

How to Get Eternal Life for the Person Who “Has Everything”

Well did you have a happy kind of week, you know a “h-a-p-p-y” kind of week. An almost perfect outline there, right? Hope, acceptance, power, presence and ya-family. It was good to be here last week and focus on the present benefits of our future salvation, but you do know that what we talked about last week, though they’re good things - hope, acceptance, power, presence and family, that’s all just minor league stuff. The big stuff, the major league stuff, is after that. I mean that really is what the focus is in the scripture, and it’s the ultimate hope of the Christian life and its good, and just to resonant on that last week was good; but it should raise the question that we’re trying to answer now for the next four or five weeks of making sure that we’ve got it.

The more we focus on the benefits of eternal life leads us to the question, well, how do I get it? How do I know for sure that I’ve got it? And so it’s appropriate that we turn our attention for the next few weeks to this passage in scripture where the source of salvation, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, is going to answer the question. It’s going to come out and tell us, here’s how you do it. Now the word that will reoccur through this series is the word “gospel” because that’s the message that gets us in this position to be right with our God and get the blessings of God, eternal life. And it’s important for us to know at least that word - a little bit about it at least. So, a little Greek lesson here real quick. That’s a translation of a Greek word, euanglian. It transliterates into a lot of English words like eve-angelical or eve-vangelism. Those come from euanglian. Anglian, that may sound familiar - angel -anglios. Eu is the Greek word for good. You go to a funeral and someone gets up and says a “good word” about the dead person. That’s called a eulogy - the good logos, the good word. Now in scripture the good message euanglian is the message that gets your right with God so that you get eternal life. That’s kind of the threshold, the doorway you’ve got to walk through to get right with eternal God.

Now, though if you were to take a poll in our community, say the Aliso Viejo town center, you’d find a lot of people that say there’s lots of ways to get there. There’s a lot of paths, there’s lots of messages that’ll get you connected with God and that’s how it works. But of course, if you know your Bible, and you open it up you find out there’s not a lot of ways. As a matter of fact, when it comes to the gospel the Bible is very very strict on this point that there’s no wiggle room in the message. The message is what it is, and you can’t tamper with it.

So before we get to Christ answering this question in Matthew 19, I want you to turn real quickly to Galatians Chapter 1. Just to remind you of how critically important this is because I know some people think - even church going people think - well, there’s wiggle room in the message. I mean that guy’s kind of got that gospel, and that church has that gospel, and you know it’s a little different, but you know, who cares. Well, God cares, and the apostles in the New Testament make a very stern case for not tampering with the gospel - the message that gets us eternal life.

Now, get past the salutation there in Galatians Chapter 1 and look at verse number 6. He starts his message to the churches of Galatia, and he says, “I’m astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different {now put

this in quotes} gospel-” A ‘different message’ that gets you right with God. Now you put it in quotations because verse 7 explains “which is really no gospel at all.” See if it’s different, it’s not good, it doesn’t work, it’s not real. “Evidently” he says, middle of verse 7 “some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert {twist, to adjust, kind of change it a little bit, pervert} the gospel of Christ” - the message that gets us right with God. “But even if we” he says, and “we” by the way, Paul and the apostolic band. They’ve got a pretty impressive resume, important guys - they’re doing miracles. These guys are important guys, or, then he says, “or an angel from heaven” and if Paul has a good resume, you know, Gabriel and Michael they’ve got better resumes. Those are really credentialed people. He says I don’t care if it’s an angel from heaven, if they should come and preach to you “a gospel other than the one we preach to you.” I mean if it’s changing or perverted or twisted or a little different, he says, “let him be” - now important phrase, hopefully, now it’s already underlined in your Bible - underline it - the NIV translates it “let him be eternally condemned.” If you’ve been around the church, you know that word anathema it is the strongest statement in scripture that refers to God damning your soul. May God damn you. That’s pretty intense. I mean those are bad words - don’t want our kids to say God damn you - that’s bad, right? Well, there is one place where I guess you could let your kids say it, and that’s when someone is twisting the gospel. Because the biblical response to that is God damn you for doing that, and may he send you to hell because no one is to tamper with the message of the gospel and if that sounds too strong or you think it’s hyperbole or he kind of got caught up in the moment take a look at the next verse. He wants to make it clear, hey, “As we’ve already said, let me now say it again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel” a message to get right with God, “other than the one you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” Now you might expect the next sentence cause if you’re saying those kind of things it’s not popular you’re not going to win friends, influence people with that - he makes it clear that’s not my goal. Verse 10, “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God?” Let’s just figure this out. I’m trying to be faithful to God and do what he tells us to do. He’s given us a message to get eternal life, and I’m just trying to reiterate that. I’m trying to make that clear. I don’t want to tamper with that. There’s no wiggle room in the message. I know that doesn’t please everybody, but I’m not trying to please men. He says, ‘If I were still trying to please men,’” bottom of verse 10, “I would not be a servant of Christ.”

You know it’s so important that we get this right. It would be good for us to go into every passage of scripture and look at what the Bible says about getting eternal life. And it would be good for us to start with the question that is posed historically to Christ by who we’ve come to know in our Bible study as the rich young ruler. It’s found in Matthew Chapter 19. And we’re going to camp there for 5 weeks, and just analyze Christ’s answer to the question, cause it’s straight forward. Hey, he says “what good thing must I do to {inherit} eternal life? - how do I get eternal life? That’s the question and Jesus answers it. Now if this sounds like a familiar story, it is, because it’s not only here in Matthew 19 it’s also in Luke 18, and it’s also over there in Mark Chapter 10. This is repeated three times in the gospels and sometimes it gets confused with another story of a teacher of the law who asks a similar question. But this particular account in Christ’s life repeated three times. And we learn about this setting and we’ve got to piece all the historical setting together by making sure we include all the information from all three gospels. But it begins here in verse number 16. Be good for us to read it.

It says, “Now a man came up to Jesus and says teacher, rabbi, what good thing must I do to get

eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16) That's a great question and you've come to the right guy. I mean you've come to the right person Jesus the Messiah, God incarnate that's a great question to ask him. Jesus says, bow your head with me and repeat after me and pray this prayer. Verse 17, you see that there? I mean that's what we expect. I've been to church man. I know how this works. He didn't say that. Matter of fact, he gives a totally tweaked answer. What in the world are you talking to me about what's good for? He says, "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. There is only one who is good." Now here's the thing. I came to ask about eternal life. I'm not asking about God. This is not a theology lesson. I just want to make sure I've got eternal life. What do I do? And he goes off, "why are you asking me about what's good." Very mysterious answer and then it gets even weirder, middle of verse 17, hey, "If you want eternal life, obey the commandments." Now if you've been to our classes on how to share the gospel that's generally not the answer we want you to give to people, right? Just go keep the commandments. Clearly, Christ is doing something quite interesting and unique in this passage. That's why it takes us some time to sort out, why is Christ doing that? What's he saying here? And the answer will become clear even this morning just by looking at a verse and a half of this. The man asks the question, well "Which ones?" There's a lot of commands in the Bible. Which ones am I supposed to keep? And Jesus starts quoting them from Exodus 20, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, 'love your neighbor as yourself'." etc. etc. you know the commands. And the guy says well hey I've done those. "All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack?" Clearly, there's got to be more than that. I mean I've done my best to be a good guy. Verse 21. Jesus says, "If you want to be [complete], {teleos (Gr?) - if you want to have this thing right - more on that when we get there - perfect it's translated in the NIV} go, sell your possessions and give to the poor." That's another thing we don't teach you when you go out to share the gospel with people, right. Here's our deposit slip Compass Bible Church, take all your stuff put it in our bank account. You want to be a Christian? This is easy. Right there, just sign it over. What? That's bizarre. Yeah, sell everything you have and go give it to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven and then come and follow me. Now "when the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth." And Jesus says, man what a great opportunity we missed out on to give a lot of money to the poor - that's not what he says. He says, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." verse 23. What ever that was it was a test and he failed it. Whatever that was in verse number 21, he didn't get it and he goes away sad and Jesus says, man too bad he couldn't become a Christian. Too bad he couldn't get eternal life. What are you talking about? It says "It is easier for a camel to [squeeze] through an eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." verse 24 more on that when we get there. "When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and they said well "who came be saved?" This guy seemed to have it together. I don't get it. He can't become a Christian? What are you talking about? "Jesus looked at them and said with man it's impossible, but with God all things are possible." Verse 26 Peter answered - we looked at this last week the parallel passage. "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us? Jesus said to them. I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me { he's sitting there looking at the apostles he says} will sit on the 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. And everybody that has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first." And that's a telling statement cause we just looked at a guy that everybody

thought, he's a prime candidate to be a follower of Christ. And let's review why.

Well there's a few things we learn about him. One thing right away is we learn that he's young. Verse 20, you see that there. "The young man said" OK which doesn't seem to be a point in his favor except for the fact we learn there in verse 22 he had great wealth and that kind of changes our view of a young person when they've earned a lot of money. So here's a guy with a lot of money, he's a young guy and you might want to put in your notes or in the margin over there in Luke 18:18 it tells us that he's also - it adds another phrase - tells us what his position is in the synagogue. It calls him "the ruler" - a ruler, arcon (Gr?), someone who's leading and in charge. Now again, people dispute this, but Luke uses that phrase in Luke and in Acts 17 times and it always invariably refers to people that are leading in the Jewish community people that are leading in the synagogue. Now that is remarkable, because there are things I've just learned about this guy. He's young, he has accomplished a lot commercially - he's got a lot of money - and, he is someone who has risen to a place of leadership in the synagogue. Which, by the way, just like in the New Testament the word that is used to describe those people is a word that really comes over from the fact that most of these people are old. They don't get there until they're old. They're called presbuteros (Gr?). Presbuteros means an old person, elders we call them in the church and so it was called in the synagogue. The elders who led the thing. Well you didn't have to be old to be one, but generally you had to have quite a resume to be one and it was unique, like Timothy. Right, Timothy was a young man who was a preaching elder at the church and that was unique and it said something about the young person. You're quite accomplished. I mean God's doing some amazing things for you. Well in his community, he was that way. A young guy who had already achieved a position of leadership in his synagogue and commercial success. Sharp, smart, the guy had everything, right? He is in terms of his synagogue, what I like to call the Sunday school graduate, he had the information. He knew about God, he knew about what he'd learned at least about God from his experience in the synagogue. He was just no back row pew warmer. This guy had it together.

Also you might want to add Mark 10. In Mark 10, it says in verse 17 - there's one more thing that's helpful for us and it reveals his attitude. It tells us that when he came to Jesus and started this discussion he knelt down. That helps me a little bit. Mark reveals a little bit of his heart in that. He's not like the teacher of the law, the expert in the law who is testing him. He comes as a successful guy, lets paint the picture, with a "church" background, a synagogue background. He comes to the right person, he asks the right question and he's got the right attitude. And again we just read the whole passage, and unfortunately, it doesn't end well. He goes away and Christ says too bad he couldn't become a Christian, really sad that he couldn't enter the kingdom of God. Wow, big deal. Now if the rich young ruler gets it wrong, asking the right question, with the right attitude to the right person, then I think we need to make sure we've got this thing straight. Cause a lot of people are presumptuous about this whole matter. They presume on God, they assume they have it. Over 90% of the people in the country think that if there is a heaven, they are going there. Less than 1% think that if there is a bad place, they're going there. Most people presume they got it right. And whatever eternal life there might be, well I'm sure I'm going to make it. Well, we better make sure. Because Jesus told a prime candidate you just missed the point. So let's get it right.

We're going to spend 5 weeks in this passage. Let's begin with just the first verse and a half in

verse 16 and 17a if you will. Let's look at it again. Now a man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" He doesn't answer the question, he answers the question with a question - isn't that annoying? I just hate that, right? I asked you a question, don't ask me a question. I want eternal life, how do I get it? Why do you call me good? It's just so weird. Now he follows up with that statement by saying this in verse 17 "There is only One who is good." Now that "One" is capitalized in your Bible we're talking about God. You can see his finger pointing. There's only "One" that's good, what are you asking me about what's good for? Very cryptic, very mysterious, very odd, but what we can say about it is. He wants to adjust his thinking about God. Before I answer how to get eternal life and get the goodies of this eternal God you need to think about God for a second. Let's adjust your thinking about God because we can assume even with the best pedigree, the best background, the best "church experience" if you will, the best synagogue -Sabbath school grad. Who you think God is, is not exactly right.

Number 1 on your outline, it'd be good for us to admit the same because it chronic in humanity that we don't get this thing right about God.

1. (We need to) Realize God May Not Be Who You Think He Is and that's how this all begins.

God may not be who you think he is. I know you want to know how to get God's goodies, but before we talk about God's goodies, let's talk about God for a second. You know God is the only one who is good. You're using the word good, just like we use the word good. We use it in a sloppy manner. Now in Greek there was an option. There are options in English, but in Greek there are 2 words that translate the word good and have kind of a similar connotation, but one, if you use it in it's technical definition, it has a really different sense then the other. The word used here is agathos (Gr?). And agathos is the Greek word that he uses when he says hey good teacher "what good thing must I do" and I say that because in both Luke 18 and Mark 10 he not only asks about what good thing must I do, but he calls him good, the rabbi good. At some point in the question he calls Jesus the good teacher and he is asking about what good thing must I do. Lot of uses of agathos and Christ says hey, stop, let's think about God for a second. You know you're using the word good here. God is the only "One" that is good. The other Greek word is colaas (Gr?). Colaas and agathos they translate the same word -good - but, they mean a little bit different. As a matter of fact if we technically take the words and use them strictly, we would use them in 2 different ways. And the best way to describe this is the way the classical Greek used to use the 2 words. If you were looking at a piece of fruit - this is the best illustration we have - and you said, is that a good piece of fruit? If you looked at the fruit, and it was a nice shiny red apple, OK, we would call it colaas. It looks good. It looks like a great apple, but we wouldn't know if it's agathos until we bit into it or cut it open. When we cut it open and looked on the inside then we'd know whether it was agathos. Colaas was it looks good, it has a good appearance. But agathos - it's good through and through. And the difference here is he uses the word good in a sloppy manner and he says before you start talking about good, let's just talk about good. The only "One" who's really agathos, good through and through is God. That's the only "One." I'm not asking about God. I'm asking about eternal life. That's the thing about the gospel. You really can't get the gospel message until you understand the God of the gospel. You can't, it's impossible. You've got to understand God, and the problem is most of us don't understand God. Most people in America don't understand God. If a guy who graduates from

Sabbath school, is a leader in his synagogue, got it going on in terms of his accomplishments in life, if he doesn't get it, we're certainly not going to get it.

We need to rethink our view of God. There are 2 basic ways that we generally view or I should say build our view of God - assemble our view of God. The first one is intuition. If you just put the microphone in people's faces and talk about eternal life or talk about God, they're going to start to say, "I think God...", "you know, in my view I picture God as...", "I think that God would...", "I'm kind of considering God." They've got all kind of opinions about God, and they get them intuitively. They think about God and they make projections about God, and the Bible says when we do that we're always projecting ourselves. Let me show you. Turn to Psalms 50 real quick. Biggest book in the Bible. When we assemble our view of God which everyone does - very few atheists in our culture even today - everyone's got a vision, got a picture in their mind - a definition of God. We generally build that view by our intuition. This is what I think. And the Bible says it is usually nothing more than a reflection of yourself. You like to create a view of God that fits you, and that is disastrous. Take a look at this text Psalm 50 drop down to verse 19 as the psalmist is in the middle of listing sins he says in verse 19 he says, hey "you {guys} use your mouth for evil." We all can raise our hand; we've done that, right? "and {we} harness our tongue to deceit." We've kind of adjusted our words to deceive; yeah, we've done that. Verse 20, "You speak continually against your brother and slander your mother's son." Not every word has been edifying; yeah, there's been some of that. We're guilty of that. Verse 21, "These things you have done {God says} and I kept silent;" Now think about that. God, when you said that bad thing that you should've said, didn't send a lightening bolt to destroy you. Like a big cosmic bug light - zzzit - your dead. Right? Or when you lied, you didn't fall down the next minute and break your leg. Or you shook your fist or maybe a digit or two at another driver. God didn't then make you hit a light pole. Splat. He kept silent. He didn't immediately judge you. And because of that, it's ok with God; I guess he understands, ok? Look at the next phrase. Very important phrase; needs to be underlined in your Bibles. Here it is, ready, here's what they say, "you thought I {God says} was altogether like you." You thought I was like you, but of course, you know where this is going. I'm not. I'm not like you. You thought I was because of the way you lived your life, because of your experience, because of your own thoughts, your projections about who you thought I was and you thought I was just like you, but I'm not like you. As a matter of fact just because I didn't immediately judge, doesn't mean I won't judge. Look at the middle of verse 21, "I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face." Now this is an interesting phrase, and it seems contradictory. In verse 22, "Consider this, you who forget God..." Now think through that for a second. You who forget God. Now it just said up in verse 21, they thought about God. They just thought God was like them. The problem though is when you think about God who's not really God, you're not thinking about God. You've forgotten the real God. See that? And that's the problem. We create a God out of in our own mind that really reflects our preferences. Well this is how I would do it. This is what I think God is like. This is reasonable to me. And the Bible says that's not God at all. That's why that passage in Matthew 7 makes so much sense. "Depart from me, I never knew you." We said last week. Well you never knew me - I never knew you - you never knew me. You had a relationship you thought with the real God, but the God you were thinking of wasn't me. It was a projection of your own intuition, your thoughts, your experience. "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces {and there will be} none to rescue." Because your God is a false God, and he's not going to save you. Now that's a harsh

passage, but it's helpful in thinking through the issue that when it comes to God, we can't just talk about the gospel until we talk about God. That's why you should never share the gospel with someone and just use the word God and assume the person across the table knows what you're talking about. Because they have created a vision of God that probably comes from their own brain. And if it doesn't come from their own brain - and here's the second tier - it usually comes from people we respect. People who we think are smart and in positions that we respect, and they told us what they thought God was, and we assume their definitions of God. That's the second tier and by the way the Bible says be careful they're often wrong. Turn with me to one more passage, and if you're not turning to any passages, please turn to this one. Jeremiah Chapter 23, a little harder to find, but it's so important that we read this together. Just think about it, if you grow up in a church - let's just start with the rich young ruler profile. We're going to learn a lot about God from our parents, we're going to learn a lot about God from our Sabbath school teachers, right our Sunday school teachers, we're going to learn a lot about God from our pastor, and we're going to learn a lot about God if we ever pick up a Christian book and start reading a Christian book. We're learning from "teachers" in our lives, and God says be careful. A teacher has one primary goal, and unfortunately, they assume a role they shouldn't assume, and that is they start to tell you what they think God is like. They don't teach God's word. They teach their own thoughts. See the problem? This is just a repeat of the first problem. God may not be who you think he is because if you've used your own intuition and imagination to create a vision of God you are probably wrong. And if you say, well I've listened to a lot of good teachers. Well, if the teacher hasn't been very careful to get those thoughts about God from God himself they've gotten those thoughts about God from their own mind - they may have sprinkled a few verses on it - but you're no better off. As a matter of fact, there are times when you've got to stop like this passage and say, be careful. When you teachers go off teaching about God and they are not supporting this with God's word, don't even listen to them. I mean that's what God says, look at verse 16, Jeremiah Chapter 23. If you don't turn to any other passage this one's critical. "This is what the LORD {Yahweh} Almighty says, 'Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; {They're saying all kinds of things about me, but don't listen to them} they fill you with false hopes. {Which, by the way, there is a popularity about saying things positively, but a lot about God is not going to sit well with the human heart. We want things that do sit well with us, and a lot of times all their doing is putting out stuff that makes us feel good - false hope though.} They speak visions {now look at this - here's the problem} from their own minds {It's all about what they thought. It wasn't about what God thought.} not from the mouth of the LORD {Yahweh}. They keep saying to those who despise me, the LORD {Yahweh} says: You will have peace. And to those who follow the stubbornness of their {own} hearts they say, {stuff like this} No harm is going to come to you." And you can just hear that fits in so well today, doesn't it? But God, he understands. You know come on - legalism - you know we're not into that. Come on, God understands. He's a loving God. OK? "But [verse 18] which of them has stood in the counsel of {Yahweh} to see or hear his word? Who has listened or heard his word?" Now this says the same thing that Psalm 50 says in verse 19, and that is, "See the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of {Yahweh} will not turn back until he's fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In the days to come you will understand it clearly." You'll get it because, verse 21, "I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with {now look at the pronoun - who's message?} their message; {Where'd it come from? We already learned that - from their minds verse 16 said} I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had

stood {one of my favorite verses in the Old Testament, here it is} if they had stood in my counsel, they would have proclaimed my words to my people {That's just a great phrase. Had they stood in my counsel they would have proclaimed MY Words to my people. Not their words to my people} and {they} would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds." Your teachers are often wrong. Your pastors are often wrong. Your parents are often wrong. Your thoughts are unreliable and so are the thoughts of others. It's not about that. And again I know this would take a 5 week series, and thankfully, we've already preached it. You can get it, and analyze it, and that is that this book is unique.

I know some people come into this auditorium today thinking that this book is nothing more than the collection of people's thoughts about God. That's not what we believe about this book. It has the fingerprint of God. It has authenticity to it that bears the marks of what we call inspiration - that lets us understand those apostles and prophets of God were conduits of God message. God's mind. And it was captured propositionally on paper. And because of that this is not the collection, 66 books of people's thoughts on God. We know that this, as the Bible says and as it's affirmed externally - whole other series I realize you're not going to buy this in 5 seconds, but you should research this, and we can help you at the Focal Point window if you need to - this is God's word about who he is. And if we want to know about what God says we've got to look at this. And your teachers should be doing nothing more than that. Teachers have one primary goal. They should have as their goal to do nothing more than reflect the content of this and get it out. That's what we call here expository preaching. Here's what God's word says. Here's how I often put it, and you staff members are tired of hearing ad nauseam, you hear it all the time, but our goal as teachers in the church is not to use the Bible to preach our message. See? It's to have the Bible use us to teach it's message. That's what the goal of teachers is all about because, drop down to verse 28, Jeremiah 23. The point is God's word. "Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream. {That's dripping with sarcasm. Like that's a waste of time, and he's going to tell you that in a minute at the end of the verse, he says} but, let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw have to do with grain?" What do your dreams and your thoughts about God have to do with God's word? Nothing. One is reliable and one is not. One is going to give you the truth, and one is going to give you opinion. Verse 29 "Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and {isn't it} like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces? I'm against the prophets who steal from one another [verse 30] words supposedly from me." They're getting them from each other. It's hilarious. Verse 31 "Yes, declares the Lord, I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, {hey} the Lord declares. Indeed [verse 32] I'm against those who prophesy false dreams, declares the Lord. They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies. {Good original thoughts on God, but it's not the truth.} yet I did not send them or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least, declares the Lord." You've got to realize that God may not be who you think he is. And just like the rich young ruler needed a lesson in who God is, so do we.

And I think I can typify a lot of your guys with the best church backgrounds. I did it. I grew up in church. I was the Sunday school graduate as I often say. I was the president of my youth group. Now it wasn't a huge church, but 600 people or so and I was the top banana. I had the verses in my head and I knew all that stuff. You've heard my testimony, right? If not, you've got to know my parents shipped me off to Bible school. That's what you do with a good Sunday school graduate, right? Ship them off to Bible school. So off to Bible school I went. I don't

know if some of you have heard me testimony - I don't mean to bore you with it, but here's one aspect of it. Let me just shine the flashlight on this. There's a guy named Bill Baker, William Baker, Dr. Baker who changed my life. And he did it very simply in my soteriology class. I was a new student at the Bible school in Chicago sitting there trying to figure out, hey Ok, I guess I'm going to go from Sunday school graduate to Bible school graduate. This is great. I didn't think it was all that great at the time, but I thought, Ok I'm going to do. Do what I'm supposed to do. I'm sitting there in soteriology class and the professor pulls out the syllabus - you know syllabus shock day, and see that there's 2 large term papers I'm supposed to write. In the first quarter I've got to write a paper and here were the basic instructions. You are to answer the question, "How Do You Get Eternal Life?" That was the question, but use nothing but the words concepts and passages from the Bible. That's all you can use. You cannot quote anything extraneous to the Bible. You have to write your entire paper - I don't know how many pages it was - you have to write it completely and exclusively based on scripture. Well off we went to do that. And I do this because we didn't have these. You young guys have it so good, don't you. You remember writing term papers in college on the typewriter? Was that the worst. You had to write it out by hand and then you had to try and put it in the... and then invariably at 2:00 in the morning when you're writing your last line of page 10 the paper tweaks, remember that? Ahhhh! I'm sorry. The computer generation. What was I saying - something about term paper. Did my term paper - ah, it was great. Good deal. Helpful. Thank you, Dr. Baker, that was great. Second shoe fell. Here was the second assignment and we were set up. We didn't know it. Second assignment was great: write a term paper for this quarter and answer the question, "How Do You Get Eternal Life?" but you can only use phrases, concepts and definitions that you find in popular gospel presentations from evangelical Christian ministries. That's all you can use. And he didn't tell us which ones to use. You can use whatever you want, but we had to have so many that we used and everyone of them had to be analyzed word for word, phrase for phrase and we had to write the paper on it. Now the first one was enlightening, the second one was life-changing for me. I mean, the first one was like, well that's interesting, yeah I like that, that's good, that's helpful to kind of interpret the Bible with the Bible and use the definitions of scripture. The second one my jaw was hitting the table. I do not believe it. I'm sitting there looking at repeated phrases and concepts over and over. Phrases like, "How do you get eternal life?" - "ask Jesus into your heart." Right? Is that not common? That sounds gospel, right? And I had just written this other term paper that there is no such verbiage, no such concept in the Bible. "Pray the sinner's prayer." Saw that repeatedly. "Repeat after me - say the sinner's prayer." Never saw that here. "Alter call." Never saw that here. "Coming forward," all this; I was like, oh man. It radically transformed my life. And it also helped me recognize that all those years as a Sunday school graduate, President of the Youth Group, scripture quoter, all I was doing was bolstering concepts and ideas about God that weren't even Biblical to start with. I didn't grow up in a cult group. I grew up in a Bible teaching church. But I recognized as a Bible school student that I wasn't even a Christian - radical. Why? Because I was willing to do what Christ was trying to get the rich young ruler to do and that was simply this: can you not interpret God based on your experience? Can you interpret your experience based on God? I mean that's the calling of the Bible. Do not define God based on your mind, your thoughts, your teacher's thoughts sprinkled liberally with verses and concepts that they don't really capture the thrust of the Bible. And stop trying to see God through your lenses. Can you start to see your life through his lens? That's different, and it's life changing, and it makes you a person of the book. There's no way around it. You will be stuck diving into the Bible everyday and saying

what does this say about who God is? What does this say about the gospel. You've got to realize God may not be who you think he is. And if today, even in this church in church going communities all over America, if you use the word God, if you show it on the screen, if you see and you sing about him, I can guarantee you because of how we intuitively make up our definitions of God that when we say the word God, it means something different than when the word God is spoken in heaven, right? It's like the word football. If I say, OK let's think about football. Let's think about how great football is, think about football - football - football.

You're thinking of one thing, but if I say that in Bolivia, Venezuela, London. They're going to think something different. We're going to think gridirons and goal-posts. They're going to think round checkered balls. We're think of oblong brown balls. They're thinking of shin pads while we're thinking of shoulder pads. They're thinking of goalies and nets, and we're thinking of chalk lines and field goals. It's totally different. And it's true to when you say, hey, I want to follow God. I want God's goodies. Well, wait a minute. You're definition of God or heaven's definition of God? You're not going to get heaven's definition of God without getting into the book. That's what this is all about. We've got to hone our view of God based on the scripture. It's the only possible way to come to the right conclusion.

Now, back to our passage. Matthew 19 is printed there on your worksheet. Man comes up to Jesus, "Teacher what good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" - to get eternal life - how do I get it? "Why do you ask me about what is good? Jesus replied. There is only one who is good." Only one who is good. Now there's 4 possible ways to look at this. You Bible exegetics need to at least see your options here.

The first option. Some liberals who haven't read the rest of the Bible they fall for this interpretation of this text. They say, hey, Jesus is just responding by saying why do you ask me about what's good, I wouldn't know, hey only God is good. This is interpretation No. 1. They think what Jesus is saying here is I'm imperfect. How would I know? Now if you've been in church for more than a week, hopefully, you know the Bible says differently about Christ. He is perfect. Tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. He is the image, the exact representation of God. He is all the fullness of deity dwells in him. He's not imperfect. This is not a confession of why do you ask me about what's good - how would I know - only God is good. He's not saying he's imperfect here. So let's write that one off. Erase that one.

No. 2. Some people say that he is rebuffing the flattery of this man. That this man is coming to him saying, hey, G-o-o-d Teacher, and he's trying to say, hey come on. Why are you asking me about good? You don't really believe that? Now, again, you've got to go to Mark Chapter 10. A lot of commentaries think that's what he's doing here - rebuffing the flattery of this man. But if we study Mark 10, and we take his posture as any indication of his disposition, we're saying I don't think this guy is like the other guy coming to test Christ. He's not rebuffing flattery. The guy is sincere. He seems sincere in his question. I don't think he's rebuffing flattery.

The third way people take this sometimes is saying that Christ is trying to make some kind of veiled declaration of who he is. When he says, hey, what good thing must I do to

get eternal life, he's saying why do you ask ME about what's good? Only God is good. Are you calling me God? Is that what you're doing? Now while that's true, that Jesus is God and the scripture says he's God. That's kind of a big of a step away from the normal reading of the text. The normal reading of the text here - though it would be true, he could describe his deity in light of God, he did it often with the Pharisees, right - I and the Father are one. He did it a lot. But really we've just got to take it at face value.

The 4th option here, exogetically is to look at this, and what he's trying to get him to do is say, stop, you need to think about God. God is not who you think he is because he is perfectly good, and you need to ponder his perfection. That interpretation which seems to be the simplest, most straight forward interpretation is his response to that question really in the key to understanding the rest of the text. Everything else in his conversation hangs on what he is doing here.

No 2. (on your outline, here's what he is doing, he's saying to this guy, hey you need to) Ponder God's Perfection.

If you understand that only the triune transcendent holy God is agathos, perfect through and through, only he is perfect, it's going to color the rest of this discussion including the question he just asked him. What did he ask him? Hey, what good thing can I do to get eternal life? Whoa, wait a minute, do you know that only God is good. Think about that. I want to know what good thing I've got to do, and you're telling me think about God. Ponder his goodness. See because the more you ponder the perfection of God the more that question seems absurd, right? Think about it. The more you stand in contrast to something really good. The more you see you're not really good.

You go to the marriage retreat with us not to long ago? That was embarrassing. I was there preaching. It was a western theme, right? Some of you have seen the pictures floating around with me in a cowboy hat, we had guns and all that. Well the highlight of the weekend for many people was not the preaching, it was the line-dancing night, on Saturday night. Remember that? Funny... Pastor Mike, line-dancing... I'm not good at this. Admittedly, but I was as a good Shepard - just going to take one for the team. Ok, you want to see me, fine, we're all about this, I'm a team player so I will line-dance. That's the second time in my life I think I've ever stepped onto a dance floor, but, cause I grew up in a church you weren't supposed to do that. I had to be a senior pastor to learn that I'm supposed to do that I guess, so anyway I'm out there trying to dance. And thankfully the line-dancing thing, the Western dancing thing started very simply and that was nice. It was like, one- two, one-two, one-two. I was hanging with that - I was doing that. Now you were laughing at me those of you who were there, right? I know all eyes were on Pastor Mike. Look at the preacher boy dancing - look at him... I know. But I was doing that first thing, right? Then it went to like one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four and then it got into some high digits and numbers and strange maneuvers that did not feel right in any way. So, by the time it started to get more and more complicated I was looking at everybody around me and guess what more normal people were doing? They were getting it and I was looking at myself and my wife was looking at me embarrassed, and "let's just sit down, dear." It got to that stage, so we did. We sat down and watched everybody else. And the more it got

complicated and going and louder - it got incredible - people doing things that just looked painful, but it worked. They were doing it. They were line-dancing or whatever it was. Now at hour two I didn't even want to get near the dance floor because the better the people got the more incompetent I felt, right. The more you're standing near competence and there were a few of you - what do they call it - cutting up the rug, burning up dance? I don't know what they call it. I grew up in a church. I don't know how to do this thing. Those of you with your "colored backgrounds" you're really good at that. You're "sorted backgrounds." I know, I know. I was busy studying the Bible... I don't, I don't. I wasn't going to dare get near you. Cause the better you were the worse I looked. Now I looked bad doing one-two, one-two, but I looked really bad doing one-two-three-four, one-two-three-four. I couldn't get it, and you could.

Bottom line is in scripture the more you ponder the perfection of God, the more you say, "how do I - what are the steps here to get in sink with God?" the more that's going to sound absurd. Why? Psalm 5. Let's look at it. You can go to a lot of places. You can go to Romans 3 for this. We're getting into Romans after Matthew 19. You know that right? And we're going to get into the argument here that Paul makes, and it's such a great tight clear clean argument that basically as we stare into the perfection of God the conclusion of Romans 3 is, hey, we're losers. We're all losers. The more you see God for who he is, and you recognize what he's saying in his commandments the more you should recognize you can never dance with God. Don't even try. You can't do it. And so it was for the Psalmist in Psalm 5. Look at verse 4. "You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; {That's what we call sin, right, sin (harmateia - Gr?) to fall short. We just don't measure up to him.} with you the wicked cannot dwell." Now here's a cannot, there's a lot of things God cannot do. I know on the playground God can do everything. He can't. Here's one thing he can't do. He can't hang out with you. If you're wicked, if there's sin in your life. "The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; {And here's one you never see on the Dayspring card.} you hate all who do wrong." Can you imagine getting that one in the mail? Little flower on the front. God hates all who do wrong. Have a nice day, right? Now, that's not going to fly. It's only going to fly if you move the scale of sin as some kind of relative term, but if we use words like agathos, with exactness and an absolute definition, and words like sin accurately, technically with an accurate, immovable, non-relativistic definition, we start seeing I'm sinful, he's not. He's perfect. I'm not. I can't hang out with God. As a matter of fact, God's got only one option for sinful people. Verse 6. "You destroy all those who tell lies; {Qualify? All you've got to do is either look at God or his commandments and you recognize real quick, you're not going to dance with him. It's not going to happen.} bloodthirsty deceitful men the LORD abhors." Now, so there's no hope. Verse 7. Now, though this is not a full explanation of the gospel, there is one word that does summarize the gospel and here it is, verse 7. "But I, {David says, he's not perfect} by your great mercy, {I} will come into your house; In reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple." What? You're not going to hang out - dance with God. Yeah, but it's by mercy, not by works. It's by grace, not by trying to keep the rules. The more you stare at the perfection of God or the list that he gives us called his commandments, the more you're going to see you're never going to dance with God. You're not. You can't keep up. That's what's going to set us up for the gospel. Jesus said, Do you know only God is good. Ponder the perfection of God, and you'll start to recognize the question of "what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" is really, while it sounds like the right question, it's really not. But he hastens on, and we'll look at it next week. Well, Ok, fine keep the commandments.

By the way, just a side bar, and I hate open this can of worms, but I did it in the last two services so I'll do it now. I know it's another sermon. But I think some people throw a flag on the play at this point, and they raise their hand and they object. You know you tell me God, God hates those who do wrong. He can't dwell with people who are sinful, and he's going to destroy people who tell lies. Well, that's not fair. Why did God make us like this? Right? I mean if you press the point out here on the street. That's what their going to say. God's got to accept me, cause he made me this way. Why did God make people this way? It's so defective. You know what the answer is to that? He didn't. That's the answer to that. He didn't. He did not make us this way.

Couple of passages, I know it's a side bar, but here it comes. Jot these down real quick. Here it comes. Genesis 1:26, 1:31 and 2:16-17. Genesis 1:26 says this that God made man and women in his own image and in his likeness. That's how he made people. To reflect his character - just like him. Ok, now they're not infinite, immortal, non-created - their created beings, but he made them like, just like the angels, they reflected the righteousness of God. They were righteous beings. And if you don't believe that the next passage, verse 1:31, "God saw all that he had made {he just made man, and it says and he saw it and he said} and it was very good." Ok, that's the Hebrew equivalent to the word agathos. People were good. We were good through and through. We were like the angels - perfect. But you know Genesis 2 comes along verses 16 and 17. He then says in your complex autonomy (the way that you are ontologically, who you are as a being) you now have a option. And for them it was personified in this, not personified, but it was "agriculturalized" in this tree in the middle of the garden. Here it was. It was once emblematically there it stood. Your decision to be loyal to me and love me like the angels choose to love me, or your decision to rebel against me. And the perfect people, made in his image, with perfect righteousness now had an option. That's not a defect. That's a decision that Adam and Eve chose to be unholy. Well I wasn't there, I didn't choose that. I understand that, but God wasn't going to give perfect children to imperfect people and because of their imperfection, their rebellion and their sin they then gave birth to sinful children. I mean you had lost from the very beginning, right? You were born to imperfect parents, who were born to imperfect parents, who were born to imperfect parents, right back to the first couple who were perfectly made, but chose to be unholy.

Now if you think that's not fair, jot this one down. Romans Chapter 5. The real punch line to that chapter is verses 17 - 19. I mean that really crystalizes the end of his argument, and the point is this. That the reason we have this picture of inherited sinfulness, the reason that this makes so much sense, the reason this thing in some of your backgrounds you call original sin, (born in depravity - whatever your tradition is) the bottom line - the reason we're born broken and that was not chosen, it was inherited, is because the parallel to this is Christ coming and doing the same thing on the other side of the ledger. In other words, if our sin is imputed to us from Adam so is our righteousness imputed to us from Christ. I know this is a side bar and it's becoming a very long side bar, but the point of point 2 is you need to know God created perfect people. And those perfect people chose to be unholy, and those unholy people begot unholy people, who begot unholy people and here we are. Now, by the way, you did choose to confirm the problem didn't you. I mean you made all kinds of choices just like Adam and Eve, but you were born sinful. The other side of that is called palagianism, right? Sunday school grads? That

is the view that you are born innocent, and that's not what the Bible teaches. You are born sinful, and you reconfirm the decision to be sinful by the decisions that you made. But because you were imputed with brokenness you can be imputed with righteousness. That's why, just like you didn't initially earn your sinfulness, (you only added to it) you cannot earn your salvation. It is imputed to you. All you can do is store up treasure in heaven after you get it. More on that when we get to Romans Chapter 5. But God didn't make us this way. We chose to be this way, and just as you were born into a sinful race you can by responding rightly to the Biblical gospel, you can be born again the Bible says with imputed righteousness. It's a great transaction. More on it as this series unfolds and as we get into the book of Romans. Pondering God's perfection. Now just bookmark that in your mind, cause this will help govern the whole rest of Matthew 19. If we understand that God is making this man ponder the perfection of God it will help us make sense of the rest of his answers here.

Ok, now great, step back, hold that in our minds we've got the rest... one more thing we've got before we leave this beginning verse and a half. He starts the gospel with God, and I've said this throughout the message so far, you cannot get eternal life unless you get God in your mind straightened out. The gospel starts with God. The Bible starts with God, doesn't it? "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The message of God begins with God, and by the way, it ends with God, and it really in between is all about God and when it comes to salvation it's the same thing. Unfortunately, the gospel gets perverted, and it's not the real gospel when we become the subject of this - the point of this. But in the scripture it always is God is the point of this. That would be a little philosophical. Let's at least jot it down and we'll revisit this as we go.

No. 3 (on your outline. We need to) Affirm the God Centeredness of the Gospel.

Jesus says before we get any further in how to get right with God we need to talk about God. God is perfect. So it is with us. You have got to get the message of God straight in your mind before you become a Christian. Why? Because it starts with God. It is about God. It ends with God. And the point of salvation is God.

Here's another one to jot down. We won't take time to turn there, but how about this we call it a doxology. In Romans 11 after this great discussion of very complicated matters he breaks out in this work of praise - word of glory, literally, that's what it means - doxology. And he ends it with this statement, (you might remember it starts in verse 33 and it ends in verse 36 and the bottom line is this) "For from him and through him and to him are all things." including salvation, including the gospel. "from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!" The point is this (and we can go a million places to reaffirm this) your salvation is really not - catch this now - is really not ultimately about you. I know that sounds counterintuitive. Salvation is about me taking care of my future, right? I want the insurance policy. I don't want to go to that lake of fire place. I want God's blessing, so the gospel becomes about me. But be careful. Because if the gospel ultimately becomes about you, you miss the God centeredness of the gospel. The hub moves to a different place and then it really gets weird. It's not right.

When I was in elementary school we had those bikes that you could pay a coupon and you could

ride on that funky bike. The clown was there which was always a bit of a deterrent to actually riding that weird bike, but they always had the spokes that were really short on one side and long on the other side and the hub was in a weird place. Remember those bikes? Did they only come to my school - or was that a dream - a nightmare I had? I remember that as a kid, and you'd ride. It would be like "errrik," and there'd be cones set up, and you'd ride around "errrik." Hide from the clown and then go on to the dunking booth when the principal was. That's what you're gospel would become - if you are at the center of it. Salvation is ultimately not about you. The gospel is ultimately about God. And I think it's telling, and it's helpful and it makes sense that God is going to start us - Christ is going to start us - with a thought about God. The Bible starts with God; it ends with God; it is for God's glory.

Which by the way, one more passage - take you to one more. Acts 17. When the gospel is told to a Sabbath school graduate who is rich and successful and a leader in the synagogue, Jesus has to clarify God. He does it with one <word?> in here, but when he moves out beyond and goes to people that aren't Sunday school graduates. He's got to say a lot more about God. Does that make sense? Because when you get people that don't have good grounding in the 39 books of the Old Testament they might not know who God is because they haven't had good teachers teaching them the words of God about God. Paul finds himself in Athens, Acts 17:22. He is dragged into this court called the Areopagus. Old translations call it Mars Hill. It's basically the professors lounge for the university there. They sat there and one day in ancient Greece they used to meet at Mars Hill, but they moved to a different place now. The Areopagus was kind of the place (and there was a place where you could sit and see what was going on, but) it was where they debated all the philosophies of the day. Well, they drag in Paul to the Areopagus, Acts 17:22. He "stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and {he} said {this}. "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious." You are all seeking for the deity - you want to connect with the gods. "I walked around {verse 23} and I looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god." Now that's interesting, isn't it? You've got all your idols out there and all these little booths and little temples, and you put your food out there for the deities and you burn your incense and candles or whatever it is. And you got one - they're all named - but there's one that like generic, the unknown god, the god we don't quite know. We don't want to miss any gods so we've got the unknown god shrine to go worship at. Now this is telling. Bottom on verse 23, he says "what you worship as something unknown {which is most of America right now, right?} I'm going to proclaim to you." I'm going to clarify it for you. You're worshiping a god you don't really know. Now I know it's just one of many gods in your pantheon of gods for you, but it is sort've true for us. If we've made up God in our own minds or we listen to people who make up God, (thoughts about God in their mind) we've got to clarify this. So he says to this people - he doesn't just give them one word - you know God is perfectly good, which would've taken the Sabbath school graduate back to his upbringing. These guys didn't have that upbringing. He's got to start in Genesis chapter 1:1. Look what he says, "I am going to proclaim {this God} to you." Verse 24. "The God who made the world and everything in it." Does that sound like the first verse of the Bible? We've got to start there. God made you. He has the position of being in charge. As a matter of fact that's the next thing he says. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord." Now I know that's an old word, but you know what it means, right? He's the boss; he's in charge. He's the supreme one. He's the one that has all authority. He's the sovereign one. Which by the way, I'm sorry I didn't put it on the readying list, but on the

back I always give you books in that bottom box there. That you might want to build your files, your library, or you might want to read a book that takes this to another level. But a book I should have added, but I didn't was from an old professor of mine from Westminster. His name is John Frane. He wrote a book recently and I haven't finished reading it yet, but I'm working on it, working through it. It's called the "Doctrine of God". And the more I read it after I made this list I thought, man, that's a good book should've been on the list. I love the subtitle. Listen to this - and it's a big book, it's like 860 pages - but the title is "The Doctrine of God" and here's the subtitle "A Theology of Lordship." Don't you like that?

He starts in the very beginning and he says if you want to know anything about God, it can be summarized in one phrase, "God is LORD" right? And in the old covenant the concept even of Yahweh as a name, this similar word to "I am." If it's Yahweh is LORD, the new covenant message is, Jesus is LORD. The triune God is all about affirming the fact that he's in charge. That's a great book. I recommend it, and I'm sorry I didn't put it on the list. "God made the world and everything in it. {He's the Lord.} He is the Lord of heaven and earth and {he} doesn't live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life, and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and {he wasn't just detached} he determined. He was involved. He set times for them, and the exact places where they should live and die. He "did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him {he's now quoting the Athenian prophets} we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets {prophets} have said. We are his offspring {and if we're his offspring, if we're subservient to deity he says, does it make any sense then that you would think he was some kind of object of gold or silver that we make?} Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone. An image {this is ironic} made by man's design and skill." Or in our case, or the rich young ruler's case, from our own thinking and mind and intuition. He's not like that. No, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, {he didn't zap us immediately} but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." Which, by the way, starts to shift the answer of Jesus to the rich young ruler. Keeping commands is a rhetorical and practical device to get him to admit something he wasn't willing to admit and he had to continually go through concentric circles until he nailed the heart of the problem with the rich young ruler. But the point is not about keeping the rules. To keep the rules is a response to regeneration. The point is regeneration starts with this word and that is "repentance." More on that as we go through our passage. But you've got to know God is in charge. We cannot share the gospel with anybody until we spend some time defining God. If you do, you will continue with a message that is predicated on the wrong view of God, which by the way, is all important because of verse 31. I know you already left the passage, but look at verse 31 before we leave, because "he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. When they heard" {that they freaked out, right?} resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered." Didn't want to hear any more on this some said.

Now this is just introductory. This whole thing today. We're going to unload and unpack all this, but I guess suffice this morning to recognize that God is the center of the gospel, and we better be very careful that we affirm what the Bible says about God and not just what we think.

And the danger is, not just like the rich young ruler, but all of us can go through church for years and miss the point. I think of the guy who's in church every single time the doors were open. He was there all the time. As a young kid he was known as a very devoted and obedient moral kid. He, I'm sure, was the president of his "youth group." People write about his life; that as a teenager he had a set time for morning devotions, he had extended times in evening prayers, he was a devout person, kept his schedule. He went off - as a lot of Sunday school grads do, was sent off - to Bible school by his parents, and he excelled in Bible school. Matter of fact, he gained so much knowledge about the Christian faith, about the existence of God, about the resurrection of Christ, that he became a great apologist. You know what that is? Not someone who apologizes for Christianity, but someone who defends the cogency and veracity of the statements of faith. And he was out there in the marketplace battling for these ideas so much so that they pulled him onto a missionary team and he was excited about going to foreign lands and teaching foreigners about the gospel. Now this is a couple of hundred years ago. So to get there he had to get there on a boat. So he and his other missionaries got on this boat and started to sail across the Atlantic ocean, and they were going to do some big time missionary work. Along the way the weather started getting rough, and the tiny ship was tossed, sorry... young people are going, what? TVland... They hit a storm; that's the point. The storm got really, really bad. Can you imagine couple of hundred years ago in these rickety old boats trying to cross a major ocean? Well he sat there as might seem reasonable and kind of started freaking out. He was really frightened they were going to die, and as he visibly expressed his fear the Moorabbin missionaries that sat on the boat with him looked at him and said "what, what's wrong with you?" "I thought you were a Christian?" And, I know it's 200 years ago, they started sharing the gospel with this guy. "Well you really need to put your trust in Christ. You should think about repenting of your sins." And this guy freaked out. As you would. He was offended. How dare you think I'm not a Christian. I'll show you my Bible school diploma. I'm on a missionary trip - I'm a missionary. I mean I grew up in church. I've been having devotions since I was seven. What are you talking about? Well he made it across the ocean, and he came actually from Britain into Georgia to start doing missionary work with Indians. And every time he preached, he writes later in his journal, he was just convicted in his heart. Maybe, I've missed the point. He did his whole stint in the missionary field, and he went back to England, and when he got there he started meeting with a pastor friend of his, and the more they talked the more he recognized he'd blown it. He said, yeah, I grew up in church, and I knew a lot about God. I could quote Bible verses. I went to Bible school. I got a diploma on my wall. I was a missionary, and he finally writes this in his journal. He said, "I finally was willing to set aside {this is how he put it} the glosses of men and simply consider the words of God." That's big. Changed my life too. I was willing to set aside "the glosses," the extraneous thoughts of men, the interpretations and thoughts of men and simply consider the words of God. And when I did, in essence he says, I realized God was not who I thought he was. He said, I realized I actually was trusting in my own goodness. I was a very accomplished church kid, if you will, he still is in his youth. At age 20 he became a Christian. His name is John Wesley. Maybe you've heard of him? And I can say this, if it weren't for that period of introspection you probably never would have heard of him. Because he probably would've been just like any other guy going through the motions - preaching his sermons, doing his thing. Probably go back to England, get his job, be a lawyer. Who knows what he'd do. He's a sharp guy. But you know his name because his life was transformed by the real gospel when he was willing - I love this line - "to put aside the glosses of men to simply consider the words of God." I know you and I are

exposed to Christianity. If you're here in this church you've got a background of some kind. Can we just jettison everything but scripture? Can we get back to this? Can we stop with the extraneous phrases that don't really find any place in the Bible? Can we stop hanging on to testimonies if they're really nothing more than stories founded on principles and ideas and concepts about God or the gospel, that are really just what I imagined, or what my Sunday school teachers or parents imagined? I mean if we can't chapter and verse the concept then I've got no right to believe it. I should have no audacity to say it. Let's get back to the Bible, and as we do, as Jesus tried to do with the rich young ruler, maybe we'll have a different conclusion. Maybe we'll be more like John Wesley than the rich young ruler who went away without the kingdom of God. Let's make sure as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13, that we're testing ourselves with introspection and reflection that may end up making all the difference in our lives. Let's pray.

God I know we're just getting started in Matthew 19. It's a good start, though. It's good for us to look at your character. Kind of scratch our heads and ask, why did Jesus take us to a quick, one phrase theology proper lesson, to think about the character of God, the agathos perfect good through and through perfection of the deity that we want to get right with? It will have implications throughout this text, but it's good for us to stop and see that, and also to glean the fact that the gospel starts with God because God is the point of the gospel. This is for his glory not just our salvation. Ephesians 1 said we'll really see one day that it's all about bringing praise to his glorious grace; not about us just enjoying some goodies in heaven. God, I pray you will help us to do what John Wesley did and though it had to be through the pathway of embarrassment and frustration, I pray we'd be gutsy enough to examine ourselves. I thank you for those in my life that were willing to point out the truth of the gospel and force me to lay aside the thoughts and glosses of men, and just simply consider the words of God. God make that a reality for me, for us, as we all again one more time test ourselves to see if we are of the faith. In Jesus name I pray. Amen