

Living Lastly

Well, this is a first,” said Aniyah, observing the statue-like form of her friend, Delphine. “Sleeping standing up?” Delphine was just two weeks out from opening her second hair salon, and the renovations to the soon-to-be-salon were impressive. Soon, it’d be a chain! But Delphine had been working every day and every night.

When Delphine had taken her styling and braiding business out of her house and into a commercial building, she felt as if she’d won the lottery. Delphine had educated herself, had sought business advice and investors, and had secured dependable hairstylists. It didn’t take long for her business to grow. Delphine loved to recall her days of triumph—to herself or anyone who would listen. She seemed to dwell on the feelings of her success to fuel her goal of taking her business even further.

But Delphine’s obsession with success was becoming unhealthy. She was pushing her staff and herself too hard. “Maybe,” Aniyah had suggested, “you need to wait another six months or so before opening a second shop.”

Delphine exploded, accusing Aniyah of being small-minded and jealous. The accusation had stung, but Aniyah told her friend that she wanted to see her business succeed. She warned Delphine about her misaligned priorities. As a Christian, her ultimate pursuits and values needed to be Christ-likeness and the things which God values. Seeking success for successes’ sake is a destructive path.

1. *What treasures do you have in your home? Why do you consider these to be treasures?*

2. *How do you define heavenly treasures?*

3. *Why are heavenly treasures so much more valuable than earthly treasures?*

What Must I Do?

Matthew 19:16–19 KJV

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Matthew 19:16–19 NIV

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷ “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸ “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

While Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, He is met by a man. Matthew calls him “young” and wealthy (vv. 20, 22). He is a man with a question: He wants “eternal life” and acts willing to do any “good thing” to get it (v. 16). Funny enough, Jesus does not correct him. In a real sense, the man has the right goal. But Jesus tests his approach. Like a wise “Master” or “Teacher,” Jesus inquires what this man considers “good” (v. 17). Jesus points him back to God, who gave commandments that lead to abundant “life” (see Deut. 30:15–16). God is good, and so Jesus says to do the obvious thing: “keep [God’s] commandments” (v. 17).

But such a simple answer isn’t enough to satisfy the man. He wants to know “which ones” (v. 18). The Lord plays along and gives him a list of commandments that deal with other people (Ex. 20:12–16). These are obvious, or they should be to the man.

4. *What is the treasure or the thing that the man is seeking by coming to Jesus?*

5. *Why does Jesus point him back to the commands of Exodus 20?*

What Am I Lacking?

Matthew 19:20–26 KJV

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

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

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Matthew 19:20–26 NIV

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

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

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

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

The young man is undeterred. He asks, “What do I still lack?” (v. 20). Now comes the true test, for Jesus asks him to give up “possessions” to follow Him (v. 21–22). Jesus is offering this man a chance to be His disciple, to follow the king as He enters Jerusalem. Only by setting aside the possessions that hinder can he be freed to follow Jesus, and he would receive a greater “treasure in heaven” (v. 21).

When the man exits the scene in disappointment, Jesus turns to His disciples, those who had followed Him and given up their former lives in the process. Jesus laments that “it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (v. 23). He means the abundant life that God alone can offer. To be in God’s presence, with Jesus as king, that is the real treasure the man gave up, without realizing his error.

To their credit, the disciples are shocked, possibly a little worried about their own motives. They say, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). It is like when a person is healed of blindness or—as Jesus proposes—a camel passes through the “eye of a needle” (v. 24). Except, “with God all things are possible” (v. 26). It is hard for rich people to let go of the idea that their wealth will provide them with happiness, security, and purpose. Jesus’ metaphor shows that it is impossible for a rich person to find eternal life, but it is possible with God. But it requires supernatural help to make that happen.

6. *How did Jesus expose the wealthy man’s weakness?*

7. *Why were the disciples astonished?*

Heavenly Rewards

Matthew 19:27–30 KJV

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them,

Matthew 19:27–30 NIV

27 Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

28 Jesus said to them, “Truly

Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, 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 fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Jesus sees the sacrifices that His disciples made to follow Him. Where this other man had failed, they had shown a willingness to leave everything to follow their king. Jesus assures them that they will have authority as His representatives. Those who set aside earthly security shall be rewarded “a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (v. 29).

But with Jesus' words, “many who are last will be first,” He shows that this isn't an easy path (v. 30). The disciples will soon be in the position of seeming like “the last.” Jesus will be executed as a common criminal, and His disciples will have to flee for their lives. It will look like they gave up everything for nothing. Jesus prepares them as best He can, for the path to follow Him is the way of costly discipleship—the road that leads to the cross. Only by overcoming the powers of evil shall Jesus make their sacrifice worthy of authority in the kingdom.

8. *What does Jesus promise for those who must sacrifice earthly things to follow Him?*

9. *Who might Jesus mean by “the last” or “the first”?*

The True Treasure

“What is here for me?” That is the question you might be asking when you hear Jesus challenge a man to leave all his possessions behind for the kingdom. Surely, Jesus cannot mean that we must do the same, can He?

I happen to know someone who could be called a “hoarder,” which is a serious mental disorder making it very difficult to stop accumulating more things. This person struggles to know what to do with anything of value. Doesn’t he need to keep it safe, perhaps sell it for a fair price? But the cycle repeats, and even his desire to “unburden” becomes another burden. How can he devote himself to God when he is owned by so many things?

But a close reader of the Gospels will find that, even though Jesus’ disciples left things to follow Him, they were supported by others who did not, like the women who “supported them out of their own means” (Luke 8:3). Apparently, Jesus did not tell those women to give up their possessions. Or, depending on how you look at it, perhaps that is precisely what they were doing by supporting Jesus and His disciples. According to Jesus, wealth has a deceptive logic of its own. As a king, Jesus had no use for it.

So again, what is here for me? I return to that question every time I read difficult words of Jesus. If you need to unburden yourself to better follow Him, that seems like the obvious thing to do. We can’t be like the man who asked Jesus what to do, only to be disappointed by an answer.

10. *What might be an example of a “deceptive logic” that comes with having many things?*

11. *Why do you think that Jesus told some people to give up all their possessions, but He doesn’t seem to have asked the same thing from other people?*

12. *What is an example of something that might be burdening you or keeping you from following God?*

Enter into the Kingdom

Perhaps it is hard for rich people to enter God's kingdom because their faith is in their riches. Money *appears* to answer all our earthly needs. We buy food, clothes, all the essentials for life. What about medical insurance, which costs no small amount of money? If we want to travel and see the world, that takes money. All these things have a price tag. But the most important things in life cannot be purchased. There is no greater treasure than being in the presence of Jesus.

► *Start a new journal and call it "Heavenly Treasures." Every time you have an opportunity to share your faith, your time, or your resources, write an entry inviting God to show you the blessings you will experience in Christ's kingdom.*

KEY VERSE

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.
—Matthew 19:24 KJV

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.
—Matthew 19:24 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of February 10 through February 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 20:1–16—God Is Generous to All.
- Tue.** Proverbs 22:1–9—Those Who Are Generous Are Blessed.
- Wed.** Luke 6:20–26—Blessings and Woes.
- Thu.** 1 Timothy 6:17–21—Be Rich in Good Works.
- Fri.** 1 Samuel 2:1–10—God Sets All Things Right.
- Sat.** Psalm 113—God Lifts Up the Poor.
- Sun.** Matthew 19:16–30—All Things Are Possible with God.