

Matthew 19C

- Today we are in the second part of Jesus teaching His disciples about entry into the Kingdom
 - Last week we studied a moment when women were bringing their children to Jesus and the disciples objected at the intrusion
 - So Jesus corrected the disciples by saying that the Kingdom of God exists for the sake of such as these
 - In other words, the very mission of the Church is to reach people who are weak, vulnerable and in need...like these children
 - Those with needs are getting in the way of ministry, they are the ministry
 - Furthermore, Jesus wanted the Church to specifically receive children whom come to Christ knowing God can bring faith to them as well
 - Even very young children can come to faith in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, we learned
 - So the disciples needed an attitude adjustment...
 - They didn't see children as candidates for His grace for whatever reason
 - They had to expand their understanding of who they will serve and how everyone enters the Kingdom
 - Kingdom Program is fundamentally a process of seeing where God is working and following Him into that work
 - Remember my analogy from months ago of the metal detector as a picture of evangelism...
 - As we meet people, we look for signs he or she may be receptive to the Gospel, and if we get positive signals, we start digging
 - That can happen in young and old, rich and poor, everyone is reachable
 - So if God is capable of saving anyone at any time, we must be ready to receive them all

- That's the first part of this teaching, and now it's time to turn that coin over to see the other side, in a second encounter that Matthew records next

Matt. 19:16 And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”

Matt. 19:17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

Matt. 19:18 Then he said to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “**YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;**

Matt. 19:19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and **YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**”

Matt. 19:20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”

- Matthew says the man asks Jesus how he may obtain eternal life?
 - Luke tells us this man is a “ruler” which means he must have been a member of the Sanhedrin council, the ruling religious counsel of Israel
 - You may remember Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea from John’s Gospel were both members of the counsel as well
- Mark says the man knelt before Jesus, so we might wonder does he believe in Jesus as the Messiah
 - Yet the man calls Jesus “teacher” or rabbi in Hebrew, so it appears not yet convinced about Jesus’s claims
 - And then the man asks Jesus what good thing should he do to obtain eternal life?
 - The ruler wants to be included in the resurrection of saints so he may enter the Kingdom that God when it comes
- His question is remarkable because it suggest that contrary to conventional thinking, a Jew was not automatically guaranteed entry
 - Generally, Jews believed they were included in the Kingdom automatically simply because they were born Jewish
 - They interpreted God’s promises to Abraham to be a blanket promise to include all Jews in the plan of salvation

- So long as a Jew remained in good standing by keeping the Law and respecting the traditions, he or she was Heaven bound
- But that's the issue for this man...the standard for being considered a "good" Jew had never been adequately defined by the rabbis
 - And that uncertainty meant a Jew couldn't know for sure where they stood with God
 - How could a Jew know for sure that he or she had been good enough to be included in the Kingdom?
 - How much observance of the Law was enough? How many laws could you break before you were disqualified?
 - Did a person need to equal a Pharisee's righteousness? Or was the standard lower?
 - The rabbi's debated the question but no one could answer with certainty from the Scriptures
 - So the man is haunted by that uncertainty, and so he asks Jesus what must he do to obtain Heaven
 - Notice what the mans says after Jesus offers an answer at the end of v.17
 - Jesus tells the man to keep the commandments of the Law, and the man replies "Which ones?"
 - The rulers is asking that of all the Laws in the books of Moses, which ones are absolutely necessary to keep to go to Heaven
 - In other words, what are God's minimum standards?
 - Is there a checklist of the good works that a person must do or is there a list of the sins we must avoid?
 - If the ruler could get that checklist, he could organize his life around hitting that mark and then he could sleep at night
- Generally, this is the way every unbeliever thinks about Heaven, at least among those who are even concerned with what happens after we die
 - The world assumes that God has set some minimum standard of behavior that gets a person into Heaven

- We can meet that standard by doing good things of one kind or another
- If we do bad things, we can even the scale by doing more good things to offset the bad
- And if we do enough good in our lifetime, we will go to Heaven
- Different religions will propose different checklists on what God wants us to do, but every version of this system suffers from the same problem
 - How do we know when we done enough to enter Heaven? What is good enough?
 - What is God's passing score for Heaven? 70%, 80%, 90%?
 - How do we even know what God considers to be a good work?
 - And if we aim too low only to discover at our death that we didn't make the grade, it will be too late to fix it
- So as this ruler demonstrates, the world has no clear answer to that question... only guesses and opinions
 - And generally, the guesswork goes like this...first, everyone agrees that a perfect person would certainly warrant entry into Heaven
 - But even the most arrogant, self-absorbed person on earth must admit he or she isn't perfect
 - Even if we only misspell a word now and again or drive faster than the speed limit on occasion...we all make mistakes
 - Likewise, the world usually agrees that there will be some people who have no chance whatsoever to merit entry into Heaven
 - When pressed to give an example of someone who won't be in Heaven, people usually pick Hitler
 - Clearly Hitler doesn't deserve Heaven, people say
 - So on the Heaven end of the scale, we place perfect people and on the "Hell" end we place the worst of the worst, people like Hitler
 - But when we move to the middle of that imaginary scale, things get murky...

- Somewhere between those two points is God's cutline for Heaven, they say, but the world can't agree on where it is
- That's the central flaw in the world's view of Heaven...everyone assumes there is a standard but no one knows what that standard is
 - And because the standard is unknown, the world lives in fear of death and without a sense of peace about what happens after a person dies
 - Everyday billions of people wonder are they good enough? Are they ready to face God and will they be accepted by Him?
 - Then those same people make a mistake, and guilt follows and worry sets in because maybe they've dropped below the line
 - And then they have to make up for those mistakes, which brings its own burden, because how much penance is enough?
 - And what happens to our loved ones who died...were they above the line? Will we see them again?
 - It's life on a hamster wheel...forever chasing an invisible finish line, always wondering if we will measure up on the day the race ends
 - That's the burden the world carries everyday, and some of you remember living like that before you knew Jesus
 - This ruler was living that life, as were many other Jews of that day and of our day today
 - It's life built on a fundamentally flawed view of God and Heaven
 - And the flaw in thinking comes from two incorrect assumptions about us and about God
 - And Jesus corrects the man on both counts with His response
- In v.17 Jesus begins by asking why are you asking me what is good? There is only One Who is good...
 - In Luke's version, the exchange is recorded slightly different

Luke 18:18 A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Luke 18:19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."

- In Luke's version, the man calls Jesus good teacher, and in Matthew's version the man says what good things must I do
- Putting the two versions together, I believe the man asked, "Good Teacher, what good things must I do to enter Heaven?"
- Jesus' response is essentially the same in both accounts, and in it we find Him correcting two wrong assumptions the ruler made
 - First, Jesus asks why are you calling me "good" because only God is good
 - In Jewish tradition, no one called a rabbi "good" because Jewish teaching recognized that only God was truly good
 - But this man called Jesus good using a Greek word meaning intrinsically good, inherently good
 - The man is saying Jesus has a good character or nature, and "yet the man means it only in a relative sense
 - The ruler wasn't intending to suggest that Jesus was as good as God, perfect and without sin
 - The man meant that Jesus was good when compared to other rabbis or people in general
 - Technically speaking, the man was saying Jesus was *better*, not truly good
 - Which is ironic, because had the man known Jesus' true identity, he would have called Jesus "good" in the literal sense!
 - Had the man possessed saving faith in Jesus, this is the moment he would have declared it
 - He would have declared Jesus to be truly good because He was Christ, the Son of God
 - But that's not where the man's heart is in this moment...he's simply acknowledging that Jesus is above the cutline
- But Jesus corrects the man saying only God is intrinsically good...which means that God's standard for measuring goodness is not relative
 - God doesn't grade goodness on a scale like weight or height or intelligence...goodness is a single point
 - Jesus says that only God is good...there is no sliding scale s

- So goodness isn't being better than someone else, as the ruler had assume about Jesus...it's being as good as God
- But the Jesus and the rest of the Bible says that no one equals God's goodness

Psa. 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

**They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds;
There is no one who does good.**

Psa. 14:2 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men

**To see if there are any who understand,
Who seek after God.**

Psa. 14:3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt;

There is no one who does good, not even one.

- Some people may be better than others but no one equals God
- And equally God is the standard that God Himself has set for entry into Heaven
- So the entire world operates thinking their goodness must rise above some outline in the middle of their scale, when in reality it's not there at all
 - You can't get into Heaven by being better than Hitler or better than your loser brother-in-law or cranky boss
 - You can't assume because you pay most of your taxes, don't steal (except for using your parent's Netflix login), and only lie when circumstances demand it that you are above the line
 - In fact, everyone assumes they are above that imaginary line... no one I've met assumes they are below the line
 - But Jesus says God's standard is way higher than the world ever imagined it to be...
 - The standard to get into Heaven is not 70%, 80% or even 90%... the standard is perfection, it's 100%
 - So just one sin is all that it takes to bar a person once and forever from Heaven
 - Which is why Paul wrote

Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

- In that well-known verse, Paul's phrase "the glory of God" is his way of describing the standard of God, the goodness of God
 - Everyone has sinned, and as a result everyone has fallen short (or failed to measure up) to God's standard of goodness
 - And therefore, no one will ever be good enough to enter Heaven
- So Jesus' first response corrects the man's wrong standard for entering Heaven...but unfortunately the man doesn't get it
 - So Jesus moves quickly to addressing his second wrong assumption by playing along with the man's question
 - Jesus answers the ruler saying if you want to receive eternal life, just keep the commandments
 - And then the man replies "Which ones?" meaning which laws must I keep?
 - We can clearly see that the man continues to assume that God grades on the curve...only some of the laws must be kept
 - So Jesus, continuing to play along, begins listing a few of the ten commandments
 - But Jesus consciously selects certain commandments that He knows will please the man
 - Specifically, Jesus selects commandments that regulate our dealings with other people including...
 - Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your parents, and love your neighbor
 - Jesus is setting a trap for the man's ego so He can expose a second false assumption the man is making
 - These are laws that every upstanding Jew would have claimed to have kept his whole life
 - No righteous Jew murders or commits adultery or dishonors parents, etc.
 - So the man eagerly responds I have kept all these from my youth! He feels he's doing really well at this point

- But then Jesus' trap begins to take effect, because notice what the man says next...he asks Jesus what am I still lacking?
 - Jesus just told the man he only need do six laws to enter Heaven, and the man is convinced he has met that standard already
 - So we should expect he would be elated at this point, happy that he had found his answer, right?
 - But he wasn't satisfied...he assumes he's still lacking something and he wants to know what that something is
 - Why wasn't he satisfied with Jesus' answer?
 - I think it's because something inside him knew that Jesus' checklist wasn't any better than any other standard he had found
 - You can ask any religious person what is the standard for Heaven and you always get an answer and everyone has a different one
 - And because no one agrees and the rules are always changing, the question remains...which standard is correct?
 - Jesus said the standard is equaling God's perfection, but since he wasn't listening, Jesus began playing the man's game to expose it's limits
 - Jesus gives the man 6 laws knowing it will please him but also away that it wouldn't satisfy him either
 - In doing so, Jesus points out the impossibility of finding a standard of performance that satisfies our soul
 - Because in the end our sin continues to convict us
 - Inside every person God has placed a conscience and our conscience is a witness testifying against us
 - It's knows our every flaw, and so it's always telling us that we can't measure up to the standard of Heaven
 - So that even when someone gives us a checklist for Heaven that we believe we are meeting, something inside us still isn't satisfied
- That was this man's problem...he knew instinctively he was still lacking something, and he was desperate to learn what it was

- That's why there is no peace for anyone who tries to work their way to Heaven
 - Anyone working their way to Heaven is forever trapped in a cycle of doing and then falling short followed by guilt and worry...
 - Because God has programmed our conscience to never be satisfied with our own standard and to keep seeking the truth
- The problem is the world's flawed understanding of God and of ourselves
 - On the one hand, we make a bad assumption about how God grades us
 - We assume His standard for Heaven is less than perfection, because that's the only standard we can hope to meet
- And on the other hand, we make a bad assumption about how we can contribute to gaining access to Heaven
 - We assume there is a recipe, a checklist, a process we can accomplish which will meet God's standard
 - And Jesus has exposed both flaws...he exposed the man's wrong standard by reminding him only God is good
 - And now He's about to expose the man's wrong thinking about to meet God's standard for Heaven

Matt. 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

- In v.21 Jesus tells the man if you want to receive eternal life, sell all you have, give the money to the poor and follow me
 - Jesus adds one more task to the ones already mentioned promising this one will make you complete
 - But as the man hears this requirement, he goes away grieving
 - Why is he sad? Because he was very rich, Matthew says
 - We might think he would have been happy to finally receive the checklist he has always wanted

- Furthermore, the man is almost finished with the list
- Jesus gave him seven rules altogether and the man says he's already done six, so he's most of the way there
- He only needed to do that one final thing and he could ever Heaven, Jesus said
- Surely, the prospect of receiving Heaven was enough motivation to do one more thing...to sell everything you own
- But Jesus didn't just pick some random requirement...he picked something He knew the man wouldn't be willing to do
 - The ruler was so attached to the world and to his wealth that if Heaven required giving that up, he couldn't accept it
 - I think he leaves sad not because he concluded he couldn't get into Heaven
 - Rather, I think he left sad because he rejects Jesus' rules, and so he still hadn't found an answer to his question
- The world will say it wants to know God's standard for entering Heaven, but in reality they only want a standard that meets their desires
 - So they go to one religion and they're told what they must do to enter Heaven, but if they don't like that answer, they go somewhere else
 - Then they go to a second religion, and they get a second answer but they still don't like that answer either
 - So they keep shopping for an answer until they find one they like
 - And when they do find it, they declare they have found God's standard for entering Heaven...how convenient
 - This man came to Jesus seeking answer, and at first he liked what Jesus told him...why? Because he thought he could meet that standard
 - But a voice inside him kept nagging him, telling him there must be more to God's standard for Heaven
 - So he presses Jesus again, and Jesus sets the trap asking a very rich man to do the one thing he wasn't willing to do
 - Which leads the rich man to reject Jesus' standard and go away sad

- But in reality, Jesus did give this man the full answer to his question
 - Notice in v.21 the Greek word for complete is *teleios* which could also be translated perfect
 - So what Jesus said to this man is if you want to enter Heaven, you need to be *perfect*
- And how do we become perfect? Jesus then told the man to stop trusting in his wealth, turn his back on the world and come follow Jesus
 - If you want to be perfect, you need Jesus, not the world
 - And if the man would do these things, not only would he receive the Kingdom, but he would also have treasure waiting there
 - So that even what he turned away from on earth would ultimately be restored to him in a much better form
- The standard to enter the Kingdom is perfection, and the means for obtaining perfection is found in following Jesus
 - To enter Heaven we must equal the righteousness of God, the perfection of God,
 - But since we are all imperfect, there is no method, no checklist of things we can do to achieve that standard
 - Even if you think you've kept all the laws of the Bible from your youth, you still fall short of the glory of God
 - So the Bible tells us that the only way to meet God's standard of perfection is if receive God's perfection assigned to us by faith
 - An analogy of a taking a test can help explain how this works... [example]
 - Paul says it this way

2Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- Jesus lived a perfect sinless life, and then he took the penalty for our sin on the cross
 - So as we put our faith in Jesus' sacrifice for our sake, God credits us with Jesus' sinless life

- We receive credit for Jesus' perfection, while Jesus takes on our sin

○ As Paul tells us plainly:

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- Our salvation comes only by the grace of God, which precludes the possibility of claiming we had anything to do with our salvation
 - For if our works played any part in our salvation, then we might be able to boast about that before God
 - And God will not have us boasting that we saved ourselves because that this simply not the truth
- So Jesus did give this man a checklist for entering Heaven...but that checklist had only one point on it
 - Stop trusting in your own works and start following me
 - This man trusted in his own righteousness and the life of comfort he had achieved through it
 - He was a religious ruler, a privileged member of the Sanhedrin, and by that position he had become very wealthy
 - So when Jesus said you must turn your back on your wealth and your status, He did so knowing the man's heart
 - Jesus was exposing the man's dependence on these earthly things and his unwillingness to obey Jesus as God
 - But the man could not agree and went away grieving
 - This man is a perfect representation of every unbeliever on earth, and of all of us before we came to faith in Jesus Christ
 - We weren't all rulers or rich, but we were all depending on something in this world
 - And we were all searching in futility for a the standard and the method to find our way to Heaven

- But God has told us from the beginning that wasn't going to work

Deut. 30:11 “For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.

Deut. 30:12 “It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

Deut. 30:13 “Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’

Deut. 30:14 “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

- In the Law, Moses told Israel the commandment to please God isn't too difficult
 - You don't need someone to go to Heaven and find God's checklist, like the ruler was seeking
 - You don't need to search the world over for a method of earning God's approval so you can enter Heaven
 - Because earning your way to Heaven is simply impossible...the standard is way too high and there is no checklist that can reach it
- So instead the Lord made it much easier for us...Moses says the word is very near you in your mouth and in your heart
 - That word is a confession of faith in Jesus Christ
 - If you believe in Him, trusting in His claim to be God and in His death in your place, then confess that belief
 - And by your faith and your confession you will be credited with Jesus' perfection and in that way, you will receive eternal life
- That's the second lesson Jesus taught His disciples on entering the Kingdom...that the Kingdom is ours not by our own righteousness
 - It only comes because we receive Jesus' righteousness