

Rich and Poor
Matthew 19:16—26

Much is said about rich men in the Gospels and expanded upon in James. Being rich in worldly things is never a positive thing in Scripture. However, there is nothing wrong with being wealthy. The problem is in the attitude toward riches.

Trusting riches

Those who live their lives trusting in riches will never be saved while those who trust in God will be saved. This is true in this dispensation as well as when the Gospel of the Kingdom was being preached. The rich, young ruler had the same mindset as the Pharisees and was probably good friends with the religious leaders of Israel. He would use these people to advance himself in his pursuit of riches.

Jesus was preparing the Disciples for the soon-to-come Tribulation. During the Tribulation, worldly riches will be of no use to the Disciples because in order to buy or sell it will be necessary to take the mark of the beast. The Disciples gave up everything they had to follow Him (Matthew 19:27). If this man was not willing to give up everything before the Tribulation he certainly wouldn't want to give it up while going through the Tribulation. His salvation was not based upon giving up his riches but in trusting Jesus. If he truly trusted that Jesus was the Messiah then he would have sold all that he had and in so doing would be storing up treasure in heaven. Under the Gospel of the Kingdom those who do store up their treasure in heaven will be rewarded when the Kingdom is set up.

According to the parable of the rich man (Luke 12:19—31) those who lay up treasure for themselves are not rich toward God. In this parable, the rich man was sent to the torment side of Hades while the poor man was in the Paradise side. James continues this tirade against the rich telling them that they should weep and howl for their miseries are coming upon them (James 5:1). Only those who are willing to get rid of their possessions will be able to get through the Tribulation and into the Kingdom. This is why Jesus tells them to sell their possessions (Luke 12:33) and why we see Kingdom believers doing that in early Acts (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:37).

In contrast to this young rich man is Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42—43; Luke 23:50—52). He was rich and had a prominent position of leadership but yet he became a disciple of Jesus. He was not trusting in his riches and was not self-righteous as most of the leaders of Israel were. He humbled himself and, in the face of losing his position and power, gave Jesus a proper burial along with Nicodemus.

Eye of a needle (verse 24—26)

One popular theory to explain this verse is that there was a gate leading into Jerusalem called the Needle Gate. In order for a camel to get through this gate its entire load would need to be removed and the camel would crawl through on its knees. The only problem with this idea is that there is absolutely no proof that this gate ever existed.

If this verse is taken literally then there is no chance for a rich man to become saved since it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Remember, this section of about what the object of faith is. A man who trusts in anything other than Christ will remain lost. This man trusted in his own riches (Mark 10:24 KJV) instead of in Christ making it impossible for him to be saved.

The Disciples were taken aback by what Jesus had said to this rich ruler. They were thinking that if this rich man could never be saved how could they be saved when they have nothing. The obvious answer is to trust Christ. This is what Jesus has been teaching the Disciples all along.

Ruling in the Kingdom (verses 28—30)

These verses offer some insight as to how the Millennial Kingdom will be organized politically. Jesus gives the Disciples some insight and hope to help them get through the soon-to-come Tribulation by promising

them a place of authority. They will be sitting on 12 thrones judging (or ruling) over the 12 tribes of Israel. This will happen in the regeneration when Christ is sitting on the throne. At that time all of Israel will be involved in ruling the earth. According to Luke 12:32

Although many people spiritualize these verses, the context indicates the Kingdom will be a literal, physical, political kingdom set up on a literal earth in the literal Jerusalem.

Millennial Kingdom

References to the Kingdom outside of Paul's writings almost always refer to the Millennial Kingdom. Many people reject a literal 1,000-year Kingdom by interpreting Scripture to mean the Kingdom is actually invisible and composed of believers in this church age. They will take a poor translation of Luke 17:21 to show that the kingdom of God is within us. This verse actually should have been interpreted to say the kingdom of God is in your midst.

Scripture treats the Millennial Kingdom as a literal Kingdom. When Revelation 20:1—7 is read, the natural interpretation would be that there will be a physical 1,000-year Kingdom, not an invisible assembly of believers in a long-lasting realm. When God first promised David that he would set him up in a Kingdom with Israel planted in their own place forever (2 Samuel 7:8—16) David would understand this to happen on the earth. His descendants will sit on the throne at Jerusalem and the nation of Israel will finally possess the land promised to her.

A righteous King

A kingdom demands the presence of a king. The Millennial Kingdom will have Jesus Christ sitting on a literal throne in the city of Jerusalem. The Davidic Covenant stresses that someone from the line of David will sit on the throne forever (Jeremiah 33:14—21; 23:5). Isaiah 9:6—7 shows that this person is Jesus Christ. This promise was passed on to Mary when the angel came to her and said her baby would be the future King of Israel (Luke 1:30—33).

Coregency

Not only will Christ be ruling over Israel but King David will be brought back to life to rule from Jerusalem as their king (Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23—24; 37:24; Hosea 3:5). He will be ruling under the authority of Jesus Christ and will be given authority over the whole world. He is even given the title of shepherd and king. Since he is promised an everlasting Kingdom (Daniel 7:27), this will continue on into the eternal Kingdom (Revelation 21, 22) when the heavens and earth are reformed to deal with the effects of sin on the universe.

12 thrones

The Disciples are promised a position of authority in the Millennial Kingdom. Christ promised that they would be sitting on 12 thrones in the Kingdom ruling over Israel (Matthew 19:29; Isaiah 32:1). It appears that they will be reporting directly to King David with each Disciple responsible for a particular region of the earth. The Disciples will have the rest of Israel reporting to them through a governmental system and the Gentiles will be ruled by Israel and will learn from them (Isaiah 1:25—26; 2:3; Mica 4:2). Israel will not need to be taught because God will supernaturally implant His word in the heart of Israel (Jeremiah 31:34). Israel will act as priests, pointing the Gentiles to God and acting as intermediaries (Exodus 19:6; Zechariah 8:20—23).

All these verses point to a literal, physical, political kingdom set up on a literal earth in a literal Jerusalem. I believe those who interpret these verses and many others as being non-literal do so because they think God has been so slow in setting up His Kingdom and they have given up hope that He ever will. This is caused by a failure to interpret Scripture from a mid-Acts perspective, that Israel and her program have been temporarily set aside and the Church, the Body of Christ has been formed in this Age of Grace revealed through the Apostle Paul. Those who don't see this distinction can't help but to mix up and confuse the various programs (dispensations) that God has instituted.

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