

LEAVING ALL TO GAIN ALL

THE SETTING

As Matthew 19 opens, the crucifixion of Jesus was just a short time away, perhaps just a week or two. Matthew 20:1-16 is a continuation of this conversation in Matthew 19. In Matthew 10:17-19 Jesus reminded His disciples of what He had already told them: He would be put to death and then raised up. In Matthew 19:20-28 the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked that her sons be given preference in the Kingdom; that led to a discussion about how authority in the church differs from authority in the world. And then, in Matthew 20:29-34, Jesus leaves Jericho for Jerusalem and the triumphal entry, which opens Matthew 21.

So when Peter speaks up in Matthew 19:27, he and the others have been with Jesus for two years or more. Jesus' popularity waxed and waned several times during His brief earthly ministry. These men remained steady and stuck it out. Jesus had been vigorously opposed by the religious leaders. These men had remained faithful to Jesus in spite of the risk to themselves. Their commitment to Him was all but assured, as far as they were concerned. They had established themselves as His Disciples with a capital "D."

But Jesus' conversation with the rich young man got them thinking. Let's refresh our memories.

16 And behold, someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" **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." **18** Then 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; **19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.** **20** The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” **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.” **22** But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. **23** And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** “And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” **25** And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” **26** And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (**Matthew 19:16–26, 2022 LSB**)

They had already talked about the power of God to save. Now their minds go back to Jesus’ command in Matthew 19:21: “go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.”

LEAVING EVERYTHING TO FOLLOW CHRIST

Matthew 19:27

27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?” (**Matthew 19:27, 2022 LSB**)

They had left **work** behind. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishermen; they left their boats to follow Jesus. Matthew left his tax table. None of the others are described as elderly or retired; they all left work behind to be with Jesus as much as possible.

They had left **friends** behind. They knew men in their villages, men they had been friends with since childhood. At that very moment, those men were back in Capernaum and Bethsaida and the other villages at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. They were carrying on their daily work or spending time with their families.

They had left **family** behind. We know that Peter was married. We read about his mother-in-law in Matthew 8. The rest were probably all married as well; Paul makes reference to their wives in First Corinthians 9:5:

5 Do we not have authority to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5, 2022 LSB)

Paul's words tell us that the disciples didn't permanently abandon their families. But they did leave unbelieving friends behind. None of them returned to their daily work. It's true that Peter went fishing again after Jesus' resurrection, but that appears to have been a single event, probably not formal work, and he never went back.

So Peter is not exaggerating. They really did leave everything behind in order to follow Christ.

Now, the majority of Christians give up very little to follow Christ. But Christians are called to a very different attitude about all those things and more besides. Trusting and following Jesus Christ means that our first and highest loyalty is to Him. Those who truly trust and follow Jesus seem to lose far more than they gain. The losing wasn't over for the disciples – after all, Judas was still with them at this moment – and the losing isn't over for us, either. At any time, the Lord can choose to move us on. Friends or family might decide that our commitment to Christ makes us unwelcome. Christian brothers or sisters might prove to be false converts and, in abandoning Christ, abandon us as well.

Peter's question is a good one. We've done what you wanted the rich young man to do. You promised him treasure in heaven – what does that mean for us?

I want you to notice that Jesus doesn't rebuke their question as being worldly or

materialistic or greedy. It's a reasonable question. We who follow Jesus leave behind things that we can see and touch and experience for things that are, as yet, invisible and unknown. Sometimes we need some reassurance.

Let's listen to Jesus' answer.

FOR THE DISCIPLES

Matthew 19:28

28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **(Matthew 19:28, 2022 LSB)**

These words are addressed to the disciples, though not to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. A time is coming – Jesus calls it “the regeneration” – when He will sit on His throne, and the disciples will sit on twelve thrones, and their task will be to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. The word “judge” does not refer to final judgment since only Jesus will do that, and it will be over in a brief time. Instead, the disciples' responsibility will be judging, or ruling, the nation Israel.

I believe that this will take place during the Millennial Kingdom. Following the seven-year tribulation period, when God will systematically judge the earth and restore Israel to faithfulness, Jesus will return. Satan will be bound, and Jesus will rule on earth for one thousand years. During that time, nations will still exist, although perhaps not the nations that exist today. Glorified saints will have the responsibility of administering Jesus' authority on the earth, and the apostles will specifically have responsibility over Israel.

I know that some theological views allegorize references like this to Israel's future. The Bible often uses figurative speech, and it often speaks of literal events. As a rule of thumb, we

take the text of Scripture literally unless there is a reason to treat it as figurative speech. There is simply no reason to treat Matthew 19:28 as figurative speech unless someone has already decided that any mention of future Israel is, by definition, allegorical. That is eisegesis rather than exegesis.

In general terms, we approach Scripture in one of two ways. The book *Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered (Volume 2)* says this:

Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means “to lead out of.” That means that **the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text**. The opposite approach to Scripture is **eisegesis**, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means “to lead into,” which means **the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants**. (Emphasis mine).

Exegesis is the method that guarantees that we understand what God actually intends in His Word. Eisegesis is the method that guarantees that the Bible will always agree with our point of view.

There is nothing in our text that suggests that Jesus’ reference to Israel is anything but a literal promise to His disciples. They were honored to be given to Jesus by the Father (John 17:6), chosen by Jesus to be His disciples (John 15:16), and led the early church (Acts 2:42). Their high status in the Kingdom will be openly demonstrated when the Lord grants them the right and responsibility to rule Israel in the regeneration.

But Jesus went to speak to all believers, and not just His disciples.

FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Matthew 19:29

29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, will receive one hundred times as much, and will inherit eternal life. (**Matthew 19:29, 2022 LSB**)

He speaks to everyone who has suffered the loss of earthly things and relationships, and not just the Twelve.

Following Jesus was costly to these men. It was costly to people like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. It was costly to Mary Magdalene. It was costly to the Ethiopian eunuch and the Philippian jailer. It was costly to Silas and Timothy and Epaphroditus and Philemon.

The book of Hebrews speaks of those who suffered physical torture and execution for their faith, but there are others losses as well, as Jesus says here. Following Jesus Christ can cost a livelihood or a home. It can cost relationships with family and friends. I am not thinking of anyone in particular when I say that most believers lose relationships with unbelieving family and friends. Sometimes we follow Christ to our financial cost; we could have made a better living by doing something else or being unethical in our dealings with others. Some lose their physical health, sacrificing themselves on the mission field. Some suffer emotionally because of the abandonment of friends and family and the abuse they receive from people they respect. Sometimes we even lose relationships with other Christians. Some are false converts, and when they abandon Christ, they abandon us as well. Some are genuine believers, but they make worldly choices and forsake us. That’s not too strong a word; there have been times when we feel forsaken by good, close friends.

Nothing this life offers is yours forever. Fortunes are lost every day. Our physical and mental health is frail. Friendships are as fragile as eggshells. Family relationships are uncertain. Pets die. We must work hard just to maintain what we have in this life, yet as hard as we work, those things can be lost to us in a heartbeat.

But heavenly things are eternal. Peter writes that we have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven for us. (First Peter 1:4). That means our rewards will not rot, rust, recede, or be robbed. Jesus says that what we lose in this world will be restored many times over. Beyond that, we have eternal life and everything that goes with it; every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, as Ephesians 1:3 says. Things that are beyond sight, sound, or imagination, as First Corinthians 2:9 says.

THE WORLD UPENDED

Matthew 19:30

30 “But many who are first will be last; and the last, first. (**Matthew 19:30, 2022 LSB**)

Given the context, I don't think that Jesus is speaking of the entire human race but rather His people. Some who have places of prominence on earth will receive few rewards in eternity. Those rewards are based on our faith, endurance, and obedience to Christ. As long as we are polluted by our sinful flesh, we will be tempted to earn rewards by means apart from faith, endurance, and obedience. Certainly, the modern fascination with popularity reveals an unbiblical statement of mind. In the end, churches will not be rewarded. Movements will not be rewarded. Ministries will not be rewarded. Individual believers will be rewarded, and all on the same basis: faith, endurance, and obedience to Christ. Did you believe? Did you endure? Did you obey? Those are the questions that matter.

On the day those rewards are given, there will likely be some surprises. There will faithful, enduring, obedient saints who no one knows, who led “tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity.” (First Timothy 2:2). They led a quiet life, attended to their own business, and kept themselves occupied in faithful, wholesome ways (First Thessalonians 4:11). They will receive great rewards.

On the other hand, there will also be those who loved to be first (Third John 1:9), who

thought more highly of themselves than was proper (Romans 12:3), who were often motivated by selfish ambition and a vain desire for glory, mostly concerned with their own interests (Philippians 2:3). They tended to proclaim Christ out of selfish motives (Philippians 1:17), and might even have been hostile to other Christians who opposed them (Galatians 4:16).

Jesus says that earthly experience and appearances don't determine heavenly outcomes. Instead, many who are first (on earth) will be last (in heaven), and many who are last (on earth) will be first (in heaven).

BRINGING IT HOME

Let's bring this home.

Regarding the disciples and their future role in judging and ruling Israel, all I can say is, "Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!" One day the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and for that, we should all rejoice. I wish we had more specific descriptions of when and how these things will take place, but the Lord has given us what He has given us. It is enough, in the end, that we believe His promises without becoming anxious about the details.

But His promise to restore what we lose as we follow Him is precious indeed. Most of us – hopefully, all of us – would say that we don't follow Jesus just for the sake of eternal rewards. Nevertheless, He promises us eternal rewards. It isn't greedy or selfish to recognize that God will compensate us for whatever we lose in this world. In fact, if there is a problem with thinking about eternal rewards, it's that our thinking about those rewards is too small and limited. We risk becoming preoccupied with how God will give many times as many mothers or fathers (when we're used to thinking of one of each) when we should be thinking about God's ability to bless us beyond our comprehension.

