

Sermon – Matthew 19

Rev. Bruce Stanley

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- **III** – Olympics

The winter Olympics was pretty good for Australia this year. One of the highlights was the gold medal won by Australian Lydia Lassila in the women's freestyle aerials. (pic) After she won, she said:

"This is what I worked my whole life for. It's here now. I never lost sight of what I could do and what I can do is this: triple somersaults." She went on to say: "After my second jump, that was everything I could do and I was so pleased with my performance and I'd done my maximum".

At an event like the Olympics, there are a lot of stories of success and failure. People work hard their whole life for the chance of a gold medal. They do all they can. But that doesn't **guarantee** a medal. What guarantees a medal is being better than every else on the day. You can be the best there is and have a small accident and lose everything you've worked for.

Will you go to heaven? For many people, heaven is like a gold medal at the Olympics. You do your best and hope to make it in the end. But don't we need to be sure about something this important? Is there a guarantee?

That's what the rich young man wants to know in Matthew 19:16ff.

- He comes to Jesus and says: "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus says: Follow the commandments.

The man says: which ones?

Jesus says: the usual ones – no murder, no adultery, no stealing... all that stuff.

The man says: I've done that! I've kept them! I've been good! But what else Jesus? What else must I do? I need to be sure. What **else** must **I do**? How do I make sure I get gold?

Jesus says: give away all your wealth.

The man says nothing. He went away sad because he had great riches that he could not give up.

The man asks: "What do **I** need to **do**?" What do **I** need to **do**?

But Jesus says, if getting into heaven EVER comes down to what you DO or what you have DONE, there is **no chance!** It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- And when the disciples hear that, they say: WHO THEN can be saved?

The disciples, and people of that day, believed riches were a blessing from God. If you were wealthy, God must have blessed you with that wealth. God must be happy with you and you **must** be going to heaven! So if Jesus is saying that a wealthy, blessed person can't be saved – who CAN be saved?!

And Jesus answers: No-one. No-one who says "What can I do?" can be saved! Because it's not about what **man** does. It's about what **God** does. With man, it is impossible to be saved. But with God, ALL things are possible.

Let's take a moment now to turn back to 19:13. Here we have people bringing little children, babies, to Jesus. And the disciples are stopping people doing this. Jesus rebukes them. But he doesn't say: guys, it's OK. I don't mind kids. Let them come to me.

He says: WHAT ARE YOU DOING! How dare you stop them! How dare you hinder them from coming to me! The Kingdom of heaven belongs to these children! If you want to know how to belong to the kingdom of heaven, look at these children!

What does he mean? He means the same thing he says to the rich man. It's not about what you've done. Children are the best example of this. Children have no money. They have no riches. They haven't yet worked a day in their life. They haven't earned **anything**. Yet, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

If only we could come to God like a child. Without our worldly baggage. Without our worldly wealth. Without our worldly ideas of **earning everything**. The desire to be a self made man.

What must I do? What must **I do**?

- And Jesus says: Go. Sell. Give. Come. Follow.

He doesn't say "Do".

He says: "Go. Sell. Give. Come. Follow."

Money, riches, earthly wealth, a promotion at work, a house, a car – all things we earn. All things we work for. We're so used to earning everything, but the kingdom of heaven cannot be earned. It is given.

And so we come to Peter again! What wise words does Peter have this time?!

- Verse 27: He says to Jesus: "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

What do we get? We've given up heaps! We've done everything that rich man couldn't! What do WE get Jesus?!

And Jesus says: Anyone who gives up this world **for me**, will receive much more **from me**.

What Jesus wants to give us is far more than we can give up for him! Far more than what we deserve. Far more than we can earn.

But for Peter there seems to be a further expectation. Perhaps an expectation that many of us have. "If I'm REALLY good, God will give me even MORE!

So Jesus tells the story of the vineyard owner in chapter 20. This man employs people to work in his vineyard for a day. Some start at 6am and work all day until 6pm. Others start work at 9am. Others start at 12noon, others at 3pm there are even some who start at 5pm, the 11th hour. And at the end of the day, the vineyard owner pays all the workers **exactly the same amount**. Exactly the same. The ones who worked 12 hours got the same pay as those who worked just 1 hour.

Everyone who worked a full day got a Denarius, which was a day's wage. But those who only worked an hour, also got a full day's wage. Jesus is saying that heaven, eternal life is a **gift** from him. It's not something we've earned. And you cannot earn MORE of heaven by being a Christian longer or living a better life than other Christians. It's not like you're going to get MORE than eternal life!

The kingdom of heaven is not like McDonalds. There are no penalty rates, no promotions, no pay rises, no employee of the month. If you work more hours, you don't get a bigger slice of heaven! It is a free gift.

As we heard last week, because of our sin, we owe a huge debt to God. But that debt is **too big** to pay off! We cannot make, it is impossible for us to make, the sacrifice that is required for our sins. We cannot buy heaven. And we cannot earn it.

The rich young man wanted to earn heaven in the way he had earned his earthly riches.

We need to listen to this because we are all rich. We live in a wealthy country, we have a roof over our heads, food in our mouths and luxuries like telephones and TVs. **We are** the rich of the world. Jesus is talking to us! But Jesus tells us again and again throughout the gospels to be careful of the love of riches. We cannot treat God's gift of heaven like a worldly asset, like something we have **earned**.

Heaven is a free gift. We need to struggle against the world's desire to "do" and "earn", thinking that in some way we can pay God back for what he has done for us. If you have trusted the death and resurrection of Jesus to pay for your sins, to pay your debt to God, you have become a child of God. Jesus has already won the gold medal and he wants to GIVE it to you. Whether you work in his vineyard for 50 years, or for 5 minutes, heaven is your gift from God when you trust in Jesus.

So here's the question: Are your riches in this world a servant, or a master? Are you controlling them, or are they controlling you? Could you give them up?

- **III** – John Laing was a British industrialist in the construction industry. His company was incredibly successful and worth millions. But John was a Christian whose wealth served the kingdom of heaven. He was generous with his company's wealth and with his own wealth. He was not a slave to his wealth. He died at the age of 99 with personal possessions valued at... £371.

We work hard to earn our money, we work harder to keep our money, and we need to work even harder to give it away.

Personally, I know that I would find it very hard to sell everything I own and give my wealth to the poor. That would be hard for me to do today. Who else here would find it hard? But my greater concern is that it will be even harder for me to do tomorrow. And even harder the day after. So my hope, my prayer, is that it will be easier for me tomorrow to give up my worldly wealth. And easier the day after.

Let me finish with this: When we place a high value on our worldly wealth, we devalue, we cheapen, God's amazing free gift of heaven. When we put worldly wealth up here, we lower the value of heaven.

Prayer – that tomorrow would be easier.