

Achieving the impossible – getting to heaven – Matthew 19:16-26

31st July at 10am

Introduction (v16)

Good morning everyone

Today we're looking at Matthew chapter 19 verses 16 to 26, so, it'd be really helpful if you'd grab a pew Bible and open it on page 987

I wonder how often you think about heaven. Sometimes? Almost never? Occasionally?

The rich young man in our passage this morning had obviously been thinking about heaven quite a lot. We don't know why this was. After all at his age I don't suppose that he was expecting to go there in the immediate future!

Maybe he was just planning ahead – never a bad thing to do... But whatever it was, it bothered him enough to approach Jesus and ask him how he could get there.

¹⁶ Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

You know, I hope you really grasp just how incredible heaven is going to be.

Understand this: heaven is going to be absolutely wonderful – it's going to be simply marvellous.

The worst thing about heaven will be better than the best thing about our current world
And the even better news? It's never going to end.

So this morning we're going to talk about how we can be absolutely sure of getting there ourselves.

I want every one of you here this morning, to have absolutely no reason for missing out on this fabulous free gift from God

We're going to do this by, firstly, seeing an example of how not to do it; before secondly seeing how we must do it

Got that? Trying to get to heaven the wrong way and then the right way

How to fail to get to heaven (vv17-22)

Okay so, how do we go about getting to heaven the wrong way?

Well, by looking at the example of the rich young man we can see three key ways to fail at getting to heaven. And this is by:

- Asking insincere questions
- Being unaware of our idols – being unaware of the things that get in the way of our relationship with God
- Giving up and going away

Let's have a look at each of these in turn

1. Asking insincere questions (v16, 18, 20)

A Sunday school teacher asked her children this question: "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would I get into heaven?"

"No!" the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would I get into heaven"? Again, the answer was "No!"

"Well," she continued, "then how can I get to heaven?"

At the back of the room, a 5 year old boy shouted out, "You've got to be dead!"

Despite his apparent interest in heavenly things, three times, in verses 16, 18 and 20, the rich young man asks insincere questions

And each time Jesus tries to put him back on track.

It's not that the first question: "what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" was a particularly bad question – even if it did reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel (we'll talk more about that later)

No! Asking a wrong question is okay. The problem comes when we're not really interested in listening to the answer

Because then our questions are effectively meaningless and insincere

Let's listen to how the man's conversation with Jesus goes:

He walks up smiling, "Jesus, I'm so glad to meet you. I want to get to heaven. What good thing do I need to do?"

Jesus says, "Well, how are you doing at keeping the Ten Commandments?"

"Well, since I want to save myself and I want God to be pleased and I want to live a moral, compliant, obedient life, I'm happy to report I have kept the commandments since I was a little boy.

My life is fantastic. You want to see my car? You want to see my house? You want to see my friends? I really appreciate the life God has given me. Now about getting to heaven – do I really still lack something?"

"Well, if you want to be perfect, then sell all your stuff, give it all away, and come and follow me."

"Oh, well now I'm very sad, because you're talking about me driving an old banger or taking the bus. People aren't going to look at me the same. And if I can't live in that house, I'll have to downsize. I'll have to mix with a different class of people.

But I really like the people I mix with now, I really like the food that I eat and I really like the drink that I drink and it just seems like you're asking a lot. After all, I've worked hard, I've accomplished it, I've achieved it, and I feel like I deserve it."

And Jesus says, "Well, it's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."

And the man says, "Yeah, I don't think I can do that. You see you don't have the money I have. You're a homeless guy. You don't understand what you're asking me to do."

And so he goes away

Do you see that the young man isn't really interested in listening to what Jesus has to say?
That what he's really trying to do is to justify his situation
And add a little cream to it by getting to heaven
Do you see that?

When we want to know things about God, especially when it's crucial issues such as our eternal destiny, it's really important to be sincere in our questioning:
We need to ask with the right attitude
We need to have a genuine desire to learn
When we're studying the Bible, we need to have genuine humility, understanding just exactly who it is we're dealing with – the God of the whole universe

2. Be unaware of our idols (vv20-21)

So we can fail to get to heaven by asking insincere questions. Secondly, we can be unaware of the things – the idols – that are getting in the way of our relationship with God

When Jesus starts challenging the young man about his wealth in verse 21, he reveals his idol.

Jesus exposes the thing that prevents this man from finding a life-saving relationship.

Jesus says to him, "Let go of your idol, which will only be temporary anyway. And instead let me give you something better. Something that'll last forever
But it's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."

You see, this man worships his success. He worships what he's achieved.
He doesn't see that it's an idol. He doesn't see that it's blocking his way to heaven.
But Jesus says, "It's not about success. It's about God who loves you and adopts you and cares for you, so let go of your idol and receive the love of God."

The problem is that for this man, he was his own god, and sadly that's the god that many of us worship:

"Look at my success. Look at my achievements. Look at my accomplishments. Look at my possessions. Look at all that I've done. Look at who I truly am. It's pretty fantastic."

But the problem is it's all for his glory, not God's glory.
His whole life is to glorify himself, not to honour the God who made him.

This young man is an idolater. And he idolises his status and his success. But he doesn't see that they're his idols. He doesn't see that they're getting in the way of his relationship with Jesus

Do you? Do you see it?

Jesus says, "It's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."

3. Give up and go away (v22)

So we can fail to get to heaven by asking insincere questions, and by being unaware of our idols. Thirdly, we can fail by giving up and going away, when it all gets too tough for us

²² *When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

An old miser died and went to heaven.

St. Peter greeted him at the entrance and escorted him to his new living-quarters.

They walked past numerous elegant mansions before finally arriving at a dilapidated shack at the end of the street.

The miser, very shocked, said "Why do I have a rundown shack when all these others have such fine mansions?"

"Well" replied St. Peter, "we did the best we could with the money you sent us."

For the rich young man the stumbling-block was money.

The question for you this morning is this: What is it for you? What is your stumbling-block? What are you unwilling to give up to follow Jesus? What would you cling to as you walked away from him, saddened because your ultimate idol had been exposed?

The truth is that often we don't know what our idol is until we face the prospect of losing it. Some of you'll say, "I don't have an idol." But you may. In fact, I'd say, you do. But maybe because your idol is safe and secure, you're unaware that it is an idol.

But as soon as there's the prospect of losing it, that's when everything changes. And that was the situation in this man's life. Jesus found his idol.

So what might prevent you from finding that life-saving relationship? What might prevent you from experiencing life in all its fullness?

Jesus says, "It's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."
And the young man makes his choice and walks away

You know, in a way, giving up and walking away is the rich young man's only mistake: Even if a person keeps on asking the wrong questions
Even if a person fails to recognise the idols in their life
Even if a person misses the divinity of Jesus and even misunderstands God's grace
If they commit to staying with Jesus and learning from him, they can still find that life-giving relationship.

Remember that Jesus disciples, even after being with him for quite some time, didn't fully understand the Lordship of Jesus.
And they certainly didn't fully understand the idea of grace

But they stayed with Jesus:

They were willing to commit to a lifestyle of learning from him.
They apprenticed themselves to him, for the long haul.

If you're finding the way to faith a tough journey – and I know some of you are – please, please don't give up and walk away.

Stay close to Jesus and learn from him – join the next Alpha course or be part of a Home Group or spend time talking with your Christian friends

Be a full part of the Southover community

Stay on that road from brokenness to wholeness

Don't copy the rich young man's mistake of walking away before he found what he was looking for

Don't risk missing out on heaven

How to succeed in getting to heaven (vv23-26)

Okay, so we've seen three ways to fail at getting to heaven. Now let's look at the right way to do it

There's three things we need to do:

- Understand that there's nothing we can do to get to heaven
- Understand that instead we must rely on totally on grace (that is we have to rely on what Jesus has already done for us on the cross)
- Have Jesus as our treasure

We'll have a look at each of these in turn

1. Understand there's nothing we can do (v25)

So, firstly, we need to understand that there's nothing we can do to get to heaven:

The young man's question was basically this:

"I want to go to heaven so what is it that I need to do? How can I save myself?"

You see he wanted know what religious work, what large cheque, what action he needed to perform, what sacred pilgrimage he needed to do, so that he could add to his résumé, 'He saved himself. He fully merited the salvation he earned. He went to heaven under his own steam. He did it his way.'

The young man was so wrapped up in himself and his achievements that he didn't listen properly to Jesus' responses.

But the disciples had been listening. You see, they did have a genuine desire to learn. And so with astonishment they asked: "*Who then can be saved?*"

You see, they'd realised what Jesus was trying to get the young man to understand:

Nobody can get to heaven by what they do

Nobody can save themselves

There is no 'good thing' anyone can do that'll get them to heaven

It is, quite simply, impossible for humans to do.

2. Instead rely on totally on grace

So, firstly, we need to understand that there's nothing we can do to get to heaven. Then secondly, we need to rely totally on grace.

Yes salvation is impossible for us to achieve. But it's not impossible for God – “*with God*”, Jesus says “*with God all things are possible*”

Salvation is for people who despair of their own efforts

Salvation is for those who realise that, in themselves and by themselves, they're hopelessly sinful and incapable of improving

Salvation is for those who see themselves as living violations of God's holiness and who choose to confess and turn from their sin and throw themselves on his mercy

Salvation is for those who recognise they have absolutely nothing good to give God – that anything good they receive or accomplish can be only by his sovereign, gracious provision in Jesus Christ.

God can do what people can't do.

The rich young man went away without receiving eternal life because he looked for it on the impossible basis of his own human resources and achievements.

This is absolutely crucial for us to grasp: our eternal destiny depends on us understanding that that it isn't about what we have to do but about what God has done for us

3. Have Jesus as our treasure

But there's one more thing we need. We need to have Jesus as our treasure.

Matthew 6:21 says this: ²¹...*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Jesus says to the young man, “Give away your treasure.”

And the man says, “I'm really unhappy with that idea.”

And Jesus says essentially, “I'm really unhappy too, because I'm supposed to be your treasure.”

The problem is that the young man preferred to keep his treasure on earth (v23) to the prospect of earning treasure in heaven (v21)

But Jesus says “you can't do that: it's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other.”

Is Jesus your treasure? Or is your treasure something, or someone, else?

Look here's the big idea: whatever comes between you and God, you need to get rid of it.

I don't know what it is for you; the Holy Spirit can highlight that.

I know what it is for me

But for each of us, it'll be something different:

For some of us it's money

For some it's "I always need to be in a relationship."
For some it's "I have to have that job or I have to drive that car"
For some it's our health and fitness
For some it's the way we look
For some it's alcohol or drugs we take

Whatever your thing is, if it's between you and Jesus and following him, which is the whole point of this story, you've got to get rid of it, if you want to get to heaven.

Jesus says, "It's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."

Jesus needs to be your ultimate treasure

Conclusion

Two Christians had lived very good, and also very healthy lives. They die, and go to heaven. As they're walking along, marvelling at the paradise around them, one turns to the other and says: "Wow, I never knew heaven was going to be as good as this!" "Yeah", says the other. "And just think, if we hadn't eaten all that oat bran we could have got here ten years sooner."

Heaven is a fantastic fabulous free gift from God.
So, if we've got any sense, we'll spend at least some time in this life investigating how to make sure – absolutely sure – that we'll be going there!

However Jesus says that not even a rich person can get to heaven by their own efforts. Salvation by works is impossible.

But Jesus also says, "What's impossible with men is possible with God."
Jesus says, "I do the impossible. I get camels through eyes of needles. I get people," – like us, you and me – "into heaven."

Yes! Jesus does just exactly that – praise God!
He goes to the cross to pay for our sin. He rises to give us new life.
The one thing the rich young man could not obtain, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, Jesus gives as a generous free gift.

Sadly some people who show great interest in the gospel never come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.
The rich young man went away from Jesus not because he heard the wrong message or because he didn't believe.
He went away because he was unwilling to admit his sin, give up all that he had, and obey Jesus as Lord.

Please don't any of you make the same mistakes!

Jesus says to all of us this morning, "It's me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other."