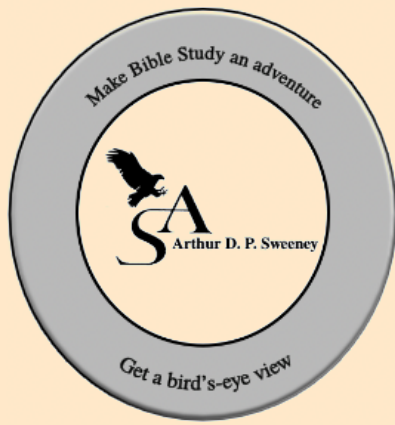




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Introduction

This MyQ&A paper concerns this question directed to Jesus:

“Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16).

Mark and Luke record the question with a slight difference:

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17, Luke 10:25, 18:18).

In Greek, to ‘have’ something is not so much about control, but defines identity, it determines who that person is. Similarly, ‘inherit’ describes the sharing of the revenues of an existing commercial enterprise without the transfer of ownership. If one can define oneself in terms of eternal life, then it’s understandable that Matthew simply identifies the questioner using the nondescript ‘someone’ (Matthew 19:16), and Mark singles him out just as a ‘man’ (Mark 10:17). However, Luke says that he was a lawyer (Luke 10:25), and in another place describes the questioner as a ruler: a chief, magistrate or prince (Luke 18:18-26). So, the enquirer could be anyone from the bottom to the top stratas of society.

The Lord's reply in Matthew

17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” 18 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; 19 Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

20 The young man said to him, “I have kept all these; what do I still lack?”

21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” (Matthew 19:17-25).

Help the poor

The rich man didn’t recognise his own deficiency before the law. However, the Lord highlighted his ‘all-for-me’ attitude as a law breaker, when he had the resources to help the poor but did not. As Proverbs puts it: *Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss* (Proverbs 22:16). *If one shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered* (Proverbs 21:13). *Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full* (Proverbs 19:17). And, what about Deuteronomy 15:7-8: *If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.*

These are commandments this rich man didn’t want to know about but his keeping of some but not all commandments, as James later put it brilliantly, summed him up nicely: *For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws* (James 2:10).

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What is eternal life?

Notice the words that I have underlined in Matthew's text on the previous page. The rich man asked about eternal life, but the Lord in reply mentioned treasure in heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, to which the disciples added being saved. These are synonyms for 'eternal life'.

Treasure in heaven

Treasure is our word *thesauros*, which stores words and is a source of wisdom and knowledge. In the New Testament this word denotes the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord, which Paul described as having this treasure (*thesauros*) in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:7). Spectacularly, Paul explains that in Christ are hidden all the treasures (*thesauros*) of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Numerically, (*thesauros*) mostly refers to the kingdom of God or heaven (Matthew 13:44, 19:22, 24, Mark 10:24-25). Moreover, this heavenly treasure is without expiration, for it cannot be stolen, nor can it be destroyed (Luke 12:33).

The kingdom of heaven

Many scholars argue that the Jewish setting of Matthew explains his preference for the term "kingdom of heaven" rather than "kingdom of God". For [du Toit](#), the genitive is a typically Jewish, reverential way around mentioning the divine name. Others contest Matthew's view that he tries to shroud the name and personality of God, for in that case he would have entirely avoided speaking of the kingdom of God, which he did not (see 12:28; 21:31, 43).

Thus, an alternative interpretation of the genitive "of heaven" needs to be found. [Pennington](#) says that many times Matthew uses "kingdom of heaven" as part of a contrast between the two polar realms, heaven and earth (e.g. 17:24-18:5; 4:1-11), to point out the great disjunction between heaven's way of doing things and earth's. [du Toit](#) also acknowledges that Matthew may have wanted to stress the absolutely incomparable, transcendent, cosmic-universal character of the reign of God in contrast to other, "earthly" ones. Similarly, [Henry](#) adds that the earth is subject to man's dominion, but not so the heavenly realities, and the kingdom of God comes to us from there, and hence it is appropriately depicted as the kingdom of Heaven. God's kingdom is first in heaven, then on earth (Matthew 6:10).

Thus, "*kingdom of heaven*" functions to orientate the Jewish reader back to Daniel 2-7, where the Kingdom from the God of Heaven was promised to supplant the kingdoms of the earth, which Matthew describes in both human and satanic terms. This theme of heavenly and earthly kingship runs throughout, climaxing in the Great Commission of Jesus' authority in heaven and earth ([Miller](#)).

[Walker](#) supports this view that Matthew uses "Kingdom of Heaven" because it fits with his theology of the Christ coming in His kingdom. [Bauer](#) concurs, showing that Matthew develops Jesus' kingship in 1:18-2:23 by contrasting it with that of Herod as legitimate, effective, humble, righteous, and committed to the salvation of the people from their sins through sacrifice. Herod's kingship, on the other hand, represents God-opposing systems and persons whose goal is maintaining their own power, even to the point of destroying others. God is manifesting his rule through Jesus for Jew and Gentile, and it renders every opposing claim to power ridiculous.

[Carter](#) goes further, suggesting that Matthew employs the imperial paradigm, and re-applies it to God's work. God's empire, the kingdom of Heaven, is fundamentally not like that of the great men of the Gentiles, because it works in marginal places and people, in alternative communities, mercifully effecting life-giving social and economic structures. Gentile empires and their rulers wreak havoc and destruction on people from which only God can save by establishing His empire and rule over all at the return of Jesus in power and triumph. Applying the entire paradigm to God, it renders the things of Caesar to God.

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The kingdom of God

[Gates](#), asserts that the kingdom of God means that God is its central figure. Agreeing, [Constantineanu](#) says that the accent falls not on “kingdom” but on “God”, that God is the king, and every aspect of His kingdom is derived from His nature, character and action. [du Toit](#) also supports this view, arguing that the qualifying genitive “of God” indicates that God is actively at work. It therefore qualifies the kingdom as God-determined, as the product of God's personal being and activity. So, as [Santram](#) points out, because it is the kingdom of God there is no capability in humans to bring it about, or to bring it in, or to extend it. It always is and remains God's kingdom. As the Lord Himself said, *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom* (Luke 12:32). It is always there as a gift from God. Human beings can only seek, pray for, see, proclaim, receive, accept, enter into, rejoice about and celebrate the kingdom of God.

Also, the label the kingdom of God is similar to the kingdom of Saul (1Chronicles 12:23), which points to Saul as king, as does the kingdom of Ahasuerus (Esther 3:6). Further, the NT equates the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of Christ in Paul's *the kingdom of Christ and God* (Ephesians 5:5), and John's, *the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah* (Revelation 11:15). These texts confirm Gabriel's words of Him as the Son of the Most High, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew El Elyon, meaning “God Most High” (Genesis 14:18–20). That is, Jesus has the same essence as the Most High God, and ‘most high’ indicates that no being is higher than He. So, the person of the king is both divine and human.

Saved

‘Saved’ is the final synonym of ‘eternal life’ appearing in this story (Matthew 19:25, Mark 10:26, Luke 18:26). ‘Save’ is part of a cluster of words that revolves around wholeness and soundness. As such, the word reminds of the familiar Hebrew word *shalom*, peace, from the verb *shalem*, to be or make whole or complete ([Abarim Publications](#)).

The opposite of save might be achieved through sickness, poverty or calamity, but also through a lack of knowledge or social skills. In our modern times, we humans are so much more safe and secure than our ancestors ever were that we tend to forget that salvation was a primary concern of everybody all the time and had nothing to do with a religion. In Biblical times, the quest for salvation was about where to get food from, how to stay safe from the environment or from invaders, how to stay healthy and keep one's children alive, how to keep rulers happy and wild animals at bay.

Saving someone means to break the chains that hold them and setting them free. Freedom is a person's most precious quality and *it's for freedom that Christ has set us free* (Galatians 5:1). So in the mind of the disciples, this rich man needed freedom from the shackles that bound him to the riches of this world, only then would he be saved, or made whole, and have eternal life.

Luke's emphasis

Just then a **lawyer** stood up to test Jesus. a “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the **law**? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your breath, and with all your diligence, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live” (Luke 10:25-28).

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Luke's emphasis

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In this story, the questioner was a lawyer, so the Lord turned the question back onto him to say what the law says. His answer was correct, that the Lord was the sole object of his devotion, loyalty, allegiance and worship. This devotion to the Lord came from the entirety of the man's being, from the heart, the center of human thought, emotions, and spiritual life. For the Hebrews the heart was the metaphor of the mind and all mental and emotional activity. Further, with all his breath, and with all his diligence he was committed to the Lord God. All of this is evidence of eternal life.

Conclusion

The question considered in this paper was **"What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"**

The rich in the story held their wealth tightly and weren't ready to help the poor, although the Law under which they lived stated that, *If one shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered* (Proverbs 21:13).

The Lord went on to teach that eternal life, and the synonyms for it such as treasure in heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, and being saved, were beyond the reach of such lawbreakers.

Another similar story, in which the same question was asked by a lawyer, had the right answer. For him, one needed to love the Lord your God with all the whole heart, and with the whole breath, and with the whole diligence, and with the whole your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

In sum, total commitment to Lord your God is required.



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