

## WELL WORTH THE COST MATTHEW 19:27-30

One of the most profound statements in all of Scripture is tucked into the middle of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. He says, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you, by His poverty, might become rich"* (8:9). This verse is also, perhaps, the biggest understatement in all of Scripture. Think of who Jesus was and what He had before He came to earth. Infinitely glorious, fabulously wealthy, residing in unimaginable splendor, entirely self-sufficient, perfectly content, having no need, no lack, and no want. C.S. Lewis famously said that if you want to know what it was like for Jesus to leave heaven, change His form, and dwell on the earth, try imagining yourself becoming a slug.

The humiliation of Jesus (which is the theological term for Him becoming poor) has many implications, especially as it relates to His suffering and death on the cross. But I'm pretty sure Paul also had in mind Jesus' lifestyle during His ministry on earth. The Gospels tell us that He had no home, no land, and no income. There is no mention of Him ever possessing or spending any money. Even when His taxes were due, He had Peter pay them from a coin that Peter found in the mouth of a fish he caught. He was sustained by the donations of some Galilean women. He preached from a borrowed boat, multiplied borrowed food, rode on a borrowed colt, and was buried in a borrowed tomb. It seems the only things Jesus owned were the garments He wore.

I assure you that Jesus did not live this way because He was a freeloader, or because He was elevating or advocating a lifestyle of poverty. He did this because He had been given an urgent assignment from His Father in heaven that was far more interesting, important, and valuable than any material thing in this broken world.

Jesus knew that this world, unlike heaven, is temporary, and that everything in this world will one day be obliterated. Jesus knew, from experience, that the treasures of this world are like dust in comparison with the treasures of heaven. Jesus was also mindful that He was not going to be around on this earth for very long. He would be going back to heaven, and not only was He anticipating enjoying the treasures of heaven, but His assignment was to prepare the way for His followers to enjoy them as well.

What I am saying is that Jesus saw the bigger picture. He had lived in heaven and He lived on earth. He knew that life on earth is about preparing for heaven. He knew that spending one's life accumulating earthly treasures is foolish and futile, because we take out of this world exactly what we brought into it—nothing! And so, He encouraged and admonished His followers to live with that mindset. To invest their time and energy on this earth storing up for themselves treasures in heaven.

But this was (and is) rather slippery for Christ followers and would-be Christ followers. A few weeks ago, we began looking at a story in Matthew's Gospel about a rich young ruler who desperately wanted to know how He could have eternal life. He was under the impression that eternal life was earned by being good, and so he asked specifically what good deed he must do to earn it. After a brief dialogue about his obedience to The Ten Commandments, **verses 21-22**, <sup>21</sup> *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."* <sup>22</sup> *When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

We learned that when Jesus asked this man to give away all his earthly treasure and

then come follow Him, He was inviting him to make Jesus his treasure—to put his complete trust in Him and to give Him his wholehearted devotion. But because Jesus knew the hold that his earthly treasure had on him, he knew that he could not make Jesus his treasure as long as he held on to his earthly treasure.

That is because this man was *not* living in the light of eternity; he was living for the here and now, evidenced by the fact that, when push came to shove, he put his trust in what his earthly treasure could do for him. His wealth was his true lord and master, and he wasn't willing to give it up for Jesus, even if it meant trading it for *eternal* treasures in heaven. Which is why, after the young man walked away, **verse 23**, <sup>23</sup> *And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus did not say this out of anger because the rich young ruler rejected His advice and walked away. He simply wanted His disciples (and us) to know that it is more difficult for some people to choose Him and trust Him than others. The fact is wealthy people are less inclined to do this than most because it is extremely difficult for them *not* to trust in their wealth. People with lots of money tend to rely on it to rescue them when they have a need or get into trouble, and, thus, they do not see their need for God.

The rich young ruler's wealth was preventing him from seeing his need for a Savior and putting his complete trust in Jesus. And putting one's complete trust in Jesus is necessary to become His disciple and to have eternal life.

When Jesus' disciples heard Him say how difficult it is for rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven, we are told in **verse 25**, *"They were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"*

Actually, they were downright scared. Jesus' words scared them because they had always thought, as did most Jews, that wealth was a tangible expression of God's blessing and an evidence of God's *special* favor. They thought God gave them their wealth as a sign of His pleasure in them. And they reasoned that if God was pleased enough with them to lavish them with earthly treasures in this life, how much more would He lavish them with heavenly treasures in the next.

But Jesus said that earthly wealth may actually be a curse, not a blessing, because it might *prevent* someone from even going to heaven. Which made the disciples wonder about their own eternal destiny. **Verse 26**, <sup>26</sup> *But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Jesus is saying that there is such a strong inclination for wealthy people to trust in their wealth that only God can help them relinquish that trust in wealth and put their trust in Christ alone.

There will most certainly be people in heaven who were rich on earth, but only by God's enablement. They must be convinced by God while they lived on this earth that putting their trust in their earthly riches is not only futile but fatal. And they must be convinced by God to put their complete trust in Jesus.

Look now at what Peter says. **Verse 27**. <sup>27</sup> *Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"*

A casual reading of this verse might lead one to think that Peter's statement and question are a bit self-serving. It sounds like something a four-year-old would say when he wants to make sure he is not overlooked when he sees his brother opening a present from his parents. Instead of being happy for his brother, he says to his mom and dad, "Hey, where's my present? What do I get?"

But the context of Peter's words, along with the grammar in the original language, suggests that Peter was still reeling from the shock of what Jesus said about the difficulty of

rich people entering the kingdom of heaven. His question may have been prompted by his confusion and uncertainty about his own eternal destiny. "If a person can have eternal life only by God's enablement, then how can we be sure that we have eternal life? We have given up everything to follow you, but is that enough?"

The disciples had, indeed, given up everything to follow Jesus. They had left their businesses, sources of income, wives, families, and homes, and they, too, were relying on benefactors to provide for their needs. And they had done this by obeying the call of Jesus to be His disciple. They had done this because they truly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, Son of the living God.

And Jesus assures them that their sacrifices for Him in this life will be greatly rewarded in the next life. **verse 28.** <sup>28</sup> *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

The word that is translated "new world" (in the ESV) is a word which means "regeneration," "renewal," or "rebirth." It was a technical term used by Stoic philosophers to describe the dissolution and re-creation of the cosmos. In the Old Testament, the word was used with reference to the time when Messiah would arrive and renew all things.

Both concepts are present in Jesus' use of the word. We will discover in Matthew 24 and then in the epistles (esp. 2 Peter 3) that this present world will be dissolved and remade when Jesus returns to this earth in his glory. Thus, Jesus is referring to a future reward for his disciples when his kingdom is fully consummated, when he sits on his glorious throne in the new heaven and new earth. What a contrast to the lifestyle of a homeless, penniless Rabbi who traversed the trails of Palestine for three years. This describes Jesus' position of unspeakable glory and unimaginable splendor.

At that time, the Twelve will also have an exalted position and a consequential role. Jesus refers to them as "*you who have followed me,*" suggesting that their relationship with Jesus is the reason for their reward. They also will sit on *thrones*. These are not, necessarily, literal thrones. I'm pretty sure Jesus is using the word "thrones" to describe symbols of honor and privilege. Perhaps more importantly, they are symbols that suggest that the disciples will be, to some degree, co-reigning with Christ.

And in that role of co-reigning with Jesus they will be given the responsibility to *judge the twelve tribes of Israel*. It is impossible to be certain of what this means, exactly. The New Testament frequently references a judgment at the end of the world, but mostly it is the Father or Jesus who is portrayed as the Judge. But the Twelve fit into that picture somewhere. At the Last Supper Jesus said that He would appoint a kingdom for the apostles and that they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes (Lk. 22:28-30).

The twelve tribes are, I believe, a reference to the nation of Israel. And Jesus' description that the twelve disciples will have an exalted position over Israel highlights the theme of the church replacing Israel as the focal point of God's saving activity in the new age (Blomberg, NAC).

We can only speculate as to how the disciples will judge the nation of Israel. Judging is sometimes used in the sense of ruling, and it is possible that this is what Jesus had in mind. Suffice it to say that the Twelve will somehow share in the activities of that glorious time, that they will have positions of great honor and privilege, and that they will engage in some way in ruling over the affairs of the twelve tribes (Morris, PNTC).

What we do know for sure is that Jesus is assuring His disciples that their sacrifices for Him in this life will be greatly rewarded in the next. They have chosen, wisely, to not be

preoccupied with the temporal, fleeting things of this world, but to store up for themselves treasures in heaven. That choice will pay rich dividends. And this is true not only of the Twelve, but of all those who follow Jesus. Look at **verse 29**, <sup>29</sup> *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.*

Jesus is making a promise to all who have made sacrifices for Him. He speaks of those who leave possessions (*houses and lands*) or their loved ones (*brothers, sisters, father, mother, and children*). These are followers of Jesus who have made a choice to obey His call to serve Him in places where He sends them, presumably away from "home".

But this is not a promise to those who have moved away from home to find a better job, or to get away from the family drama, or to satisfy their wanderlust. These are people who have done this "for Jesus' name's sake". Jesus is speaking of those who recognize Him for who and what He is, God's Son and Messiah, and who accordingly are quite prepared to give up whatever is necessary in order to fulfil their vocation as His followers (Morris).

These are people who, unlike the rich young ruler, do not live for the here and now. They have an eternal perspective. They understand the folly and futility of putting one's trust in earthly treasure, since it is temporary and fleeting and will burn up in the end. They know that the ultimate purpose of their earthly lives is to prepare for the next life, where Jesus will reign in unrivaled glory and majesty, and where they will live for all eternity in His presence. So, they willingly sacrifice for Jesus in this life, believing that Jesus will reward them in the next.

And Jesus declares that such people will not be disappointed. He says they will receive a hundredfold. This, of course, is not to be taken literally, but points to uncountable blessings. He does not say what it is that they will receive so abundantly, but He is clearly referring to a generous reward, far more wonderful than anything this earth has to offer.

And especially wonderful will be the inheriting of *eternal life*. This means, of course, life that never ceases, but more than that it means life of a particular quality, life that is appropriate to the age to come. The greatest gift that comes to those who obey the call of Christ is that they share in life of the highest quality (Morris).

Jesus concludes His response to Peter's question by saying, **verse 30**. <sup>30</sup> *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

Those who are highly esteemed and considered to be *first* in this world's order of things will end up *last*, in the worst possible position. That is because they have put their whole effort into earthly success instead of the more worthwhile life of service to Christ. Inevitably when the time comes that earthly success is seen for the tawdry and temporal thing it is, they will rank with the *last*. That is what they have qualified for, and that is where they will be (Morris).

On the other hand, those who, because of the sacrifices they made for Jesus' sake, are considered the least and last here on earth will be found to be among the *first* in the life to come. In the words of Paul to the Colossians, they have not set their minds and hearts on the things in this world, but have set them on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. They have not devoted their earthly lives to their own business, but have devoted themselves to their master's business, no matter what the cost to themselves. And Jesus will reward them generously.

Of course, it is impossible to read this passage without thinking about our missionaries, who have left their lands and homes and loved ones for Jesus' sake. But I would be remiss if I did not challenge some of you to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider doing the same.

What Jesus said two thousand years ago still applies, and the urgent need to go in His name and speak on His behalf is still the same.

We also must never forget that this world and everything in this world is passing away and that we can take nothing out of this world when we die. We must always keep in mind that the treasures of this world are like dust in comparison with the treasures of heaven. We are not living for the here and now. The Bible calls us pilgrims and strangers in this world. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there. What God has in store for us when Jesus comes is beyond our comprehension, but Paul says it best in Philippians when he simply says, "it is better by far." Better by far than what experience on this earth. But it is that hope that ought to be our incentive to make the most of our brief sojourn on this earth. So how should we live and what should we do.

Paul sums it up in his letter to the Corinthians. <sup>58</sup> *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58 NIV).*

In light of the fact that this earthly existence of ours is just temporary; in light of the fact that our present bodies are wearing out and wasting away, in light of the fact that every human being is immortal and will experience either eternal life with God in heaven or eternal punishment in hell, *we ought to devote our lives to the work of the Lord*, because it is the only thing that has lasting significance.

## **“Well Worth the Cost” Matthew 19:27-30**

**Main Idea:** *Those who have sacrificed for Jesus in this life are assured of a generous reward in the next.*

### **Peter inquires about the reward for being a disciple (27)**

The financial implications of leaving everything for Jesus

The expectation of compensation for their sacrifice

### **Jesus addresses the issue of future rewards (28-30)**

For the Twelve disciples (28)

An exalted position (sitting on twelve thrones)

In the new world

During Jesus' reign

A consequential role (judging the twelve tribes)

For disciples who have left everything for Jesus (29)

Leaving loved ones and lands in this life

Receiving enormous rewards in the next life

### **An upside-down kingdom principle (30)**

Application