

# Wealth and Heaven

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This is the AM service on November the 2nd 1997. The preacher is Warwick Grant and the sermon is entitled Wealth and Heaven and is taken from Matthew chapter 19 verses 13 to 30.

We thank you Lord that you inspired him to write that account. And as we look at it this morning please teach us and help us to be better followers of you. For we ask it in your son's name. Amen.

Please be seated. So then there was this kid with his little plastic scooter. Now you know the type of little scooter I'm talking about.

If you can think back to when you were three or four years old or perhaps when your children were three or four years old they might have had one of these little scooters themselves. They were made of moulded plastic.

Do you know the sort of things I mean? Not many of you. I'm really sorry about that. But you set astride them and you push yourself off with your two legs on either side and off you went with that plastic on asphalt sound down the path.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] Anyway there's this little guy playing on his little plastic scooter in the front yard and he's going up and down the driveway on his scooter having a great time. Now because the driveway slopes down to the street you can get quite a bit of velocity going and all of a sudden he notices that mum has left the front gate open.

Now he's a bit of an opportunist and he thinks well I could just actually go through the gateway and actually down the street because the street has a nice little natural curve to it. He could fly out the gate down the street and get even more speed.

He decides to give it a go. He lines up top of the driveway and he zooms down, down past the gate, past his own front fence, past Mrs Green next door who sees this meteor just go and then behind the hedge of the next door property.

Now remember he's never done this before and all of a sudden he realises he's about to set a new personal best in land speed. He's hurtling down the footpath, he can't put his feet down so he kicks them up in the air and he's going down the street like this.

Well all of a sudden Mrs Green hears this stop and there's a sound and a yell and that nasty sound again of plastic on asphalt and the kid has stopped.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] Well Mrs Green runs out fearing the absolute worst. What has this child done to itself? Is it majorly injured? Well fortunately when Mrs Green gets to the scene of the accident the little boy is okay.

He's already picked himself up and dusted himself off and he's fine. The scooter is a totally different matter. It's in two pieces.

The front piece and the back piece. The thing is completely separated and Mrs Green's heart goes out to this little kid and she says you poor thing, look at your poor scooter.

But the little boy puts his little hands on his little hips and says don't worry my dad will fix it. Don't worry my dad will fix it.

Now frankly I'm not sure whether or not his dad could fix it. The point is though that this little kid just had complete and total and implicit trust in his dad.

[ 3 : 40 ] His father was indestructible and totally able to do anything. He knew that he couldn't do anything about the scooter but he said my dad he can fix it.

And that's the sort of childlike trust that Jesus calls us to have in our Heavenly Father. Don't worry my dad will fix it.

If you want to follow with me the passage is from Matthew chapter 19 and it's on page 800 of the Bibles in the seats. And I'm beginning at verse 13.

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them. But Jesus said let the little children come to me and do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

And he laid his hands on them and went on his way. It may strike us as strange that Jesus' disciples spoke as they did to those who brought the children.

[ 5 : 01 ] Maybe they felt that Jesus had better things to do than to worry about the needs of some kids. Maybe they were very conscious of the draining nature of Jesus' ministry.

They were sort of like minders trying to protect Jesus. And furthermore children in Jesus' day were to be seen and not heard.

They had no legal rights and officially had no status at all. So the disciples weren't unusual. They were acting in the way that their society would treat children.

children are important to Jesus. Everyone is important to him. But children have do they not a sensitivity perhaps to the things of God that us adults in our sophistication sometimes perhaps have left behind a few years ago.

Their simple implicit trust in God is a great example to us all. That's why Jesus says in verse 14 Let the children come to me and do not stop them for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

[ 6 : 20 ] Well it's quite a contrast. Jesus now encounters the rich young man. This rich young man comes up to Jesus and says Teacher what good deed must I do to have eternal life?

Without saying anything else we can see that this guy has no idea at all about the fact that eternal life is a free gift. We know from Romans chapter 6 that God says to us that the gift of God is eternal life.

This guy feels he has to earn it perhaps by doing some spectacular good deed. So he asks Jesus what sort of good deed do I need to do to get eternal life?

Friends our churches and our community is full of people who think they have to earn their way to heaven. It's a myth that only we can explode.

We don't have to earn our way to heaven. We are given the gift of eternal life by Jesus when we put our trust in him. The message that God has entrusted to us is of his salvation by grace through faith.

[ 7 : 34 ] Grace is a word we don't use very much but it means unmerited favour. Unmerited favour. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2 for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith.

And this is not of yourselves. It's the gift of God not by works not by what we try and do so that no one can boast. Our righteousness as Christians is the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Jesus says in verse 17 there is only one who is good and it is him in whom we need to place our trust for the gift of eternal life.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 17 why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.

If you wish to enter into life keep the commandments. 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.

[ 8 : 42 ] Honour your father and mother also you shall love your neighbour as yourself. The young man says to Jesus that he kept these commandments.

Well I think he was deluded if he'd kept them completely. None of us keep God's commandments completely. And he seems to be aware that there's something not quite right when he asks what do I still lack?

What do I still lack? He seems to think that he's done all these things but there's still something missing. There's some gap that he needs to fill up. And in verse 21 Jesus gives him an answer.

Jesus said to him if you wish to be perfect go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come and follow me. But while the man claimed to have kept those other commandments pretty diligently they were commandments number five to nine of the ten commandments from the Old Testament.

[ 9 : 52 ] But his response to Jesus indicated that he wasn't keeping commandment number one. And what is commandment number one? You shall have no other gods before me.

this young man's God was his wealth and he couldn't let go of it. It was everything to him it seems. Now that's not to say that being rich is a sin.

Far from it. There are several examples of rich people who follow Jesus. Zacchaeus the tax collector Joseph of Arimathea who gave his tomb for Jesus to use and Nicodemus.

No, being rich is not a sin but it can be a danger. It can become as it did with this guy a blockage between us and God.

There was a bishop in the Church of England who once said that our litany should contain a line which says in all our time of wealth good Lord deliver us.

[ 10 : 59 ] Well following this incident this encounter of Jesus and his disciples with the rich young man Jesus has to debrief his disciples and we see that in verses 23 and 24.

Jesus said to his disciples truly I tell you when he says that it's also now you listen to this truly I tell you it will be hard for a rich person to 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 someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The culture of Jesus' day seemed to indicate that if you were wealthy that was a sign of God's blessing. Now Jesus has just told this guy to get rid of his wealth.

Notice that Jesus didn't say it's impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. he said it's hard. Do we rely on our material wealth too much?

Sure we endeavour to follow God we understand that he has saved us by his grace but if we're really honest with ourselves do we rely on that long term investment that we've got or that bundle of shares that's doing quite nicely?

[ 12 : 25 ] whenever I go to the bank to renew my term deposit I think now how much am I relying on this? There's nothing wrong with having those things but we must be careful not to rely on them or to depend on them or to think ah yes that's there.

and Jesus goes on one of his most famous examples of hyperbole hyperbole is when Jesus said an incredibly exaggerated statement and I'm talking about the camel and the eye of the needle to make a point he makes this point with great exaggeration 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 and there have been attempts to explain this expression and perhaps Jesus wasn't saying something quite so exaggerated after all what's this eye of a needle?

well some people have said oh it's the name that a gate in Jerusalem was given a fairly short gate which a camel would have great difficulty getting through but most commentators disagree with that and they say that Jesus said what he meant can you imagine like this camel trying to push it through this eye of this needle it's just a ridiculous sort of thing to conjure up in your mind Jesus is saying that it can be difficult it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God well Jesus had his disciples baffled at this stage if wealth they thought was a sign of God's blessing and the wealthy only entered heaven with difficulty the disciples concluded that heaven was pretty empty really but Jesus explains in verse 25 the disciples said then who can be saved verse 26 but Jesus looked at them and said for mortals it is impossible but for God all things are possible indeed for us without God salvation is impossible our salvation is only possible because God took the initiative and sent his son to appoint us back to him and to die for us it is our trust in Jesus and his death on the cross and his resurrection and ascension for us that we can have eternal life it's nothing we do we don't earn it we don't deserve it when we do do things to serve God it's out of gratefulness and thankfulness for what he has done for us we don't seek to earn his acceptance he just accepts us just as we are

God is not limited he can save anyone wealthy or poor well the next person to speak was of course Peter of course it was Peter he always has something to say Peter is one of those guys that often puts his mouth into motion before he puts his brain into gear and he said look we've left everything and followed you what then will we have now it's not that Peter was doubting his own salvation but he was asking if perhaps there would be some kind of reward for the disciples the disciples had left everything to follow Jesus and Peter was asking what does that mean for us eternally and in the last three verses of our reading today we see Jesus said to them truly I tell you again you know take notice of this truly I tell you at the renewal of all things when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel we can't be sure what it means for Jesus to say that it seems that the disciples would have some role of leadership in the heavenly kingdom but we can't be sure about the specifics of that and there's this wonderful verse of assurance in verse twenty nine everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life when we follow

Jesus of course it means that sometimes we have to make sacrifices but the blessings that result the blessings that come are impossible to count in particular we become members of God's family some of you may know that I'm an only child and this verse is really special to me those of you who put your trust in Jesus are my Christian brother or sister I hope that's okay but you are my brother and sister in Christ if you're following Jesus and putting your trust in him I'm no longer an only child my family is here and it's a worldwide family of Christians across the world you are going to be spending eternity with me maybe you want to start getting used to that idea and of course when we inherit eternal life it's that life of the best quality and eternal life begins now not when we die it's now when we have that relationship with God that life in all its fullness life in abundance is another expression for it that Jesus spoke of in John's

[18:19] Gospel life with God not separated from him but with him what could be better than that life with the one who made you the one who sent his son to die for you the one who loves you more than you know what could be better than life with him well in the last verse Jesus turns the world's values on their head but many who are first will be last and the last will be first what is important in this world will be seen to be temporary and second rate in God's kingdom and what the world regards as second or even third rate that is someone laying down their life to follow Jesus that will seem to be the best thing that you could have ever done with your life are you following Jesus do you put your trust and faith in him there's much food for thought in today's passage and as I close let me just ask a couple of questions and I'll pause between each question and don't be scared of the silence just use that time to reflect on your own situation and your own relationship with God just examine how your response would be to that question let's do that now do you have a childlike trust in God do you totally rely on Jesus and his death and resurrection for your salvation or do you sometimes feel you've got to earn your way to heaven is there anything at all it might be wealth it might be something else it's currently a barrier between you and God seek to deal with that confess that to God now and do you really enjoy the eternal life that God gives us the life in all its fullness and the family of brothers and sisters that you can have in Christ may there be absolutely nothing that comes between us and Jesus may we be totally devoted to him amen me to all that can go to him their