

SESSION 3

SELL EVERYTHING YOU OWN



What's one thing you'd have trouble living without?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

*Choose Jesus or worldly wealth,
because you can't live for both.*

THE PASSAGE

Matthew 19:16-26

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

One of my favorite TV shows has an episode where the main character's uncle dies. The uncle wanted to be buried with all his favorite things: baseball cards, old trophies, the helmet he wore in battle—well, you get the idea. He has so much stuff in his casket they spend most of the 22-minute episode trying to figure out how to close the casket without breaking anything.

I enjoy this episode because it is just so silly. We know these things won't be with us when we die, nor will they matter; yet, some people in the world have been buried—or plan to be buried—with their possessions. No, it's true that we “can't take it with us,” but it can still be easy to get wrapped up in all our stuff. The things we own are not what bring us closer to God, but in some cases, like with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, those possessions can tear us away from Him.

Matthew 19:16-20

16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

18 He said to him, “Which ones?” And 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 mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

20 The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”

We know three things about the man who came to Jesus:

- ▶ He was young (Matt. 19:20).
- ▶ He was rich (v. 22).
- ▶ He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

Many religious leaders questioned Jesus with the intent of trapping Him, but we have no hint of that with this young man. He even called Jesus “Teacher,” and he seemed willing to learn from Him.

What he wanted to learn could be seen as a universal question, one you may have asked at some time: “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” This young man was trying to secure his way into heaven through the practice of good deeds. It is clear from his answer in verse 20 that, in spite of his actions, he sensed in his spirit something different was needed. I picture him standing with writing instrument in hand, waiting for Jesus’ profound answer. He was primed and ready for his “Get into Heaven To-Do” list.

Jesus challenged his way of thinking with a question, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.” This is our first sign that what matters is not the good we do but the

DIGGING DEEPER



"JESUS THE MASTER TEACHER"

Believers and unbelievers alike

agree that Jesus was a great teacher. Check out this article on pages 114-117 for more information about Jesus' teachings.

One who is good. In church it's common to hear the phrase, "God is good!" Of course, it's true, God *is* good.

The problem comes when we think we can earn right standing with God. We donate to charities. We give our last dollar or a water bottle to the homeless man on the corner. We volunteer our time, resources, and energy to reputable organizations. Overall, we are kind and good people. But we're sadly mistaken if we do these things in our own version of the "Get into Heaven To-Do" list." None of these things is bad, but they also aren't what it takes to answer the man's question: "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

Jesus gave the young man the check list he was looking for:

- ▶ "Do not murder." Yep, got it.
- ▶ "Do not commit adultery." Nope, haven't done that.
- ▶ "Do not steal, do not bear false witness." Double check.
- ▶ "Honor your father and ... mother; ... love your neighbor." Check.

Jesus used these six commandments because they would have been familiar to this Jewish man. Out of the Ten Commandments, these six involve other people. When it came to outward behavior, the man had done well. But he knew this was not enough. He was still missing something. "What do I still lack?"

The young man may have obeyed these commandments but his obedience may have been out of obligation. Simply obeying the commandments was not enough. God doesn't just want our outward acts. Are our acts good? Maybe. Probably. But our acts don't always reveal our hearts. "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). Our hearts determine our motives and actions, and God wants our hearts to obey His call.

Why is keeping certain commands not enough to receive eternal life?

QUESTION #2

Matthew 19:21-22

21 Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Want to be perfect? OK. Here is what you do:

1. Sell your possessions.
2. Give to the poor because your treasures are in heaven.
3. Follow Jesus.

Easy, right?

If Jesus asked you to sell everything you own to follow Him, could you do it?

- ▶ The house.
- ▶ The car.
- ▶ The TV.
- ▶ The washer and dryer.
- ▶ Your great-grandmother's letters from your great-grandfather.
- ▶ The crib that's been passed down from generation to generation

Jesus was asking the young man to make an enormous sacrifice. He wasn't just to sell his possessions; he was to give away the money! All of it. Gone. But let's not get stuck on the possessions.

Giving up our possessions is not the point of this story. The Gospels record no other time Jesus called anybody to do that. In

following Jesus, Zaccheus gave away half of all he owned and paid others four times what he owed them (Luke 19:1-10). In His parable of the minas, Jesus called us to use what we have wisely for His kingdom (vv. 11-27). So why did Jesus make such a radical demand of this young man? Jesus knew the man loved his worldly possessions more than he loved Jesus. This call to external obedience was a step of internal obedience to trust Him. External obedience involved selling all his worldly possessions, and his internal obedience was trusting God for his happiness and provisions.

To follow Jesus is to place Him far above everything in our lives. If those things get in the way of our full devotion and commitment, get rid of them.

- ▶ Brothers Simon Peter and Andrew walked away from their jobs. They were fishermen. Simon watched Jesus preach from his boat and decided that it was worth leaving the fishing industry to follow Jesus (Matt. 4:18-20).
- ▶ James and John were also fisherman and gave up a thriving partnership with their father to follow the Lord (vv. 21-22).
- ▶ Matthew was a lucrative tax collector before he decided to follow Jesus (9:9).
- ▶ Simon was a zealot (10:4) who gave up his political goals to follow Jesus.

These men gladly walked away from these things to follow Jesus. Following Jesus changed their whole identities and what they thought they knew about themselves. That is a big “ask” from Jesus! But it’s the ultimate act of obedience and trust. I have friends who left lucrative and powerful jobs to follow God’s call to vocational ministry. Their trust was not in their own abilities or in the jobs they were doing. Their trust was—and still is—in Jesus. They trusted Him enough to know He would provide for their families.

The rich young ruler would’ve known that too, had he not walked away. He couldn’t do it. His heart was too wrapped around his worldly possessions that he could not give them all up. To him, what he owned was so important it kept him from truly knowing the Lord.

Why is a willingness to surrender everything necessary to follow Jesus?

QUESTION #3

Initially, the man ran to Jesus, fell on his knees, and was ready to do anything to secure his place in heaven (Mark 10:17). Well, almost anything. The young man wanted eternal life, but not at that cost. Ultimately, it was his possessions that owned him. And with that, he missed out on something far greater.

Matthew 19:23-26

23 And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Jesus made a profound statement to His disciples as the rich young man walked away—and He uttered it twice! “Truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

When the disciples heard this, they were in awe and completely confused. People commonly believed wealth was a sign of God's favor and blessing. If a person was rich, he was thought to be the

perfect candidate for heaven. And on top of that, this rich young ruler was a great guy by anyone's standard. He obeyed all the commandments. He honored his mother and father; He didn't murder, steal, or do harm to others. He was even a synagogue leader!

So why is it so hard for the rich to enter heaven? So long as their wealth takes priority, they lack the relationship with God that He desires. They depend on what they have instead of depending on God. This young man's heart was tied to his possessions and wealth, and that left no room for a relationship with God.

This man assumed the things he owned gave him more fulfillment—even though he knew something was lacking (v. 20)—than he would have if he trusted and followed Jesus. But what if the tables were turned? What if he sold his stuff, separated himself from personal success and wealth—basically everything he knew—and followed Jesus? He definitely would not have walked away sorrowful. He would have had freedom and joy that come with having a personal relationship with the Lord.

In what ways can wealth and possessions get in the way of following Jesus?

QUESTION #4

That's true for us too. When we find our identity in Jesus and not in the things of this world, we experience:

- ▶ **Freedom.** When we trust and follow Jesus, the chains of bondage break, allowing us to live in freedom from anger and bitterness. “The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).
- ▶ **Peace.** The peace we seek and desire comes from Jesus—and only Jesus. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

- ▶ **Joy.** “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

The rich young ruler missed all this. He was a perfect example of Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” We cannot be “all in” for Jesus while obsessing over the things we own. We can’t follow Him when we’re chasing money. It is impossible to have the mind of Christ when our thoughts are consumed with our financial portfolio.

Our relationship with God should be the center of everything on which we set our eyes and heart. Is that hard? Yes, but it’s not impossible. “With God all things are possible.” Trust and follow Him—and see what amazing things He does.

How can we own possessions without possessions owning us?

QUESTION #5

OBLIGATION OR OBEDIENCE

List characteristics and attitudes of seniors who respond to God out of ...

A. Obligation _____

B. Obedience _____

Circle the list that best describes you. What would it take for List B to describe you?

LIVE IT OUT

Having money and wealth is not wrong or sinful, but when it gets in the way of our relationship with Christ it's a sin. Take action by following one of these steps:

- ▶ **Trust.** If you've been trying to be good and moral in order to gain a good standing with God, acknowledge the futility of it. Trust Christ and be obedient to His Word as a response to His grace in your life.
- ▶ **Audit.** Walk through your residence and look at the things you own. Review each line of your financial statement. What do these possessions and purchases say about what's important to you? Consider ways you can use what God has given you to honor Him and build up His kingdom.
- ▶ **Sell.** Sell what you don't need or give it away. If you have possessions that consume your time in an unhealthy way or tempt you to focus on anything but Christ, sell it. Don't let anything come between you and following Christ.





JESUS THE MASTER TEACHER

BY MARK R. DUNN

“No man ever spoke like this!”¹ said the temple guards. Encounters with Jesus, the Master Teacher, were spellbinding, challenging, and memorable. Many rejoiced to know God better. The masses received His compelling teaching with acclaim and amazement; even the temple guards, sent to arrest Jesus, found His teaching captivating (John 7:45-47). Jesus also polarized His listeners, often pitting the masses against religious leaders who opposed Jesus’ persuasive voice.²

Teaching saturated Jesus' ministry from His baptism to His arrest.³ Indeed, the offense that spurred religious leaders to demand capital punishment for Jesus was that His teaching "stirred up" people.⁴ Any study of Jesus must, therefore, include an examination of His teaching ministry.

Jesus was an itinerant teacher, constantly moving from village to village. Capernaum was His center point, yet Jesus traveled to all the villages of Galilee and into the other Jewish provinces. Jesus taught in homes, outdoors, and by the sea. He taught on common days and the Sabbath. He taught in synagogues and the temple. Jesus saturated the Israelite homeland with His message.⁵ Common people, religious leaders, Jesus' disciples, and even Jesus Himself referred to Jesus as "Teacher,"⁶ sometimes using the equivalent Jewish term, "Rabbi."⁷

At the core of Jesus' teaching was the good news of the kingdom. In grace, God has drawn near and calls people to repentance.⁸ Using parables and major discourses, Jesus taught extensively about the authority, growth, and character of life in God's kingdom.⁹ He also taught a variety of topics including prayer, the purpose of the temple, His pending passion, and the importance of His mission.¹⁰

The famous Sermon on the Mount is a typical teaching session.¹¹ Jesus covered a variety of themes: character traits valued in God's kingdom, the place of the Law, interpersonal relationships, alms-giving, prayer, fasting, priorities, judging others, seeking God, and building one's life on the wisdom of Jesus' teachings. He used imagery drawn from common life, references to Jewish religious life, proverbial sayings, poetry, vivid expressions, encouragement, and challenge. Public astonishment and amazement greeted Jesus throughout His ministry, even into Passion Week.¹²

Jesus' teaching was frequently attended by healings and sometimes by exorcisms.¹³ These miracles drew attention and validated Jesus' authority to speak.



Stone chair, likely a "seat of Moses" from the synagogue at Hippos, which is on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus taught His followers the importance of humility and of not being like "The scribes and the Pharisees [who] are seated in the chair of Moses" (Matt. 23:2, CSB).



Shepherd tending his flock at Abila in northern Jordan

Jesus' teachings and miracles had people constantly buzzing about His authority. Many realized the teachings of a miracle worker could not be ignored. The more reserved religious leaders asked for special signs. The issue of Jesus' authority to teach became so acute that during Passion Week, Jewish leaders focused on discrediting Jesus' authority.¹⁴

Jesus had many methods of teaching, the most famous being His use of parables.¹⁵ Through parables, Jesus taught about the growth of God's kingdom, the great value of the kingdom, God's forgiveness, joy over sinners who are saved, kingdom justice, the high standard for inclusion in the kingdom, and warnings about pending judgment. The parables appealed to the crowds because they explained kingdom truths by using everyday imagery.

Jesus also quoted Scripture, used questions, engaged in symbolic action, employed repetition, and even modeled personal example to teach others.¹⁶ During Passion Week, Jesus used public debate and teacher/student role-play to teach. Jesus' teaching methods show He was capable of engaging any audience, from peasants to academics, and from supporters to opponents.

The varied responses to Jesus' teaching show the wide regard that people had for Jesus as a teacher. The antagonism to His teaching underscored its divine source. Crowds responded with amazement and flocked to see Jesus. Some individuals, upon hearing part of Jesus' more challenging teachings, no

longer followed Him.¹⁷ Some religious leaders affirmed Jesus while others questioned His associating with sinners and His breaking religious traditions.¹⁸ Jesus' teaching attracted persecution which increased steadily to open attacks during Passion Week.

The purpose of Jesus' teaching was to draw people to Himself. Jesus' last command before ascending into heaven was for His followers to make disciples and teach them.¹⁹

Jesus desires His people to continue doing what He did in His earthly ministry: bring people to know Him and teach them about God's kingdom.

Jesus desires His people to continue doing what He did in His earthly ministry: bring people to know Him and teach them about God's kingdom. Jesus' ministry bears out that He was indeed the Master Teacher: "You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am."²⁰ 🕯

1. John 7:46. All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).
2. Dividing His listeners, John 7:43. Opposition of religious leaders, John 7:47-49.
3. Luke 4:14-15: Jesus taught immediately after His baptism. Luke 22:52-53: Jesus had been teaching in the temple in the daytime prior to His arrest.
4. Luke 23:5. See also John 18:19.
5. Jesus taught in Capernaum (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:31; John 6:59), Galilee (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:4), all the villages (Matt. 9:35; 11:1; Mark 6:6), and Judea and Perea (Mark 10:1). Jesus taught outdoors (Matt. 5-7), by the sea, (Mark 2:13; 4:1), in synagogues (Matt. 4:23; 13:54; Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:15; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59; 18:20), on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21; 6:1-6; Luke 13:10), on the way to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22), and in the temple (Matt. 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 19:47; 21:37; John 7:14,28; 8:2,20; 18:20).
6. By people (Matt. 8:19; 19:16; Mark 5:35; 9:17; 10:17,20; Luke 8:49; 9:38; 12:13; 18:18; John 11:28; 20:16), religious leaders (Matt. 12:38; 17:24; 22:16,36; Mark 12:14,19,32; Luke 7:40; 10:25; 11:45; 19:39; 20:21,28,39; John 8:4), the disciples (Mark 4:38; 9:38; 10:35; 13:1; Luke 21:7; John 13:13), others referring to the disciples' teacher (Matt. 9:11), Jesus Himself (Matt. 26:18; Mark 14:14; Luke 22:11; John 13:14).
7. By John's disciples (John 1:38), Nathaniel (v. 49), Nicodemus (3:2), Jesus' disciples (4:31; 9:2; 11:8), the crowd (6:25), Peter (Mark 9:5), a blind man (10:51), Judas (Matt. 26:25,49), Mary Magdalene (John 20:16).
8. Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 20:1; Mark 1:15.
9. See Matthew 5-7; 13; 18; 21-25; Mark 4; 12-13; Luke 15-16; 18-21; John 3; 6-7; 13-17.
10. Prayer (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-4); temple (Mark 11:15-17); passion (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22); mission (Matt. 9:13; Mark 10:45; Luke 4:43).
11. Matthew 5:2: "Then he began to teach them, saying. . . ." The Sermon on the Mount is in Matthew 5-7. A shorter form of this message, known as "The Sermon on the Plain," is in Luke 6:17-49.
12. Matthew 7:28-29; 22:33; Mark 1:22,27; 11:18; Luke 4:32.
13. Healing, Mark 4:1-12; an exorcism, Mark 1:23-27.
14. Jesus' authority sensed by the crowds (Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22); a sign requested (Matt. 12:38); attacks on Jesus' authority during Passion Week (Matt. 21:23; 22:15-16,23-24; Mark 12:18-19; Luke 20:27-28).
15. See Matthew 13; Mark 4; and Luke 15 for samples of parables.
16. Use of Scripture (Matt. 12:39-42; 22:23-45; Mark 11:17); use of questions (Matt. 16:13; 22:42; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18); use of symbolic action (John 13:3-11); use of repetition (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34); use of example (Luke 11:1-2).
17. Some ceased following Him, John 6:25-66.
18. Regarding Jesus' affirmation by leaders, see Luke 20:39. Regarding Jesus' association with sinners, see Matthew 9:11-13. Jesus frequently challenged religious tradition, especially the Sabbath. The connection between Jesus' teachings and His lack of regard for tradition is in Matthew 15:2.
19. Purpose: John 6:45; compare Isaiah 54:13. Command: Matthew 28:19-20.
20. John 13:13.



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