

Matthew 19D

- Today we conclude a series of three teachings Jesus gave His disciples on entering the Kingdom of God, or as we would say, going to Heaven
 - Our series started three weeks ago with Jesus rebuking His disciples for their reluctance to minister to children
 - Jesus taught them that the underprivileged, including young children, will be part of the Kingdom of God
 - Therefore, the Church must be prepared to serve those groups
 - And then last week, Matthew related a second moment when a rich ruler asked Jesus which good works are necessary to enter the Kingdom
 - Jesus response by reminded the man that only God is good
 - And then Jesus proved to the man that there was no checklist or formula that could make him equal to God's goodness
 - Our sin disqualifies us from Heaven, because only perfection may enter the presence of God
 - So Jesus offered the man the real solution: to follow Jesus and trust in His righteousness rather than in his own
 - Across these first two lessons, we learned that God is in the business of bringing men and women and even children into the Kingdom by faith
 - He can do so at any time and without human intervention, as He did for David and John the Baptist and even the apostle Paul
 - Moreover, we learned that God must do this work for us, because we are incapable of working our own way there
 - That's why Jesus utter the phrase "It is finished" on the cross
 - He was declaring that all the work necessary to reconcile us to the Father had been accomplished on our behalf
- The only way to enter the Kingdom, to go to Heaven, is to be born again, to be given Christ's sinless spirit through our faith in the word of Christ
 - We would expect everyone to be receptive to a salvation made so easy
 - Why would anyone reject such a simple and powerful truth?

- Well, in fact, many do reject it, and that raises the next question in this series
- Why do people turn away from so great a salvation? That's the question Jesus answers today
- Matthew's account picks up again where we left off at the end of last week's encounter between the ruler and Jesus
 - Having just told the ruler he must leave his wealth behind if he wants to enter the Kingdom, Jesus then addresses His disciples

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Matt. 19:23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 19:24 "Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

- As we learned last week, Jesus demanded the man leave his wealth as a test of his heart
 - Jesus knew he wouldn't be willing to meet that test, and in that way Jesus revealed the man's unwillingness to accept Jesus' authority
 - That ruler was so attached to his wealth that it chose it over Jesus' word
 - But the man's problem wasn't greed or selfishness...the problem was he trusted his wealth could get him to Heaven
 - In fact, he trusted his wealth more than he trusted Jesus' word
 - Which is why Jesus turns to the disciples and says it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom
 - This is a well-known but often misunderstood statement
 - We suppose Jesus is saying that wealth has such a corrupting influence that it holds the power to block our entry into Heaven
 - Some will even tell us that being rich is an instant disqualification from Heaven, but neither view is accurate
 - But notice Jesus didn't say it's impossible for a rich man to enter...He said it's hard

- So having wealth doesn't disqualify us from Heaven, nor will giving all our money away gain us entry
 - Remember, there are no "good" works that can gain us Heaven, and that even includes the good work of giving away money
 - The standard for entry into Heaven is not how little *wealth* you have, it's how little *sin* you have
 - And the amount of sin you may have if you are going to enter Heaven is zero...none
 - Which is why we cannot work ourselves into Heaven, not even by giving away all our wealth
 - What only enter by trusting Jesus' perfect life lived on our behalf, which is why Jesus told the ruler to come follow Him
- So how is wealth an impediment to salvation? Because for some, wealth is their proof that they are already Heaven-bound
 - And this thinking was especially prevalent in Jesus' day and in Pharisaic culture
 - Under Pharisaic Judaism, wealth was viewed as divine favor or sign that God approved of a person
 - If a person was wealthy, God had assigned that reward to the person because they lived an especially righteous life
 - Conversely, poor people were thought to be under God's judgment for sin in their life or in their parent's lives
 - Of course, it just became license for greed, because it encouraged unrestrained pursuit of material wealth
 - In particular, it legitimized the Pharisee's accumulation of wealth
 - Pharisees used their religion positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the people
 - And then they taught others that their wealth vindicated them
 - So wealth had become a sign of God's endorsement, and rich people were thought to have an automatic entry into Heaven
 - That's why Jesus says it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven

- Jesus wasn't saying that wealth by itself disqualifies a person from Heaven
- The problem with wealth and the easy life it creates is in how it deludes a person into thinking they have no need for God's mercy
- Wealth's effect on a heart can be understood as the the opposite of the effect of experiencing a crisis or trauma
 - As you've heard it said, there are no atheists in foxholes
 - When someone fears for their life – or they endure a difficult set of circumstances – questions of life and death come to mind
 - Because of that trial, the person may become intensely interested in knowing where they stand with God
 - In that way, God can use difficult circumstances to draw a person's heart toward Jesus and away from the world
 - Now Jesus is saying the opposite is also true...when someone is too satisfied with life, they lose interest in what comes next
 - And the most powerful spiritual sedative known to the world is wealth
 - Wealth allows a person to have everything life can offer, and as a result he or she gives little or no thought to the life that follows
 - In fact, wealth is so powerful Jesus says that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to find his way to Heaven
 - There is no trick to understanding Jesus' statement...just take it at face value
 - Can a camel get through the eye of a sewing needle? No
 - Likewise, can a rich man find his way to Heaven? No, not if that man sees his wealth as proof that he's already there
 - Jesus was denying the Pharisee's view that their wealth vindicated them
 - Wealth is not proof that Heaven has already come...it's a poor substitute that inoculates a person from seeking true riches
 - So as long as a rich man thinks of his wealth in that way, it will be impossible for him to enter the Kingdom

- This false view of wealth is not limited to first century Judaism...it still exists today
 - Today, there is a form of false teaching in the church claiming that wealth is proof of God's favor...it's called the prosperity Gospel
 - This false teaching claims that God wants to make us wealthy, and that if we do our part, then He will glad do so
 - Conversely, if you lack wealth, then there is something in your relationship with God that is lacking and need to be corrected
 - And the false teacher tells us the way to pleasing God is to give our wealth to the teacher so that God may return it to us
 - And when you give, they claim you "release" God to bless you with even greater wealth
 - Of course, this is no Gospel (good news) at all...it's heresy
 - The only thing this teaching accomplishes is making those false teachers even richer at the expense of those they deceive
 - Like the Pharisees, these false teachers will point to their own wealth as proof their teaching is true, saying their wealth vindicates them
 - It's all just the latest version of Satan's favorite con game, because there is only one person getting richer (not you)
 - Nevertheless, millions have chosen to believe in this lie because they desperately want it to be true...
 - They've believed in a false gospel, and as a result they have no interest in the real one
 - Remember what Jesus said would be true of the church in the last days:

Rev. 3:17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

- Jesus said the church of the last days would point to it's wealth as proof that it was in need of nothing
- In other words, the last days church will say our wealth vindicates us before God when in reality they need salvation

- Truly, a rich man cannot enter the Kingdom because once a heart has found “heaven” in earthly riches, it stops looking
- That’s what happened to the ruler...he wasn’t interested in Jesus’ way to heaven if it required leaving his earthly heaven behind
- Now look at the disciples reaction to this teaching

Matt. 19:25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?”

Matt. 19:26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- In Greek, the text in v.25 emphasizes the degree of shock among the disciples
 - They were *very astonished* by what Jesus just said
 - And as a result, they ask Jesus who can be saved?
- The disciples have been taught their whole life that wealth was evidence of God’s favor resting on that person
 - From a first-century Jew’s perspective, the rich were the ones guaranteed heaven
 - The only question was whether *poor* people could enter the Kingdom
- But now Jesus flips that thinking on its head saying the rich are *less* likely to enter the Kingdom, and the disciples are stunned
 - If a rich person isn’t able to enter Heaven, they wonder, then who can be saved?
 - It shows us just how wide-reaching this false teaching had become in that day under Pharisaic culture
 - It’s even ironic to realize that the disciples began their service to Jesus believing in a prosperity heresy
- But in way, their question is right on the mark...how *can* anyone be saved?
 - How does anyone put aside trusting in this world so that they might trust in Jesus?

- Because wealth isn't the only thing blocking people from seeking a way into Heaven
- People place their trust in intellect or in physical beauty or career achievement or social status or fame or ancestral background
- In all case, the achievement of these desires become excuse to put aside concerns over what comes after death
 - And since we're all prone to these misplaced affections, how does *anyone* rise above the noises so as to hear the voice of God?
 - The odds seem so low and so the disciples ask incredulously how can anyone make it?
- And then Jesus confirms their suspicions saying in v.26 that with people this is impossible
 - Now to understand what Jesus is saying, we need to understand what is "this" in His statement?
 - And based on the context, the "this" is salvation, finding the Kingdom
- So Jesus says that if salvation requires people turn from trusting in wealth or anything else in this world to follow Jesus, then salvation is impossible
 - Because people don't make that turn on their own, because the human heart is desperately wicked and it will not seek God on its own
 - Last week I read from Romans 3 where Paul told us that there is none who seeks for God, none who do good, no not one
 - So if salvation required that God wait for people to turn away from the world and toward Jesus, it would never happen
 - Notice this time Jesus doesn't say it's hard or unlikely...Jesus says it's impossible
 - But what's impossible with man is possible with God, He says
 - The power to turn a heart away from the world and toward the Lord belongs to God alone
 - Remember what John said in the prologue to his Gospel

[John 1:4](#) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.

[John 1:5](#) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

[John 1:9](#) There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

[John 1:10](#) He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him.

[John 1:11](#) He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

[John 1:12](#) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

[John 1:13](#) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

- The Light came into the world but the darkness, that is the world, did not comprehend the Light
 - The world did not know Jesus, not even those who were His own and should have recognized Him yet didn't
 - But to those who were given the right to become children of God, they received Him
- Those who were born again received Him
 - Not those born of blood (that is not because of family associations)
 - Not those born of the will of the flesh (that is not because of any good work they did in the flesh)
 - And not born by the will of man (that is not because of some personal choice to follow Jesus)
 - It was only because they were born again by God that they turned to the Light
- That's what we've been learning throughout this three-part teaching of Matthew 19
 - Entering the Kingdom is a work that God does to bring us to Himself
 - That work was centered on Jesus's sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross
 - Jesus did everything required to bring us into the Kingdom, and all we do is receive that work by faith

- But we're also learning that our receiving of Jesus' work required that God first change our hearts
 - He brings faith to us by His Spirit because it's impossible for the human heart to turn away from the world on its own
 - He can bring faith to adults and to children, rich and poor, and in His eternal purposes He favors the weak over the powerful
 - So that in all these things, no one may boast before God
- So wealth stands in the way of entering the Kingdom and so does any worldly attraction that removes our incentive to seek for God
 - But as we sit here this morning having already placed our faith in Jesus for salvation, how should we view wealth?
 - Wealth itself is not an enemy, and wealthy Christians are not disqualified from Heaven
 - On the contrary, wealthy Christians possess great potential to impact the Kingdom by their wealth if they put it to work for Jesus
 - In fact, the Lord Himself has assigned great wealth to godly men throughout history
 - Abraham was wealthy, Joseph was wealthy, David and Solomon were wealthy and there are wealthy believers today
 - The problem is not wealth itself but our love for it and our dependence upon it

1Tim. 6:9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

- For a believer, wealth can be dangerous if our desire for it competes with our affection for Christ
- It can tempt us to set aside fellowship, prayer, study and the personal sacrifices of serving Jesus and the Kingdom
- And in place of those things, a love for money leads us to devote more time and attention to the accumulation, storing and spending of wealth

- And love for money makes us more susceptible to foolish schemes or dishonest choices that lead to ruin
- In those ways, our desire for earthly wealth can rob of us of obtaining eternal riches
 - Because as Jesus said, store up your treasure in Heaven, not on earth
 - That was the important detail the apostles were missing

Matt. 19:27 Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?”

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matt. 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

Matt. 19:30 “But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

- When Jesus came upon Peter by the Sea of Galilee, He told Peter to drop his nets and follow Him
 - When Peter obeyed that command, he wasn’t just trading one desk for another or a cubicle for a corner office
 - Peter walked away from his entire livelihood
 - He abandoned his business and his only means of support immediately becoming a poor man
 - That’s why he says he and the other disciples left everything... because they did
 - But why did he do it? We assume Peter possessed great faith and that’s why he was willing to make personal sacrifice to obey Christ’s call
 - That’s true, but Peter was also operating based on the Pharisee’s teaching concerning God and wealth
 - He was expecting that the Lord would repay his sacrifices with new wealth, just as the Pharisees received riches serving God
 - Then Peter hears Jesus say wealth stood in the way of the Kingdom, and Peter panics and cries foul

- He tells Jesus we've left everything behind, so what will there be for us then?
- Peter's worried that all his sacrifice will amount to nothing
- But it's a classic example of living without eyes for eternity... forgetting this world is temporary and the next is permanent
- In v.28 Jesus reassures the disciples that there is great reward for those who serve Jesus but that reward won't come in this life...it awaits for the next
 - Jesus says there is a reward system in the Kingdom, and that system involves two parts
 - First, there will be rewards in the form of privilege or authority in the Kingdom government
 - In the life to come when Jesus returns to the earth, the Bible says He will establish a government to rule over the nations on earth

Is. 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
 And the **government** will rest on His shoulders;
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Is. 9:7 There will be no end to the increase of His **government** or of peace,
 On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 From then on and forevermore.
 The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

- The Lord will rule the world from Jerusalem, and all the world's government will answer to Him in perfection
 - And in v.28 Jesus says that when the Lord returns at the regeneration (meaning the resurrection) we will share his rule
 - And in particular, the twelve apostles will receive special positions in the Kingdom ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel
 - The tribes of Israel will live in the Promised Land separated according to tribe
 - And each of the twelve will govern over one of those tribes

- That's a great privilege when you consider that these men will be ruling over the tribe's namesake too
 - In other words, Reuben won't rule over the tribe of his name... neither will Judah, Asher, Joseph and the rest
 - That tells us how important the apostles' service was and how much the Lord was prepared to reward them for that service
- But there is a second part to the Lord's reward system in the Kingdom
 - In v.29 Jesus says that as we we make earthly sacrifices to serve Him like losing family or possessions, He will replace them with heavenly equivalents
 - In fact, they will be replaced many times over Jesus says
 - To understand this promise you must realize that the Kingdom life is a real life
 - It's a time living on this earth in a glorified body that will never sin or die
 - And will will have homes and farms and engage in meaningful endeavors and enjoy the fruit of our labors
 - Like today, we will have possessions these possessions will be assigned to us according to a reward system
 - And that reward system takes into account our service and sacrifices to Jesus now
 - And sacrifice is the key, because serving Christ always involves a degree of sacrifice
 - We are called to give time and energy to Kingdom work, and that time and energy has to come from somewhere
 - For example, in Peter's case he couldn't stay his fishing boat making a living while also spending time serving Jesus
 - Those two pursuits were mutually exclusive, and so he had to choose one over the other, and so it will be for us
 - Every time we choose to obey Christ, we're simultaneously saying no to something else, something our flesh preferred
 - Serving Christ may mean spending less time at work: less time selling, less time making widgets, less time climbing the ladder

- And that probably means less money to buy nice things like houses or farms or whatever
- Or perhaps the Lord calls you to work hard but to use the wealth it yields to advance the Kingdom work of others
 - At the very least serving Christ will mean less free time, less opportunity to pursue things we enjoy or relationships we desire
 - And as we make that sacrifices, Jesus says there will be a great reward in the Kingdom for those who give up much
 - In v.29 He promises we will have many times as much in the Kingdom, and we will have an eternal life in which to enjoy it
- So there is a prosperity teaching in the Bible after all... but the Bible's prosperity teaching says sacrifice now to prosper later
 - It's good for a believer to pursue wealth...just be sure you pursue it in the right way
 - Like everything else in our walk with Jesus, living by this truth depends on faith
 - If we don't trust the Lord, then we will will devote our lives to pursuing wealth here, trying to turn this world into heaven
 - And we may very well obtain it...but we do so at a cost because what we gain we enjoy only for a very limited time
 - Then when we enter the Kingdom we may find that sacrifices will come
 - That's why Jesus ends saying the first will be last and the last will be first
 - He's speaking about this eternal tradeoff...where we can have our reward now or later
 - Those who pursue being first now are making a trade
 - The effort to be first now comes at a cost and that cost will not be evident until we enter the Kingdom
 - In the Kingdom, those who have made themselves first in wealth or power or privilege will be surprised to learn these were not Jesus' priorities

- And those who sacrifice worldly achievement to build the Kingdom will be pleased to see those sacrifices returned many times over in the Kingdom
- They will enter into a life of great rewards and truly the last shall have become first
- Next week we start chapter 20 with a parable Jesus uses to explain the criteria He will use to assign us wealth in the Kingdom
 - So we put aside further conversation on that point until then
 - Meanwhile, what should we do? Is it wrong to be wealthy? Is it wrong to achieve success in the world?
 - Should we be worried about how we will be judged?
 - First, only you can know what the Lord has asked of you in service and sacrifice to Him, so we all need to search our hearts on that question
 - If the Lord asks you to make a sacrifice, then make it knowing He is trustworthy to reward you greatly in the Kingdom
 - Or if the Lord calls you to success and wealth today, then consider how you can put that wealth to work for the Kingdom
 - In the end, what you do is between you and Jesus, but make your decisions understanding the Kingdom reward system
 - Whatever you do, don't think that wealth in this world is an end to itself
 - Because when you do that, you've stopped trusting in Jesus and you've started trusting in yourself