

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 19:27 - 19:30



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into the meaning behind Matthew 19:27-30, where Jesus speaks about the rewards for those who give up everything to follow Him. Gregg analyzes the significance of the twelve apostles and their role in judging the twelve tribes of Israel, suggesting that their thrones may be a part of the millennial kingdom on a new earth. He also warns against pride and emphasizes the importance of humility, as those who are regarded as least esteemed will be first in God's eyes.

### Transcript

When Jesus told the rich young ruler that he must sell all that he has and give to the poor and come and follow him, the man did not obey and he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. It's interesting how the devil lies to us and tells us that being rich will make you happy. Most of us assume that we would be much happier if we only had more possessions.

And yet this story should correct us that this man had great possessions and he went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. You see, these possessions controlled his heart. They made it impossible for him to follow Jesus because they were the idol of his heart.

It's very difficult to have possessions and not be an idolater of possessions. In fact, Jesus said, how hardly shall those who trust in riches enter the kingdom of God. He told his disciples, it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. When his disciples expressed astonishment at this statement, they said, who can be as saved? And Jesus said, with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. And we're going to pick up today in the passage in Matthew 19 after these verses that I've just alluded to and see what the response was of Peter.

In Matthew 19, 27, then Peter answered and said to him, see, we have left all and followed you. Therefore, what will we have? So Jesus said to them, assuredly, I say to you that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who

have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last shall be first. Now, here we have something that Jesus said that applies apparently to the twelve apostles. And even though you and I are not them, there is something of importance we can learn from this passage for ourselves.

Peter, when he saw that the rich young ruler had refused to do what Jesus said, and of course what Jesus had said to do is sell what he had and give to the poor and become a follower and take up his cross and be a disciple of Jesus. Peter said, well, we've done this. See, we have left all and followed you.

And then he says, therefore, what shall we have? Now, Peter had indeed forsaken all, as he says, and followed Jesus. But he was still concerned about what rewards there might be for doing so. And is this wrong? I don't think the Bible ever discourages us from thinking of the rewards that will come from following Jesus.

Now, personally, I think it's great and probably commendable if a person would make every sacrifice for Jesus without any interest in ever experiencing any reward for it. Just out of love for him, I just gladly give up everything. And I don't care if I get a reward for it or not.

However, even if that's a commendable thing, the Bible does not require that we have that kind of attitude entirely. Because the Bible tells us there will be rewards, and we are in fact given these promises of reward as incentives to do what is right. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 when Jesus said, Do not give your alms in such a way as to be seen by men, otherwise you have your reward, and you will have no reward from your Father which is in heaven.

And he went on to point out that if you give alms and if you pray and if you fast in the manner that pleases God, he says, your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Obviously, Jesus was presenting the prospect of heavenly rewards as an incentive to do things the way he was saying they should be done. And therefore, there must be nothing low or base or wrong about being aware that there will be rewards for what we do, if we do what is right.

Now, Peter was wondering about this, because he had in fact, you know, given up all. Now, what's interesting about this is that we can look at Peter's case and get a better understanding of what it means to forsake all. He says, Lord, we have left all and followed you.

You know, Jesus indicated in Luke chapter 14 and verse 33, that unless you forsake all

that you have, you cannot be my disciple. And we say, wow, that sounds a very stiff requirement. Forsaking all that I have, must I become a pauper? Well, that depends.

What does it mean to forsake all? Well, here's a good example. Peter is an example of somebody who forsook all. As he said, Lord, we have left everything to follow you.

Now, when we look at Peter, we find that Jesus, in fact, did consider Peter to be one who had left all to follow him. And yet, Peter still had some things, didn't he? He had a house, because we find Jesus frequently staying, after this point, in Peter's house. He had a wife and probably children.

We know that Peter was married. And he had some possessions. We know that he still had some fishing equipment, because Jesus sent him out fishing on one occasion in Matthew chapter 17.

He also seemed to have still owned his fishing vessel, because from time to time, Jesus had Peter and the others take him across the Sea of Galilee in their boat. Now, here's a case of a man who truly is said to have forsaken all. And yet, he owns a house.

He's got a family. He's got some possessions. He's got a boat.

And yet, he says, Lord, we've forsaken everything. Jesus did not say, Peter, what are you talking about? You haven't forsaken everything. Don't you know you still have your house and your boat and your family? You've got to get rid of those things, too.

No, that's not what Jesus said. Jesus actually said to him, assured I say to you, that in you who have done this, you who have followed me in this time, and everyone who has forsaken these things will be rewarded, he says. Now, Peter is a good example of what it means to forsake all.

Unlike the rich young ruler who was specifically told to sell everything he had and give it to the poor, Peter was never told to do that. Peter was simply told to follow Jesus, and his particular mission was not to sell everything he had, but in his case, to consecrate everything he had to the Lord. Peter had a house, but it became the place where Jesus and Jesus' friends were allowed to stay.

Peter had a boat, but it became the means of transport for Jesus and his friends. In other words, forsaking all that you have doesn't mean that you have a yard sale and sell every possession you have, although it may mean that if that's what God tells you to do, as he told the rich young ruler to do, but apparently he never told Peter to do that, and Peter didn't do it, and yet he had forsaken all in the sense that he had transferred the ownership, as it were, from himself to Christ. Christ had total access to everything, and insofar as Peter had anything, he was just managing it for Christ.

To forsake all does not always mean that you divest yourself of all. It simply means that

you renounce your ownership of it and transfer that ownership to Jesus himself, so that your possession of it becomes a stewardship. It becomes a responsibility that God has given you to use his things for him.

And so, Peter and the other disciples are examples of those who have indeed forsaken all. And he says, therefore, what shall we have? Now, Jesus' answer is twofold. First, he says, Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now, it seems obvious from this comment that this applies to the twelve apostles. When he says, you who have followed me, he specifically means you twelve who have followed me in the role that I've called you to be apostles, because he mentions they will sit on twelve thrones. He also says they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel, which gives us a very good clue that the reason Jesus chose twelve apostles instead of ten or eleven or thirteen or fifteen or twenty is because he intended for the number of apostles to correspond to the number of the tribes of Israel.

It was a way of symbolically saying that Jesus was establishing a new Israel, as the Israel of the Old Testament was known for its parentage was the twelve patriarchs, which gave rise to the twelve tribes, and Israel was sometimes simply called the twelve tribes. Jesus was establishing a new movement, which also had twelve founders, twelve leaders, and it was in a sense a new Israel. Now, these twelve, he said, would sit on thrones.

And we need to ask ourselves some questions about this. First of all, what does he mean, in the regeneration? Because when they sit on these thrones, it's said to be in the regeneration. There are indeed not lacking those who believe that he's talking about the resurrection, that when Jesus comes back and he raises the dead, as many believe, Jesus will reign on earth and the disciples will sit on twelve thrones with him, reigning alongside him on these twelve thrones.

Now, if this is literal, then it's, to my mind, interesting, because in Revelation 3.21, Jesus said, in general, to him that overcomes, I will grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I have overcome and am seated with my Father on his throne. Now, Jesus does not talk about individual thrones there. He says that everyone who is an overcomer, every faithful Christian who remains faithful to death, will sit with him on his throne, will reign with him.

And this, apparently, is the destiny of all faithful Christians in eternity, to reign with Christ. However, Jesus speaks to the twelve apostles and talks about them sitting on twelve thrones, apparently one each of their own, and ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. Now, if this is literal, then we must conceive of a situation someday, I guess in the resurrection, that Israel will be reestablished as a special people, still divisible into twelve tribes, and the twelve apostles will sit on the twelve thrones, perhaps in a

millennial kingdom or in the new earth, and will reign over these twelve tribes of Israel.

Well, who will reign, then, over the Gentiles? Well, you know, theories could be advanced, but that does leave that question open. I'd like to suggest to you that Jesus, quite remarkably, does not say, in the resurrection, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones. He doesn't say this will happen in the resurrection, a term which Jesus, by the way, did use at times, and a concept, the resurrection, was something Jesus frequently, or at least on a number of occasions, spoke about.

However, he used the word, in the regeneration. Now, the scripture uses the term regeneration elsewhere, not in the terms of the resurrection of the last day, but in a very different sense. If you would look in your Bible, at Titus, chapter 3, you'll find the sense in which regeneration is used in the New Testament.

It says in Titus, chapter 3, beginning at verse 5, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, having been justified by his grace, that we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Now, Paul is not talking about something that happened later in the resurrection. He's talking about something that has happened.

We have been justified. He has poured out his Spirit upon us. He has saved us, and he has saved us by this means, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Now, the word regeneration there speaks of being born again. It speaks of the phenomenon of having been remade into new people by the Spirit of God, reborn into a new existence. That's what the regeneration is, in Paul's language anyway.

Now, whether Jesus used the term precisely the same way Paul did, we don't know for sure, because we don't really have Jesus using this term elsewhere. But there is at least the possibility that Jesus used the term regeneration the same way Paul did. And if so, then when Jesus said, in the regeneration, he doesn't mean after Jesus comes back and all are resurrected.

He would mean, perhaps, in the age of the church, in the time after Pentecost, when regeneration occurs, when the church has come into that state of regeneration, then the apostles would sit on twelve thrones reigning over the twelve tribes of Israel. Now, I can imagine some objections to this suggestion, but before we consider them, let us think about this possibility. This would mean, then, that the special authority the apostles were being promised was not relative to eternity or in a future millennium after the resurrection, but it had to do with their special status in the church during the church age, as having special authority, like those who sit on thrones.

Now, the objections to this interpretation would be multiple. One would be that Jesus says, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory. We can find places in the Scripture where Jesus sitting on the throne of his glory can be equated with his session after the second coming.

It would seem, for example, that this term is so used in Matthew 25, 31, where Jesus says, when the Son of Man shall come and sit on the throne of his glory, and that would be, of course, at his second coming. And yet the Scripture also teaches of Jesus currently being enthroned. Jesus is enthroned now.

He ascended into heaven. He is at the right hand of God. He says in Revelation that he has been seated on his throne, on his Father's throne.

God has said to him, sit here at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. And the apostle Paul and the other apostles make it very clear that Jesus is reigning today. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

And it could well be that the regeneration, when Jesus sits on his throne, began when Jesus ascended and then sent the Holy Spirit. He has ascended to assume a position on his throne, and he is there today. Jesus does now sit on the throne of his glory.

There's another sense in which that will be manifested at his second coming. It's not visible to our eyes today, but it is nonetheless a fact. And therefore, Jesus could be speaking, of course, again, of the later life of the apostles after Jesus ascends into heaven and sends his Spirit.

Now, he also said, you who have followed me will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. One could argue, well, the apostles didn't do that. As you read the book of Acts, you don't read of them sitting up twelve royal seats and sitting on it in the manner that one would picture people sitting on twelve thrones.

Nor do we find them ruling in Israel. However, there are ways in which this can be understood. To suggest even that God sits on a throne may be figurative, because God is not a physical being.

To speak of him having hands and eyes and feet and a portion of a body that sits on a chair, and a literal chair itself, may not be as literal as we tend to think of it. It may be simply a way of speaking of God's sovereignty and of the fact that God is the great king and he rules over all things, and as we think of kings sitting on thrones, the anthropomorphic way in which it is described is that God is sitting on a throne. It may not necessarily be that there are literal thrones that God sits on.

It would not be important to the concept. Now, some are prone to take things more literally than others, and that's fine. I'm saying, however, that there's every reason to suggest the possibility that even the reference to God sitting on a throne is non-literal,

and what it suggests is that God is reigning supreme and is sovereign, whether or not he literally is seated on a chair.

And some people who want to think more literally may object to my suggesting this, but when one is open-minded, they'd have to recognize there is the possibility that sitting on a throne is an anthropomorphism for God, simply an emblem of his sovereignty. And if it is so, then it's possible that the apostles sitting on thrones could be similarly non-literal, that it simply speaks of them having authority, that they would be the authoritative ones in the church, that their role would be one of ruling and guiding and directing the church. They would have a supreme authority in the church that was unlike that of others.

Now, the twelve tribes of Israel could be literally the Jewish people because the twelve apostles believed that the realm of their apostolic authority was directed toward Israel. You might remember in Galatians chapter 2 that Paul said that he once met with Peter, James, and John, and they believed that they were sent to the twelve tribes of Israel, whereas he was sent to the Gentiles. And James wrote his epistle addressed to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, that it seems that the twelve apostles tended to see themselves as having a mission directed to the Jewish people, and that their authority to preach and to extend the kingdom of God was directed toward a Jewish audience, and that Paul and his companions were sent more to the Gentiles.

Well, this could be symbolically stated as if they, the twelve, sat on twelve thrones as they had an authority given them by Christ to represent him to the Jewish people. And this is perhaps the statement that led them to believe this, because we know that, according to Galatians 2, this is exactly what Peter, James, and John thought was their mission. And they may have been right.

Who's to say they were wrong? So anyway, we find Jesus promising these men a special place of authority, whether this is going to materialize at the end of time in the resurrection, or whether he's speaking symbolically of the special authority the apostles had during the age of the church. We can't say. But what he says next, the other part of his answer, applies beyond the twelve apostles.

And he says in verse 29, Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and inherit an everlasting life. Now, Peter said we've forsaken everything. What shall we have? It may be that Peter was saying, hey, we've done a big magnanimous thing.

We've given up everything to follow you. Don't we deserve something? Isn't God indebted to us? And Jesus seems to be saying, you know, anyone who's given up anything can never outgive God. If you've given up wives and children and houses and lands, you may think you've made a big sacrifice.

But you know, even in this life, and especially in the next, you're going to receive much

more than that from God. God is more generous than you are. And you will receive many times more in this life.

In fact, where he says a hundredfold here, in Luke's parallel, he says manyfold or manifold, many times more. It's not a literal hundred. He's simply using that as a hyperbole.

He's saying much more than you ever have given up, you will receive back from God. Don't think yourself magnanimous. Don't think yourself to be making a great sacrifice that you've given up this or that for God.

When you calculate all that God will give you in this life and in the next life, eternal life, you will never end up indebting God to you and having him owe you something to balance the scales. You will certainly still end up a great debtor to God because he gives you many times more than what you've surrendered at this point. And also eternal life as well.

And that's what I believe Jesus means by this. Now it's possible he even means that the apostles who became preachers and left their homes and their background and their families, they inherited greater homes, more homes and family in the church itself. Every home in the church of God was open to them.

They could stay there. Everyone was their brother and their sister and their mother. And so he could be meaning it that way, that you've given up the physical, God gives it back to you in spiritual terms.

But his last comment is, many who are first will be last and the last first. What he means by that is many of those who in terms of human society are first and the most important people will be the last to come into the kingdom of God. And many of those who are regarded to be the last in line, many of those who are the least esteemed will be the first because that's just the way the whole kingdom of God is.

It appeals to those who don't have a great stake in this life and in this world and who are looking more toward the next life. Those who have comforts and riches and all things they could want in this world are much less interested, generally speaking, in the next life. And so they who are first in this world often are the last in terms of coming into the kingdom of God, whereas those who are the last in terms of status in this world are the first to embrace Christianity and to follow Jesus on his terms.

I hope that you won't be last. I hope that you'll respond today and consecrate yourself wholly to Jesus Christ and become his disciple.