

## Encountering the Treasure

Temecula Hills Christian Fellowship

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### Introduction

Well, this week a group of us are going on a trip to Israel. And everyone is excited about different things we'll be seeing. My wife and I are very excited to see all the sights, but if we're being honest, we're probably more excited to be on vacation. It will be 10 packed days, and it's our longest vacation since being married! And as we've studied Israel in preparation for the trip, one thing that's struck me is how many valuable archeological treasures have been found in Israel. We heard of a man working in Israel a few years ago who fell through a hole in the ground, and found himself in an ancient tomb that actually contained the bones of Caiaphas—the high priest who condemned Jesus to death. Earlier this year a ring was found that belonged to one of court officials mentioned in the Bible that bore his signet that he'd use to emboss documents. Just two weeks ago, a few high school students were hiking along a stream in Galilee, and found a rare Byzantine gold coin. And probably the most famous treasure found in Israel is the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in 1946 by a couple of teenage shepherds throwing rocks into caves. They heard something break in one cave, and after investigating, they discovered large clay pots that that contained the most ancient copies of the Old Testament we have. Not knowing what they had discovered, these shepherds sold the first 7 scrolls found for \$35 to an antiquity dealer. Today, a fragment the size of your fingernail would sell for about 1 million dollars. In fact, there were even reports that the shepherds considered burning some of these scrolls as kindling for their fire before deciding to try to sell them! So, I've thought, I kind of hope that we come back from Israel having found some great, valuable treasure! But I've also thought about what valuable things I have already found and how I treat those valuable things. Can you imagine coming upon something so incredibly valuable—and treating it like trash? Well, I'm afraid sometimes we do that with the most valuable thing in existence. Sometimes, we just don't value Jesus as we ought.

Today, we're going to look at a passage that should cause us to ask ourselves, "How am I valuing Jesus?" I have found the greatest treasure of all, so how am I valuing Him? I want you to think about that. In your daily life, this past week, how have you valued Jesus? The passage we'll look at this morning should cause us to consider what we have been valuing, and how we can set our hearts aright, so that we're truly valuing Jesus. We're continuing our series today called, Encounters with Jesus—where we're looking people who meet Jesus, and are changed forever. And today's encounter is somewhat of a tragedy—it's a story of someone who gives up a treasure not realizing the great worth they're missing. It's a man who values the things of this world so much that He turns away from Jesus. This happened towards the end of Jesus' ministry, just a bit before His triumphal entry to Jerusalem, and his crucifixion later that week. This story was so impactful on the disciples that it's recorded in 3 gospels—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—and today we'll look at Matthew's telling of the episode.

And as we look at this passage, we're going to read the whole story, and then we'll unpack the conversation Jesus has with this man in 3 steps. So we'll see three truths we can take away from this passage that will help us value Jesus this week. So, please open your Bible's to Matthew 19, if you're not already there.

### Body

And we'll begin by reading the whole episode beginning in verse 16.

**Matt. 19:16-22 ESV** <sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" <sup>21</sup> 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, follow me." <sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

This man comes to Jesus, and the different gospels give us some details about him. Matthew tells us in verse 20 that he's a young man—he's between 20 and 40 years old. Luke says that he's a ruler—he's probably some sort of religious leader, maybe a Pharisee. And all of them tell us that he is rich—he's wealthy. Now the first thing I want you to notice

is the question that this man comes to Jesus with. **Matt. 19:16 ESV** <sup>16</sup> And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” He comes to Jesus and asks a question because he didn’t have a soul at rest. He was fearful of death. He was deeply troubled. He didn’t have permanent peace and joy and a settled hope. The very fact that he would come publicly, and publicly ask the question in the community where he was the ruler of the synagogue, indicates that he didn’t mind people knowing that whatever he had achieved in terms of his religion, it wasn’t eternal life. That was honest, and it was something he wanted so profoundly that he didn’t mind the embarrassing moment of publicly stating what he lacked.

And what does this rich young ruler ask about? “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have **eternal life**?” This man is concerned with eternal life—and we need to take a moment to unpack what that phrase—“eternal life”—means. When he mentions eternal life, what is he talking about? Well, he means more than just an unending existence. What he means is the life that is characteristic of eternity. What he’s really talking about is living with God forever. He’s talking about the life of the eternal age to come, the life in God’s world. God is the eternal God. Eternal life is, in fact, the life of God in the soul of man. So eternal life doesn’t just refer to the duration of our lives, but also the quality, the character of our lives. There’s a story in Greek mythology that illustrates this. In the story, Aurora, the Greek Goddess of Dawn falls in love with a mortal young man named Tithonus. And it was bad for a goddess to fall in love with a mortal because it would be a short-lived relationship. In the story, Zeus wanted to be kind to Aurora, so Zeus offered her any gift that she might choose for her mortal lover. She asked that Tithonus might never die. But you gotta be careful when you’re messing around with Zeus, because she forgot to ask that he might remain young forever. So Tithonus, according to Greek legend, lived forever, getting older and older and older and more and more decrepit, and the request became a terrible and intolerable curse. You see, just existing eternally is not what anyone is after. In fact, many people will exist eternally in a deplorable and agonizing state. So we’re not just after eternal existence. We long for something more—what our hearts long for, what God has written into our hearts is a longing for eternal life. And that means knowing God and sharing in His life through a relationship with Him. **Jn. 17:3 ESV** <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And that’s what this man was after. And he didn’t have that kind life and he knew it. He didn’t have peace. And he didn’t have rest. And he didn’t have purity. And he didn’t have hope. He didn’t know God. He was existing, but he was spiritually dead. He wanted a new life, a life not so dominated by sin and fear and doubt and shame and remorse and anxiety.

And maybe this morning you’re asking yourself that same question—how can I have eternal life? Only that’s not what this man asks. What does he ask? “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have **eternal life**?” Now inherent in this question is a problem. This question is what philosophers call a category fallacy. It’s when you ask a question that inherently doesn’t make sense. It’s like if I asked what is the color of the smell of a rose? It can’t be answered because your categories are wrong. Why is this a category fallacy? Because eternal life never ever comes from good deeds. And if we want to be people who value Jesus—we absolutely must recognize this fact. The first point on your outline is this:

## **Valuing Jesus comes from recognizing that eternal life never comes from our good deeds.**

If you want to value Jesus as you ought to, you have to get this point right. Nothing you do contributes to you obtaining eternal life. In fact, eternal life is not something you attain—it’s something you receive as a gift from God. It’s by grace alone, through faith alone. **Eph. 2:8-9 ESV** <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. And the truth is that many of us know this in our heads—we understand the theological truth that we’re not saved on the basis of our good deeds—but if we’re being honest, this truth has not sunken deep into our hearts. We may look at this guy and say, “Classic Pharisee—approaching God as if doing good things could save him.” But the truth is we tend to do this exact same thing—we tend to approach God on the basis of our works. We think of God as being angry with us when we fail—and we think of God as being happy with us when we succeed. You see, we love conditionally—but God is not like us. But God’s heart towards you does not vacillate with your behavior! God could not love you any less or any more than He loves you right now. His love does not change or shift with your behavior. His love does not depend upon what we do for him. Not at all. In the eyes of the King, you have value simply because He has called you valuable. You don’t have to look nice or perform well. His love is constant and unchanging. And the way you get eternal life is by putting your hope and your

trust in Him—not by doing a bunch of “good things.” And this is exactly where Jesus is going to shift his focus. What Jesus is going to do is to shift this man’s focus from a focus on self to a focus on God. And the way He does this is pure genius, and sets us a great example.

Look at Jesus’ response to this man’s question: **Matt. 19:17 ESV** <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. Jesus redirects the focus to His own Person, and the nature of goodness. He says there is only One who is good—because goodness is defined by God. He is the standard. He’s the only one who is truly good because He is the standard. You see, this man was centering on his own good works rather than centering on God, who alone can grant eternal life—and Jesus in a moment shifts the focus. Jesus knows that until the man turns from focusing on himself to God, there is no hope. And so Jesus’ conversation with this man is designed to reveal His soul. And what we’re going to see Jesus do is use God’s law to direct his attention to His sin and God’s holiness. And so, the next point on your outline is this:

## Valuing Jesus comes from understanding our sin and God’s holiness.

Once you write this down, let’s look at how Jesus does this by pointing to God’s Law.

**Matt. 19:17-19 ESV** <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus says “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” Now it’s interesting how Jesus says this. The man asked “Teacher, what good deed must I do **to have** eternal life?” He speaks of eternal life as if it’s a possession of a commodity. Jesus speaks of **entering** eternal life—He speaks of eternal life not as a possession, but as a status or secure place. Eternal life is not just something you have so you don’t have to worry about death—it’s something that has you—it’s the beginning of a journey in which you get to have a relationship with God. Now, when Jesus says, “If you would enter life, keep the commandments,” He’s not saying that we’re saved by works. Instead, he’s using the Law to draw this rich young man to reflect on the reality of his sin so that he can see that salvation by good deeds is totally impossible. He’s using the Law to show this man his own sin, and by contrast, God’s holy perfection.

**Rom. 3:20 ESV** <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

**Gal. 3:24 NAU** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

You see, the Law shows us our desperation for God’s grace in Christ—that’s what it’s designed to do! And you may think, “Why in the world wouldn’t Jesus just preach grace? Why wouldn’t He just preach the free gift of salvation?” Because a person cannot be saved unless there is a recognition and a turning from sin. And this man needed to know that he was a living, breathing offense to a holy God. And grace cannot be discussed until law is understood. The cross means nothing apart from the law. Without knowledge of the condemnation from God’s Holy Law, the cross will only draw sympathy, but not saving faith. What sense was there in offering the man salvation when he had only a vague awareness of his crimes and what he stood in danger of? He was a moralist, unprepared for the Gospel because he didn’t understand how wicked he was. Imagine when we board the plane to Israel, the stewardess gets on the speaker and says, “As a bonus for your flight today, we have some parachutes available to you.” “We’d like you to put them on because they’re going to make your journey far more comfortable.” “They’re going to enhance your ability to rest and relax, and you’ll find that if you just put one on, it will complete you and make you feel happy.” What’s going to happen? First, I’m going to think this stewardess is a nut. Second, if I did put it on, about 10 minutes into the flight, I’m going to think, “Man this is uncomfortable—and we still have about 14 hours left!” But what if the captain comes on the speaker and says, “We’ve had a major mechanical failure, and the plane is going to crash—but we’ve planned for this contingency, and we’ve got enough parachutes on board for each of you to wear—so go ahead and put one on and I’ll let you know when it’s safe to jump.” How much more would we cling to that parachute then?

You see, we tend to approach the gospel as if it's just this add-on to enhance our lives when we don't understand our sin and God's holiness. Without the Law, we wouldn't understand our desperation for the gospel that saves us! We serve a holy God. **Ps. 50:21 ESV** you thought that I was one like yourself. God is saying, "You make the mistake of thinking I am like you." You see, if you don't have God's Word, you end up creating a god in your own image—a god who looks like you and thinks like you and is okay with sin like you. But that's not who the God of the Bible is. God is not okay with sin. God is totally and completely perfect, and He's a perfect judge of sin. He is set apart. He is completely righteous and holy.

We need to be reminded again and again of God's absolute holiness. This is one reason why the Old Testament is absolutely indispensable. There are some Bible teachers today who never read the Old Testament and never teach the Old Testament. I've even heard one prominent pastor say that we need to unhitch Christianity from the Old Testament if it's going to reach the next generation. But that's a lie. We need the Old Testament because it shows us God's perfection and holiness—it expands our view of God, and it helps us to see Jesus as the historical culmination of God's dealings with humanity through Israel. So if you want to have a rich, full view of God, we need the Old Testament—even the book of Leviticus with all its specificity and Laws.

Now what Jesus does is he lists the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and fifth commandments of Exodus 20 in that order, and adds "love your neighbor as yourself." Really, what Jesus does is focuses this man on the commandments that deal with his behavior towards other people. In the 10 commandments, the way they're structured, the first four commandments deal with our relationship to God. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make idols. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain. And remember the Sabbath. Jesus skips these, and focuses on commands that deal with how he's treating others. And this is relevant because the way we treat others and love others is a good litmus test for where our heart is at with God. We can think to ourselves—"Sure I'm a jerk to everyone else, but God knows my heart—He knows I love Him."

**1 Jn. 4:19-20 ESV** <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And these commands are a powerful reminder of our desperation for God's grace—let's look at a few of them. You shall not murder. You may think—alright, at least I'm in the clear on that one. But in Matthew 5, Jesus got at the heart of this command and said this:

**Matt. 5:21-22 ESV** <sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Have you ever been angry at someone in your heart? Have you ever lashed out at someone and insulted them—demeaned a person created in God's image? Then Jesus says you've murdered them. You shall not commit adultery.

**Matt. 5:27-28 ESV** <sup>27</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Have you ever looked at someone with lust in your heart? Then Jesus says you're an adulterer. You shall not steal. Have you ever taken something that wasn't yours—even something small? You're a thief. You shall not bear false witness. Have you ever lied to someone—even a small little lie, or sought to deceive someone? You're a liar. Honor your father and mother. Do we even need to talk about this one? You shall love your neighbor as yourself. How often do you treat others with the same love and care that you treat yourself? And that's not to mention, you shall not have any other gods before me—how often do we put other things in our lives before God? You see, the Law shows us our sin—and it shows us God's standards and holiness by contrast so that we see the utter futility of ever trying to stand before God by our own good deeds.

Now, this man is not easily phased—his heart is very proud, and so he continues. **Matt. 19:20 ESV** <sup>20</sup> The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Now, that question is telling—"What do I still lack?" You see,

this man is uncertain and has a total lack of assurance. He's unsure if he's done enough. He doesn't have assurance of salvation. And one thing I've noticed as I've shared the gospel with others is that people who rely on their own goodness never ever have assurance of salvation. If you ask them if they're going to heaven when they die, they all will say, "I hope so." Whether it's a Muslim person, a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, or just a person who thinks of themselves as moral—none of them will tell you that they know that they will go to heaven when they die. Why? Because it depends on themselves, and not on the cross of Jesus. It's impossible to have assurance of salvation when your salvation depends on yourself. And that's true of this rich young ruler—and so he asks, "What do I still lack?" Now, what Jesus says to this man next really gets to the heart of this encounter, and what we're going to see is that...

## Valuing Jesus means joyfully making Him the supreme treasure of our lives.

Once you write that down, read with me in verse 21.

**Matt. 19:21-22 ESV** <sup>21</sup> 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, follow me." <sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Now this may sound like a harsh requirement to you—but listen to what Mark says,

**Mk. 10:21 ESV** <sup>21</sup> And Jesus, looking at him, **loved him**, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

You see, Jesus looked at this man with deep love for him—and so this requirement was borne out of love. What's going on here is that Jesus is doing heart surgery on this man. He looked at this man, and he saw what held his heart. And for this man, it was his possessions—his riches, his stuff, his money. He had been captivated by his possessions so that he didn't possess them; they possessed him. He didn't just own them; they owned him. And so like a master surgeon with a steady scalpel, Jesus seeks to excise this cancerous idol from this man's heart. And Jesus gives this man a two-step process. Step one: sell everything you own and give it to the poor. Step two: follow me. And this is still how it works today—there's always a turning from something, and a turning towards Jesus. Repent, turn from your sin—and follow me. Reject what the world is offering you, and follow me. When Jesus first called the disciples, what did they do? Left their nets and followed Jesus.

So you might be thinking—do I have to sell all my possessions? Let me answer that this way: this is not intended to be a specific command for each of us. This is not telling us the specific requirements Jesus has for you and for me, but it is telling us type of Lordship Jesus requires over each of us. You see, Jesus should have the kind of Lordship over your life such that He could say this to you, and you would joyfully obey Him. That's the kind of Lordship Jesus is to have over our lives. That's the kind of surrender we are to have before Him. That's the type of King He must be in our hearts—One from whom we would not hold anything back. In the musical, *Carousel*, there's one place where one of the characters, Carrie Pipperidge, sings a song about how she can't wait to be married and have children. That's her great dream. The night she sang that song, if Jesus Christ had come down in the middle of the carousel, he would have walked over to Carrie Pipperidge and said, "There's one thing you lack; I want you to be willing to live a single life all of your life for me." That's what he would do. He comes to Abraham and says, "I want you to take your son, your only son, whom you love, and offer him up as a burnt offering." He comes to the rich young man and says, "You have to give away all of your money."

Jesus will lay His finger on what's most precious in your life and say, "Give me that, and then come follow me." That's the kind of surrender He demands. And this will be different things for different people. Maybe it's your comfort—God I'll follow you wherever you want me to go, but not there—not to that place of discomfort. Maybe it's your ambition or your future plans, your dreams—maybe even plans that are about Jesus. Maybe you think I'm going to do this for Jesus, or I'm going to go to this place and serve Jesus. But what you're really doing is taking your plan for your life, and your pasting "for Jesus" at the end of it, and calling it God's plan. Jesus calls you to surrender. Maybe it's a certain

relationship—Jesus, I want to follow you, as long as you don't ask me to give up this relationship with this person. Maybe it's a sinful habit you have—Jesus I'll follow you, but don't start asking me to change this aspect of my life—because that would be too hard. Or maybe if you're sitting here and you were relieved that I said Jesus is not asking you to sell all your possessions—and if so, then maybe your possessions have become an idol in your heart—maybe Jesus is asking you to give these up. One author put it this way: "That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command." –Robert Gundry, Matthew.

Here's what you need to understand, to follow Jesus, He asks you to surrender in trust to Him. He asks you to give up everything you have, and to transfer ownership of it to him. You put His name on the deed. And then you let Him decide how you're going to use it. You ask Him, what would His heart be with His stuff that He's entrusted to you—with His money, His possessions. Part of being a Christian is surrendering our possessions to Jesus, and learning to be good stewards of our mortgages, our credit, our giving, our insurance, our investments—all of it must be brought under Jesus' lordship. And He may very well tell anyone of us to sell all of our possessions and give them to the poor—that's the kind of Lordship He requires over your life.

And what does this man do? **Matt. 19:22 ESV** <sup>22</sup> When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. You see, this man wanted to give God the scraps of his life. He wanted to give God the leftovers he didn't really care about. He wanted salvation, but not discipleship. He wanted deliverance, but not the Deliverer. He wanted to be saved, but not to be saved from His own idolatry. He wanted to be saved on his own terms. In short, he liked the idea of salvation, but he didn't want Jesus—He didn't want the Savior. What a sad, tragic story.

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells a story that's the opposite of this. Imagine we're walking in Israel, and we see this big open field with a "for sale" sign on it. And as we're walking notice something glimmering in the field. And as we approach it, we realize we've found a treasure of inestimable worth. We've found the ark of the covenant! It's not in that warehouse like Indiana Jones put it in, it's still in Israel, in this abandoned field! And so we quickly cover up the treasure, and decide, we've got to buy this field! Do you know how much that would be worth?! We'd be set for life—our kids' kids' kids would be set for life! We look at how much it would be, and it's an expensive field. It would take every penny we own. We've got to liquidate the retirement accounts, we've got to sell the house, sell the car, sell the TV, we've got to sell our business—every penny is going to go into this field. Let me ask you, would we do so with sadness, or with excitement and joy?

**Matt. 13:44 ESV** <sup>44</sup> "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

That's what it looks like to treasure Jesus. You see, everything you have is garbage in comparison to Jesus—and that's how we ought to value Him. That's how we ought to treasure Him. It's not complicated—it's the simple, childlike trust that says, I trust in you Jesus, and I surrender because I trust you and I know you love me. In fact in each of the gospels where Jesus' encounter with this man is described, it's always told right after Jesus commends children for their childlike faith. That's what Jesus wants from us—a childlike abandon that trusts Him above any earthly thing. And when we do so, Jesus gives us this man and us a promise: In verse 21 he says, "go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, **and you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow me."

**Matt. 6:19-21 ESV** <sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

### Conclusion

So next week in Israel, we'll keep our eyes peeled for the ark of the covenant! But no matter whether we're in Israel or we're here, our common bond is that we have the greatest treasure of all available to each of us—and that's a saving relationship with Jesus—a relationship that gives us eternal life. So, let's not treat that as trash. Let's cherish and value Jesus with all our lives this week. And as we close this morning, let me encourage you—live in surrender to Jesus. Put

your trust in Him. Cast down any idols in your heart, and remove them from your life. Let Jesus reign as your supreme treasure and your only King.