

Perfecting Witness: Salt and Light Encounters  
**Rich Young Ruler: Commitment**



*The **seeker** comes to Jesus hoping to find answers for life.  
The **servant** trusts in Jesus for life.  
Both seeker and servant are challenged to rethink what matters most in life.*

**A. The Seeker: A Rich Young Ruler** *Matt 19:16-23*

*Our attitude regarding 'possessions' often determines how we view life, and God. For many seekers, like the rich young ruler, possessions became a test regarding following Jesus.*

1. What good thing shall I do...? :16-17  
*The purpose of the Law was to reveal sin and the need for forgiveness and atonement.*
2. How good was this man? :18-20
3. If you want to be perfect (complete)... :21  
*True salvation requires perfection. *Mat 5:48**
4. You will have REAL treasure :21  
*Not hoarded wealth *Luk 12:18-21**
5. Salvation cannot be purchased—it is a gift *Rom 5:18*
6. What are you unwilling to give up for Christ? :22

**B. The Servant: The Disciples** *Matt 19:23-30*

*The servants attitude regarding possessions is a test of following and trusting Jesus.*

1. **The Poverty of Riches** :23-26
  - a. Wealth gives false sense of security and empowerment that is in the hand of the possessor. To operate in the power of God, attachment to possessions **MUST** be released.
  - b. It is impossible to use possessions to gain entrance **TO** or operate **IN** the Kingdom.
  - c. However, what is impossible with man is possible with God. God can use a penny given with the right heart for His glory. *Luke 21:1-4*
2. **The Riches of Poverty** :27-30
  - a. What about those who **HAVE** left all? :27
    - aa. For the original apostles :28
    - bb. For all others :29-30; *Mark 10:30*  
*The key here is, "for my Name's sake!"  
God will replace what we give up for Him with an increase of His provision. In some cases it's simply a change of ownership as we release what we have to Him.*

It is not enough to start out well on the path of service and discipleship. It's how we finish that counts!

Matt 19:30

**Matthew 19:16-30**

:16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, (A1) "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

:17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. (A1) But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

:18 He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' 'YOU SHALL NOT STEAL,' 'YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,'

:19 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER,' and, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "

:20 (A2) The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

:21 Jesus said to him, (A3) "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and (A4) you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

:22 But when the young man heard that saying, (A6) he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

:23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that (B1-a) it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

:24 And again I say to you, it is (B1-b) easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

:25 When His disciples heard *it*, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

:26 But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, (B1-c) "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

:27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore B2-a) what shall we have?"

:28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for (B2-bb) My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

:30 But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.

## Mat 19:16-26

### G. Concerning Riches: The Rich Young Ruler (19:16-26)

**19:16** This incident provides a study in contrasts. Having just seen that the kingdom of heaven belongs to little children, we will now see how difficult it is for adults to enter.

A rich man intercepted the Lord with an apparently sincere inquiry. Addressing Jesus as “**Good Teacher**” he asked **what** he had to **do** to **have eternal life**. The question revealed his ignorance of the true identity of Jesus and of the way of salvation. He called Jesus “**Teacher**,” putting Him on the same level as other great men. And he spoke of gaining **eternal life** as a debt rather than as a gift.

**19:17** Our Lord probed him on these two points. In asking, “**Why do you call Me good? There is no one good but One, that is, God,**” Jesus was not denying His own deity, but was providing the man with an opportunity to say, “That's why I call You good—You are God.”

To test him on the way of salvation Jesus said, “**But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.**” The Savior was not implying that man can be saved by keeping the commandments. Rather, He was using the law to produce conviction of sin in the man's heart. The man was still under the delusion that he could inherit the kingdom on the principle of *doing*. Therefore, let him obey the law which told him what to *do*.

**19:18-20** Our Lord quoted the five commandments dealing primarily with our fellow man, climaxing them by saying, “**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**” Blind to his own selfishness, the man boasted that he had always **kept** these commandments.

**19:21** Our Lord then exposed the man's failure to love his neighbor as himself by telling him to **sell** all his possessions **and give** the money **to the poor**. Then he should **come** to Jesus and **follow** Him.

The Lord did not mean that this man could have been saved by selling his possessions and giving the proceeds to charity. There is only one way of salvation—faith in the Lord.

But in order to be saved, a man must acknowledge that he has sinned and fallen short of God's holy requirements. The rich man's unwillingness to share his possessions showed that he did not love his neighbor as himself. He should have said, “Lord, if that's what is required, then I'm a sinner. I cannot save myself by my own efforts. Therefore, I ask You to save me by Your grace.” If he had responded to the Savior's instruction he would have been given the way of salvation.

**19:22** Instead, **he went away sorrowful.**

**19:23, 24** The rich man's response prompted **Jesus** to observe **that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven**. Riches tend to become an idol. It is hard to have them without trusting in them. Our Lord declared that “**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.”** He was using a figure of speech known as hyperbole—a statement made in intensified form to produce a vivid, unforgettable effect.

It is clearly impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle! The “needle's eye” has often been explained as the small door in a city gate. A camel could get through it by kneeling down, but only with great difficulty. However, the word used for “needle” in the parallel passage in Luke is the same word used to describe the needle used by surgeons. It seems clear from the context that the Lord was not speaking of difficulty, but of impossibility. Humanly speaking, a rich man simply *cannot* be saved.

**19:25** The **disciples** were **astonished** by these remarks. As Jews living under the Mosaic code, by which God promised prosperity to those who obeyed Him, they correctly viewed riches as indicative of God's blessing. If those who thus enjoyed God's blessing couldn't be saved, who *could*?

**19:26** The Lord replied, “**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**” Humanly speaking, it is **impossible** for anyone to be saved; only God can save a soul. But it is more difficult for a wealthy man to surrender his will to Christ than for a poor man, as evidenced by the fact that few rich men are converted. They find it almost impossible to replace trust in visible means of support for faith in an unseen Savior. Only God can effect such a change.

Commentators and preachers invariably inject here that it is perfectly all right for Christians to be rich. It is strange that they use a passage in which the Lord denounces wealth as a hindrance to man's eternal welfare, to justify the accumulation of earthly treasures! And it is difficult to see how a Christian can cling to riches in view of the appalling need everywhere, the imminence of Christ's Return, and the Lord's clear prohibition against laying up treasures on earth. Hoarded wealth condemns us as not loving our neighbors as ourselves.

**Mat 19:27-30**

## **H. Concerning Rewards for Sacrificial Living (19:27-30)**

**19:27** **Peter** caught the drift of the Savior's teaching. Realizing that Jesus was saying, “Forsake all and follow Me,” Peter gloated that he and the other disciples had done exactly that; then he added, “**What shall we have?**” Peter's self-life was showing, the old nature reasserting itself. It was a spirit each of us must guard against. He was bargaining with the Lord.

**19:28, 29** The Lord assured Peter that everything done for Him would be rewarded handsomely. As to the twelve specifically, they would have places of authority in the Millennium. **The regeneration** refers to Christ's future reign on earth; it is explained by the expression, “**when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.**” We have previously referred to this phase of the kingdom as the kingdom in *manifestation*. At that time the twelve will **sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel**. Rewards in the NT are closely linked with positions of administration in the Millennium (see [Luk 19:17](#), [Luk 19:19](#)). They are *awarded* at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but *manifested* when the Lord returns to earth to reign.

As to believers in general, Jesus added that all who have **left houses or brothers or**

**sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for His sake shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.** In this life, they enjoy a world-wide fellowship of believers that more than compensates for severed earthly ties. For the one house they leave, they receive a hundred Christian homes where they are warmly welcomed. For lands or other forms of wealth forsaken, they receive spiritual riches beyond reckoning.

The future reward for all believers is **eternal life**. This does not mean that we earn eternal life by forsaking all and sacrificing. Eternal life is a gift and cannot be earned or merited. Here the thought is that those who forsake all are rewarded with a greater capacity for enjoying eternal life in heaven. All believers will have that life but not all will enjoy it to the same extent.

**19:30** The Lord closed His remarks with a warning against a bargaining spirit. He said to Peter, in effect, “Anything you do for My sake will be rewarded, but be careful that you are not guided by selfish considerations; because in that case, **many who are first will be last, and the last first.** This is illustrated by a parable in the next chapter. This statement may also have been a warning that it isn't enough to start out well on the path of discipleship. It's how we finish that counts.

Before leaving this section we should notice that the expressions “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used interchangeably in verses 23 and 24; therefore, the two terms are synonymous.

## 18

### How to Obtain Eternal Life ([Mat 19:16-22](#))

**And behold, one came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” He said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear fake witness; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property ([Mat 19:16-22](#))**

At first one might wonder what kind of message Jesus was trying to give this man who came to Him. The truth is summarized in Jesus' statement on another occasion: “So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” ([Luk 14:33](#)).

Some years ago the young man in the seat next to me on an airplane asked, “Sir, you wouldn't know how I could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, would you?”

Taken somewhat by surprise by his openness and seeming readiness for salvation, I told him that he needed to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He said, "I'd like to do that," and we prayed together and rejoiced in his decision. He was on his way to a new job near our church, so he was baptized and began attending services. But some months later I was extremely disappointed to discover that he had developed no interest at all in the things of the Lord and was living in such a way that it was apparent he had not been transformed. He soon disappeared from the church and has never returned.

Anyone who has done much personal witnessing has encountered persons who make a profession of faith in Christ but whose subsequent lives show no change in attitudes or behavior. And when they indicate no love for God and Christ, no interest in the Bible, in prayer, or in the fellowship of God's people, there is no good reason to believe they were ever saved.

Our Lord gave this young man a test. He had to make a choice between Christ and his possessions and sin, and he failed the test. No matter what he may have believed, because he was unwilling to forsake all, he could not be a disciple of Christ. Salvation is for those who are willing to forsake everything.

The incident recorded in [Mat 19:16-22](#) gives insight into how some people who show great interest in the gospel never come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This young man went away from Christ not because he heard the wrong message or because he did not believe but because he was unwilling to admit his sin, forsake all that he had, and obey Christ as Lord.

## 19

### The Poverty of Riches and the Riches of Poverty ([Mat 19:23-29](#))

**And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And 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." And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can he saved?" And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" 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. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life." ([Mat 19:23-29](#))**

The rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking eternal life, but the barriers of his self-centeredness and self-righteousness stood in the way of his receiving it ([Mat 19:16-22](#)). He would not recognize his need for repentance and Christ's forgiveness nor would he submit to Christ's lordship. He sincerely wanted eternal life, but he wanted his

riches and his self-righteousness even more. Whoever wants anything more than Christ will forfeit Christ.

In this present passage the Lord elaborates on the spiritual danger of trusting in material riches and the spiritual blessings of forsaking them for His sake. He first focuses on what might be called the poverty of riches ([Mat 19:23-26](#)) and then on the riches of poverty ([Mat 19:27-29](#)).

## The Poverty of Riches

**And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And 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.” And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking upon them Jesus said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”** ([Mat 19:23-26](#))

The expression **Truly I say to you** was a common Jewish figure of speech used to introduce a teaching of great importance. It carried the idea of, “Pay special attention to what I am about to say” The important truth Jesus wanted to convey to **His disciples** at this time was that, as they had just seen tragically illustrated by the rich young ruler, **it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.**

The kingdom of heaven refers to the sphere of God’s gracious rule and, as is clear from the fact that Jesus uses both in the same statement, is synonymous with the kingdom of God. By intertestamental times, heaven had become a common Jewish substitute term for the covenant name of God (Yahweh, Jehovah), which they preferred not to speak. In this context the terms are also synonymous with eternal life, which the rich young ruler was seeking ([Mat 19:16](#)), and therefore with salvation. Following up on the incident of that young man, whose wealth was for him an impenetrable barrier to receiving Christ as Lord and Savior, Jesus explained to the Twelve the eternal danger of trusting in material possessions.

The Lord repeatedly emphasized that following Him required willingness to sacrifice everything a person had, economic, personal, social, and all else. “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me,” He said; “and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it” ([Mat 10:37-39](#)). A person must desire salvation more than anything else, so that no sacrifice is too great to make for Christ’s sake. That is why “the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” ([Mat 7:14](#)).

*Duskolo* (hard) is used in the New Testament only here and in the parallel synoptic accounts ([Mar 10:23](#); [Luk 18:24](#)). Jesus went on to explain that, as far as a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven is concerned, hard is equivalent to impossible: **“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.”

The expression easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle was a Jewish colloquialism for the impossible. It was probably a modified form of a Persian expression for impossibility “easier for an elephant to go through the eye of a needle,” that is quoted in the Talmud. Being the largest animal known in Palestine, the camel was substituted for the elephant.

Some have been confused by this text, thinking it appears to say that the rich have no hope of salvation. So in order to make the expression signify something difficult but not impossible, interpreters have suggested numerous explanations, many of them far-fetched. Some propose that there was a very small gate in the ancient wall of Jerusalem called the Needle’s Eye. In order for a camel to go through it, they surmised, the animal would have to be completely unloaded and then crawl through on its knees. But neither the Persian nor the Jewish saying used the term *gate*, and no Jerusalem gate by that name is mentioned in any extant historical or archeological record. In any case, no sensible person would go to such trouble when he could take his camel a few hundred yards down the wall and go through a larger gate.

Other scholars have suggested that scribal error changed the Greek word *kamilos* (a large rope or cable) into *kameilos* (a camel). But a large rope would also be impossible to thread through the eye of a needle. More than that, it is hard to conceive that the scribes who made copies from the original manuscript all made the same mistake and made it in all three gospel accounts!

Even if an ancient manuscript were found with the word for camel changed to *rope*, it would be rejected for the reason that it would indicate a scribe had changed it to make it more acceptable. Because no scribe would turn *rope* into *camel*, the latter would be considered the original reading. The expression clearly refers to an impossibility. It is impossible for a rich man such as the one just encountered to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Before considering what Jesus meant by saying it is impossible, let us consider some reasons why it is difficult. For one thing, the rich tend to have false security in their riches. Because wealth can provide for all physical needs and a great many things beyond needs, the wealthy are inclined to rely on their money to buy whatever they want, so they see little reason to depend on God. That is one reason there are “not many wise,... mighty... noble; but God has chosen the foolish,... weak,... base,... despised” ([1Co 1:26-28](#)). The poor, on the other hand, became the special objects of and responders to our Lord’s teaching ([Luk 4:18](#)).

An attitude of self-sufficiency plagued the church at Laodicea. Because they said, “I am rich, and have become wealthy and have need of nothing,” they did not realize that spiritually they were “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” ([Rev 3:17](#)). In a.d. 60 Laodicea had a devastating earthquake that virtually levelled the city. Although the Roman government offered to rebuild the city for them, the proud inhabitants insisted on doing it themselves. They succeeded in raising the entire city out of the ashes, as it were, without any outside help. That proud, self-sufficient attitude obviously had spilled over into the church, whose members came to think of themselves as able to do without the help even of God.

Those who have great material resources tend to imagine they do not require divine

resources. Paul therefore told Timothy to “instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” ([1Ti 6:17](#)). More than that, the apostle goes on to say “Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take bold of that which is life indeed” ([1Ti 6:18-19](#)).

Paul’s advice to Timothy was that he confront prospective converts who were rich in the same way Jesus confronted the rich young ruler. If a person prefers his earthly fortune to the lordship of Jesus Christ, his heart is not prepared for salvation. Willingness to give up everything for the Lord will not in itself save him, but it demonstrates that he is desperate for salvation and has found the “pearl of great price” for which he will sell all he has if need be.

Only godliness brings gain that has lasting value and satisfaction, Paul assures us. “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. 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 a pang” ([1Ti 6:6](#), [1Ti 6:9-10](#)).

It is especially difficult for rich people not to be closely tied to this world, to their bank accounts, investments, and possessions. A person’s heart is where his treasure is ([Mat 6:21](#)), and the wealthy usually find it hard, and seemingly unnecessary to treasure the things of God. When they hear the gospel, its divine seed frequently falls on thorny hearts that may have an initial response but are full of “the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things” that choke the Word and make it unfruitful ([Mar 4:18-19](#)).

The successful farmer who tore down his old barns and built bigger ones to hold all his grain was oblivious to the welfare of his soul. Completely content in his riches, he said to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry” And because he refused to recognize God as the source of his many goods or to allow Him to have any place in his life, his life was forfeited. “God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man,” Jesus explained, “who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” ([Luk 12:18-21](#)).

Every possession a person has is by the provision of God and ought to be used to His glory. Even Christians run the danger of being sidetracked and trapped by their possessions, giving to God only what remains after they have accumulated what they want and fulfilled their own plans.

All that may explain why it is so hard for the rich to enter God’s kingdom, but why it is impossible is a completely different issue — and is the whole point here.

The young ruler was not a denouncer of Christ but a seeker who wanted eternal life, who wanted kingdom citizenship. But the flaw was that he thought he himself had the resources to procure it. That is the point here.

In Mark’s parallel account, Jesus makes clear that the impossibility of entering the kingdom by any humanly devised or empowered means extends to everyone, not just the rich. We learn from Mark that after the disciples expressed amazement about His statement concerning the wealthy, Jesus said, “Children, how hard it is to enter the

kingdom of God!” ([Mar 10:24](#)). The rich young ruler’s problem was not his wealth itself but his trust in his wealth and in his own ability to meet God’s standards for acceptance. He wanted to enter the kingdom and receive eternal life on his own terms, through his own money and by his own efforts. But, Jesus said, it is so hard for anyone to get saved on his own terms and by his own efforts that it is absolutely impossible. The poorest of the poor have no better chance to gain eternal life by their own efforts at righteousness.

Jesus is not here teaching how hard it is for rich people to get unhooked from their riches and bow their knees to Him in humble faith. He is saying how impossible it is for them or for anyone else to be saved by self-effort of any kind. In effect, He was saying the same thing God said through the Mosaic law. It was humanly impossible to live up to a single one of the Ten Commandments or to the two great commandments ([Lev 19:18](#); [Deu 6:5](#); [Mat 22:37-39](#)), and those laws were intended to show God’s people the impossibility of meeting His perfect, holy standards in their own power. Salvation has always been impossible by human effort.

Paul expressed the same truth when he wrote: “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” ([Rom 3:19-20](#)).

Jesus declared that all works — righteousness, which is the basis of every manmade religion, is worthless, affirming what Jeremiah had written hundreds of years earlier: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil” ([Jer 13:23](#)). Every human being since the Fall is by nature “accustomed to do evil” and is therefore unable to do good in any way that is acceptable to God. No one can save himself any more than he can change the color of his skin or than a leopard can change his spots.

Jesus was not separating out the rich as being more inherently far from the kingdom than other people but was pointing out that their riches on the one hand were a formidable barrier and on the other hand that their money gave them no advantage at all, though they might be able to buy more sacrifices, give more alms, and make more offerings at the Temple.

The wealthy are also inclined to be selfish and self-centered. Their time and interests are often devoted to enlarging, protecting, and enjoying what they have, and consequently they have little time or concern for the interests or welfare of others. I once talked with a man who had worked for several multimillionaires. He said that they had three things in common: they not only were rich but were capable of getting even richer, they were eccentric, and they were extremely selfish and self-centered. Although there are exceptions, those characteristics are generally universal. Like the self-indulgent rich man who was oblivious to the diseased and destitute Lazarus who laid outside his gate hoping to have a few table crumbs ([Luk 16:20-31](#)), the wealthy are inclined to be interested only in themselves.

Jesus’ teaching about the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom by their own efforts was a shocking idea to Jews. Therefore, when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” For many centuries the rab-

his had taught that accumulation of wealth was a virtue and that it was not only unwise but sinful for a person to give away more than one fifth of what he owned. They had designed a religious law to protect their selfishness and greed. Envisioning the Lord in their own materialistic image, they reasoned that God was pleased with a gift in direct proportion to its size. Therefore, the more one gave out of the permissible one fifth limit, the more favor he found with God.

Such ideas were so strongly entrenched that in much Jewish thinking alms giving was virtually a means of buying salvation. Much like the indulgences of the Middle Ages, alms giving was considered a means of literally purchasing a more favored place in the kingdom. For Jesus to teach that wealth was actually a serious *barrier* to the kingdom was diametrically contrary to everything most Jews had been taught. The rich could afford the largest and choicest of the sacrificial animals. They could give large amounts to the Temple and their local synagogues. They never lacked for money to drop into the thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles in the court of the women that were conspicuously located so that their generous giving to the Lord's work could be observed by fellow worshippers.

But if even the rich cannot enter the kingdom by their own efforts and generosity the disciples wondered, what could the poor hope for? In total bewilderment they therefore asked Jesus, "Then who can be saved?"

And looking upon them Jesus said to them explicitly what the Mosaic law said implicitly: "With men this is impossible." Just as it is not merely difficult but impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, it is not merely difficult but impossible for men to please the Lord and come into His kingdom on their own terms and by their own efforts. In one simple declaration, Jesus utterly destroyed the current perspective in the religion of Israel and, at the same time, all hope in works-righteousness. Whatever his material possessions and earthly accomplishments, every person stands totally helpless and powerless before God. He stands condemned before a righteous God, and in his depraved nature he can do nothing to make himself holy and worthy of God's forgiveness and acceptance. With that statement Jesus swept all religions of human achievement and works-righteousness into hell. Left to any work of man, salvation is impossible.

"But with God all things are possible," Jesus went on to say. Because God is able to change sinful hearts, it is possible for Him to save helpless men. God can do what men cannot do. The rich young ruler went away without eternal life because he sought it on the impossible basis of his own human resources and goodness. Salvation is entirely a gracious and sovereign work of God, and the work of His human witnesses is simply to proclaim the full truth of the gospel as clearly and lovingly as possible and to rely on God to apply that truth to an unbeliever's heart and bring him to recognize his spiritual bankruptcy and come to repentance and obedient faith. Although repentance and faith require an act of human will, they are prompted by the power of God.

"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him," Jesus said ([Joh 6:44](#)). That is why Paul admonished that "the Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" ([2Ti 2:24-26](#)).

## The Riches of Poverty

**Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” 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. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life.”** ([Mat 19:27-29](#))

With hope perhaps tinged with uncertainty, **Peter** ventured to ask Jesus, **“Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?”** “We came on Your terms, didn’t we?” he said in effect. “Do we thereby qualify for eternal life? The rich young ruler refused to surrender his possessions and his life to You, and he forfeited the kingdom. But we forsook our jobs, our families, our friends, and everything else we had in order to be Your disciples. We have repented of our sins and surrendered to Your lordship. Just as You commanded, we have denied ourselves and taken up our crosses for your sake. Doesn’t that qualify us for a place in Your kingdom?”

Peter was speaking for all of the Twelve, because he had no suspicion of Judas’s betrayal. As that false disciple would soon make evident, he had *not* forsaken everything for Christ but was instead seeking to use Him for his own ends. He expected Jesus to overthrow Rome and set up His own earthly kingdom, with the disciples given the highest places of honor and power. Judas was much further from the kingdom than the rich young ruler, who at least knew he needed eternal life and had a certain desire for it. Judas, on the other hand, was totally concerned with his present, earthly life.

But the rest of the Twelve, despite their small faith and slowness to understand Jesus’ teaching, had truly given themselves to Him. They shared with Judas many of the common Jewish misconceptions about the Messiah and His kingdom. They may still have been expecting Him to establish the kingdom during their lifetimes and therefore could not bring themselves to accept the idea of His suffering and death. But they nevertheless continued to follow and obey Him. As Peter had declared in behalf of the Twelve, “You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” ([Joh 6:68-69](#)).

Although Peter and the others were still confused about much of Jesus’ message and mission, they knew they truly belonged to Him and that He truly loved them and would not forsake them. They were certain He had something divinely good in store for them, even if they had a distorted idea of what it was. Peter therefore asked to hear from Jesus’ own lips concerning **what then will there be for us?** “What are the benefits of Your kingdom for us?” they wanted to know “What do we have to look forward to as Your disciples?”

Some have criticized Peter for his expectation of blessing and reward. But Jesus gave no hint of dissatisfaction with the question. Instead, He acknowledged that they were indeed His true and sincere disciples, referring to them as **you who have fol-**

**lowed Me.** The Greek aorist participle characterizes them as His followers.

Next, He gave them the marvelous and unique promise **that 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.**

The term *palingenesia* (**regeneration**) literally means new birth. It was used by Josephus for the new birth of the Jewish nation after the Babylonian Captivity and by Philo of the new birth of the earth after the Flood and after its destruction by fire. It is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in [Tit 3:5](#), where Paul uses it to refer to the personal new birth of believers. In the present passage, however, Jesus uses it to represent the rebirth of the earth under His sovereign dominion at the time of His second coming. It will be paradise regained and a global parallel to the individual rebirth of Christians.

The earth and the world of men will be given a new nature, described in great detail by the Old Testament prophets and by John in [Rev 20:1-15](#). Just as they have been given spiritual life and a new nature in Jesus Christ but are not yet perfected, so there will be a rebirth of the earth that is divinely recreated. Although it will not yet be a totally new earth ([Rev 21:1](#)), it will nevertheless be wonderfully superior to the present fallen and unredeemed earth. It was the belief of the Jews that Messiah would renew the earth and heavens, based on the prophecy of [Isa 65:17](#) and [Isa 66:22](#). Peter called it “the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times” ([Act 3:21](#)).

All believers will sit on the throne of Christ ([Rev 3:21](#)), exercising authority over the people of the earth ([Rev 2:26](#)), while the apostles are uniquely ruling restored Israel. This cannot be the eternal state described in [Rev 21:12-14](#), where twelve gates in the New Jerusalem are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes and twelve foundations are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles.

At the time of the restoration of the earth, righteousness will flourish, peace will abound, Jerusalem will again be exalted, health and healing will prevail, the earth will produce food as never before, the lion will lay down in peace with the lamb, the deserts will blossom, and life will be long. The age-old curse that began with the Fall will then be *limited*, in anticipation of its being *eliminated* completely in the eternal state to follow ([Rev 22:3](#)).

As God had long before predicted, the Messiah, the Lord’s Anointed, will then receive all the nations as His inheritance and have the very ends of the earth as His possessions. “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron,” the psalmist declared; “Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware” ([Psa 2:2](#), [Psa 2:8-9](#)). Then **the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne**, as King of kings and Lord of lords ([Rev 19:16](#)). This is a reference to the prophecy of [Dan 7:13-14](#), where God, “the Ancient of Days,” gives the kingdom to the Son of Man Jesus is affirming the reality that He will rule in the coming kingdom.

At that time the redeemed of all the ages will also reign with Him. “Then the sovereignty the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” ([Dan 7:27](#); cf. [1Co 6:2](#); [Rev 20:4](#)). The nation of Israel will be restored, and sharing Christ’s rule over her will be the Twelve apostles, **who also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** Matthias, who took Judas’s place among the apostles shortly

before Pentecost ([Act 1:26](#)), will join the other eleven on the **twelve thrones** (cf. [Dan 7:22](#) and [Isa 1:26](#)).

Because amillennial interpreters do not believe in a literal thousand-year kingdom on earth or in Israel's national restoration, they take the **twelve thrones** and **the twelve tribes** as being purely figurative. One such writer made no attempt to discern Jesus' meaning but simply commented, "Now we have to wonder what our Lord meant by the twelve tribes of Israel."

If Jesus was referring to a real reigning on His part when He spoke of His throne, He must be referring to literal **thrones** that the apostles would sit upon while literally **judging the twelve tribes of Israel**. And as already noted, this millennial truth is also revealed elsewhere in Scripture.

The Word makes clear that in the reign of Christ over the world, He will be sovereign and rule over Jews and Gentiles with righteousness, peace, and immediate justice. He will be worshiped as supreme Lord, and His kingdom will bring prosperity healing, health, and blessedness.

Not only that, Jesus continued, **but "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive as much, and shall inherit eternal life."** Those who renounce their possessions and become poor for Christ's **name's sake** are going to share with the apostles in His triumph and reign. Mark reports that Jesus said the person who gives up those things for His sake and the gospel's "shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age" ([Mar 10:30](#)).

When a person comes to Jesus Christ he must often have to turn his back on certain relationships, even with those who are very dear to him. Many times his conversion turns his own family and closest friends against him, in some cases even to the point of seeking his disinheritance or even his life. But the one who gives up everything for Christ's sake, not only will **inherit eternal life** but also the family of God in this present life. He will have a host of new fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters with whom he will forever be united in God's divine family. Wherever he goes, he meets spiritual loved ones, many of whom he has never seen or heard of before. Throughout the world he finds those who will share his sorrows, encourage his spirit, and help meet his needs, material as well as spiritual.

The believer in Jesus Christ will have blessings now blessings in the millennial kingdom, and blessings throughout all eternity. To be poor for the sake of Christ is to be rich indeed. Jim Elliot, a young missionary martyred by the Auca Indians of Ecuador whom he was seeking to reach for Christ, wrote shortly before his death, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."