

Getting eternal life is counterintuitive: those who bring nothing but childlike trust are welcomed into God's kingdom, those who leave all for God gain all, but those who seek admittance by what they bring walk away empty-handed. To inherit eternal life, simply follow Jesus as your King and don't turn back.

Introduction – Nearly everyone wants to go to heaven. A smaller subset, but still the majority of people, believe they are headed for heaven. A still smaller group are certain they will be with God in heaven. This group has what we call “assurance of salvation.” Yet many people lack assurance.

I. Eternal Life is Not For Sale

A. The extremely rich ruler tried to buy a ticket to heaven (vv. 18-21)

1. This rich man was possibly a ruler in the synagogue (cf. Luke 8:41) or a member of the Jewish Council (Luke 23:13, 35; 24:20). Likely he was a member of the upper classes, those who were commonly considered “first” in the kingdom of God by the people. It appears he sought assurance concerning his eternal destiny. He wanted to know if there was something more he needed to do to enter the kingdom. But Jesus discerns a problem in the way the ruler asked the question: by addressing him as “Good Teacher.”
2. Jesus could have launched into a gospel presentation, like Paul did when asked a similar question (cf. Acts 16:29-31). Many evangelicals would probably would smell “conversion blood in the water” and cast for the catch. But not Jesus. It is as if Jesus replies, “Do you know who I am?” Jesus discerns the ruler has a false understanding of goodness, believing that some people can be so good that God would grade them “good enough”.
3. Jesus recites commandments 5-9. These entail the “second table” of the law (except the tenth: do not covet). These comprise man’s duties to his neighbor, which are easier to test by a person’s outward behavior. Why did Jesus go to the law? He is subverting the rich ruler’s self-confidence. He refers him to the law that he might gain knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).
4. Amazingly the ruler claims he has kept from his youth all these commandments! He hasn’t understood the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus expounds the law’s true concern: the heart (Matthew 5:20ff, 48). He’s never considered all the law requires and forbids (For 8th, cf. Westminster Larger Catechism 141-142).

B. Jesus set the price much too high for him (vv. 22-25)

1. Is Jesus pressing the law on the ruler so he might come to the end of his goodness? Yes. But Jesus also subtly changes from the category of law to gospel. This man trusts the law to save him. So the Lord pressed him to instead trust in Jesus! That is why Jesus tells this man he must sell all and give all. It is a test of this man’s trust in Jesus.
2. The rich ruler became sad, because Jesus had exposed his lack of goodness. He did not actually keep the law by loving God and his neighbor. He loved his wealth more, and was unwilling to give it away when commanded by God to do so. His riches were his god, and he desired them more than God. Jesus gave him the exact command he needed in order to be set free from his love of money. In the end, he would see Jesus as Good, but refuse to obey him as God.
3. Who can forget the thought of a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle! Remember hyperbole illustrates truth, not an exaggerated truth stretched to the point of incredulity. The point is not that rich people can only gain eternal life with a herculean effort. No, it is absolutely impossible for a rich man to do anything to get eternal life apart from God (1 Timothy 6:10).

II. Eternal Life is Inherited

A. Who can be saved? (v. 26)

The people of Jesus' day assumed that the rich were experiencing God's favor, and were in a spiritually privileged position (cf. Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4; 28:19). Thus people reasoned that great wealth enabled someone to "get ahead" in the spiritual life. People must have thought the rich ruler was first in line for heaven. If it was so very difficult for him to be saved, then the average person didn't stand a chance! "Who then can be saved?" is a question of desperation.

B. No man can buy it, but God does bequeath it (v. 27)

No one, no matter how spiritually privileged, ever paid his own way into the kingdom of God. Eternal life is not for sale. Your goodness and good deeds are offensive to God when you offer them in exchange for the kingdom. Instead God is pleased to *bequeath* eternal life to his followers.

III. Eternal Life Has One Condition

A. Follow Jesus and don't look back (v. 28)

The disciples thought hard about this—the camel, the needle, selling all. Peter, probably speaking for all of them, reminded Jesus that they had left everything to follow him. They wanted assurance that they had inherited eternal life. Had they met the one condition? Had they passed the "sell all" test? Had they followed where the rich ruler had turned back?

B. Follow Jesus with a childlike faith (vv. 15-17)

Earlier Jesus pointed to babies as an example of the kind of faith required to inherit eternal life. At first the disciples didn't understand how to get eternal life—that it requires childlike trust in Jesus. They tried to prevent parents from bringing their little ones to Jesus. But Jesus seized that moment to teach God's kingdom belongs to "such as these." Now it seems the disciples finally began to understand.

C. Follow Jesus who is our eternal inheritance (vv. 29-30)

1. Jesus taught no matter what his disciples give up for the sake of the kingdom, God's good gifts are always of surpassing worth and greatness. They will receive treasure in heaven, as Jesus promised the rich ruler if he would trust and follow him (v. 22).
2. This is a spiritual idea, that anything one gives up for the sake of following Christ will receive the full equivalent (and more!) in Christ. For leaving one's family to follow Jesus, disciples will gain a new family (the church; cf. Mark 3:34-35). For leaving one's life in this age to follow Jesus, disciples will gain eternal life in the next age. The eternal inheritance is Jesus, following him, united to him by faith, and receiving all kingdom rewards as they are bound up in relationship to Christ.

Conclusion – These are some of the blessings believers have inherited in this age (Hebrews 6:5), and will experience fully in the age to come. Peace of God that passes understanding (Philippians 4:7; Isaiah 26:3). Unspeakable joy and full glory (1 Peter 1:8). The light of knowing God's glory in Christ's face (2 Corinthians 4:6). God's love that the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts (Romans 5:5). Ability to endure trials for Christ's sake by faith, hope, and love (Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:10). Rejoice in suffering shame for Christ's sake (1 Peter 1:8; Acts 5:41). Assurance of God's love and life in his presence forever as his blessed child: heir of eternal life.