



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis

Matthew 19:16-26

“Eternal Life – A Gift Not Earned”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading today is in Matthew chapter 19 verse 16 through verse 26. Surely a passage that practically everyone in this room has read probably more than once, because it's a passage that is repeated in each of the synoptic gospels. It's the story of the rich young ruler who came to our Lord and asked him a significant question. So Matthew chapter 19 and verse 16 and I'm going to read the Authorized Version although there are one or two little mistakes in this version which nevertheless are justifiable because of the things that are said in the other accounts. So, let me give you an example of what I mean. According to the Authorized Version, we read, “Behold one came and said unto him good master.” The adjective good is not found in the text here, but it is found in the two other contexts where this incident is repeated and so we'll read it as here and realize that it is representative of what the young man said. And so beginning at verse 16,

“And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? 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. 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; Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. (That last statement of course is taken from Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 18.) The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, (That is if thou wilt be mature and possess what you have asked for, eternal life) go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Hardly is the rendering of the Greek adverb *duskalos* which means with difficulty, with difficulty. Verse 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. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, who then can be saved? (That's very interesting incidentally to note that to enter into the Kingdom of God is equated with being saved. Or to put it the other way around, being saved a good Biblical expression is equivalent to entering the Kingdom of God.)”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, how thankful we are that we may open up the Scriptures and read accounts of the ministry of the Son of God who came by the incarnation to live in the midst of human society witnessing to the reality of our Father in Heaven of the salvation that is available through him and of the things that have to do with our great Triune God in Heaven. No man hath seen God at any time the apostle said, the only begotten said who is in the bosom of the Father he has led him forth into revelation. How blessed we are and Lord we give Thee thanks that Thou hast in marvelous wisdom

and kindness and grace given us marvelous understanding of Thee through the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray Lord if there are some in this audience who have not yet come to know him whom to know is life eternal, that they may turn their attention to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, his birth, his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, the promise of his coming and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in enlightenment come to give themselves to him for the possession of eternal life.

We pray for our country, we ask Thy blessing upon the United States of America, for its leadership. We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ, the true church composed of the believing members of that body all over the face of this globe. We pray for this body of believers and we ask Thy blessing upon them and upon their families. We especially remember those who are suffering illnesses and other trials and difficulties. Oh God, answer their prayers, minister to them through those who do minister to them, their physicians. Give encouragement and consolation and comfort and healing in accordance with Thy will.

We pray Thy blessing upon the ministry of Believers Chapel upon its elders and deacons. And upon the outreach through the radio and the printed page and the tape ministry and we pray for the staff and for others who help as Phoebes in the ministry of spreading the good news concerning Christ. For all who participate in the ministry of the Chapel, the teachers, the Sunday school teachers the helpers, all of those who have a part, we pray for them Lord and ask Thy blessing upon them. And reward them for their faithful service. We pray now as we sing together, as we hear the word of God, that we may have the sense of Thy presence in our midst for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is, “Eternal Life – A gift not Earned.” It's one of the saddest stories in the gospels, the story of the rich young ruler, a true tragedy of a human soul, a man whose earnestness is not strong enough as Alexander McClaren once said, “to float him over the bar.” It illustrates the inability of human effort to win

salvation. And, in fact, if we were to put a text of Scripture over this incident, it would be Ephesians 2:8 and 9, “For by grace we’re saved through faith and that not of ourselves, it’s the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works.” And so what we have here is a passage that underlines the fact that salvation belongs totally to the Lord.

The passage has been widely misunderstood, it’s been understood by Pelagian legalists, incidentally the adjective Pelagian is a historical term referring to Pelagius, a monk who came to Rome and taught essentially that salvation is by what we do. Augustine dealt with him in a number of his treatises seeking to show that it is not by what we do but it is by the principle of divine grace that we are able to enter into eternal life. Salvation is the gift of God. The legalists have misunderstood it because the words that our Lord spoke if taken out of the context of the parable itself would support that because did not Jesus say in response to the young man, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” “Keep the commandments.” Now that would seem to simply say that the way to life is to keep the commandments. Of course, I might say at this point, if it were really true that from the time we first breathe until we breathe our last breath, we had kept the commandments, then of course, that would be true. But unfortunately for us, it’s too late. And even if we were able to render perfect obedience from now on, what about the past? And so no one can gain life that way, but if that text were taken out of its context, a Pelagian legalist might say, “Did not Jesus say you get to Heaven by what you do?”

It’s been misunderstood also by the Unitarians who also find in it a line or two that are suitable for their doctrine. That is that there is one God and there are no three different persons as the Christians say one God who subsists in three persons. But there is one God and that God is not Jesus of Nazareth, for did not Jesus of Nazareth say after the young man said to him, “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Did not Jesus reply to him, “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is

God.” And is not as plain a disclaimer of Deity on the part of our Lord as you could ever find?

It has been misunderstood also by the communists as one might express and so we'll have to drop the term communists and say the socialists. Because in verse 21 we hear our Lord saying, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven and come follow me.” And so the socialists have suggested that what we need to do is to divide the wealth, and particularly the wealth of those who have it, the rich and give it to the poor. And one can pick a phrase or two out of this and support that doctrine for those who do not read and study the word of God.

So, it has been a widely misunderstood passage, and even evangelicals have had difficulty explaining it. Many years ago I was on the platform at a conference with several other men. And one of the men was president of a theological seminary in the Midwest. And he spoke on this passage and he said some very very good things in it. And in his introduction he said, “I used to hurry past this passage as one does by a graveyard at night.” And he expressed I'm sure the feeling that many have if someone comes to you and asks for an explanation and you may never have really pondered this incident too much.

Campbell Morgan who wrote commentaries on all of the gospels said with reference to this passage that the passage contained three surprises. The first was that there should be any man to whom Jesus could say that he only lacked one thing. How marvelous it would be if we only lacked one thing. The second surprise he said was that it could be said that he lacked anything. And then Mr. Morgan went on to say, “when following carefully the whole story I came to the third surprise and it's a surprise that I was ever surprised, because I see the supreme importance of the thing that he lacked.”

So we want to turn to it, and give a simple exposition of it. I try to hit the major point that the passage makes. And if I were to sum it up in a word or two it was simply

this, that eternal life is a gift it is not something that can be earned. It's not like investing, like the commercial we saw for so many years on television which ends up with, “We earn it.” I could never say it like that individual said it.

But let's look at the conversation now, and the man who comes to the Lord Jesus is called a ruler by Luke. Now he's probably a religious leader but possibly a civil ruler. He is rich and he is young, these are things that are said with reference to him. In fact, one of the commentators has summed up the young man by saying, “He's rich, young and prominent, clean keen and reverent.” And for you mothers and you fathers in the audience, he's exactly the kind of man you'd want to marry your daughter. He's a man who has all the keys of life hanging at his girdle. Cultured, a ruler, gifted, moneyed, religious, defers to the Lord Jesus, polite and courteous, all of the kinds of things that you would love to have in your son in law.

Now, let's see what happens. He asks the Lord Jesus the question, “Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Now this first request is very interesting. He calls our Lord good, and our Lord comments upon that good master. It's a mistake, to ask him about goodness if he's not God, that's what our Lord says. He says, “Why callest thou me good?” “What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” “Why callest thou me good? Goodness belongs to God.” So Jesus said. So why call me good if I'm not God? In other words, he doesn't really have the right to answer questions like that if he is not himself able of himself to give an authoritative answer. I don't know how to illustrate this other than to illustrate it in a practical way. You might come up to me for example, many of you know that for over forty years I've taught Greek Exegesis, and still occasionally do in theological seminaries. And you might come up to me, not knowing me and ask me a question, “What does this word mean in the Greek?” pointing to an English word. And I might say to you. “Why are you coming to me? What you need is someone who is skilled in the knowledge of the Greek language.” Now this is an illustration. And you then might reply, “But, Mr. Johnson, that's precisely what you have

done.” Well then of course I would try to answer it. I may not be able to, but I would try to answer it.

Now when the person comes to our Lord and calls him good master, putting an adjective that belongs only to God with teacher, our Lord picks up the word good and tells him in effect, “you shouldn’t call me good, goodness belongs to God.” Now what the man should have replied right at this moment, and it’s not found in any of the accounts is “But Jesus, you are God.” But he didn’t do that. He doesn’t know him yet in that way. The emperor, Joseph the second of Germany used to go incognito on extensive tours throughout Hungary, Bohemia, France and Spain and Holland lands that belonged to him. He did it in disguise. And the reason he did it was that he wanted to find out what people really thought of him so he went out in disguise and asked about himself. They didn’t know that. It’s very plain for these rulers in disguise, their true character unrecognized to accept from a citizen some homage or obedience that belonged only to the emperor would be an act of treason. And so if as the Emperor Joseph the second went out, someone bowed before him as if he were the king and rendered him that kind of obedience not knowing that he really was the king, he would be subject to the charge of treason. And so for him to say good teacher and not know who Jesus Christ was, our Lord must respond, “Why callest thou me good?” He’s a teacher, that’s true, but when you put the adjective good to it, it’s something else. And so teacher was alright, but that’s not enough.

And so, “Good teacher, good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” I’ve often used the illustration; it would take too much time to go through it. But we’ve had a lot of golf playing presidents. Eisenhower used to play at Cherry Hills in Denver, marvelous course on which the National Open has been played. And if it were possible for someone to come on the course when the presidents and I believe Gerry Ford also played there or played something that was supposed to be golf. And if you had gone out on the course, and you as a member of our Secret Service or our Secret manufacturing

defense, if you knew secrets like that and you divulged them to one of those men not knowing that they were the president, they would have just cause for charging you with treason, so in this individual.

So Jesus replies to him, “Keep the commandments.” Now there’s one thing that I think I am justified in saying and that is when the young man said, “Good master, what good thing shall I do,” he uses a tense of the verb that suggests an outstanding kind of event. At least it could be taken that way, and in the way our Lord replies, I’m going to suggest that he does. What he has in mind is he probably knows that so far as the usual qualifications for acceptance with Heaven, he has most of them. But he wants to know the outstanding thing that he must do in order to get eternal life. Incidentally, the fact that he used eternal life is remarkable, because the rabbis, they talked about lots of things, but they rarely talked about eternal life.

Now when Jesus replies to him, he says, “Keep.” But replies in such a way as to suggest a continuous activity of doing. In other words, he came asking for some great outstanding brilliant deed that he might do that would win him eternal life, and our Lord replies, “Go on keeping the commandments.” In other words, it’s not some outstanding deed that you might perform, but it’s the constant keeping of the law of God. You never give up when you are keeping the law. You could never earn life unless you are finished with your last breath at a perfect obedience. Do you not realize that God has said so plainly in his word you must present him with a righteousness, total righteousness that is totally acceptable to God? And you an unclean sinner, that’s an impossibility. That’s what our Lord hopes to succeed in getting over to this man.

Well the young man has prodigious self confidence, and so when our Lord says, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments,” he says, “Which ones?” As a matter of fact, the expression is something like, what sort of ones? It is prodigious self confidence, it’s like you name them I’ve kept them. And in his answer he convicts himself. What sort of commandments? So our Lord responds again and he says, “Thou

shall do no murder, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not steal, thou shall not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother.” And then he adds the line from Leviticus, “Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself,” which is part of our Lord’s summary of the content of the Mosaic Law in other passages.

Now these commandments that he selects are commandments of what is known as the second table of the law. As you know the Ten Commandments has been divided often into two tables, the first table having to do primarily with our relationship to the Lord God, the second having to do with our horizontal relationships with the world and others about us. None of the first table is given by our Lord, not one of them. All of the second table, and the reason that the second table of the law, the manward responsibilities is given is undoubtedly to convict him of with reference to the commands that he thought he had already kept that he really hadn’t kept them, but he thought he had. And so our Lord points him to the things that have to do with other people. “Thou shall do no murder, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not steal, thou shall not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother.” So, it was an attempt on our Lord’s part to show him his self deception. After all, Paul later says that the law was designed to bring us to the knowledge of our sin. That’s the preeminent service that the law renders to anyone, the Ten Commandments. It points us to our sin, and our need of the gift of righteousness. So, that’s our Lord’s second response.

Hell is loaded with respectable people. Respectable according to human standards mind you, respectable people. Leviticus 19:18 removes the façade. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Deep down in your heart my friend could you say that you have fulfilled that word of our Lord? You have loved your neighbor as yourself. Are you willing to admit that you have broken that commandment of our Lord? If you are, and you should be, you need the gift of salvation, the gift of salvation. You’re a law breaker, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” If you’d like to have someone go first, I have

broken that commandment, many times. That’s why I need a savior. So hell is loaded with lots of people that we consider respectable people.

It’s very interesting, the things that people say about spiritual things. God saves men for nothing, for nothing, it’s a gift. There’s a story of a famous violinist from Chicago. He was convinced after having managed to come to the top of his profession that people really did not appreciate the skill of violinists such as he was. That they judged violinists by the price of the tickets they had to pay to hear them. He got into some discussion with friends about it and he decided that he would prove it. And so he put on some old clothes, he put on some dark glasses, he put on a cap and went out and stood on a corner with a cup nearby and started playing his violin. And according to the story, he played his violin all day long and he played actually through three concerts that he knew. And at the end of the day, he looked in the cup, and he had a dollar and sixty-nine cents. He’s proven his point; at least you could say that.

Now the third request follows. “The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?” Incidentally, the fact that he said yet, shows that he had a sense that there was something missing. Even though he had everything it might appear to us, he still deep down within managed to get out that yet, perhaps it came out without even his thinking. “What lack I yet?” Now, I also heard the story, told by the same man incidentally who told the other. About a fellow who went in to hear a sermon on the Ten Commandments. Now he didn’t go in to hear the sermon, but he went in and the sermon was on the Ten Commandments. And the individual went down the Ten Commandments and when he finished the sermon, and they walked out of the auditorium, this man turned to a friend of his and said, “At least I’ve never made a graven image.” [Laughter]

We like to pick and choose among the commandments. You know if I could keep one of those commandments, I’ve kept the commandments. But look to keep the commandments means to keep all the commandments. And furthermore, our Lord said,

it's not a matter of the outward keeping of the commandments, but the inward keeping as well. Your thoughts, your thoughts, you break the commandment by your lust for example. You murder by the thought in your mind. So, our Lord could have said, after this man has said, “What lack I yet?” He could have said, “You're a liar.” He hasn't kept all of the commandments, but he graciously takes him at his word so to speak to lead him on further, humanly speaking, hoping to bring him to the confession of his need. So he says, “If you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give it to the poor.” This is the test of thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Sell everything you've got and give it to the poor.

Now the Romanists like to talk about the blessing of poverty, but that's not what our Lord is talking about. This is not something that is addressed to everyone. If it were true that all of us are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, who's going to buy them, the things that we're trying to sell? It's obvious that this is for this man, his problem is his covetousness. His possessions, let me put it this way, his portfolio, his pension, all of the things upon which we rely for our security, it's all there. So, “Sell all you have give to the poor, you shall have treasure in Heaven” and “Come to me and go on following me.” Talk about a commandment that is a commandment, that's a commandment that can only be fulfilled through the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

One thing he lacked. Campbell Morgan said he was once preaching in a great church and when he called out the first hymn, because it used to be the practice for the preacher to call out the hymn even as a visitor, because he would be calling out a hymn that would be consonant with the message that would be given. He said when he called out the first hymn; an old reed organ began to play in this great church. And he turned to the minister who was sitting on the platform and he said, “What's happened to the great organ?” And the minister said, “Nothing has happened to the great organ, but we don't have anybody who can play it.” One thing lacking so to speak, they had everything, but the one thing was a player. Well this man lacks one thing. And Jesus says, “Come follow

me.” Present tense, come and be following me. He’s talking about a way of life which should issue from coming to him.

I don’t think any body who reads the New Testament could fail to come to the conviction that faith in our Lord Jesus Christ issues in a life of obedience. Not total obedience, not a kind of obedience that is minus a fall at times, but a different kind of life, a different bent of life. We have a new nature, we’re given new life. We’re not like we were before, we passed from death into life, there must be a change. And so he says, “Come and be following me.”

And so we read in the final reaction, “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.” What a sad story. One of the other accounts described the change of his countenance as being a darkening of his countenance. And he turned from our Lord, and you see him walking off, this man who was so eager to have the answer to the question that he ran to our Lord one of the accounts says, he knelt before him, showing his high regard, for this Jewish man that the leaders in Judaism thought was a blasphemer. This individual with all of that eagerness and desire to know and all of the natural goodness of his life, everything collapses and we discover that his enthusiasm was real enthusiasm, but shallow enthusiasm. His money he likes before God, and Paul calls covetousness idolatry. And one can understand then that this individual is a breaker of the law.

One of my friends who’s preaching today Warren Wiersbe, Mr. Wiersbe said “that he came to the right person, he asked the right answer, and he made the wrong decision, he turned away from our Lord.” You know in evangelicalism there is the kind of attitude that surfaces every now and then that if you show love, you’re bound to be successful in the preaching of the gospel. Now I think love should be shown of course in the preaching of the gospel, but I’d like to suggest to you that that’s not true. When I was on a theological faculty here in Dallas, the students one year fifteen to twenty years ago got up a little movement among themselves in which they went around with a sign upon their

bodies. I've forgotten exactly how they did it whether they just had a sign or something, but the message that they were giving to one another was that “when love is felt, the message is heard.” When love is felt, the message is heard. And it was designed to encourage the students to manifest love. And of course we should manifest the love of Christ, but let us remember that when love is felt, the message is not always heard. No one ever loved more than the Apostle Paul, and yet the message was not heard. I don't mean he was not heard partially, but generally, the apostles had difficult times. But our Lord is the supreme illustration. No one ever loved people more than our Lord, but his message was not heard, he was crucified. It's no true, when love is felt, the message is heard. It may or it not be heard. The word that we should remember is that salvation is something that God gives. And he gives in his own sovereign unique way. I still believe we ought to show love. But we ought to be realistic and realize that salvation is of the Lord.

Now, at this point, I want you to notice the last verses, verse 23 and 24 for a moment, and then we'll look at verse 26.

“Then said Jesus to his disciples, (As the young man goes off who has great possessions.) Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall with difficulty enter into the kingdom of heaven. (And in order for it to be underlined,) And again I say unto you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Now that was a startling thing to the disciples. The ideal tool for resistance to the gospel message in my opinion is self sufficiency cash wise. May I say that again? The ideal tool for resistance to the gospel is self sufficiency cash wise. If we have money, if we have a portfolio large enough if we have possessions, it's very very difficult for us to realize our need. That's why our Lord says, “It's with difficulty that a rich man shall enter into the Kingdom of God. Now I know many of you are not rich people in this

congregation, some of you are probably. But I'm not seeking to talk to any of you, we're just talking about what are Lord says. But you can understand from what he says that rich men do have a particular problem.

And in fact our Lord illustrates by in a sense, making the emblem of the rich man a camel trying to get through a needle. What an emblem for a rich man., so the camel with his great body, his long neck, his hump, struggling to get through the eye of a needle. Now I know in the literature that gathers around the gospel records, it's sometimes said there was a needle gate in Jerusalem, there is no true evidence that there was a needle gate in Jerusalem. That has been manufactured by those who take you around the city of Jerusalem. But so far as I know and there is good authority, scholarly authority, there never was a needle gate.

But the idea that the rich man is like a camel who has a burden on his back and now he's trying to get through this needle gate and in order to get through the needle gate he must take the burdens off his back, that's his riches and go through the needle gate, makes a good illustration. It just so happens, I don't think it's true, in fact, I know it's not true. You know why I know it's not true? Luke uses the term for a needle that refers to a surgeon's needle, a surgical needle. So what he's trying to say is a rich man is like a camel. In the first place, a camel is one of the most difficult of all animals to control. Isn't it interesting? And he also is the ungamliest animal. You look at a camel and you just wonder how this fellow gets along in life. That's the rich man, that's the emblem of the rich man.

It's a new thing to pity a rich man, we don't pity a rich man normally, we admire them and we long to have what they have don't we? But here it is, our Lord, you look at the rich men in our Lord's language, “with difficulty, they shall get into the Heaven.” For the apostles to think of riches and wealth as disqualifying them for something like entering into Heaven, it's obvious they haven't attained a whole lot of level of spiritual life yet. They're children with the naiveté that characterizes them and they wonder, and we

may wonder that they wondered. They couldn't understand what sort of a kingdom it was in which capitalists would find entrance difficult. Isn't that interesting? I'm not attacking you capitalists. I guess my philosophy is capitalistic. I'm just not living up to my philosophy as I would like to of course, but it doesn't have anything to do with that.

I'd like to also point out this, that in our society, all doors flow open for the rich people just as then. They don't find much difficulty in getting into the church do they? How many people do you know were not allowed to enter the church because they were rich? You won't find any. But you'll find it difficult for them to get into the Kingdom of God. So Jesus said.

Let's be careful, I hope I haven't made any unfortunate statements, but what our Lord says I do believe, "It's with difficulty that a rich man shall enter the Kingdom of God," because it's difficult for a man who has everything to realize he has nothing really. And when on his death bed, on his death bed, he realizes he has nothing, but he must live eternally. What a tragedy, what a tragedy repeated over and over in societies over the face of this globe. So, what do we say? We say like the apostles no doubt, "Who then can be saved?" If the rich man cannot be saved, the man who's been a benevolent rich man in our society, the buildings are named after him. Go down to Southern Methodist University and look and there's Perkins school of theology. I hope the Perkins were Christian people, I'm just using this illustration. You go down all over this city and buildings named for individuals who've done the city of Dallas great things in that sense. But that didn't get them into Heaven. No, they're just like you and me as far as getting into Heaven is concerned.

The apostles say, "Who then can be saved?" If the Perkins' and the Florences and others can not get into Heaven, how can I? With their good works piled up so high. I think I can have a lot of sympathy with the apostles. And so our Lord looked at them and he said unto them, "With men this is impossible." With men it's impossible; nothing that

men can do can be the means of their salvation. No man can work himself to Heaven, eternal life is a gift, it's not earned, it's given. It's given because we cannot earn it.

Now what did Paul say, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves." Not of yourselves, with men this is impossible, not of yourselves, with men it's impossible, do you get it? Do you get the point? Paul and our Lord agreeing, no man can work his way into Heaven. Only one man could ever have gone on that route, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he says, "With men this is impossible." But that's not the climax, "But with God, all things are possible." "For by grace you are saved, through faith." Through faith, through receiving as a free gift eternal life, through acknowledging we have nothing with which to commend ourselves to the Lord God, we receive as guilty burdened sinners. What we must have if we are to live eternally cannot earn of ourselves, but God in marvelous grace and loving kindness conveys to us apart from works.

So here is a man, I'll sum up his character. He didn't lack morality; he kept most of the commandments he honestly believed. He didn't lack religion; he wanted to know about eternal life. He was orthodox; he was no Sadducean. He didn't lack humility; he came to our Lord and knelt before him and he an outcast Jew and the rich man with the in crowd. He didn't lack sincerity; our Lord loved him so one of the other accounts says. He didn't lack courage; a ruler with the right party to come and kneel before the misunderstood and cursed carpenter, that was a costly act no doubt, didn't lack desire. You too, may have all of this and lack the one thing. Mr. Lovely but lacking is what Mr. Spurgeon called him. Brings congratulations, we would say to him, "Congratulations Mr. Lovely and lacking that you are a person who are earnest. Congratulate you on your sincerity, congratulate you on your high regard for Jesus of Nazareth, congratulate you on your attempt to keep the commandments and your honest feeling perhaps that you have kept them." So I say to you in the audience, you who think somewhere other that you're going to get to Heaven on the basis of your culture, your education, your family, your

religion, your observing the ordinances and so on, congratulations. That's not enough according to our Lord, it's not enough. This man didn't lack, he did lack the one thing that was essential, and that was the knowledge of himself and the knowledge of the Lord God.

So, God's requirement, recognize our inability, recognize his ability. The answer to verse 16, “Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” is given in verse 26, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” What was the cause of his failure? Was it in Jesus? No, we read Jesus loved him. Now the Bible tells us that there are two kinds of love. There is the love of complacency which is the love God has for his elect, his divinely chosen elect people which he brings to the knowledge of himself and to relationship with him throughout all eternity. But the Bible also talks about the love of benevolence, which God exercises toward all men. He invites all men to come and receive the gospel message, and the gospel message is given to all. And when we read that Jesus loved him, I wish I knew really what kind of love that was. I hope and I have some reason for thinking this man may have gone home and thought about what the Lord had said to him. And he may have ultimately come to our Lord. Great suggestions made by commentators, but we don't know.

So, I look at it and I say, you in this audience who stand in the same position, I say, Mr. Lovely but lacking, I say, come to him, believe in him, trust in him, acknowledge your own need of mercy and grace. And receive as a free gift the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. No better time than now. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are so thankful to Thee that Thou hast in marvelous consideration for us given us the gospel records so plainly telling us that eternal life cannot be earned. It's given, it's given when we acknowledge that we cannot earn it but we need it. And we turn to Thee through Christ who has offered the atoning sacrifice, paid for our sins. Father, touch the hearts ...

“Eternal Life – A Gift Not Earned” by S. Lewis Johnson
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[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]