



Daily Verse and Comment

Matthew 19:16-26

(16) Now at that time, one came to Him *and* said, "Good Master, what good *thing* shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (17) And He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good except one—God. But if you desire to enter into life, keep the commandments." (18) Then he said to Him, "Which?" And Jesus said, " 'You shall not commit 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) The young man said to Him, "I have kept all these things from my youth. What do I yet lack?" (21) Jesus said to him, "If you desire to be perfect, go *and* sell your property, and give to *the* poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come *and* follow Me." (22) But after hearing this word, the young man went away grieving, because he had many possessions. (23) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it *is extremely* difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. (24) And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through *the* eye of a needle than *for* a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (25) But after hearing this, the disciples were greatly astonished *and* said, "Who then is able to be saved?" (26) But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

A Faithful Version

We see a very polite, respectful, and eager young man who leaves Christ and goes away sorrowful. Why? The story makes it clear that he is young, and Luke tells us he is a ruler ([Luke 18:18](#)), possibly a magistrate or a kind of Justice of the [Peace](#).

In the parallel account in Mark, we are told that the young man came "running" up to Christ and "knelt" before him ([Mark 10:17](#)), indicating a sense of urgency and respect. He then shows submissiveness and a

willingness to be taught when he addresses [Jesus](#) as "Good Teacher." This was not a typical form of address for the Jews at this time. A more respectful greeting may not be found in the entire Bible.

This young man came, not to tempt Christ, but to learn from him. We know that he was not a Sadducee because it is clear that he believed in eternal life and wanted to attain it—an unusual goal in someone of his position and age. A man of wealth will often trust his riches and not be interested in what [God](#) has to offer. The young do not often look beyond today, much less to the far reaches of eternity.

This rich young ruler was a very sensible fellow. He knew something must be done to attain this happiness; eternal life is not a game of chance or blind fate. [Romans 2:6-7](#) tells us that we are rewarded for our works, good and bad, and that "eternal life [goes] to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality."

Christ's response to all this is interesting. He first establishes that none are truly good except God, and to Him goes all glory. Then Jesus tells him to "keep the commandments," specifically listing the last six of the Ten Commandments, the ones dealing with human-to-human relationships. The Jews of the time were well-versed in the mechanics of the first four commandments, in terms of the letter of the law, so Christ lists the ones in which they were weakest.

It seems so simple, right? In order to have eternal life, "keep the commandments." How do today's professing Christians, who claim the law has been done away, get around this simple instruction? Other verses, such as [John 14:15](#), "If you [love](#) Me, keep My commandments," reinforce this straightforward directive.

The young ruler tells Christ that he has kept the commandments since he was a child. What else should he do? Jesus does not contradict him. In Mark's account, it says He looked at him and "loved him." Possibly, this man was adept at keeping the letter of the law, but he was coming up short in abiding by the spirit of the law. Perhaps Jesus saw that he was absolutely sincere in his efforts to abide by those commandments.

Whatever the case, Christ does not attempt to sermonize on this point. The way the young man phrased his question, "What do I still lack?" smacks a bit of pride or self-righteousness. In effect, he says, "I'm keeping the commandments and have done well in that regard all my life. Show me where I'm coming up short."

Unlike what many of us would do, Christ avoids becoming mired in a dispute about this claim, but gets right to the bottom line: The young man's love of [the world](#). He tells him to sell his possessions, give the money away, and follow Him as a disciple. Yet, the young ruler was unwilling to do this. His treasure was here on earth. His money exerted a stronger tug on his heart than Christ did. Matthew Henry says in his commentary, "When we embrace Christ, we must let go of the world, for we cannot serve God and money."

To the young man's credit, he was not hypocritical. He did not pretend he could do this when he could not. He knew what this meant: Christ's high standards and his own ambitions and desires were incompatible. Being both thoughtful and well-intentioned, he went away "sorrowful."

What did he possess that had such a hold on him as to make him willing to walk away from eternal life? To put it into terms we can relate to: Did he have a fully equipped game room with pinball, billiards, jukebox, and wet bar? Maybe he had the latest and hottest SUV? Perhaps his living room sported a plasma television, where he could kick back and watch all the sports he could handle?

What was holding him back? What did he really trust in? There is nothing spiritually wrong with wealth itself. The Bible is full of examples of godly men who were very wealthy—for instance, great men of God like Abraham, [Isaac](#), Jacob, Job, and David. The problem is in the love of money.

Because we live in a consumer-driven society, the love of money can hold us back too. Advertisements call to us constantly, informing us of "needs" we did not even know we had. It is difficult to maintain a proper balance while under such an assault. We may not think of it this way, but it could be considered a blessing not to have great wealth because of the additional stress it can put on our spiritual lives.

It is instructive to study what Christ had to say to His disciples after the rich young ruler sadly walked away. *Twice* Jesus tells us how hard it is for the rich to enter the [Kingdom of God](#). The Christian walk is not easy for anyone, but it is particularly hard for the wealthy. In fact, Jesus goes on to say, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

— Mike Ford

To learn more, see:

[**The Rich Young Ruler and the Needle's Eye**](#)

Related Topics:

[Commandments, Keeping](#)

[Covetousness](#)

[Law Keeping](#)

[Lawkeeping](#)

[Letter of the Law](#)

[Lovers of Money](#)

[Parable of the Rich Young Man](#)

[Spirit of the Law](#)

[Wealth](#)