

THE CONTENT OF CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO THE
RICH YOUNG RULER ACCORDING TO MATTHEW 19:16-22

by
Larry B. Duncan

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Author: Larry B. Duncan
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Advisor: John C. Whitcomb

This thesis has set out to answer the question of the content of Christ's pre-cross salvation message as it is related in Matthew 19:16-22.

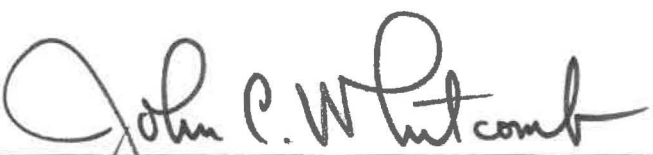
Initially, the writer considered an exegetical examination of the passage. The three questions dealt with were as follows: "What did the rich young ruler ask?"; "What did the rich young ruler know about Christ?"; and "Was Christ preaching his pre-cross message?" The writer concluded that the rich young ruler asked how he could attain everlasting life based upon a merit system, and that the rich young ruler did not recognize the deity of Christ but rather recognized Christ as a reputable religious teacher, and finally that Jesus did preach the gospel to the man in that he pointed out his sin and then pointed the ruler to Himself as the answer to his question of eternal life.

Next, comparative biblical data was presented. Other salvation accounts were considered, along with statements declaring the content of Christ's pre-cross salvation message. Also, statements were presented declaring what Christ's pre-cross salvation message did not contain. The writer's conclusions were that from the example of other salvation accounts faith in Christ was what saved individuals, not works, and that a clear emphasis upon repentance and faith was central to Christ's pre-cross salvation message, and finally that Christ did not preach performing good deeds or the way of false religious teachers as the way to attain eternal life.

The final area considered was dispensational and theological factors that affected the pre-cross salvation message as Christ presented it. The biblical means of salvation, the purpose of the law, and the progressive nature of the salvation message were examined. The conclusions were that salvation has always been by faith, the law was primarily God's administrative code, and the salvation message expanded in content as God revealed more truth.

In short, Christ preached the gospel, as much as had been revealed in that day, to the rich young ruler.

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Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

The writer must admit that Christ's message as He presented it is one that has received much attention down through the centuries. However, lest one think that this theme is amazingly simple, it must be emphasized that the actual deciphering of His pre-cross salvation message can be fantastically complex at times. Yet, when one spends time examining Christ's pre-cross gospel, he will discover that the content of Christ's pre-cross message of salvation was basically quite simple.

This paper does not deal with every facet of Christ's pre-cross message. The paper will seek to determine the message Christ gave to the rich young ruler, based on the account found in Matthew 19:16-22.

Therefore, this thesis will address itself to several key areas. First, an exegetical examination of Matthew 19:16-22 will be considered. Basically, this will determine exactly what the rich young ruler asked and what his mind set was. Secondly, comparative passages will be examined to determine the exact nature of Christ's pre-cross message. This will aid in determining if Christ actually preached the gospel to the young ruler. Thirdly, a theological and dispensational discussion will be set forth to determine if God ever allowed for two means of salvation, namely

law and faith. This is a particularly important discussion for it determines the means of salvation, the purpose of the law and the progressive nature of the salvation message. The writer will thus seek to determine just how all these areas relate in explaining just exactly what Christ preached to the rich young ruler.

CHAPTER I

AN EXEGETICAL EXAMINATION OF MATTHEW 19:16-22

The exegetical examination of Matthew 19:16-22, as well as other pertinent passages, will seek to answer three basic questions. After answering the questions from an exegetical standpoint one should understand that the exegesis of this passage is not in conflict with other salvation statements by Christ.

1. What actually did the rich young ruler ask? The rich young ruler asked Christ, τί ἀγαθόν ποιήσω ἵνα ὀχλῶ ζῶντων αἰώνων, what good should I do in order to get eternal life? One should notice two key ideas in this question. First, the rich young ruler was in search of eternal life. Second, the young ruler was of the opinion that he must do something to get eternal life.

What exactly did the rich young ruler have in mind when he asked about eternal life? Some think that the young man did not have in mind everlasting life. "Eternal life probably means here, not everlasting life, but the life of the age to come, since the Greek word *aionios*, translated eternal is related to the word *aion*, meaning age."¹

¹Charles M. Laymon, Ed., The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary On The Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 633.

Does this observation by this commentator have any validity? Only a study of the term in the Greek will answer the question. Arndt and Gingrich cite Matthew 19:16 and say it refers to eternal life in the Kingdom of God.¹ Also, one cannot say that because αἰώνιος comes of αἰών that it necessarily means age. "As a predicate of God αἰώνιος contains not merely the concept of unlimited time without beginning or end, but also of the eternity which transcends time."² The point is that αἰώνιος does not have to mean age simply because its root is αἰών. Therefore, when αἰώνιος occurs with ζωῆς the phrase can mean exactly what it seems to mean, eternal or everlasting life.

Most conservative scholars concur that the rich young ruler was interested in obtaining life that was guaranteed to last forever rather than merely the assurance of life in an age to come.

Another word that must be examined is the Greek word for "do," ποιεῖν. Basically the word means to do or make. In the New Testament the word is used in a variety of ways. With regard to humans the word always has reference to

¹W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 28.

²Gerhard Kittel, Ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 208.

external deeds or results.¹ The important point to discern is that when *ποιεῖν* is used the external not the internal is most characteristically represented. Therefore, the rich young ruler was not asking what he could do inwardly to obtain eternal life. Rather, he was asking what he could do externally (deeds) to obtain eternal life.

Also, the grammatical construction of his question indicates what he had in mind. The word *ποιήσει* occurs as a future indicative active which indicates the mind set of the rich young ruler. First, the young man truly believed that he could do something to attain eternal life and that he had yet to do it. This is indicated by the use of the future. The writer classifies the use of the future here as a "deliberative future." Dana and Mantey comment concerning this particular use of the future, "Questions of uncertainty are occasionally expressed by the future indicative. Such questions may be real questions asking for information."²

The rich young ruler was not in doubt as to whether or not eternal life could be ascertained by the performing of some good work. Rather, he was asking Christ what

¹Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, pp. 687-689.

²H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament (New York: MacMillan Company, 1965), p. 193.

exactly the "good deed" was that he had yet to do for he fully intended to do it.

Harrison and Meyer well surmised the intent of the young man. "This young questioner (called a ruler by Luke), felt sure that eternal life was gained by the performance of deeds."¹ "Agreeably to the meaning of his question, vs. 16, the young man expected to be referred to commandments of a particular kind, and therefore calls for further information respecting the $\epsilon\nu\alpha\gamma\alpha\lambda\alpha\varsigma$ to which Jesus referred."² It is apparent that this young ruler clearly had in mind that salvation was on a merit basis and that he wanted to do the exact deeds necessary to obtain eternal life. Lenski supports this conclusion in stating the following:

The question this man asks is not how he may obtain life eternal as though he were entirely at a loss as to the way and the means to obtain it. On the contrary, he thinks he knows quite well how to obtain this life, namely by doing some good thing, $\alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omicron\nu$, good.³

2. What did the rich young ruler know about Christ?

Actually, the direction of this question is to determine whether or not the ruler was aware of Christ's deity. There

¹Everett F. Harrison, The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 963.

²Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 343.

³R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 746.

are several grammatical indicators which point to the fact that the young ruler was not aware of the deity of Christ.

First, as one reads this account, there is a realization that the young ruler does not once employ a name for deity when addressing Christ. This is an argument from silence and in itself is not conclusive. However, one would have to admit that if the young ruler was aware of Christ's deity, he probably would have addressed Christ with an appropriate title.

Second, the young ruler addressed Christ as διδάσκαλε or teacher. There is a difference between the significance of this word which is dependent upon who uses it. When Jesus used it or His disciples used it of Him, it carried a uniqueness with it that ascribes authority and dignity to Christ not rendered to other teachers.¹ However, when someone who was not an associate of Christ used the term διδάσκαλε it has a bit different significance.

The first point to emerge from this review of the use of διδάσκαλος in the New Testament is that the term, and therefore the addressing of Jesus as διδάσκαλε, does not imply any attribution of dignity, like κυριος.²

The point is that Jesus and His disciples ascribed greater authority and dignity to His person and His teaching than did

¹Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. II, pp. 155, 156.

²Ibid., p. 152.

others. When the rich young ruler addressed Jesus as διδασκαλε he was not giving Him a title of deity. He merely addressed Jesus as he would any reputable teacher. At best, one can only affirm what Albert Barnes declares. "He fell upon his knees, (Mark;) not to worship him, but to pay the customary respectful salutation; exhibiting the highest regard for Jesus as an extraordinary religious Teacher."¹

Based upon the context and the significance and use of διδασκαλε, the writer concludes two things. First, the rich young ruler realized that Jesus was a teacher of tremendous religious insight and that is why he sought out Christ.

3. Was Christ preaching His pre-cross message of salvation when He answered the rich young ruler? To answer this question one must examine the content of Christ's answer to the young man. The following is what Jesus said to the young ruler.

If you want to enter life, obey the commandments. Which ones? the man inquired. Jesus replied, Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself. All these I have kept, the young man said. What do I still lack? Jesus answered, If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

¹Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1974), p. 88.

Jesus' reply here can be stated in a threefold manner.

- 1) Keep the commandments.
- 2) Detach yourself from your possessions.
- 3) Follow Jesus.

Initially, the element of keeping the commandments will be examined. When Jesus told the young man to keep the commandments, was He affirming that he could actually do good and gain eternal life? Some scholars believe Jesus did teach a salvation of works in this passage.

The passage does suggest a two-level approach to the life to come. At one level entrance is achieved simply by following the commandments, but at another level treasure is₁ gained in heaven by heeding the counsel to perfection.

This declaration by Cope cannot be true for several reasons. The young ruler asked which commandments he should keep. This reply shows that the young man was shaken by Christ's answer. A thinking Jew would realize that to break one commandment was as bad as breaking all the commandments.

That the young man's attitude toward keeping the commandments was of a superficial character, not at all in harmony with Christ's deeply spiritual and penetrating interpretation is clear from his reaction.²

¹Lamar O. Cope, Matthew, A Scribe Trained For The Kingdom of Heaven (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1976), p. 116.

²William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 726.

It was not a matter of keeping certain commandments but keeping all of them.

The Bible elsewhere states that the commandments or the law would nullify Christ's ministry if it could be kept perfectly. Galatians 2:21 states that if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. Christ would not have contradicted what would later be penned by Paul under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Christ was not affirming that salvation comes through obedience to the commandments. Since Jesus knew that obedience to the commandments could not obtain eternal life for one, what was His purpose in using them? Lange contends that Jesus quoted the commandments to show him his sin.¹ The writer agrees that to a certain extent this is true. More apparent, though, is that Jesus first used the commandments to direct the thinking of the young man in the right direction. The young ruler wanted to perform some good act whereby he would attain eternal life. The man's thinking was totally wrong. Salvation could only come by faith in God and by repenting of sin. Jesus was trying to make the man be honest with himself. Any honest Jew would realize that it was humanly impossible to keep the standard of God. An honest man would then realize he needed outside help, and that help is God.

¹John Peter Lange, The Gospel According to Matthew, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1915), p. 344.

Therefore, Jesus' use of the commandments was step one in bringing a man who believed in a merit system to realize that he could actually do nothing to gain eternal life. One should notice that Jesus did not mention a very significant commandment. The reason for this will be discussed in the next section, dealing with the selling of possessions and giving to the poor.

Jesus told the rich young ruler he must sell all his possessions and give what he received to the poor. After the young man made the statement that he had kept the commandments Jesus then initiated step two of His plan. Before ensuing the discussion of Jesus' second step, a short comment needs to be made with regard to the question by the young man regarding what he still lacked.

The fact that the young man had superficially stated that he had kept all the commandments mentioned and yet he was lacking reveals something. The rich ruler apparently did not think that commandment-keeping was the way to gain eternal life. The lack by context should be linked with the "what good thing must I do" of verse 16. In other words, he thought he lacked the "good" that he had yet to do in order to obtain eternal life.

Now, Jesus deliberately did not mention the commandment not to covet. Christ stated this commandment in different words by saying, "go sell all your possessions and give to the poor." Jesus' whole aim in this discourse was

to bring the young ruler away from the mind set of deeds to the issue of sinfulness. The young man would not understand the message, "repent of your sins," if he thought he was basically good and righteous. Jesus' first step was to point him away from good deeds to God's standard with the purpose of making him realize his sin. Step two was to make the young man realize that indeed he had not kept all the commandments, for he had coveted and thus broke all the law. Francis Schaeffer has some pertinent thoughts on coveting that help to explain why Jesus told the young man to detach from the specific result of his coveting, rather than simply telling him not to covet.

Thou shalt not covet is the internal commandment which shows the man who thinks himself to be moral that he really needs a Savior. The average such moral man who has lived comparing himself to other men and comparing himself to a rather easy list of rules (even if they cause him some pain and difficulty), can feel, like Paul, that he is getting along all right. But suddenly, when he is confronted with the inward command not to covet, he is brought to his knees.¹

Since the young ruler had already stated that he had kept the previous commandments, it is logical that he would say he had kept the tenth one, not to covet. Therefore, Jesus simply asked him to give up the things that were the result of his sin of covetousness. R. V. G. Tasker well comments on this.

¹Francis Schaeffer, True Spirituality (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), p. 8.

It is clear that this command of Jesus in verse 21 is an ad hoc command, addressed on a particular occasion to a particular individual, a victim of the covetousness, equated by Paul with idolatry, which drives men relentlessly on to amass great wealth and to cling to it with grim tenacity. To regard the injunction as a counsel of perfection leading to a higher degree of holiness is unjustifiable.¹

Finally, Jesus was ready to state the third phase of His plan, namely following Him. When Jesus told the rich young ruler to follow Him, it meant something more than to merely follow Jesus around to different places. Many Bible scholars believe that Jesus was inviting this young man to become one of His intimate disciples by asking the man to follow Him. What exactly did Jesus have in mind when He asked the rich young ruler to follow Him? The following Bible scholars believe He was asking him to be one of His intimate disciples.

Barnes comments, "To follow Jesus, then meant to be a personal attendant on his ministry; to go about with him from place to place, as well as to imitate and obey him."²

Hendricksen states the following:

Such following to be accompanied by and to prepare for active witness-bearing, would imply that the young man must learn to deny himself and take up his cross (16:24),

¹R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing, 1968), p. 187.

²Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, p. 89.

and would therefore no longer be able to devote himself to the service of Mammon.¹

"The invitation to become a disciple is seriously meant. Jesus, who repelled some offering themselves, thinks so well of this man as to desire him for a disciple,"² states Nicoll.

Spence and Excell have the following to say in this regard: "The offer to him was to become one of Christ's more intimate disciples; to be specially trained by Him in the knowledge of spiritual things, and to preach His gospel."³

Finally, Alfred Plummer suggests the following:

We must not overlook the fact, however, that the Lord's last word to him was not a charge, but an invitation: Come follow Me. We may reverently believe that the man's own good was not the sole motive for Christ's treatment of him. Jesus really wanted him. He saw in him the making of another Apostle, a Barnabas, if not a Paul; and He longed to have the strengthening of this lovable, but weak character. For His own sake, as well as for the man's, He gave⁴ him that affectionate look and asked him to come.

However, after studying the context of the invitation, "Come follow Me," one must ask if Jesus really had in mind making the rich young ruler one of His disciples.

¹Hendricksen, New Testament Commentary, p. 726.

²W. Robertson Nicoll, Ed., The Expositor's Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing, n.d.), p. 250.

³H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. II (Chicago: Wilcox and Follett Co.), p. 269.

⁴Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1910), p. 268.

The writer believes that Jesus had something other than discipleship in mind when He issued His invitation to the rich young ruler. The "something other" was more basically eternal life. A few Bible scholars reflect this basic element in commenting on Christ's invitation, but they fail to develop the full significance of the expression in view here.

Lenski states, "To follow Jesus thus is evidence of true faith in him. When Jesus demands true repentance and faith he does not always ask us to give up our earthly possessions."¹

Olshausen also reflects the significance of Christ's invitation when he states the following:

The truth of Christ's words, that the new birth into eternal life consists in the giving up of all that is our own, and in the consecration of our whole property and possessions to him who is their Author, must have deeply impressed the young man. For as Jesus had no outward authority over him, and as in the Old Testament law, no such requirement was anywhere to be found, it would seem that he might with a good conscience have refused it. But that he could not do. The Spirit who accompanied the words of Jesus had deeply penetrated his heart, had enlightened the darkness within, had revealed to him the true (though hitherto entirely unknown) way of regeneration, and thus he felt himself bound by the power of the truth.²

It is the conviction of the writer that Jesus had salvation

¹Lenski, The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel, p. 753.

²Herman Olshausen, Biblical Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. II (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1860), p. 112.

in mind rather than a position of disciple. Kittel verifies this concept in stating the following:

ακολουθεῖν means participation in the salvation offered in Jesus. In Lk. 9:61f. only he who εὐθεὶς ἐστὶν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ can achieve αὐτοῦ ακολουθεῖν. In Mk. 10:17,21 (which is the comparative account of Matt. 16-22), and par. αὐτοῦ ακολουθεῖ μοι¹ is an answer to the question concerning ζωὴ αἰώνιος.

The context further emphasizes this concept for the whole issue centered around is regeneration not discipleship. The rich young ruler wanted to know how he could attain eternal life. Christ's response must be related back to the central issue, namely eternal life.

In other words, Jesus was telling the young man that salvation was through Him. Thus, the central significance of the phrase "come follow me" was not that of an invitation to become one of Christ's intimate disciples. Rather, Christ was pointing the man to Himself, the only One by whom the young man could be saved.

Jesus was connecting Himself directly with eternal life. He was saying that eternal life was found in Him. Thus, in a direct manner He was pointing out His deity. In demanding that the young man follow Him, it robbed him of the complacency of depending on a good act and made him dependent on Jesus. Unfortunately, the young ruler did not respond positively to Christ's appeal.

¹Gerhard Kittel, Ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 214.

Much time has now been spent in answering question three. After all this discussion, what are the conclusions to the investigation? Simply stated, the content of Christ's reply to the rich young ruler was the content of the pre-cross gospel. The reasons for proposing this viewpoint are as follows.

- 1) Jesus, after perceiving the mind set of the rich young ruler, had to direct his thinking to the proper area of his sinfulness.
- 2) Christ's first step was to expose him to the area of God's standard, namely the commandments.
- 3) After his superficial reply, Jesus then showed him how indeed he had broken the commandments by coveting.
- 4) After Jesus had shown the young man his sin, He then pointed the rich young ruler directly to Himself as the answer to his questions concerning eternal life.

The result is that Jesus was first making this man realize his sin before he would even begin to tell him the good news. Jesus was breaking ground to plant the seed. In a sense Jesus was employing in concept what is called today the "Romans Road" in talking with the rich young ruler. Jesus pointed out the man's sin and then directed him to the proper source of eternal life.

Now that an exegetical examination of the passage has been completed it is imperative that the results from the three questions be drawn together. The best way to handle this is to follow the flow of thought in the passage.

1) The quest of the rich young ruler was that of eternal life. This is indicated by the words $\zeta\omega\eta\nu\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omega\nu$. However,

the means by which the young ruler thought he could obtain eternal life was by externally performing some good deed. This is indicated by the phrase $\tau\iota\ \alpha\gamma\alpha\theta\omega\ \pi\omicron\upsilon\eta\sigma\omega$ and the subjunctive mood in which it occurs.

2) Jesus perceived the self-righteousness of the man.

Jesus knew that in order for a man to believe, he must first see himself a sinner. Therefore, Jesus initiates a three-fold progressive plan to bring the rich young ruler to this realization.

First, Jesus tells him to keep the commandments. This was designed to make the young man doubt his assumption that he could do something good and attain eternal life. That the young ruler was shaken psychologically is seen by his unthoughtful and superficial reply, "I have kept them, what do I still lack?" No honest Jew would make such a claim. That he was steeped in a merit system is seen by the phrase, $\gamma\iota\epsilon\gamma\iota\upsilon\sigma\tau\epsilon\phi\omega$. The man still thought he could perform some good act and attain eternal life.

Jesus now implements the second phase of His plan. It was now imperative for Jesus to make the rich young ruler see his sin. Jesus, instead of saying that the young man was guilty of covetousness, pointed out his covetousness. If the rich young ruler wanted eternal life more than all else, he would be willing to give up all to attain it. However, the man was more attached to his possessions than his desire to have eternal life.

Before the young man has opportunity to react, Jesus states his third phase, namely following Him. When Jesus made this statement, he directly linked eternal life with His Person. The young ruler was looking for some good act to perform to attain eternal life and Jesus pointed him finally to His Person, not to some act.

Thus, the flow of thought indicates that Jesus did preach the gospel here. Although the words repent, faith and believe are absent from the presentation, the concepts are clearly there. Thus, if the concepts were perceived by the rich young ruler he could have exercised saving faith based upon the knowledge shared by Jesus. Dr. Alva J. McClain agrees with this conclusion in stating the following:

In the greatly misunderstood incident of the rich young ruler, it is striking that every commandment quoted by our Lord is from the Second Table of the Law; not because the observance of these social laws men could earn eternal life, but in order that the young man might be tested by his own claims of moral perfection and come to see¹ himself as a sinner whose only hope is in what God can do.¹

If the young man had perceived two things which Christ was pointing out, maybe he would have obtained eternal life. Those two truths would be his sinfulness and that Christ was pointing to Himself (His deity) ultimately as the way to attain eternal life. Perhaps the absence of certain key words (faith, repent, believe), which Jesus

¹Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1976), p. 290.

used in other presentations of the gospel, but which He chose not to use here, can best be explained by His own words.

Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them. Matthew 13:13,14.

CHAPTER II

COMPARATIVE BIBLICAL DATA

This chapter will present comparative biblical data that will aid in determining just what Christ was telling the rich young ruler. Scripture bearing on three related areas will be considered. First, scriptural data bearing on specific salvation accounts will be considered. Second, information stating what Christ's pre-cross salvation message was will be examined. Lastly, statements from the gospels will be examined which will show what Christ's pre-cross salvation message was not.

Other Salvation Accounts From The Gospels

1) Matthew 9:2 cf. Mark 2:5. The statement from these two verses that is of interest is "Jesus saw their faith and said, son, your sins are forgiven you." The point here is that sins were forgiven on the basis of faith.

2) Luke 18:9-24. In this passage Jesus relates the parable of two men, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. Both men are pictured as praying. The Pharisee uttered a very self-righteous prayer. The tax collector said, "God, have mercy on me a sinner." Jesus exclaimed concerning the tax collector, "I tell you that this man, rather than the

other, went home justified before God." Of significance here is the fact that when a man recognizes his sinfulness before God and asks for mercy he is justified.

3) Luke 19:1-10. This portion of scripture records the salvation of one tax collector named Zacchaeus. Of interest in this account are the statements by Zacchaeus and Jesus.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

Zacchaeus responded in exactly the opposite way the rich young ruler did. Zacchaeus was not saved because of what he did, but he did what he did because he had just previously been born again.

4) Luke 23:39-43. The scene in this portion of scripture finds Christ dying on a cross with a criminal on each side dying by the same means. One criminal repudiates Christ. The other criminal said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus then assured the man that in that very day he would be with Him in paradise. The point from this account is that Jesus acted upon an expression of faith and trust and not upon some deed.

5) John 1:49,50. These verses relate the salvation account of Nathaniel. Nathaniel confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, the King of Israel. Because Nathaniel believed

this about Christ, he was considered justified. Again, deeds were not involved, but belief.

6) John 3:1-18. Recorded in this account is the dialog between Nicodemus and Jesus. This passage does not say whether or not Nicodemus believed at that time, but it is known that he did become a believer. However, Christ told Nicodemus in very clear terms how to be born again. Such clear statements would include, "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (vs. 5) "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." (vs. 14-16) Jesus did not mention the law once in His discourse with Nicodemus on this topic. Rather, Jesus told him that he must be born again and that it would occur as a result of faith in Him.

7) John 4:4-42. In the account of the Samaritan woman, several important truths stand out clearly. First, the words Jesus used to present the message of salvation were very different from other salvation accounts. Jesus told the woman that she could drink of the water by which she would never thirst again. Later, he simply said He was the Christ. Therefore, the basic content of Christ's message was the

same, which was Christ's deity and the necessity for believing in Him for forgiveness of sins.

Secondly, the content of Christ's message was the central important fact in the salvation of this woman and others of the town of Sychar. "And because of his words many more became believers." (vs. 41)

Thirdly, salvation was imparted to these people by means of a spoken message which they heard, not some type of an experience or a process of doing good over a period of time. "We no longer believe just because of what you said, now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (vs. 42)

Thus, salvation came by faith in the message preached by Christ concerning His Messiahship.

8) John 4:46-53. This passage relates the account of the royal official. Verse 53 is the important verse. "Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, Your son will live, So he and all his household believed." The man did not believe when his son was healed. He believed when he realized who Jesus was. Again, in this account there is no mention of observing the law for salvation.

9) John 9:35-38. These verses tell of a man who was blind from birth and how God opened both his physical and spiritual eyes. The man asked Jesus who the Son of Man was so he could believe and verses 37 and 38 give the result.

"Jesus said, you have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you. Then the man said, Lord, I believe, and he worshipped him." It is clear from this account that this man was born again because he believed what Jesus said concerning Himself. In fact, as one leaves this account, one leaves the law keepers, the Pharisees, lost in their sin and leaves the sinner a born again man saved by God's grace.

From these nine accounts cited there are several concepts that need to be brought out. First, eight out of nine specifically mention belief or faith in Christ as being what saved the individuals. In the one account (Luke 19:1-10), faith is assumed on the part of Zacchaeus because of his activity after talking with the Lord.

Second, the content of Christ's message concerned His deity. Only once (John 3:14) is there any hint of Christ's death as He spoke with the different individuals. Therefore, from the salvation accounts, one must assume that the death of Christ was not a prominent part of His salvation message.

Third, only in two of the accounts is the law even referred to. Luke 19:1-10 refers to the law when Zacchaeus said he would sell his possessions, and give them away and repay those he had cheated. This was an application of the law as a response of his new-found faith. In John 3:14 Jesus quoted Moses, using an example out of Numbers to illustrate the fact that those who would be born again must look

to Him for salvation. The references to the law are not prominent in these accounts, making it safe for one to assume that Jesus did not preach the law as a means of salvation. In short, these salvation accounts indicate that people were justified when they believed what Jesus said concerning Himself.

Biblical Statements On What Christ's Message Was

1) Matthew 9:13. "But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." The first part of the verse is a direct quote from Hosea 6:6. The latter half of Hosea 6:6 explains what was meant by the statement, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." The completion of Hosea 6:6 reads, "and the knowledge of God more than burnt offering." In other words, Jesus was saying that a genuine knowledge of God (meaning at least salvation) was what He desired rather than a strict obedience to the ceremonial aspect of the law but not having a heart to live by the moral aspects of the law. Before one can know God one must admit his sinfulness. Thus, Christ said He came to call sinners but not the righteous.

2) Matthew 10:39. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Jesus was saying that in order for one to find life he must first accept Christ and then deny himself.

3) Matthew 11:27. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Jesus affirms that if anyone is to know God it must be through Him.

4) Matthew 13:18-23. These verses relate the interpretation of the parable concerning the farmer sowing his seed. From this is learned that Christ's pre-cross salvation message was the central part of Christ's kingdom teaching. Christ affirms here that those individuals who hear and understand the word represent the seed that is sown and comes to life bearing much fruit.

5) Matthew 15:24. It is stated in this verse that Christ was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. This does not indicate specifically what Christ's message was, but it does declare that Christ's message was limited to Israel.

6) Matthew 21:31,32 cf. Mark 1:4. Christ preached what John the Baptist preached, namely that people must repent and believe, and that included the strict Pharisaical law keepers.

7) Matthew 22:14. "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Christ was summing up the central point of the parable of the wedding banquet in this verse. What he says is that admittance to the King's banquet is by divine choice not the deeds of the guests invited. Thus, salvation is a matter of divine choice.

8) Mark 1:15. Jesus preached what John the Baptist preached. John declared here that "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" The Kingdom was near in the sense that the King was near. The first responsibility of the people was to repent and believe.

9) Mark 8:34-36. These verses state that if one is to save his soul he must deny himself and follow Christ. A failure to do this is what Jesus called, "forfeiting one's soul." (vs. 36)

10) Mark 12:28-34. This passage relates the account of the man who asked what the greatest commandment was. Jesus told him and he went on to say that to observe what Jesus had shared was more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus then told this man that he was not far from the kingdom of God. What Jesus was quietly saying was that this man was close to realizing his spiritual need of forgiveness of sin by God. The sacrifices and burnt offerings only pointed to this truth.

11) Luke 3:8. John tells the crowds to produce fruit that is characteristic of repentance before he will baptize them. John demanded that the crowds have a genuine repentance. Simply being a Jew and observing the law was not fruit characteristic of genuine repentance. Jesus preached what John preached.

12) Luke 5:20-26. Jesus, in so many words, claims that He is God and has authority to forgive sins. The writer

believes that this basic thought was the essence of Christ's message.

13) Luke 9:2,6. These verses declare that Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the Kingdom of God and the gospel. It can be safely assumed that they preached what Jesus preached, namely the Kingdom of God is at hand, therefore repent of your sins and believe in Jesus Christ the Messiah. The writer concurs with Alva J. McClain in declaring that the emphasis of Christ's pre-cross message was a spiritual one.

In harmony with the Old Testament prophets, our Lord insisted upon a spiritual basis for His Kingdom. In preparation for this Kingdom which was at hand, men must repent of their sins (Matt. 3:2; 9:13). For all those who comply with these demands there is promised a divine remission of sins (Lk. 3:3). Furthermore, there can be no entrance into the Kingdom, except as men are born again (Jn. 3:3). Important though it is, mere physical descent from Abraham is not enough (Matt. 3:8-10). Those who enter must become as little children (Matt. 18:1-4). According to the laws of the Kingdom, only the pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8). And the supreme requirement of the citizens of the Kingdom is that they shall love the Lord in their entire being with no reservation, no division of allegiance (Mk. 12:30). As to their daily needs, they are called to a life of continual trust and dependence upon God through sincere and believing prayer (Matt. 6:1-7:11).¹

The writer believes that the disciples preached a spiritual message to the people not a political or military type of message.

14) Luke 10:27. Stated here is that if a man loves God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and if he loves

¹McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 286.

his neighbor as himself, he will live, have eternal life. This is humanly impossible to do apart from a regenerating work of God in a man's heart. Jesus told the lawyer here to do this, knowing it would drive him to despair and he would have to call on God. At that time God could help him.

15) Luke 13:3. Here one finds a very clear verse on what Jesus preached. Jesus said that unless an individual repents he will perish.

16) Luke 13:22-28. Jesus answered the people when they asked if many would be saved in the following manner. One has to know the owner of the house in order to be saved. A failure to know the owner will result in a weeping and grinding of teeth for those outside the house. Other passages already cited clearly show that to know God meant to repent of one's sins and believe on Christ the Messiah.

17) Luke 15:7. "I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." The emphasis here is upon a sinner repenting and coming to God to gain forgiveness.

18) Luke 15:11-24. This passage relates the parable of the lost son. Jesus was saying something about salvation in this parable. The main point of this parable is so clear. A son who left his father returned and asked forgiveness and that his father take him back. Likewise, if an individual

wants to be born again he must admit his sin to God and ask God to take him back in.

19) Luke 16:16. This verse states that before John the law and the prophets were proclaimed. But beginning with John, the good news of the kingdom of God was preached. Thus, Christ's message was the kingdom of God.

20) Luke 16:29-31. These verses are part of the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Jesus declares that if someone is told about salvation by someone who has been raised from the dead and yet will not accept the testimony of Moses and the prophets, then he will not repent. The significance here is that repentance must come through the testimony of God's Word. Jesus preached repentance based upon God's Word.

21) John 5:24. This verse clearly states what Jesus preached. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." There are two key concepts that are very clear in this statement. First, the Word of God is necessary in salvation. Second, faith in that Word of God is also necessary. One must believe what God has said.

22) John 5:37-40. Jesus declares that the scriptures testify of Him. Jesus said that one cannot possess eternal life if he only studies the scripture and then tries to live by them. Jesus clearly states that one must come to Him in order to gain or possess eternal life.

23) John 6:35-40. This passage clearly states that Jesus was sent by God the Father and that His message was, "For My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life." Again, very important truths are evident here. First, salvation comes to those who have been divinely chosen. Second, all those who have been divinely chosen to salvation will be saved. Third, salvation will be by faith in what God has said concerning His Son.

24) John 6:63. This verse states that Jesus' message was a spiritual message and only those who were inclined to hear a spiritual message would hear and be saved. "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

25) John 6:68,69. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Peter did not say this in a vacuum. The only way Peter could have known these truths was if Jesus told him. Thus, Christ's salvation message contained these truths.

26) Probably one of the clearest statements by Jesus concerning salvation is found in John 14:6. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus greatly limited the ways by which one could be saved when He said this. In fact, He limited salvation to one way, Himself!

Twenty-six statements concerning Christ's message were examined in this section. The reason so many scripture references were cited was to prove that the gospels say much concerning what Christ preached about salvation.

The basic elements of Christ's salvation message will be stated, based upon the references cited.

1) After examining these passages, one must agree that there is a very clear emphasis upon repenting of one's sins and believing God in order to be born again.

2) Salvation includes a knowledge of God. One cannot simply recognize his sin and be saved. He must know something about God. Before Christ, Israel could know of God through the law and the prophets. Before Abraham, man knew of God as God revealed Himself to individuals and through individuals. Christ came to more fully reveal the Father to men and to make it possible for men to know God.

3) Salvation comes through God's Word. Jesus put the testimony of Moses and the prophets on an equal plane with His words. Thus, God used the words of Moses and the prophets to save people because their words were His words. God has always had a salvation message for man and from the time Moses began to write scripture that message has been found in His Word. Whether one reads or quotes the Word, it is still God's Word and salvation is through that Word. Peter said to Jesus, "You have the words of life."

4) Even in the gospels there is a progressiveness in the content of the salvation message. When Jesus began His public ministry He began preaching with the simple message of John the Baptist. That message was the Kingdom of God is near, therefore, repent and believe. As Jesus' ministry grew and He more fully began to reveal the Father and to explain the law and the prophets He began expanding the basic message. By the end of Christ's ministry he was not only telling Israel to repent of their sin but to believe in him as the only way to gain eternal life.

However, this is not to say that those regenerated prior to Christ's ministry were regenerated by a different means. God always expected men to recognize their sin or repent and to believe Him, or to put their trust in His promise of forgiveness and acceptance. "The basis of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the requirement for salvation in every age is faith; the object of faith in every age is God; the content of faith changes in the various dispensations."¹

Therefore, one should realize that even as Christ preached, His message was progressive in character. As He more fully revealed the Father and His plan, His message was expanded.

¹Charles C. Ryrie, Dispensationalism Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 123.

5) It is very interesting that in all the twenty-six passages cited not once is it mentioned that Christ must die, be buried, and rise again. Now, lest the writer be accused of being negligent, he wants to let it be known that he is aware of what Christ told His disciples concerning His death. However, this paper is concerned with what Christ told the multitudes in a public manner. Christ, while publicly presenting the gospel, never mentioned His death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, the writer declares that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was not an integral part of His pre-cross message. He alluded to it but He did not expound on it.

6) Also, the pre-cross message of Christ included the doctrine of election. More than once Christ said that only to those whom God had given Him would He reveal the Father (Matt. 11:27). Matthew 22:14 states that few are chosen. No Israelite could do anything to merit salvation. God chose whom He would save, and it was not on the basis of how well one kept the law.

7) Christ's pre-cross salvation message was intimately associated with the Kingdom message. This is very logical when one understands that the basis of Christ's Kingdom is spiritual. In order for the Kingdom to be established, there had to be a large nucleus of regenerated individuals. Therefore, Christ preached repentance and faith in Him that He might build the basis for His Kingdom. Many publicans,

prostitutes and sinners repented and believed Christ and entered the Kingdom (Matt. 21:31,32).

8) Christ also preached that one must deny himself and follow Him in order to be saved. Therefore, Christ emphasized the humbling of self and the elevating of Christ to His rightful place in order to save one's soul.

Biblical Statements On What Christ's Message Was Not

1) Matthew 7:21-23. Of particular interest in these verses is the statement by Jesus indicating what will not save an individual. "Many will say to me on that day, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers." Christ's message was not "prophesy, drive out demons and perform miracles all in My name and you will be saved. Any deed, no matter how worthy, will merit God's grace."

2) Matthew 16:12. This verse clearly states that Christ directed no one to listen to the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees to find the way of eternal life. In fact, Christ instructed His followers to guard against their teaching.

3) Mark 9:31,32; Luke 18:31-34. These verses relate the accounts where Jesus spoke of His death, burial and resurrection. However, He spoke of it in explicit terms only very shortly before His death. Also, Christ told them the

truths not so much for their comfort as for future purposes. Again, the disciples did not comprehend what Christ taught concerning His death, burial and resurrection because it was hidden from them (Lk. 18:34). Moreover, Christ only revealed this to His disciples. He never spoke of these three truths in a public proclamation of a pre-cross salvation message. In fact, the disciples did not preach these truths until after the events of Calvary. Thus, even though Christ mentioned His death, burial and resurrection, one has to admit it was not a prominent part of His pre-cross salvation message.

In short, Christ's pre-cross salvation message was not to do certain worthy deeds that were worthy of God's grace. Neither did Christ say to listen to the message of the false religious teachers. Lastly, Christ's death, burial and resurrection was not a primary part of His public message.

A Synthesis Of Cited Passages

A synthesizing of the stated conclusions which occur at the end of each section in this chapter will greatly aid in determining what Christ was telling the rich young ruler. Could one affirm from the answer Jesus gave to the man that He was preaching that salvation is the result of the following?

1. Keeping the commandments of not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not giving false testimony, honoring one's father and mother, and loving one's neighbor as himself.
2. Selling all that one has and giving it to the poor.
3. Following Jesus.

After examining thirty-nine passages from the gospels, the writer must answer the previous question in an affirmative manner. In a clear and simple form, Christ's salvation message would have the following elements:

1. Repent of your sins for you are a sinner (Matt. 21:31,32).

2. Believe in Me for I am the Son of God and by Me is the only way you can be saved (Jn. 14:6).

3. You must be born again or else you will not be able to enter the Kingdom of God.

Christ was preaching the gospel to the rich young ruler. He was laying the ground work to bring the man to Himself. That ground work was to make the man recognize his sinfulness and that he was helpless apart from God to do anything about it. Jesus did not use the terms repent, faith, or believe here but the concepts were certainly present. Jesus pointed out the man's sinfulness and then pointed to Himself as the One through whom the rich young ruler could obtain eternal life. The man left greatly saddened with a heart full of despair. Perhaps the soil of his heart would turn out to be good soil for the seed of the good news.

CHAPTER III

THEOLOGICAL AND DISPENSATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, the theological aspects of the dialog in Matthew 19:16-22 will be discussed as it relates specifically to the means of salvation. Second, the dispensational development of God's salvation message throughout history will be discussed. It is imperative that these two areas be discussed in order to clearly present what Christ was saying to the rich young ruler.

Theological Significance

That it is possible for man to attain eternal life by some other means than repentance of sin and faith in God is conceded by many scholars when exegeting this passage. To be fair the writer must quickly add that most of these scholars would say that this other means was theoretical and not humanly possible. "Hypothetically, the law could give life if men kept it."¹ The argument in this chapter is that God does not even allow for a theoretical means of salvation in the passage being discussed.

¹Alva J. McClain, Law and Grace (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 17.

Two scholars that are persuaded of such a view as stated above are Calvin and Lenski. Calvin stated that "any man who kept the law perfectly, if there were such a man, would obtain life for himself."¹ Lenski, a contemporary scholar, made the following statements with regard to Matthew 19:16-22.

His essential Sonship as also his atonement are set aside ... If this man has the will to enter into life (and by way of reality Jesus implies that the man has) by way of his own doing, then what good thing he must do has long been set down in God's Word, let him guard and keep inviolate² his biddings what he has told and ordered men to do.

Are these conservative exegetical scholars correct in their assumptions concerning this passage, and on a broader scale, of the possible means of salvation? The first chapter of this thesis dealt with an exegetical examination of Matthew 19:16-22. The conclusion reached by the writer was that this passage did not present salvation by perfect obedience to the law as a viable means of salvation. In fact, the rich young ruler, at least superficially, had convinced himself that he had kept the law. If eternal life could have been gained through a perfect obedience to the law, there would have been no need for the rich young ruler to ask what he still lacked. Again, the man was not

¹John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing, 1949), p. 394.

²Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, pp. 746, 748.

interested in knowing what law he had failed to keep but what good external act he had failed to perform. The point is that if perfect obedience to the law was really a viable means of salvation for this man, it is logical to conclude that he would have known about it (he was obviously influenced by Pharisaical teaching), and he would have concluded that he had eternal life because he felt he had kept the law.

However, some scholars are persuaded that the Bible not only in Matthew 19:16-22, but in other passages as well, presents perfect obedience to the law as a means of salvation. The writer disagrees with that premise and will now seek to marshall a brief statement concerning the only possible means of salvation. If the Bible does not allow for any other means than faith, there is no argument for the "perfect obedience" theory. There are at least five reasons why the law (the commandments) was and is not even a hypothetical means of salvation.

1) The Bible is clear in its statements that the law never has nor ever will justify anyone. Dr. Alva J. McClain has clearly and accurately recorded the testimony of scripture concerning this point.

Actually, then, the law can save no sinner. On this point the witness of the Bible is ample and unbroken. By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight (Rom. 3:20). By him all that believe are justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39). But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith (Gal. 3:11). So crucially important is this truth that

the Holy Spirit repeats it no less than three times within the scope of a single verse in Galatians. A man is not justified by works of the law ... not by the works of the law ... for by works of the law shall no flesh be justified (Gal. 2:16). As a matter of fact, Calvary itself should make this clear to all, for if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain (Gal. 2:21).¹

Dr. McClain's citations of the scripture demonstrate the clear teaching of the Bible concerning the law as a supposed means of salvation. The law never has and never will justify any man in the sight of God. One good solid hermeneutical principle is that one must interpret the unclear or vague portions of scripture by the clear statements of scripture. There are no clear statements in scripture declaring that the law is able to justify anyone. Therefore, it seems not only logical, but necessary to state that the Bible does not teach perfect obedience to the law as a viable means of salvation.

2) Another point that must be considered is that it would not be logical for God to institute a hypothetical means of salvation (namely the law) to one people and for only a single dispensation. If salvation has always been by faith, as all conservatives would contend, then why should God introduce an ineffective means of salvation that was merely temporary? The answer is that God never intended the law to be a means of salvation secondary to faith in Himself.

¹McClain, Law and Grace, pp. 18, 19.

It is totally unbiblical to contend that God gives man any other option than faith to lay hold of eternal life.

3) It is not in harmony with the character of God to offer a hypothetical empty means of salvation that saved no one during the time in which it was effected. If one carried out the "hypothetical salvation theory" to its logical end, the following would have to be the result. God would offer a means of salvation which was impossible to attain and therefore would have been deceiving anyone who honestly tried to attain eternal life by that means (i.e., law-keeping). God is just, holy and fair. When He declares that a man can be justified by faith, men who respond in faith to God are saved. The same would be true if obedience to the law brought life, but it does not, and the scripture declares this. Therefore, salvation by law-keeping was never a genuine means of salvation offered by God.

4) As far as the biblical record is concerned, there has never been any need for a secondary means of salvation. Most conservative Bible scholars would contend that Adam and Eve were regenerated after their sin. However, the Bible does not bear testimony that by faith they believed. The first individual that is said to have exhibited salvation faith is Abel. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offering" (Heb. 11:4). The Bible

clearly states that Abel was commended as righteous because of his faith. After Abel there is only scant testimony as to salvation of men up to the time of Abraham.

The following verses give glimpses of how man came to know God prior to Abraham.

"And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26).

"And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:22).

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9).

The Bible has nothing to say concerning God's relation with man (outside of Babel), from Genesis 6 to Genesis 12. Then, God speaks to Abram and tells him to go to a land that he would be shown. This is the beginning of the Jewish nation. How was Abram justified? Genesis 12 does not say but Romans 4:3,5 and 9 (in reference to Gen. 15:6), state how Abraham was justified.

For what does the scripture say? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness apart from works. Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness.

Concerning the descendants of Abraham of which the Bible speaks, namely Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, Hebrews 11:13-23 states that they had the same faith as Abraham. Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, therefore, it is a solid assumption to say that those who exhibited the same faith were justified by their faith.

Now that biblical statements have been given as to how man was justified from Adam to Abram there are two things that are plainly evident. First, there is no mention in either the Old or New Testaments that anyone was saved by the keeping of the law. In fact, that would have been impossible since there was no law to keep. Second, the statements in the Bible regarding man's relationship with God are clearly statements indicating that faith was how man knew God. Men who believed God were counted as righteous in His sight.

Now as far as this writer can discern, there is only one problem period in biblical history regarding the idea of salvation by faith alone and that is the period or dispensation of law. Before the law the Bible is clear that man was justified by faith alone. After the dispensation the Bible is clear that man is justified by faith alone. Is it therefore biblical that God instituted a secondary means of salvation, namely perfect law-keeping, during the dispensation of law? Or, has God always worked on the principle of salvation by faith alone, even during the dispensation of law? To answer

these questions one can only turn to the period involved and see if anyone was justified by the keeping of the law. One will search in vain to find such an account. For God never justified anyone by the deeds of the law. One will find statements like the following concerning the just.

a) Habakkuk 2:4, "Behold, puffed up, his soul is not straight within him: but the just, through his faith will he live." (Delitzsch then comments on his translation.) It is not the sincerity, trustworthiness, or integrity of the righteous man, regarded as being virtuous in themselves, which are in danger of being shaken and giving way in such times of tribulation, but, as we may see in the case of the prophet himself, his faith . . . The deep meaning of these words has been first fully brought out by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11), who omits the erroneous $\mu\omicron\nu$ of the LXX, and makes the declaration $\sigma\delta\kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\kappa\ \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\varsigma$ $\gamma\eta\sigma\epsilon\gamma\alpha\tau$ the basis of the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith.¹

Habakkuk, a prophet used by God during the dispensation of law, affirms that those justified were justified by faith. However, he says nothing concerning the law with regard to justification.

b) "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God" (Is. 50:10,11).

Isaiah clearly states that anyone who walks in darkness and has no light (a lost sinner) should call upon the Lord and trust in Him. In the dispensation of law God never

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmans Publishing, 1977), pp. 71, 74.

invited men to salvation by means of keeping the law. The two verses referred to show what God's message of salvation was, by faith or trust in Him. Grossman, in writing concerning salvation during this period of time, comments as follows:

How was the Old Testament saint saved? By believing God. As pointed out by John F. Walvoord, Adam and Eve had the promise of God to believe, although the character and work of the Deliverer was not revealed until later. The Israelite had a revelation of the Person of God; he could trust God at His Word and believe whatever particular promise was made to him, even though the content of that promise did not disclose that in the plan of God, there was a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.¹

5) The origin of the theory "salvation by law-keeping" is extra-biblical. This concept originated in the Rabbinic misinterpretations of the Torah.

The idea that man can choose God's way of salvation by his own efforts permeates the Apocrypha . . . A basic postulate of Rabbinic theology was that a man could acquire merit by keeping the commandments of God; in fact some Rabbis taught that the Torah had been given expressly in order that Israel might be given the opportunity of gaining merit.²

This Rabbinical teaching did not begin as an abrupt doctrine, but more than likely was a gradual development. There is a possibility that certain Old Testament passages could have been easily misinterpreted. In fact, the same type of passages are still misunderstood today. These

¹Harold Grossman, "The Jewish Anticipation of the Cross" Bibliotheca Sacra, Vol. 106 (July-September, 1949), pp. 375, 376.

²Stephen O. Stout, "The Pauline Conception of Ethical EPTA" (Winona Lake: Master of Divinity Thesis, 1976), pp. 55, 56.

passages will be dealt with in the next section which deals with dispensational aspects of the salvation message. Also, a discussion on the purpose of the law will follow. It is hoped that this discussion will aid in clearing up the confusion that rests around the idea that perfect obedience to the law is a means of salvation.

Before moving on, the writer wishes to assert in conclusion to the previous section that theologically and biblically God never considered a means of salvation other than faith in Him.

Dispensational Significance

In this section the writer wishes to discuss two themes. First, the purpose of the law will be briefly considered. If one can understand the purpose of the law there will be far less confusion in his mind in associating it as a means of salvation. Secondly, the writer desires to discuss the progressive development of the salvation message.

The Purpose Of The Law

As the writer understands it, the law had two basic purposes. The primary purpose of the law was for administrative purposes. God was doing something unique on the earth. He was establishing a nation that would bear a unique relationship to Him. The nation Israel would be God's nation. Now every nation has to have laws in order for it to

operate and exist. However, Israel was not to draw up its own laws. God gave the law to provide Israel the guidelines by which He wanted His nation to operate. God did not expect anyone to be regenerated by a perfect obedience to the law. In fact, it is contradictory to assume so. God did not expect anyone to perfectly keep the law, but He did expect them to be characterized by obedience rather than disobedience.

McClain states the following:

For the law of the historical kingdom not only demanded obedience to all its moral requirements, but in the event of human failure (and God knew everyone would fail), it also provided for divine forgiveness through obedience to the law of sacrifice. See the oft repeated assurance, it shall be forgiven him. These offerings, prescribed for a redeemed nation, stood continually as a witness against any theory of absolute moral perfection on the part of the citizens of the Kingdom of God.¹ (writer's parenthesis added)

Dr. McClain's observations lead the writer into stating the other purposes of the law. For those who were regenerated the law was their sole guide for living, for the law touched every area of human need. It touched the spiritual, ethical, social, physical, political, and ecclesiastical areas of life.²

On the other hand, those who were not regenerate regarded the law as a schoolmaster to point them to their need of putting their trust in God.

¹McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 88.

²John C. Whitcomb, Unpublished class notes, Kingdom and the Church (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1977), p. 46.

Before leaving this discussion, there are two problem passages that need to be considered. These two passages are Leviticus 18:5 and Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21. Both these passages state that, "Ye shall keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them."

The problem phrase is "ye shall live in them." Does this mean that if one does the law of God, he will in return attain eternal life? The writer hardly thinks so. What these passages are stating is that one who is under the law will prolong his life on earth. To openly rebel against the law meant death. Likewise, in the millennial kingdom when the law is reinstituted, open rebellion against it will mean death by the sentence of Christ.

The great principles of the Mosaic code will be made the law of all nations, and enforced by immediate divine sanctions under the beneficent rule of God himself in the person of His incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

Just as eternal life will not be attained by a perfect obedience in the millennial kingdom, likewise eternal life was not attained by perfect obedience in the Old Testament Mediatorial Kingdom. Therefore, these verses do not speak of eternal life but of the preservation of one's life during the mediatorial kingdoms. It is interesting to note that Leviticus 18:5 refers to the Old Testament Mediatorial Kingdom while Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21 refer to the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

¹McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, p. 90.

Progressive Nature Of Salvation Message

To many the concept of a progressive unfolding of the content of the salvation message would sound perhaps heretical. However, if one is to understand God's message to man throughout the centuries, one must recognize this. Moreover, the Bible itself reveals the progressive unfolding of the salvation message. The recognition of this fact will greatly aid in understanding why Christ did not publicly and frequently preach His death, burial and resurrection as part of the pre-cross gospel. The Bible verses that will aid in understanding this concept will now be quoted in the hope that this progressive feature will be recognized.

"Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord"
(Gen. 4:26).

"Who is among you that fears the Lord, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on his God" (Isa. 50:10).

"But the righteous will live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"
(Matt. 3:3).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through me" (Jn. 14:6).

"Men of Israel, listen to these words, Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an

end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified. Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:22-24, 36, 38).

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Why was it that Christ did not preach the entire gospel message? The answer is that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ had to occur in history before they could be preached openly as a completion of the gospel.

In conclusion to this chapter, two concepts need to be asserted. First, theologically and biblically God has offered only one means of salvation and that is by faith. The significance of this statement is that for Matthew 19:16-22 it eliminates the theory that Christ told the young man he could gain eternal life by the works of the law.

Secondly, the dispensational aspects of the chapter stated the primary purposes of the law thus dispelling confusion with regard to its relation to salvation and thus demonstrating from scripture the progressive nature of the salvation message.

CONCLUSION

Now that a discussion on the content of Christ's message to the rich young ruler has been completed, the writer wishes to state his conclusion. It is the viewpoint of this thesis that Christ was preaching the gospel to the rich young ruler. There are several reasons for this conclusion.

First, the exegesis of this passage yielded some very interesting insights. One, the rich young ruler had a completely false assumption on how to gain eternal life. His mind set was geared toward the performance of some external good act whereby he would be granted eternal life. Jesus had to completely redirect the young man's thinking. Therefore, Jesus in His response had to show him the bad news, namely that he was a sinner, before He could give him the good news, that confession of sin and belief in Him would give him eternal life.

Secondly, the examination of the comparative gospel passages revealed what Christ's message of eternal life was. The salvation accounts showed that people were justified by recognizing their sin and calling upon God. The statements concerning Christ's message revealed that salvation involved repentance of sin and believing in Christ as the Son of God.

Also, these statements demonstrated that Christ further completed the message as He progressed in His ministry. The statements concerning evidence of what Christ did not include as a part of salvation were helpful. They revealed that Christ preached against works of righteousness and Rabbinic traditions as having merit in justifying anyone. The result was to show that Christ did preach the gospel, in that He at least mentioned in an indirect manner the concepts of repentance of sin and faith.

Thirdly, the last chapter discussed two important ideas. It was theologically and biblically demonstrated that Christ did not allow for any other means of salvation other than faith - not even on a hypothetical basis. Also, dispensationally the purpose of the law was discussed to clear up confusion as to its function. If God ever intended the law or allowed the law to be a means of salvation, it is clear that Christ did not tell the rich young ruler to be regenerated by means of it. Also, the progressive nature of the message of salvation indicated that the concepts of repentance and faith were always basic to it. These concepts were present in Jesus' reply even though He did not use those specific terms. Then, as God revealed Himself more, the message became more complete.

Therefore, as Christ addressed the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22, He did present the gospel. The rich

man did not perceive Christ's message and left with Jesus uttering the following words to His disciples: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24).

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