

Jesus Taught About Riches and Rewards

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that a person cannot earn salvation but must come to Jesus in repentance and faith in order to receive salvation. In this topic, we will see that Jesus went on to use that event to teach His disciples about riches and rewards.

As the rich young man left Jesus, Jesus began to talk to His disciples. Matthew 19:23-24 says, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that 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.’” Here, we see that Jesus explained to His disciples that it is with great difficulty that a rich person enters into the kingdom of heaven. In that day, the people felt that riches were a sign of God’s approval and that the rich were the people who were most likely to get to heaven. Jesus quickly proved that such an idea was false because no one can earn his or her way to heaven. The rich often think that they can depend on their riches to get them to heaven, instead of coming to Jesus by faith.

Jesus then went on to give an illustration to show that it is totally impossible for a person to pay his way to get into heaven. Jesus said that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Most people find it hard to get even a tiny thread to go through the eye of a needle; of course, a camel is a very large animal. Paul warned in 1 Timothy about the danger of riches. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that the love of money is what causes money to become an idol.

In contrast, the Lord may bless some Christians with riches so that they can use those riches to serve others. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Liberty does not mean that we are free to serve our sinful desires. Instead, liberty means that we are free to serve one another in love. A Christian that has been given riches by the Lord has been given the opportunity to serve others with that money or his possessions to serve the Lord and to serve others. This was illustrated by the early church in Acts 4:34-37 where we read, “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid *them* at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles’ feet.” Those Christians were not required to share but they chose to share because of their thankfulness to the Lord.

Jesus used a question, by the disciples, to help prepare them for the future when the church began. Matthew 19:25-27 says, “When His disciples heard *it*, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’ Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’” The question of the disciples showed that they had the same understanding many of the Jews of that day had. The people thought that riches were a sign of the approval of God and that those who were rich were the ones who God would certainly take to heaven. Many people today have that same false idea.

The disciples had to clearly understand that salvation is totally the work of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” These verses make it clear that God gives us the faith to believe as a gift. Then, Romans 10:17 adds, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This verse shows us that people receive this gift of faith as they hear, read and study the Word of God. It is impossible for people to be saved through their own efforts. Instead, God must give them faith as they hear or read the Word of God. That is why all things are possible with God. He can give that faith to any person He chooses.

Peter then went on to say, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” By this statement, Peter said that he and the other disciples had done exactly what Jesus had just told the young man to do. Matthew 4:18-20 says, “And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.” Jesus had given each of the disciples an invitation to follow Him. Here, we see that Peter and Andrew had immediately left their fishing and followed Jesus. The same was true for other disciples. Matthew 4:21-22 says, “Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.” Then, Matthew 9:9 adds, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me,’ so he arose and followed Him.” As a result, Peter wanted to know what reward the disciples would have.

Matthew 19:28-30 says, “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. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.” Here, we see that Jesus promised the disciples both present and future rewards.

The word translated “regeneration” means *a renewal or a restoration of life after death*. This word is also used in Titus 3:5 where we read, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” In Titus, the word is used to speak of our immediate change and restoration that happens at the moment of salvation. We see that this is the work of the Holy Spirit at that moment, which restores us to the spiritual life that Adam and Eve lost at the moment that they sinned.

Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

Spiritual death is separation of man from God. Physical death is the separation of the body from the soul and the human spirit. Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death at the moment they sinned. Adam experienced physical death nine hundred and thirty years later according to Genesis 5:5. Jesus said that when He sits on the throne in His glory, the complete restoration to spiritual and eternal life will be complete. That condition was present in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 and we see that the same condition will be present in Revelation 21 and 22. During the period from Genesis 3 to the end of Revelation 20, we will live under the effects of sin. As a result, we see that the twelve can look forward to eternal rewards when Jesus sits on the throne of His glory.

However, Jesus also went on to promise the disciples that there would be spiritual blessings in their lives here on this earth. Matthew 19:29 says, “‘And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.’” This promise was not just to the original disciples. We see that this promise of spiritual blessings is for everyone who leaves houses, family or lands for the sake of Jesus here on this earth. We see that in this earthly life we will receive spiritual blessings worth one hundred times as much for the things that we have left for the sake of Christ. One thing that happens as we serve the Lord on this earth is the fact that we gain a spiritual family. In 1 John 1:7, we read, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Here on this earth, we are able to enjoy the fellowship of other believers as we serve the Lord. We will also enjoy rewards for our works on this earth as 1 Corinthians 3:14 says, “If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.”

In addition, all believers can look forward to inheriting eternal life. Romans 8:16-17 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” This reward of eternal life is for every true believer. Those who become Christians just a short time before they die will have eternal life just like those who have been Christians for many years. In this way, the reward of eternal life is the same for all believers.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand both the blessing of fellowship with other Christians during this life and also the eternal blessings that all will receive at the moment we enter into eternal life. We will certainly enjoy the rewards of salvation throughout eternity. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow in the understanding of the rewards we receive as followers of Christ.