**Grace to You** :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

**How to Obtain Eternal Life**
Scripture: Matthew 19:16-22
Code: 2343

How to Obtain Enternal Life

This morning, in our study, we're looking at Matthew chapter 19 again. And we come in our ongoing study of this great gospel to verses 16 through 22, Matthew 19, verses 16 through 22.

As a preface to looking at the text, I have been reminded of some time ago when I was riding on an airplane and there was a man sitting next to me. And as we were just flying along, he looked over at me and introduced himself and then said to me, he said, "Sir, you wouldn't know how I could have a relationship with Jesus Christ, would you?"

Now that doesn't happen very often to me, but it does. And I happened to have a Bible open and so that prompted him to ask the question. And I thought he was so ready and so eager and this is some time ago. And I said, "Well yes, you simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior," and so forth. And he said, "I'd like to do that." And so we prayed and I was so very excited about what happened and tried to follow it up unsuccessfully to find out only that he has had no continuing interest in the things of Christ at all, as far as I can tell.

That's very hard sometimes for us to deal with but very frequently occurs. Anyone who's in any kind of ministry at all and even people who are lay people like yourselves, perhaps, out sharing Jesus Christ, have those occasions where someone prays a prayer with you or someone is led to Christ by you and you see no change in their life, nothing really happens differently and they never ever connect up with the church in any ongoing sense at all. And if you've been struggling with why that happens, then I think you're going to find the answer to that in the message this morning.

I don't think I really understood fully why that happened until I understood this particular story that's here in Matthew 19. The passage before us gives us an insight that I think is extremely valuable. We might even say that Matthew 19:16 to 22 is an illustration of another truth. And that truth is very clearly articulated in Luke 14:33. And maybe in the margin of Matthew 19:16 to 22, you ought to write Luke 14:33 because I believe this explains the meaning of that verse.

Luke 14:33 says this, "So likewise, whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be My disciple." Now that is a very straightforward truth. Unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be the Lord's disciple. Salvation is not for people pray a prayer necessarily or people who

think they need Jesus Christ, it is for people who forsake all. There is an abandonment of everything in genuine salvation. And that, I think, is the essence of what our Lord is teaching us with the encounter with the young man in Matthew 19.

Let's begin at verse 16, you follow and I'll read you the text.

And behold, one came and said unto Him, Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? And He said unto him, Why are you asking Me what is good? There is none good but one, that is God, and if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto Him, All these things have I kept, what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come and follow Me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

You see, there was a test. On the one hand, he had his possessions. On the other hand, there was Jesus Christ. He had to make a choice. Because he was unwilling to forsake all, he never could be a disciple of Christ. That's the essence of what the text is saying. Salvation is for those who forsake everything. Now I think it's very important to affirm that.

Now you'll notice in verse 16 that the young man poses a question related to eternal life. He asks about how to obtain eternal life. The term "eternal life" is used about 50 times in Scripture and is essentially the heart of all evangelism. In other words, in all that we endeavor to do, we try to get people to want eternal life, to seek eternal life, to receive eternal life. In fact, in the most familiar gospel verse of all, John 3:16, we remember that the text says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting, or eternal life." And we struggle and we work and we pray and we study and we strategize and we plan and we develop methods to try to get people to want and to receive eternal life.

But here comes a young man who walks right up and asks Jesus the very question. Most of our work in evangelism is to get somebody to this point. From here on out, it's easy. I mean, if you can just get the guy to say "what do I need to do to inherit eternal life" you've got him where you want him, all you have to do is say: believe, sign the card, raise your hand, walk the aisle, do whatever. I mean, you've got him right where you want him to be.

So, when the young man walked up and asked the question, he jumped over the whole process of normal preevangelism effort. Like the young man on the airplane, who jumped by all the things that you usually have to work on, like how do you know there's a God, how can you believe the Bible and on and on and on. He walked up and asked Jesus the question about eternal life.

Now, that's not an unfamiliar question to the Lord. It appears on several occasions in the New Testament. Not only asked by this young man, but also asked by a lawyer and also in John 6, asked by a group of people, essentially the same question. How do you get eternal life? And all of our evangelistic efforts are basically to bring someone to that point, aren't they? Where they seek eternal life. And it can be given to them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I guess I have to say this has got to be the hottest evangelistic prospect in the gospel so far. I mean, this guy is really ripe. He is ready. But the amazing thing is he goes away without ever receiving eternal life. And the reason he goes away is because he is not willing to forsake everything. Jesus actually set up an insurmountable barrier for the man. Instead of taking him where he was and just getting him to make the quote/unquote "decision," Jesus stops him dead in his tracks and makes it impossible for him to get saved on those terms which he had already had come to.

Now you say, "What kind of evangelism is this? Jesus would have flunked the evangelism seminar. He doesn't know how to get closure. He doesn't know how to draw the net. He doesn't know how to sign the guy up. I mean, you get a guy coming along saying I want eternal life, you've got a hot one. You don't want to lose it."

But, oh do we need the truth that's in this text. We have so many contemporary unbiblical modes of evangelism. Our mass evangelism with its decisions, statistics and its aisle walking and its hurry-up-and-come-to-Jesus and just believe and there's nothing else kind of approach is leading all kinds of people into the delusion that they're saved when in fact they're not. And so, we must go to this passage for its very important instruction.

Now, let's ask a question similar to the young man's question and then we'll flow through the text. And I think it will unfold very easy in your eyes and you'll see what happened that went wrong with this young man. How does one obtain eternal life? That's the question. How do you obtain eternal life?

Well, let's look at the points. First of all, it's necessary to know what you want. The man came to Jesus and he said I want to obtain, I want to do something to get eternal life. Now he knew what he wanted. And that's where it has to start. You cannot come seeking something if you don't know you want it. You've got to know what it is you seek before you can seek it. And he wanted eternal life. He knew he didn't have it. He had a lot of things but he didn't have that.

Matthew tells us that he was young, verse 20. Matthew tells us in verse 22 that he was rich. He had great possessions. Luke tells us in Luke 18:18 that he was arche, he was a ruler. And most likely he was a ruler of the synagogue, comparing it with Matthew 9:18. He was probably a ruler of the synagogue. He was a Jewish religious leader, devout, honest, in terms of his relationship to Judaism,

young, wealthy, prominent, influential. Very rare that a young man would be a ruler of a synagogue. Well we don't know for sure that he was a ruler of a synagogue but that seems to be the best indication. But he was highly respected, very devout, very religious. As far as the culture of his day, the religious environment of his day, he had everything. And I think that's why in verse 16, Matthew says, "And behold," and that's an exclamation "and lo," and we would say in our vernacular, "Can you believe this, that this guy came to Jesus wanting eternal life who is a devout Jew who was a religious man, who is a ruler of a synagogue, who is influential, prominent," and so forth, it was amazing that he would come and admit that he didn't have eternal life.

He had not found the reality to put his soul at rest. He had not found a confident permanent peace, joy and settled hope. And he was feeling in his heart the absence of this. He was basically coming on the grounds of a felt need. There was a restlessness in his heart. There was an anxiety in his heart. There was a sense of being unfulfilled. And he knew what was missing...eternal life.

Now how did he know that? Well, the Jews understood eternal life. They understood that term or that concept. Simply stated, if life means--and it does mean--the ability to respond to your environment, that's what life means, if you don't think it means that, look at a dead person and see how well they respond, life basically means the ability to respond to your environment. Eternal life means the ability to permanently respond to your environment. And eternal life carries with it the divine environment. In physical life, we can respond to a physical environment. In eternal life, we have the ability to respond to the divine environment. In other words, we respond to the life of God. That's why when we're saved, Paul says we enter into the heavenlies. Our citizenship takes on a divine character and we all of a sudden come alive to God and that's unending.

But it is a quality of existence, not a quantity of existence. It is the idea that I am sensitive to God, that I can respond to God. Before I was saved I was dead in sin, utterly unresponsive to the divine environment. When I became a Christian, I became capable of responding to the divine environment and I shall always be capable of responding to the divine environment.

The Jews thought of it as the life of the age to come, the life which is characteristic of people who live in the age to come. And this young man knew that he did not have the ability to fully respond to the divine environment. He knew that he did not have the ability to fully respond to God. He wasn't sensing God's love, God's rest, God's peace, God's hope, God's joy, the security of belonging to God. He knew that he did not possess the divine life. He knew that he didn't have in his soul the life of God.

By the way, John uses the word zoe34 times and every time he uses it in his writing, it always means the life principle itself which makes us spiritually alive. And so, eternal life is not just long-time living, eternal life is a quality of existence which allows us to be alive to the world that God dwells in. It allows us to possess the very life of God. It is that life which is the result of the new birth. Nicodemus

was born into a new life, a new dimension of living in which he was alive to God and that life is unaffected by death which only transfers us fully into the heavenly world.

Now the rich young ruler knew that he didn't have the life of God in his soul. He knew that he really didn't sense God fully. He knew that he didn't walk with God, commune with God. So he was very perceptive. He'd gone beyond the Pharisees in his own system who were content with their own musings and praying to themselves. He was not. He knew it was a quality of life which he missed. And I hope we can get it through our heads that eternal life is not just a long time of living, eternal life is a quality of being alive to God, a quality of possessing the life of God, of being aware of the environment of the divine.

It's reminiscent of the old Greek mythology story of Aurora who was the goddess of the dawn. And Aurora fell in love with Tithonis(?) and Tithonis was a mortal youth. And when an eternal goddess falls in love with a mortal youth, it's got its limitations. And so she didn't want to ever lose him and she knew he would die so she went to the head of the gods in the mythology who was Zeus. And she said I want one wish for you. And he said I would grant you one wish in behalf of your lover Tithonis. And she said I wish that he would live...I wish that he would never die, that he would live forever. And he said the wish was granted. And he did. But she left out one important element...she forgot to ask that he would stay young. And so in the Greek mythology, he lived for ever but he just kept getting older and older and older until life was a horrible punishment.

That's not eternal life in the biblical sense. Eternal life in the biblical sense is the process of ever getting younger and younger and communing with the living God in an unending communion. And that this young man wanted.

So, he knew what he wanted. And I think that when we preach or evangelize, we're trying to get people to understand...to understand what they should want. We're trying to get them to see that they don't have eternal life and they should have eternal life. That's part of it. And so he was on track.

The second element that comes through here is that not only did he know what he wanted but he felt deeply the need. Now there are people who know they don't have eternal life but they also don't feel any need for it. Have you ever met them? I've met some like that. They know they don't have eternal life but they don't feel any need for it. They know they're not alive to God but they really don't care to be alive to God. They know they don't sense the divine dimension, they don't have the full confidence of security in the life to come, the great settled hope that comes to believers, they know they don't have it. But they really aren't that interested in it. And sometimes we say they're not desperate enough to really want what they don't have. This guy was. He not only knew what he wanted but he felt deeply the want of it.

And I think there's an urgency in his question, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I might have eternal life?" He doesn't have any prefaces, he doesn't warm up, he just blurts it out. I mean, it's right on the front of his tongue. And if you look over into verse 20, at the end of the verse, he's gone through all the things he's done religiously and he says, "What lack I yet?" And I sense there a certain amount of frustration, a certain amount of unfulfillment, a certain amount of anxiety saying, "Man, I've been at this religious thing with all my might and something is missing in my life." And it's the cry of a heart that feels a need. I want this thing.

So, boy, he's a really great prospect. He knows what he doesn't have, eternal life, and he wants it very badly because he has an empty place in his life, he has some lack in his life and he wants to fulfill that. Oh, he's lived an exemplary life outwardly. He has avoided outward sins. He tells all those laws that he supposedly thinks he's kept. He's moral. He's religious. He's strong in heart to conform to the standards of his..of his religion. He is a leader in terms of the eyes of the people. And yet he's unsatisfied and he knows that it's eternal life that he lacks and he wants to know how to get it. And there is a real felt need deep in his heart. There is a vacuum there. Now you're beginning to see what a tremendous prospect he is, aren't you?

That takes us to the third element. In obtaining eternal life it is also necessary to seek diligently...to seek diligently. And so you have a person who knows what they don't have, wants it and is willing to seek Jesus, you know, waited for the man to come to Him. And we see that very often in our Lord's life. Of course, the prophet of the Old Testament, Isaiah, said if you seek Me with all your heart, you'll find Me. And so here's a diligent seeker.

You say, "How do you know that?" Well, in verse 16 it says "one came." And that's all that Matthew tells us but in the parallel passage in Mark 10:17, Mark says he came running...he came running. Now there's urgency in that. I mean, he's dealing with a real frustration in his heart. This is a religious guy with some integrity. He really does want to know God. I believe he really did want the peace and the joy and all of that. If you would have approached him on: how would you like to have peace, joy, happiness, love? Boy, you would have had...you would have had a guy on a hood right now because he felt deep psychological need. There were missing elements inside of him.

But would you note somewhere in your mind that this is a very self-centered...young man at this point? He is coming for something that will satisfy his heart and the need of his heart. That's not wrong, it's just incomplete. But that was his approach. There was an urgency. There was an eagerness. I mean, he rushed down the aisle before there was an aisle, you know. He ran to Jesus before "Just as I am" had ever been written. He beat the invitationalists. I mean, he is in a hurry. He's enthusiastically in pursuit of eternal life, salvation.

In fact, Mark 10:17 says the Lord was walking down the road in Perea, no doubt there was a crowd around Him, as always gathered around our Lord in addition to the disciples. And this guy runs right into the crowd. He's not embarrassed by the fact that he's ever...he's known by the people in that area. Everyone perhaps knew who he was. If indeed he was a ruler of the synagogue, they surely did. He is not embarrassed by the fact that he confesses publicly and openly that he does not possess eternal life, which would have been some kind of a confession to make when you're a person of his stature. And beyond that, Mark says, he not only came running to Jesus but he got on his knees. And now he's in a position of humility before the Lord. He's prostrate in some sense before the Lord. He acknowledges the humble situation that he's in where he lacks something. Now that takes some kind of integrity to do that. That's stepping down off your high horse. And so there's something kind of special about this guy. He's serious, motivated, anxious. He wants eternal life so badly, so eagerly, he seeks it so diligently that he doesn't mind losing face with all the people who thinks he's a spiritual giant already.

You say, "What an opportunity. Boy, if you could just...I mean, this guy's ready and this guy...you get this guy saved, he'll be terrific. He's rich. Boy, we need rich Christians. Not only is he rich, he's influential. Boy, what could he do as an influential guy? He's a prime prospect for a testimony on Christian TV, or write a book or...I mean, this guy's a hot one. And you sure don't want to muff this opportunity. A can't-miss convert."

That takes us to the fourth element of obtaining eternal life and that is he came to the right source. You know, there are lots of folks looking for eternal life and looking real hard but they're looking in the wrong place. Have you noticed? And why do you think Satan counterfeits religions all over the face of the earth? So that people go chasing the wrong thing. It isn't there. They won't find eternal life there but some people may be rather diligently looking for it there. But he came to the right source.

You know, in 1 John it tells us that, if not in many other places, chapter 5 verse 11 says, "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son." And verse 20 says of Him, "In His Son Jesus Christ, this is the true God and eternal life." So Jesus not only was the source of eternal life, He was that eternal life. And so this guy came to the right source.

No doubt he had heard of the power of Jesus, no doubt he had heard of the teaching of Jesus because he comes to Him and says, Didaskolos, or master, or teacher. He acknowledges that He was a teacher of divine truth. Mark and Luke tell us he called Him "good." It's added here in the Authorized of Matthew, but it isn't in the manuscripts of Matthew, but it is in Mark and Luke. And so he said, "good," agathos. Kalosmeans good form, good on the outside; agathosmeans good on the inside, good inwardly, good morally, good in nature, good in essence. So he says I know that You are good. I know that You are a good person. I know that You're moral. I know that You're upright and I also know You teach and You teach divine truth. You perhaps know the secret of getting eternal life.

I don't think he thought he was God.  I don't even think he particularly thought of Him as the Messiah. I just think he was such...he was so struck with the power of Jesus' teaching and the power of His life however he had been exposed to it that he said surely this teacher has got the secret to eternal life. He must have it.  And maybe He can tell me how to get it.  So, I think he's approaching it that way, more than affirming the deity of Christ or the Messiahship of Christ.  He just calls Him a basically internally morally good teacher whose life demonstrates that He probably walked with God and knew the secrets of eternal life.  And so he came to the right source.

And even though he didn't know who He was in the fullest sense, he certainly did come to the right place.  For Acts 4:12 says, "There's salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus Christ."  So, he came to the right place for eternal life.

Fifthly, in moving through our outline, and we're still in verse 16, he asks the right question.  He really did.  Now a lot of people have sort of knocked the guy for the question he asked.  They say he's saying, "What good thing shall I do?"  And that he's asking some works oriented question.  Well, certainly he was works oriented.  Certainly he was raised in a Pharisaic system of tradition.  Certainly he was trained to think that you did things religiously to gain divine goals and divine ends.  But I still think with all of that obviously in the background, the question's a fairly fair question.  I mean, I don't think we ought to knock him for the question.  What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? That's a fairly simple question. And there's nothing in the text that says he specially said, "What good thing shall I do," we don't know that he verbally emphasized that.

And it's a fair question.  I mean, you do have to do something to get eternal life, you have to believe, right?  Your will has to be involved.  There has to be a response.  The question is basically a fair question.  It's an okay question.  He didn't say, "How can I be more religious...how can I be more moral...how can I get more self-respect...," or whatever.  He didn't say that.  He said, "I want eternal life, what do I do to get it?"  And I don't think it's a calculated question of someone trying to trap Jesus or trying to offer his self-righteousness as a vehicle by which he will gain the answer.  I think he just asked an honest question. What do I do to have eternal life?

It's not much different than the question in John 6:28 where the people said to Jesus, what do we do to work the works of God?  Now that is a works question.  But to that, Jesus said, this is the work if God that you believe.  So, the question itself isn't that offensive to me.  I think he's simply saying what do I need to do to have eternal life.  Sure he thought it was something he'd have to do and there's a sense in which he was right.  Because we must act as an act of faith...activate our will as an act of faith toward Christ.  What does he do?  It's the right question.  He's asking how, you see.  Now I know I need eternal life, I feel deeply the desire for it, I'm here diligently seeking it now how do I get it? Boy, this is too good to believe.  I mean, if you lose this guy, you've really muffed it.

What good thing?  And he even knew that he had to do something good, something really good, something genuinely good.  And Jesus' answer is amazing.  I mean, if Jesus was a contemporary evangelist, or contemporary evangelical, He might say, "Hey, just believe.  I mean, Jesus died for you and rose again, if you just believe that, just pray and ask Jesus into your heart and confess Him as your Savior, your...you'll be saved."  And Jesus didn't do that at all.  Jesus put up a wall in front of this guy.  I mean, Jesus drew him to a sudden stop.

Verse 17, "He said to him, Why are you asking Me what is good?"  You want to know what good thing you have to do, why are you asking Me?  Why are you asking Me what good thing you have to do? You think I've got some secret you don't know?  You think I've got some insight that you've never heard of?  You think God's given Me something that no one else knows about?  You think I'm the only person in the world who knows what you have to do?  What good thing...what are you asking Me about that for?  There's none good but one, that's God and you know what He said so go on out and keep His commandments.  That's what He's saying.  I mean, if you want life, then keep the commandments.  You know what they are, you don't need to ask Me.  There's no new information. There's no secret.  Why are you asking Me what is good?

Now, as a well-taught Jew, he was saying--in effect--You know exactly what's good.  You know what good things are written in the law of God, now go do them.  That's what He says.  "If you will enter in to life, keep the commandments."  God alone is the one that's good and God good...in His goodness has revealed all of His will, you know the Word of God, you know the revelation of God, you know the law of God, it's all there, I haven't added anything to it, I have nothing to add to it, just go out and keep it all.

You say, "Why in the world does He say that to the guy?"  Because, you see, there's a missing factor here.  This guy is coming to Jesus and his seeking of salvation is based on his felt need, right?  He's seeking a salvation because he has anxiety and he has frustration and he wants joy and love and peace and hope.  And that is not a good enough reason to come to Christ.  That is incomplete.  It isn't wrong, it's incomplete.  I mean, if we go around the world offering people happiness and joy and peace and so forth and so forth, it's very easy to get them to respond to that.  All you have to do is find all the folks who are psychologically incomplete.  And if you can offer them all the panaceas to their anxieties through Jesus, they'll take Jesus to get those things.  But that is not a complete understanding of salvation.

So, Jesus slams a wall in front of the guy and says, "Look, the one thing you haven't done you know and it's all...it's good God who's revealed His good Word so you just go out and do it all.  You keep the commandments." You say, "But nobody can do that."  That's exactly right.  That's exactly right. You say, "Well, why did He tell him to do that?"  So that he'd realize he couldn't do it.  You see, because the problem with this man is that by the time we get to the end of verse 16, there's

something that hasn't been mentioned.  What is it?  His sin.  There's been no mention of that.  And the young man has no sense that he's offended a holy God.  His...his desire for eternal life is purely wrapped up in his own anxieties and his own personal needs and has no thought for the affront that his life is to an infinitely holy God.  And that is a necessary element in understanding the truth of salvation.

So, Jesus just says you know what you have to do to do the good thing, keep the law of God.  You don't need Me to add anything.  God is good and He's revealed His good will and His good will is His law so go out and keep it.  Keep the commandments.

You mean you could get saved that way if you could keep them?  But you can't.  We've learned that over and over again.  You can't.  So the guy now has to be confronted with the fact that he has violated God.  You see, people, you cannot bring people to Jesus Christ simply and only on the basis of psychological needs or anxieties or lack of peace, or lack of hope, or lack of joy, or lack of happiness.  They must understand that salvation is for people who want to turn away from the things of this life and turn to God who see that they have lived in violation and rebellion against holy God.  And they want to turn around, confess that and affirm their commitment to live for His glory.  You see, God has to be involved.  Salvation is not a psychological thing.  God has to be involved.  A man know...must know that unless he is willing to forsake all of the things in this life and come to God, he can't be His disciple.  All he felt was a personal need.  All he felt was personal anxiety.  All he felt was the lack of stuff in his life.  And that is not substantial enough.

So, our Lord takes the focus off of his felt need and puts it on God.  And tries to show this young man that the real problem in his life is not what he doesn't have in his heart but it's what he's doing to offend a holy God.  And when He says to him, "You keep the commandments," He is beginning to take this young guy and slam him up against the divine standard so that he'll see that he comes short.  That's the issue.

As I look back to talking to that young man on the airplane, that's something I didn't do.  I took him at such face value as he was feeling his own psychological needs and gave him Christ for his psychological needs without understanding that he was receiving Christ for his sin.  So what you need to do when you evangelize someone is to make sure they understand the full nature of their sinfulness as it violates the holy law of holy God.  So that salvation is a Godward thing, not just a manward thing.

All evangelism must take the imperfect sinner and place him up against the perfect law of God so he can see his deficiency.  That's an utterly essential element.  And evangelism that deals only with men's needs, only with men's feelings, only with men's problems lacks the true balance.  And that is why the churches are jammed full of people who aren't really saved because they gain...they sought and gained some kind of psychological affirmation and not transactional redemption.

Why do you think Paul in Romans spends chapters 1, 2 and 3 affirming the sinfulness of man before he ever gets to salvation? That's the whole issue. And the rich young ruler had no sense of his offending God, he had no remorse. I believe there has to be remorse. I believe that's where you get the Beatitude attitude, you have to be begging God for forgiveness. There needs to be a sense of meekness. There needs to be a sense of mourning overwhelmed by your sin. You see, he didn't have that. He wanted psychological needs met. But I don't see the remorse over sin at all in this passage. I don't see him saddened that he's offended God. I don't see him aware of his sin. It's got to be more than something about my needs.

You can't just approach people on that basis. You know the truth of the matter is, this may sound like heresy, but did you know that God doesn't have a wonderful plan for your life? Unless you consider eternal torment a wonderful plan. He has a horrible plan. And maybe when we approach people, we ought to say, "Did you know that God loves you and has a horrible plan for your life?" And you understand what I mean? You see, we have to approach the sin problem. You can tell them the Old Testament says, "God is angry with sinners every day." A good God, a holy God, a pure God can't tolerate evil at all. So Jesus affirms what must always be affirmed that there's a divine law which must be kept and if you violate that law, you're under the judgment of God.

Now this is the barrier. Young man, you're incomplete. You've got to see yourself as living in violation of holy God and you've got to be willing to acknowledge that and abandon that. And the Lord puts up a barrier, a pre-salvation barrier is what it is. This young man is incredible. And I think he's sincere. But look at his answer. Verse 18, "He said to Him, Which?" Which what? Which laws? He says you keep the commandments? Which? You name them. Which ones?

So, the Lord responds by giving him the last half of the Ten Commandments in reverse. Do no murder, shall not commit adultery, shall not steal, shall not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother, and then He adds, love your neighbor as yourself. You know, the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first half deal with God, the second half deal with man. In other words, man's relation to God is the first half, no idols, you know, never take His name in vain, all that. The second half deal with man. The man...He gives him the second half which are easier, right? I mean, they're both impossible to keep but the second half is less impossible. Does that make sense? I mean, at least he wouldn't have said, "Well, I've kept all the first...." You know you didn't love God the way you should have and you haven't been totally honest before God, but at least you might say, "Well, I never killed anybody, I never stole from anybody, I never committed adultery with anybody and I never lied to anybody and I've always tried to honor my father and mother."

In other words, you might think you did the second half. So He gives him the benefit of the doubt, gives him the easier half of the impossible, if you will. And then adds a little one at the end just to make it really difficult, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So, Jesus nails him against the Ten

Commandments, against the law of God. You've got to understand that it's God that you're violating. The law of God is the issue, sin is the issue not just psychological felt need, not just religious desire. So He gives him all these laws. And He reverses them, He ends up with the father and mother one. I don't know, maybe He knew that the guy was not honoring his father and mother, I don't know why He chose that order. But He preaches law.

Now let me just give you a little footnote for your thinking. You can't preach grace until you preach law, right? Cause nobody understands what grace means unless he understands what law requires. No one understands mercy unless they understand guilt. And so you cannot preach a gospel of grace unless you've preached a message of law. So He binds the guy to the commandments of God, says you've got to keep them all and here are the ones you've got to keep. And the whole idea is so that the guy will say, "Hey, I...I've fallen short of that." And that's the whole point. Now you know that what you need is not simply to have your psychological needs met, what you also need is to get right with a holy God whom you have offended. See.

But this guy's unbelievable. In verse 20, "The young man said to Him, All these things have I kept." Now that shows you how he perceived those laws. Maybe he never murdered anybody. Maybe he never committed adultery. Maybe he never stole anything and he never lied to anybody. And he really thought he honored his father and his mother. I mean, maybe on the surface he did do those things in the way that they had been defined to him as external. Now you know, when it got to the internal deal of love your neighbor as yourself, that he was woofing when he said he kept them all. And now we know he's not telling the truth. So he violated one of the former ones already.

But, you see, the Jews had gotten into a deal where they had so externalized the law that they saw everything on the outside and they never dealt with the heart. I mean, Jesus when He preached in Matthew 5, you remember what He said? He said, "I know you don't think you murder but when you hate someone, you murder in your heart," right? "And I know you don't think you commit adultery, but when you look on a woman to lust after her, you've committed adultery in your heart. And when you divorce your wives without biblical grounds, you commit adultery as well. And I know you say you don't lie, but I'll tell you one thing, you have all these phony oaths and you lie through your phony oaths."

In other words, Jesus says to them all through Matthew 5, on the outside you look good but on the inside you've got all this vile evil. You see, the Ten Commandments were simply external pictures, external symbols, external behavior patterns that were to be indicative of hearts that were right. It wasn't enough not to kill someone, you shouldn't hate someone. It wasn't enough not to commit adultery, you shouldn't even want to do that. It wasn't enough not to lie, you shouldn't even desire to do that or to try to fool somebody or to make a vow that was not legitimate. The point is that the man didn't understand the internal character of God's law, he understood only the externals. And so he said, "On the outside I've kept all these things." He thought he was really okay. He thought he was

as Jewish as you could be, as religious as you could be.  It's amazing.

And again, it's amazing that he said that in the presence of all those people.  He must have felt that they would affirm that, that it was believable to them, that the guy was really a good guy...terrific guy, religious.  And externally he kept the law.

But, you see, that was his whole problem.  You see, all he wanted was some fulfillment in the empty place in his heart.  He had no sense of having violated God at all.  And Jesus couldn't take him on those terms.  He had to slice him open.  As Samuel Boulton(?) said, "When you see that men have been wounded by the law, then it is time to pour in the gospel oil."  He said it is the needle of the law that pulls through the scarlet thread of the gospel.  So you've got to wound them before you can sew them up.

What he was saying, in effect, was "I don't have any real sin.  I've kept all that...I can't...I look at myself and I don't see any sin."  It's incredible.  Listen, this man couldn't be saved.  He couldn't be saved because he didn't understand the real meaning of salvation, that's a sinner coming to God and asking forgiveness, right?  If you don't think you've sinned, you can't get there.  So here's a guy who sought eternal life, sought it diligently, asked the right question and when Jesus stopped him at that point, confronted him with his sin, he wouldn't confess his sin.  Listen, beloved, confession of sin, repentance, turning from sin is an utter essential in salvation.  It's an utter essential.  Has to be there.  And our Lord is proving that point to us explicitly...explicitly.

The young man had totally missed the point of God's law.  He had externalized the whole thing, failed to understand that the external law was only an indication of how God wanted the heart to be.  So our Lord tried to open up the heart to him and he couldn't see it.  He said, "I..all these things have I kept."  And then he says at the end of verse 20, "What lack I yet?"  What haven't I done?  In other words, I've tried to do it all.  I've tried to do every bit of it.  And in my own mind, I'm convinced I did.

You know, this is the way...this is the way self-righteous religion works, by the way.  It's very self-deceiving, it's very self-convincing.  This guy actually believed this.  He believed he was righteous.  He really did.  He believed he'd kept the law.  He kept the code.  And he just couldn't figure out what else he ought to do.  For him it wasn't, "Oh, I know I've fallen short."  For him it was, "You know, I've done everything good, what other good thing could I think to do?"  That's an incredible approach.

Now, our..the Bible says at this point, in Mark 10, "Jesus looked at him and loved him."  It's a very kind of pathetic statement, "Jesus looked at him and loved him."  The guy was sincere.  There was something genuine in him.  He really was a religious person.  And Jesus loved him.  And Jesus is not willing that any should perish.  And the Lord Jesus Himself was about to die for the sins of this man and He wanted this man in the sense that He longed for the soul of that man.  But He would still not take him on his own terms.  You understand?

As much as He loved him and as much as He was not willing that he perish, He still wouldn't take him on his terms. He had to have him understand his utter sinfulness. Where was the mourning? Where was the sorrow over sin? Where was the sense of having violated holy God? It wasn't there. It just wasn't there. In fact, the guy couldn't even think of anything that he hadn't done. "What lack I yet?"

So, I say again that the sixth point in our outline in obtaining eternal life is confession, repentance. Confession of sin, repentance--turning from sin. And this is where this guy went out. I mean, he wouldn't do it. And this is a necessary element. And may I add at this point, it is as much a work of the Holy Spirit as is any other element in true salvation. It isn't some kind of pre-salvation human work. We know we are dependent on the Spirit of God for it and that's the mystery of how the Spirit works and the human will as well. But Jesus wouldn't take him without confession of his sin, without an understanding that he must turn from his sin.

So, Jesus, then, goes even another step. In verse 21, "He said to him, If you will be perfect," and by the way, perfect is often used in the Bible to speak of salvation, particularly in the book of Hebrews. "If you will be perfect, Go sell what you have, give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven and come and follow Me."

You say you love your neighbor as yourself. Okay, go give everything you've got to your neighbor, your poor neighbor. If you really love him as much as you love you, you'll be glad to have him have everything you have.

Now what is this? This is the seventh element, submit to obey the Lord. Here is a pre-salvation test for this guy. Jesus, in effect, is saying, "Are you going to do what I want you to do? Who runs your life? Do you or do I?" And He gives him a test. He gives him a command and says when you're done with this first command, come right back here and keep on following Me.

True salvation, I believe, includes confession of sin, repentance and true salvation includes a submission to obey the Lord. Now let me say this. I don't think a person coming to Christ understands fully all that that confession may mean and I don't think they all...they understand necessarily all that that submission to the Lordship of Christ may mean, but all the Lord is asking for here is the willingness. And He'll unfold the fullness of what it means.

Jesus really hit the sin of this guy. The sin of this guy was a sin of covetousness, it was a sin of indulgence, it was a sin of materialism, wealth and all that stuff. And he was indifferent to people who were poor and people who were in need. And He nailed him on that thing. And He said, "I want to give you the ultimate test, will you...will you do what I say? Will you obey My Lordship?"

Do you have to be...by the way, do you have to give away everything you have to be a Christian? Do you? No, no you don't. The Lord didn't say that to other folks. But do you have to be willing to do whatever the Lord asks you to do? Yes. And it may be different in different cases. But the Lord put the finger on the issue here. He took us right back to the principle of Luke 14:33, the people who are My disciples are the people who forsake all. And He says to the guy, "Look, are you willing to do what I tell you? And right now I'm telling you to get rid of everything." And He knew right where He was talking because He knew this was most important to the guy. For some people it might be a car. For some people it might be a girl. For some people it might be a job or a career or a certain sin they want to indulge in. For this guy, it was his money and his possessions. And the Lord put His finger on it and said, "Are you willing to give every bit of that up?"

I always think about the slave. His master said to him, "Ah, how can I have what you have?" And he said, "Put on your white suit, come down here and work in the mud with us slaves." He said, "I'll never do it." He said, "Why do I have to do that to be a Christian." He said, "I'm just telling you, you have to do it." And he said, "I'll never do it."

Came back later and said the same thing to him. He gave him the same answer. Three times...the fourth time, the guy came back and said, "I'm willing to do it cause I want what you have." He says, "You don't have to do it. You just have to be willing to do it."

It may not have been. It may not have been, but for this guy alone that Jesus directed that specific command. But what He was doing was putting His finger on the very nerve of this man's existence. He knew right where his heart was and He was saying, "Unless Jesus Christ is number one priority in your life, there's no salvation coming to you." You understand that?" He was telling...He was asking him what his priority was.

Now, salvation, I think, demands these two things. Will you acknowledge your offense to God and turn from your sin? That's what He's saying. And the guy wouldn't do it. He just wouldn't acknowledge his sin. And the second thing, will you leave your present perishing priorities and follow My commands though they cost you what is dearest to you? That's what He's saying. I don't know how else you can interpret the passage. Salvation is a commitment, then, to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ at all costs. And if you're not willing to do it on those terms, Jesus doesn't take you.

You see, the faith that will not save is the faith that offers to men some psychological relief from their anxiety, but does not require a turning from sin and an affirmation of the Lordship of Christ. In Matthew 13 you have two parables, verses 44 to 46, you have the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price. I believe those refer to the salvation that's offered in the Kingdom. And in both cases, you remember the man sold everything he had, bought the field to get the treasure and the guy sold everything he had to get the money to buy the pearl, all it cost you is everything you have. To come to Jesus Christ you have to say yes to Christ which means You

become the supreme Lord of my life and You take number one priority.  If you tell me to do that, that's what I'm willing to do.

I don't think people understand the full implications of the Lordship of Christ.  But I do think salvation involves a commitment to that.  And that's exactly what Romans 10:9 and 10 means when it says, "Thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, thou shalt be saved."  There's a price for salvation, all you have, all you possess.

Now this was the test, see. Cause this guy held on to everything in life.  And what was his reaction? Verse 22, "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions."  He went away.  Why?  What was more important to him than Christ?  Possessions. And he couldn't come on those terms.  He could not come on those terms.

You know, isn't it interesting that he went away sorrowful?  What does that mean?  He went away sorrowful because there was some honesty in his heart.  I mean, he really did want eternal life, he wasn't willing to pay the price.  And unless he forsakes all, he can't be My disciple.

Do you want me to show you the opposite kind of attitude?  Look at Luke 19.  "And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho and behold there was a man named Zacchaeus, who was the chief among the tax collectors.  He was rich.  He sought to see Jesus, who He was and couldn't because of the crowd for he was little of stature.  He ran ahead and climbed up in a...actually a fig mulberry tree, to see Him.  He was about to pass that way.  And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him and said, Zacchaeus, make haste, come down, for today I must abide at thy house."

Now you don't usually find a tax collector in a tree.  And you sure don't know his name and have your...and invite yourself to his house for dinner.  It must have been a jolt.  "And he made haste," might have fallen out, frankly, "came down and received Him joyfully."  Why?  Cause he was a seeker, too.  He was a seeker.  Tax collectors don't usually lose their dignity either by calling up in trees to watch parades go by, but he did.  He was a real seeker.

"And when they saw it, they all murmured saying that He was gone to be the guest with a man that is a sinner.  And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "O behold, the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I've taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."  You want to see the attitude of this guy?  Boy, he knows he's been doing wrong all the time and he says, "Oh, I've got to get my life right.  I've got to get my life right.  I've got to get it right.  I've got to give everything back.  And I've got to give all this stuff to the poor.  And I've got to return to everybody four hundred percent."  This is the opposite, isn't it?  I mean, the guy want...the first thing he wanted to do was unload everything he had.  And Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house, for he also is a son of Abraham."

Here's a true Jew.  And, boy, this is real salvation.  Why?  Cause the guy can only think of what a sinner he is and he wants to unload all of the stuff that he's taken unjustly from people and give them back, not only what they deserve but everything else he's got.  "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost."

Well, too bad about the young man in Matthew 19, isn't it?  See, he wasn't willing to confess what Zacchaeus was.  The Lord showed him he was a sinner.  Measured him up against the law of God.  He wouldn't see it.  The Lord gave him a command, asked him to follow, he wouldn't do it.  And so he demonstrated that because he was not willing to turn from his sin and because he was not willing to affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life, he could not receive salvation.  "He went away very sad for he had great possessions."

He came for eternal life.  And he left without it.  Oh what a sad, sad thing.  And so we learn a lot, don't we, from this story about how we present the gospel and what our Lord expects.  Let's bow in prayer.

Father, thank You for the great truth of this passage.  Thank You for how it helps us understand the gospel.  And how consistent You are, it's always that way.  You call for repentance.  From the first we heard Your voice saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom is at hand," and all through the Scripture we hear of the fact that You are the sovereign Lord and those who come to you must come to you as Lord.  So, Father, do Your perfect work of salvation.  Find the true seeking heart who is bound with unfulfillment, who feels the pain of hopelessness, the absence of joy and peace, who seeks eternal life, seeks it diligently and eagerly, comes to the right source, asks the right question, but who also is willing to acknowledge sin and see themselves as one who's violated the holy law of holy God and is willing to abandon their life to the sovereign Lordship of Christ.  Do a saving work, Father, in hearts even in this place this morning.  May Your Holy Spirit bring about that conviction of sin, bring about that repentance.  May Your Holy Spirit work that work of submission and obedience, even though they don't yet understand all that it means, may Your Spirit do that as a part of the saving work.

Father, we thank You that You are so clear as we study this great treasure of Your Word.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).