LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

# Matthew 19 (Part 3) :16-22

*Good Deeds and Eternal Life*

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · April 18, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? And he said to him, Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments. He said to him, Which ones?

And Jesus said, You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The young man said to him, All these I have kept. What do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come and follow me.

When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Stop there, if you would, please. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we open our hearts to you that we might hear your voice, that we might receive from you today that which is in keeping with your heart and your desire and the wisdom that comes from your word. We open our hearts to you that we might hear your voice.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen, amen. The conversation that goes on between Jesus and this individual whom we call the rich young ruler is proof positive that people can talk and have a conversation without really listening to what one another is saying. Sometimes we just get things in our heads, you know, and it doesn't matter what somebody says to us. We're going to get out what we want to say. I don't know if you've ever had someone kind of get angry with you because they think you did something and you right away, you realize what they're saying and you say, no, I didn't do that.

But they're still mad. They're still mad at the thought that you might have done that. And so they're like, yeah, well, if you had, you know, and you're like, yeah, but I didn't do that. Yeah, well, let me tell you, because, you know, and they're just, they just got to blow off some steam because they got it just in their head. This is, this is what's going on.

And, and, and even though everything around me says the opposite, I've just still got to kind of just get this thing out. And you know, this is kind of, this is kind of a little bit of what's going on here in this conversation that Jesus is having with this particular young man. It becomes obvious to us by listening to this conversation that the Jews had come to a place of actually believing that they could, that they could keep the law so well that, that it could actually become for them a means of securing their eternal salvation. And that belief was really what was behind this conversation. And so we want to look at this conversation very carefully.

We want to see what's being said. We want to see how Jesus responds. And we want to learn from this passage what we can about this. So let's take, let's take a look at this. Look with me again in verse 16.

We see this man who comes up to Jesus and he has a question. He says, teacher, and I want you to listen carefully to what he's asking. He says, what good deed must I do? All right. What is asking?

What is required? What does God require of me? People have been asking this for a long time. What does God want out of me? I remember one time Dave Parsons once told me about a young man from the high school who was at the time, he's grown up now, but he was just kind of, Dave was kind of, you know, sharing the Lord with him and talking about Christianity.

The guy was just kind of like, I don't know if you remember this, David, he just kind of said to you, he said, just tell me the rules. I'll just, just tell me what this is all about. Give me the rules and we'll do it. Right. And, and that's just really, really common.

You know, people want to know what's required. What, what do we got to do? Just, just tell me what you want, what's, what's going on here and I'll do it. Right. So that's what he's asking.

But he's saying, what good deed must I do right. To have eternal life. What do I got to do? And that's the next thing is he tells us or he exposes to us what his goal is and it's eternal life. He's not saying what good deed do I need to do in order to have a blessed marriage or, or, or have make a lot of money or be a success in business.

You know, he's, he's asking specifically so, so that I might go to heaven, what do I need to do? What good deed do I need to do now in this single question asked by this young man, he exposes for us his preconceived ideas, his assumptions about eternal life and what it takes to get there. So I'm going to put them up on the screen here for you. You can, you can judge these. Tell me if you think these are accurate.

Number one, it seems pretty obvious. This guy believed that eternal life could be earned. That seems pretty blatantly obvious to me because he's saying, what must I do in order to have it? I want eternal life. Tell me what I got to do in and so forth.

The second thing that he believed is he believed that the way that we earn eternal life is through good deeds. He didn't just say, what do I got to do? He said, what good deed do I have to do to get eternal life? So he believed these two things that eternal life was earned. Eternal life was earned by good deeds.

And then lastly, he believed that he was personally potentially good enough to earn his salvation because otherwise, why, why, you know, would he come even ask if he didn't think he was even in the potential running? He must have believed that he personally had a, a possibility of actually getting the job done. You know what I mean? Or he wouldn't have even asked. Now you can tell that he's not a hundred percent positive that he's going to be able to do this because he asked the question, what do I got to do?

But you know, that's the problem with works based religion. You can never be a hundred percent positive. If you are working your way to heaven, if, if that's the, if that's the relationship that you have with God, if it's a relationship of merit and what you do, you will never be sure. You'll never ever be certain that you're actually doing the job. It's like you just kind of hope you hope you get to heaven and, and you know, I think the vast majority of people who believe in heaven are kind of going on a wing and a prayer.

It's kind of like, you know, Hey, do you believe in heaven? Yeah, I believe in heaven. I believe I just, I just believe there's a place like heaven. Well, how do you get there? You know, you just got to kind of try to live a good life.

Well, you know, when is there ever a time that you know that you've lived a good enough life? Well, I suppose once you get there, that's pretty, pretty common thing. And it's not necessarily a living a good life from the standpoint that I've just lived nothing but a good life. What people are kind of saying is, I just hope this is what they believe. I hope the good outweighs the bad.

It's kind of like the scale. And I'm just hoping, you know, that if it's, if it's, if it's 50, 50, that a good and a bad life, I'm hoping I got 51 on the good side because then I think they'll probably let me in because the majority or at least, you know, even if it's barely the majority, if that's better than what the bad part was, then, you know, I think God's fairly obligated at that point just to kind of open the doors and let me in. And we even, you know, we work this into our jokes, you know, about people going to heaven and they stand before Peter, you know, as if Peter has anything to say about it. And, and, and, you know, dah, dah,

dah, dah, why should I let you into heaven, dah, dah, dah. And, you know, and like I say, even though those jokes aren't theological by any stretch of the imagination, there's a belief structure that's behind it, you know, you don't make jokes about stuff that you absolutely, you know, don't have any basis in reality anyway.

So let's take a look. Now that we've, we've looked at what this guy has said, we've, and we've looked at the assumptions that he has in his heart about these. Let's look at how Jesus responds to this. Look at verse 17 with me again. And he said to him, why do you ask me about what is good?

And then he makes this statement, there is only one who is good. And by the way, that one is God, just in case you were wondering, it's not the person sitting next to you. Definitely not you. And it's definitely not me. It's God.

Now this may sound like Jesus is just giving a preliminary answer before he actually answers the question. But you want to know something? He actually, Jesus is actually answering the question here. He's answering the whole question. And this is where we find out that this man isn't listening to what he's saying.

Because if you look at what Jesus says here, he says, why do you ask me about what is good? Only God is good. Only God is good. Guys, only God is good. Where does that leave you and me?

That leaves us in the not good category. Right? Why? Because only God is good. Right?

See, we don't like to make that leap of logic. We don't like to embrace that implication. We're fine saying. God is good. But if we say, and you know, we might even be comfortable saying, you know, only God is really good, but we're going to reserve a little for ourselves.

I'm kind of good. Yeah, I can be, you know, whatever. But Jesus is making his statement here. And he's saying, only God is good. And if that means if I'm not God, then I'm not good.

And so that's why Jesus says, Why are you asking me about what is good? Why are you asking me about that? Did you notice too, that the man doesn't answer that question? Why are you asking me about what is good? No answer.

Jesus comes back, he says, only God is good. Hmm. Okay. But he doesn't answer the question. He doesn't even respond to the question at this particular point.

Because he like the majority of people living on this earth, who believe in heaven, believe that you can get there by living a good life, even when God comes and tells us, you're not good. We go, Yeah, well, I'm going to try. Because we just somehow believe that's how you get to heaven, by being a good person. By the way, people, that's why the gospel is so repugnant to people. Because the gospel says to you, and I, you don't measure up.

And we don't want to hear that. I mean, who does you want to hear that? I don't like hearing that. Look how Paul put it when he wrote to his letter to the Romans. You guys probably know this Romans 323.

It says all have sinned and fall short, fall short. Do you like to hear that you've fallen short? I don't like to hear that. I like to hear that I've made the grade. I like to hear that I've measured up.

I want to hear people say things are going to build up my self esteem. Right? Don't you? You don't want to have people going around telling you Oh, by the way, you don't measure up. You fall short.

But that is exactly what the gospel says to you and I, you fall short, I fall short, we all fall short. That's what Paul's saying here. All have fallen short. We've all sinned and fall short. Well, that makes the gospel kind of unpalatable to a lot of folks who just plain flat out want to believe they're good.

And you hear that all the time from people, they'll say, Well, I just really believe that all people are essentially good. I just really believe that in my heart that we're all just really good people. Well, I'm sorry. Jesus differs with you. And if you have a problem with it, you better take it up with him.

Because he made a very clear and concise statement. Only God is good. And that leaves you out. Right? So I mean, it's just one of those things you got to deal with.

I'm serious, you got to deal with it. Because as I've said many, many times, you can't get to the good news until you've grappled with the bad news. And the bad news is, you and I don't measure up. Okay, that's an important thing to remember. to them to Israel, keep my law and you'll go to heaven doesn't say it.

He says keep my law and I'll bless you in the land. Keep my law and your enemies won't overwhelm you. Keep my law and none of the diseases that came upon the Egyptians will come upon you. Keep my law and your children will be fruitful and prosper. Keep my law and and on and on.

He promised them all these wonderful glorious things. He never once said to them, keep my law and you'll go to heaven. He didn't do that. People really get confused about this. I've had people many times

say to me, well, if we're saved by believing in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross, how were people saved in the Old Testament?

And a lot of people assume that they were saved by keeping the law. It's not true. God never promised salvation for keeping the law. People were saved in the Old Testament the same way we're saved. They're saved by grace through faith.

They're simply looking forward to the promise. We're looking backward at the promise already having been given and we're saved the exact same way by faith through that understanding that it is God who provides the sacrifice by which we are saved. He pointed to it through the sacrificial system for the Jews. For us, we have the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But the point is, salvation is always by grace through faith.

Now, Jesus is confronting, however, this assumption in this young man that you can actually be saved by keeping the law. He's confronting it here now in this man who believes all these things. We'll put him up on the board again so you can see him. He believes all three of these things that eternal life can be earned, believes with all his heart that the way you earn it is by doing good deeds. And he believes that he is potentially good enough to get the job accomplished.

All right. So what is Jesus going to say in response to all that? His response is only God is good. Now, had the young man been listening when Jesus said only God is good, he would have realized he just had his question answered and he would have realized that all those things that he believed actually can't possibly happen. Let's put him back up there one more time.

When you think about when Jesus says only God is good, what does that do to believing that eternal life can be earned? If you're not good, how are you going to earn eternal life? Because the second one is also the case. What are you going to pay with? If you're not good, you can't do good deeds to earn eternal life.

You can't do it. You personally, and that's the third thing, cannot ever be good enough. You can't. If you really believe what Jesus said, if he would have listened when Jesus said, why are you asking about what's good? Only God is good.

If you really would have listened, the man would have said, oh, okay. Well, in that case, I withdraw the question. That's what he would have said. But he wasn't listening. And so he didn't withdraw the question.

In fact, he kept going on. So in the middle of verse 17, Jesus says, okay, you want to talk about salvation through personal merit? Is that what you want to talk about? Do you really want to have this conversation with me? Okay, fine.

In the middle of verse 17, he says, okay, you want to enter life? Keep the commandments. And this is a straightforward response really by Jesus. He's basically saying, listen, you want to get to heaven based on your own merit? Well, you have to keep the standard of holiness and righteousness that is laid out in the law because the law reveals God's standard of righteousness and holiness.

You got to keep it. You have to keep it. And what he's doing here is he's giving this man another opportunity to turn his back on these preconceived ideas that he actually can do that. And he's he's saying here, you know, listen, you want to do it on your own merit, then you got to keep all the commandments. The man should have.

This is the second opportunity for him to say, I don't think I can do that. And Jesus would have said, precisely. That's why I've come to die on a cross, because you can't do it. If you could do it, I wouldn't have really been needed here to come and die on a cross, right? But he's still not listening.

But you know, later on, James would make a statement about anybody who thought they could keep the law unto salvation. Here's what James wrote about it in the second chapter. He said, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point, what does he say, has become accountable or guilty, if you will, for breaking all of it. That's the understanding that believing Jews came to in the light of Christ Jesus. They came to understand, you know, we actually deluded ourselves to the point where we believed we could earn salvation by keeping the law.

But you know what? We've come to understand the fullness of what that means. That means, you know, if we do that, if we decide that we're going to keep the law, we're going to merit salvation through being good, doing good deeds and so forth and so on. If we even break one thing, we've broken it all. All!

We've broken it all. It's not a three strikes and you're out. It's a one strike and you're dead. Sort of a situation. But again, this man is only hearing what he wants to hear, so he throws out yet another question.

Jesus lays out, he says, you want to do it on your own merit? Fine. Keep the commandments. He says, really? Which ones?

That's what he says in verse 18. He wants Jesus to be specific with him. And now Jesus is going to zero in. And he's going to take this second, this next question. Questioned by this man, and he's going to

use it to expose in his heart the fact that he cannot Keep the law and look what he says in the middle of verse 18 In Jesus said and he begins to list various commandments from the law you shall not murder you shall not commit adultery You shall not steal you shall not bear false witness Honor your father and mother and you shall love your neighbor as yourself now again Jesus has given this young man yet another opportunity to back off because anybody who understands the true depravity of his heart is going to hear that laundry list of Commands and he's gonna go.

Well. I think I'm disqualified I Think I think I need to find another way to get to heaven because I Don't think I can do all these things, but I want you to see how this young man responds because it's very it's very Exposing the young man said to him all these I have kept In fact, this is what do I still lack again? That's life? When you are trying to do a works-based religion you think you're doing okay? But you still feel this sense of lack.

I feel like it just there's something more. There's something missing right So he says what do I what do I lack? I've kept all these things now I want you to think about that statement just a moment where he says I have kept all these things You know, it's a it's a fair question to ask ourselves Did he really had he really kept all of those things? Well, it's likely That this young man kept all of those laws insofar as men could see Okay Do you guys remember when we went through the Sermon on the Mount starting in? Matthew chapter 5 and do you remember when Jesus started expounding on the true intent of the law and he said things like this You've heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery But I tell you if you even look lustfully at a woman it's a done deal you've committed that adultery in your heart He said you've heard that it was said you shall not murder But I tell you if you're even angry with someone you are guilty of murder in your heart and What Jesus did when he talked to us about the law in that way?

He made us realize that the intent of the law was not just what happened out here it's what happens in here and That brothers and sisters in Jesus is where you and I? fail miserably Because even though we might on an external level be able to say I've never done that what goes on in the heart is a completely different matter altogether and Jesus knew and we understand that the law condemns us all without question Because when we when we see our heart condition for what it is we recognize our Guilt now this man wasn't looking at a heart condition. He was probably looking at just external sort of things And so he says to Jesus listen. I've kept all those things what else do I lack and so now it's time for Jesus to Zero in on just one of the commandments that he's laid out and what Jesus is going to very graciously Do with this young man is he's going to show him in no uncertain terms that you do not Keep the law You might think you do, but you don't and I'm going to expose your heart in this and this is going to be a very painful Exposure and revelation for this young man But it is one that nonetheless needs to take place for this man

to understand the depth of his own personal depravity And I don't know if you were paying attention or not But the very last commandment that Jesus cited in verse 19 if you look in your Bible there the very last commandment that Jesus mentioned was and you shall love your neighbor as Yourself do you remember that did you catch that? You might wonder what's that mean to love your neighbor as yourself?

Well, it means to love others and to do for others the way you love and do for yourself It's that level how you take care of yourself you take care of others without even Blinking the things you buy for yourself you buy for somebody else without even blinking Okay And so Jesus takes that last commandment and he says to the man look with me in verse 21 in your Bible He says Jesus said to him if you would be perfect complete go and sell what you possess and Give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me and what Jesus did in that one single challenge to the man Is he put him he put his statement to the test, oh I've kept all those I've kept all those commandments really Really you've kept all those commandments you love your neighbor as yourself Absolutely All right, then this should be absolutely a piece of cake for you. Take everything that you have sell it to the poor Sell it rather and give the money to the poor and then come and follow me Not a problem, right? Not according to verse 22 It says in verse 22 that when the young man heard this he went away Sorrowful why because he had a lot of money. He had a lot of possessions and he could not Part with them and this is one of those times they see in the scripture where Jesus is bursting a bubble that desperately needed to be burst for this young man to even be open to the understanding of what salvation is and how we get it and by Challenging this young man to take all of his wealth and to give it away he is basically testing his claim that he kept the law and Remember what James said if you stumble over even one part of the law and you don't really truly from your heart Love your neighbor as yourself. It's like you've stumbled over all of it.

You've broken all of it and That is what this man needs to come to understand but his sorrowful withdrawal Is proof that he could not keep the law to the degree of Perfection and of earning his own salvation he could not and his heart had to be exposed for what it was And you know the believing Jews came to a place of understanding this idea of their being unable to perfectly keep the law They knew it. They understood it Do you remember when Paul was going about his missionary journeys and he came to a particular church? excuse me and We're told that some individuals referred to as Judaizers began to make their way into the church and the Judaizers were Jews Who were following around after Paul and they were telling the Christians? Oh this Jesus that you believe in that's all great and fine and good But if you really want to be saved you have to also submit to the right of Jewish circumcision Because you see Jesus was a Jew he came initially for the Jews and if the Gentiles are going to be included in the children Of God, then you must submit to the right of circumcision. It's just something you have to do Well in the

book of Acts tells us that Paul came in sharp Dispute and debate with these men who brought this message and it came to the point where they finally said listen We're gonna go back to Jerusalem, and we'll just ask the Apostles We'll get all the Apostles together and we'll we'll find out from them These are the guys that were with Jesus and and the longest and and we're gonna go we're gonna go talk to him We're gonna bring this to them and Paul was very I think Paul was very Submissive in this that he that he agreed to do this, which is kind of a side point but anyway, so they go back to Jerusalem and and they begin to kind of give their testimony and and they're talking about how God has been moving among the Gentiles and so forth and how what a great thing how God's Spirit is being poured out and suddenly these Judaizers stand up in the Assembly of the believers and they say but the Gentiles must be circumcised Right.

Well, this course brings up a raging debate and Various people stand up and talk and finally Peter Peter stands up and and and and says something that's very very profound And and I want you to as we look at this statement that he makes I want you to think of it in light of the fact that The the perfection of the law or the keeping of the law unto salvation was something that many Jews heretofore believed but Peter Says this he says now therefore Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the Neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear he says no, he says we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as They will what's Peter saying here? He's saying you guys are you serious? Are you serious? You're gonna put the law on these people. You're gonna tell them they have to be circumcised Is that what you're gonna say to him?

Where does that end? What about the rest of the law? What about Sabbath keeping what about food and dietary laws? What about this and what about that? Where is it going to end?

He says no, we believe that salvation is through grace and that their salvation comes just like our salvation it is not because of circumcision it is not because of keeping these rules and laws and so forth and he says why in the world would you consider putting a burden on them that we haven't been able to carry we were never able to bear that burden of perfection unto the law unto salvation why in the world would you now put it on them very very profound statement by the Apostle Peter you know about 15 years ago I'm guessing on that but I had a guy come to me and really challenged me right out of this passage here in Matthew and he said to me that this passage was proof positive that you had to earn your way to heaven he looked at this passage and he said it says it right here young man came to Jesus and he said what do I need to do to have eternal life and Jesus said keep the commandments right there says it got to keep the commandments in order to be saved completely totally missed the point of the passage which was to expose in the man and understanding that he did not and could not keep the law unto salvation and Jesus had to do that in a very a very difficult sort of a way for that young man but you know Jesus Jesus

was asked this question other times you know and he didn't you know that the question was very very similar in its in its structure but Jesus's answer was different at different times let me show you another example from John chapter 6 says then he said or they said to him people are talking to Jesus what must we do recognize the words what must we do to be doing the works of God remember the Jews were on a works-based religion and Jesus answered them this is the work of God that you believe in him whom he has sent is that interesting different answer really a similar question what do we got to do what we got to do tell us what to do to do the works of God Jesus said you want to do the works of God believe in the one that he sent no that's not a contradiction with Matthew chapter 19 in Matthew 19 Jesus is working with an individual young man who had been given over to the idea that salvation through works was a possibility Jesus had a very tenderly exposed in his heart that it is not and you cannot do it I'm sorry son and I repeat once again that if salvation were possible by works Jesus wouldn't have had to come and die he would have just simply said to us hey do your best man I've given you the law there's the standard live up to it if you make it great if you don't well sorry just do your best but he never said that in fact he said quite the opposite Bible says that God looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there's any who understand any who seek him he says they have together become corrupt there is no one who does good no not one people have a hard time with that as I've already said pastor Paul you telling me that people aren't good at all see I don't understand that I can't wrap my mind around that because you see I see people doing good things all the time giving away stuff caring about people I'm talking about unbelievers and I hear this sometimes from people to say you know I've met unbelievers who I've seen do incredibly good things and you're telling me that God's Word says none of us are good how do you explain that I explain it by the Word of God you see we know what good and goodness is and we can even emulate it here's the problem it doesn't make us good just because you can do good doesn't mean you are good the reason you and I can do good is because we have an understanding of goodness we have a knowledge of goodness it came when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden which was the knowledge of good and evil and at that point they took on a knowledge of it it didn't make them good in fact at that particular point because that was a matter of disobedience it made them sinners but the point is that knowledge of good and evil has been passed down and you and I know what good is we can look at and say that's good and that's bad that's evil that's that's morally good that's and we can look at those things and we can point to them and we can recognize them for what they are but just because I know goodness and just because you can do a good deed doesn't mean you are good doesn't mean that at all but that is the conclusion people come to I have seen good I have done good equals I am good and Jesus comes along and says no you have a knowledge of good but you are not good only God is good and you need a Savior and Jesus Christ is that Savior and he came to die not for good people but for sinners as the Apostle Paul

said of whom I am chief right I'm the worst I'm the worst of the bunch and Paul said in my flesh dwells no good thing nothing good lives in me apart from Christ in me the the physical human man there is no good the Apostle Paul said and he understood that Jesus came to save sinners not good people you know it's funny the world thinks good people go to heaven that couldn't be more wrong good people don't go to heaven forgiven people go to heaven right and we get forgiven not because we're good we get forgiven because there's something to be forgiven for and from and that's our sin and we come to him and we say God I am not good I need you I need your forgiveness oh thank you Jesus that you died for me a sinner thank you God that you came to give me new life because I was dead in my trespasses and sins now I'm fully aware there might be some people here today who've been trying to be a good person maybe you've been trying to live a good life and you know my what I say to people whenever I meet up with that I say knock it off because if you're trying to impress God I'm here to tell you it isn't going to work he's not impressed by man's attempts at emulating goodness the only goodness that's ever going to be inside of me and you is when Jesus Christ is inside me and you and his goodness begins to be expressed through his Holy Spirit from our lives as the instrument of that goodness but it's still not our goodness it's still his but that's the only way goodness is ever going to come out of you and I I mean out of from the inside God is the one who is good and God loved you so much he sent his son that you would not perish but have everlasting life you