

# Rich, Young Ruler Wants Eternal Life

**H**ave you ever asked someone if they are going to heaven? Some years ago a man on the street asked some people if they were going to heaven. Here are a few of the answers he received. “I am going to heaven because I am a decent person.” “Not the way I am living.” “I have never thought about it.” “I am already there!” “If you have faith in Jesus.” “I do not know!” “Heaven and hell do not exist.” “People go to heaven if they are humble.” All of the answers, except one was wrong. The wrong answers reveal that some believed heaven and hell, but they did not understand what was required to enter heaven. The person who said that heaven and hell did not exist, believed in an afterlife. He believed in reincarnation. His reply reminds us that it is the unusual person who believes that when we die, we cease to exist. Ecclesiastes 3:11 teaches us that we have a sense that there is something beyond us. Part of the verse says,

[He has also set eternity in their heart. Ecclesiastes 3:11 \(NASB\)](#)

We do not understand how our universe was created from nothing. We do not know how an eternal God had a beginning. But it is obvious the universe exists, and our consciences have a sense there is God. Our consciences also tell us there is life after death. Those who stop and seriously think about eternity understand that if they make the wrong decision the consequences will be bad for them. Our study is about a man who believed life existed after death. He called it eternal life. This study comes from Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-27, and Luke 18:18-27.

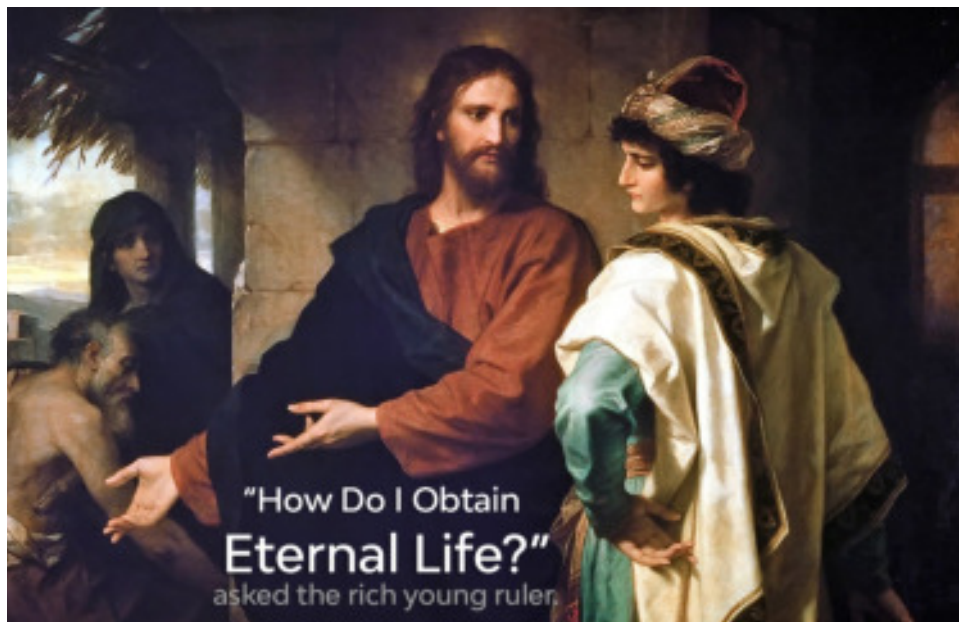
**Rich Young Ruler Ran To Jesus.** In Mark 10:1 we are told that Jesus has been in the region of Judea on the east side of the Jordan River. While Jesus was there, He taught about divorce and marriage on one occasion. On another occasion He blessed some children. Now in Mark 10:17 we are told Jesus had started out on a journey. We will discover later in verse 46 that He is resuming His trip toward Jerusalem. He will arrive in Jericho.

In verse 17 we are told that as He starts to resume His trip, a man ran up to Him. Here is the verse,

[As He was](#)

[setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him . . . Mark 10:17a \(NASB\)](#)

Matthew 19:22 reveals this man was young. The Greek word for “young” refers to a man past puberty but not married. Luke 18:18 adds that he was a ruler of Israel, and all three gospels tell us he was extremely rich (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23). Both Matthew and Mark say He owned much property. As a result, we often hear people say that he was a rich, young ruler. This helps us understand



this man. Imagine being rich, young, a ruler of Israel and most likely single. This is truly amazing. How did he become rich at such a young age? Was his father very wealthy and an influential ruler in Israel? Maybe he acquired his wealth and position very quickly due to wisdom and God's gift (1 Samuel 2:8).

The young man asked Jesus a question about eternal life.

**... and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Mark 10:17b (NASB)**

This young man called Jesus a "good" teacher. The Greek word for "good" is *agathos*. This Greek word has the sense of moral goodness. It is doubtful that the young man actually understood how "good" Jesus was. It is doubtful that he knew Jesus was God. Most likely he had heard Jesus teach and had seen His miracles and wonders. There is every reason to believe he was extremely impressed with Jesus' teaching. Earlier, Luke 4:22 records that the people praised Jesus' teaching. John 7:46 informs us that when some officers of the temple had been sent to seize Jesus, they returned and said,

**Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks. John 7:46 (NASB)**

So, we can imagine this young man was overwhelmed with Jesus. Then he asked, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

The term "eternal life" means more than life that is eternal. It refers to a quality of life. Matthew 25:46 teaches us that everyone will live forever. They will experience eternal punishment or eternal life. Eternal life refers to life in heaven with God. It is also called the eternal state. It is life without sin, sadness, sickness, suffering, and death. There will not be any evil people in heaven. Everyone will be saints, that is, holy people. Romans 14:17 says the kingdom of heaven or heaven will be a place of righteousness, peace, and joy. Revelation 21:4 says,

**And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things**

**have passed away. Revelation 21:4 (NASB)**

In John 17:3, Jesus will teach us that eternal life is to know the only true God.

While we do not know what this young man knew about eternal life, it is obvious that he wanted to live with God forever.

**Why Do You Call Me Good?** Then the gospel of Luke gives us Jesus' reply. It says,

**And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." Luke 18:19 (NASB)**

The other two gospels communicate the same idea. When Jesus asked, "Why do you call Me good?" the Greek He used for good was *agathos*. There are two Greek words that can be translated as good. This word refers to moral goodness. The rich, young ruler considered Jesus to be morally good. While this was a great compliment, it will become obvious that he did not understand he was speaking to the Holy One, to God Himself in human flesh.

Then Jesus said, "No one is good except God alone." This is serious information. Research has been conducted that reveals that eighty-four percent of Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of these people believe they are going to heaven because they are good people. They believe any negative behaviors were justified by their circumstances. Usually, they find fault with and blame other people, reasoning they needed to protect themselves. As a result, they are comfortable with themselves. So they think they are going to heaven. I have met only one person who said he was going to hell. That statement was surprising and amazing. He was unusual in his response. Recently, I saw a motorcyclist who was wearing a jacket with the words "Sacred Skulls" on the back of his jacket. The skulls on his jacket were demonic in design. That was truly an oxymoron. How could such skulls be sacred? That illustrates our understanding of what is good.

Romans 3:23 tells us,

1. Paradise Polled: Americans and the Afterlife." Roper Center.

... for all have sinned . . . Romans 3:23 (NASB)

That includes you and me! You have sinned. I have sinned. Now before we say that we are not so bad, read these words,

**ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY  
HAVE BECOME USELESS;  
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,  
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”**  
Romans 3:12 (NASB)

We are told that no one does good, not even one! The message is a serious one! The message is that we must do something about our sinfulness or we are not going to heaven. But the verse also says we cannot do anything that helps us to earn heaven. Giving money, doing social work, or attending church will not help us go to heaven. It will soon become obvious that this young man did not know

what to do in order to go to heaven either.

**All These I Have Kept.** Notice Jesus' next statement,

**You know the commandments, “DO NOT COMMIT  
ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT  
STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,  
HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.”** Luke  
18:20 (NASB)

Jesus quoted the seventh commandment, then the sixth, eighth, ninth, tenth, and finally, the fifth commandments in the Ten Commandments. He skipped the commandments related to God. Jesus quoted all of the commandments related

to our treatment of people. It may be that Jesus emphasized the commandments that would be easier for him to understand how he had violated them. Matthew 19:19 adds that Jesus also included the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Then verse 21 says the rich, young ruler told Jesus that he had kept all of these commands.

**And he said, “All these things I have kept from my  
youth.”** Luke 18:21 (NASB)

His reply is extremely surprising! “All these things I have kept.” The Greek word for “kept” is *phyllasso* and it has the meaning of “continuing to keep.” He told Jesus he had faithfully

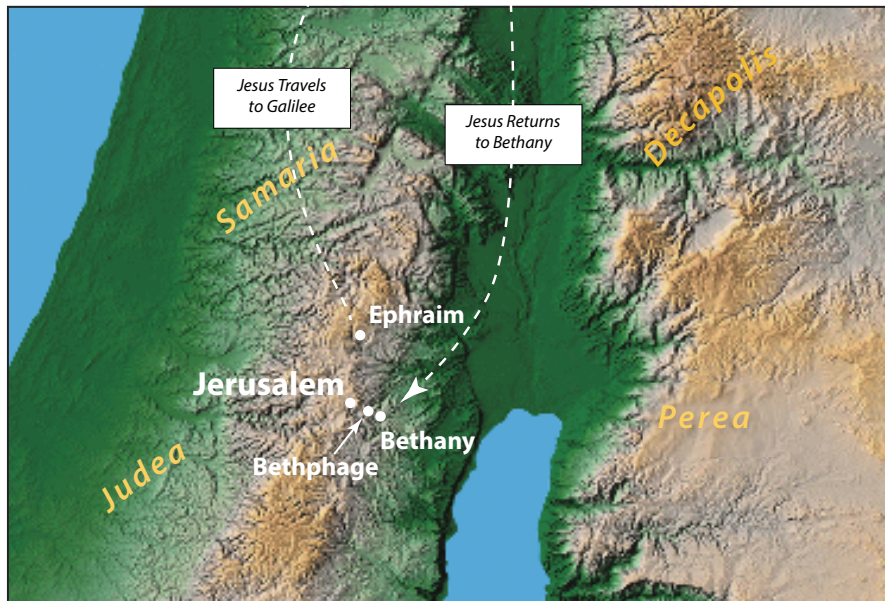
obeyed those ten commandments from his youth. He was not very honest or he was self-deceived. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that we deceive ourselves. It says,

**The heart is  
more deceitful  
than all else and  
is desperately**

**sick; who can understand it?** Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB)

God helps us understand that we do not see ourselves correctly. We think more highly of ourselves than we should. We are not as nice and kind as we think.

Most likely this young ruler evaluated himself by his external behavior. He did not understand that God sees the sin in our hearts. The Pharisees ignored the sins of the heart as evidenced in some of Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount. For example, Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-22 that if a person is angry in their heart, it is like the actual act of murder. Jesus also said that if a man lusts after a woman, he has committed adultery in his heart. While this young ruler



# Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Perea - Winter of A.D. 33

	Ten Lepers Healed	Second Coming Prophesied	Parables On Prayer	Jesus On Divorce	Children In The Kingdom	Riches and The Kingdom	Owner & Laborers	3rd Prophecy Death & Resurrection	Pride of Disciples	Blind Man Healed
Matthew				19:1-12	19:13-15	19:16-30	20:1-16	20:17-19	20:20-28	20:29-34
Mark				10:1-12	10:13-16	10:17-31		10:32-34	10:35-45	10:46-52
Luke	17:11-19	17:20-37	18:1-14		18:15-17	18:18-30		18:31-34		18:35-43
John										

may have obeyed these five commands, it is clear that he ignored the sins of his heart. It is not possible for a young man to have never been angry at someone, never have lusted after a woman, or not have ever been rebellious at least momentarily.

**Sell All That You Possess.** What followed next must have surprised the young man. Jesus was not impressed with his claim that he had been keeping these five commandments throughout his life. Instead, Jesus told him that he lacked one thing.

When Jesus heard this, He said to him, “One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Luke 18:22 (NASB)

Mark 10:21 adds that Jesus loved this young man. That gives us insight into Jesus’ heart. Even though this young man did not believe in Him, Jesus loved him. This helps us understand that Jesus’ reply was a loving and caring reply. He was not attempting to hurt the young man. He wanted to help him.

Jesus’ statement is significant. He told the young man

that he lacked one thing. The young man probably did not think he lacked anything in this life, except for eternal life. Now he wanted to make sure that he acquired eternal life too! So, Jesus masterfully told the young man that he lacked one thing. Then He told him that he had to do three things to obtain it. That is, these three things will result in the thing that was missing in his life.

*Sell All You Possess.* First, the young man had to give up all of his money. It appears that this young, rich ruler had a god called wealth. Maybe he was not aware that he had violated the first of the Ten Commandments. The first commandment is,

You shall have no other gods before Me. Exodus 20:3 (NASB)

If so, he was not unique. People deceive themselves. They do not always realize they worship gods and goddesses. Unfortunately, many think that the first commandment warns us to not worship idols, pictures, and artifacts. But Colossians 3:5 tells us that we can have gods and goddesses called immoral-

ity, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed. He had a god called greed. Greed was the emotion, the internal drive to acquire more money. Greed was his root problem. Some men and women have a god or goddess called passion (*pathos*) or evil desire (*epithymia*). It is common for these gods or goddesses of strong emotions to constantly pursue sexual feelings because they feel good. So, people will fuel these passions with pornography, sex novels, and a variety of other stimulating activities. These passions can also result in gluttony and anger. This man's god was a greed for wealth.

He may have violated the second commandment too! It says,

**You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. Exodus 20:4 (NASB)**

Is it possible that he worshiped his coins? At the time of Christ, paper money did not exist, but coins did. Were they one of his idols? Since Scripture does not tell us, we can only speculate.

So, Jesus told the young man to sell all that he had because he owned much property. That is the message of Mark 10:22.

**But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. Mark 10:22 (NASB)**

*Distribute It To The Poor.* Second, after selling his property, Jesus told the young man to give his money away. He might have still loved his money if it was in the bank or in coins buried in his backyard. That was common in those days. Then he would have been rid of his god. Imagine selling all your property and giving it away. Then Jesus promised him treasure in heaven. Jesus tried to redirect his attention to what he could have gained and not to be focused on what he would lose.

*Come, Follow Me.* Third, the young man was to follow Christ. Jesus promised him treasure in heaven if he would sell everything in this world, give it away, and follow Him. This gives us a valuable lesson. We often focus on the fact that

Jesus told this man to give up all his money. But we need to notice that the acts of selling, distributing his money, and following Jesus would have given the man what he lacked. What did he lack? He lacked salvation! He was clinging to the world and not to Christ.

In Matthew 13 Jesus gave the disciples some parables about the kingdom of heaven. He said the kingdom of heaven was like hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44) and a costly pearl (Matthew 13:45-46). The message of the two parables is that a person must be willing to give up everything in this life in order to gain heaven. The truth is that only these individuals will follow Christ. This gives us an important principle. The sign that someone truly believes in Christ is that they will give up the gods and goddesses in their lives and follow Christ. Giving up these things does not cause someone to become a Christian. But a true believer in Christ is willing to give up everything to follow Him!!

**Sad and Grieving.** Luke 18:23 reveals that this young man immediately became very sad when he heard Jesus' statement because he was extremely rich.

**But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Luke 18:23 (NASB)**

As William Hendrickson said in his commentary on Luke, "He was bitterly disappointed."<sup>2</sup> He was a very unhappy man. This confirms that he greatly loved his wealth. The Greek implies that he was exceedingly wealthy. Today, he would be called a multimillionaire or a billionaire. He did not have any earthly needs that he could not meet. He loved his wealth more than the poor. But his real problem was that he loved his wealth more than Jesus. He knew that he could not buy his way into heaven. So, he had a choice. He chose his wealth and not Jesus. What a foolish decision. May I ask, "What have you chosen? What inner desires do you satisfy?"

James 1:14-15 reminds us that our passions, emotions, or feelings tempt us to make wrong choices.

**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and**

<sup>2</sup> Hendrickson, William. Luke. New Testament Commentary. Baker Book House, 1978, p. 834.

enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. James 1:14-15 (NASB)

When we yield to our feelings, we sin. The glutton yields to his emotion to eat more. The adulterer yields to his temptation to have sex with someone who is not their spouse. The proud and the insecure individuals yield to the love of self. I am sure you can think of some emotion that controls you.

Jesus knew that the man would never truly seek heaven until he was serious enough to give up his life for Him. His passion for wealth had to be replaced by a passion for Jesus! This teaches everyone who claims to be a Christian an important lesson. You are not loving Jesus with all your heart, all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength if you are not willing to give up whatever you seriously desire and follow Christ. Are you like this rich, young, ruler? In a few more studies, Matthew 19:27 will tell us that Peter announced to Jesus that they had left everything for Him. The New Testament reveals they did do that, including giving up their lives. How about you? Jesus has told us the choice is between your god or goddess and Himself.

**How Hard It Is For The Wealthy.** Then, Jesus surprises us when He looked at this rich man and gave him a warning! Did Jesus look directly into his eyes or just in his direction? The implication seems to be that Jesus stared at him as He spoke. Here are verses 24-25.

And Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For 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.” Luke 18:24-25 (NASB)

When this already sad, rich man heard these words, he was further discouraged. Imagine hearing that you had made the wrong choice, that it would be difficult for you with all your wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Your wealth was not a benefit, but a hindrance to being saved. The Greek word that Jesus used for “hard” is *dyskolos*. It is better translated as “difficult.” That is, it is difficult for the super-wealthy to enter

heaven. Why? They love their wealth and do not sense a need to follow Christ. From their perspective, they do not have any need that they cannot satisfy alone.

Jesus’ illustration was designed to teach the rich young ruler that it is impossible for rich people to enter heaven. All of their wealth is of no greater worth than a beggar’s money. They cannot buy paradise. Money is their god. Then Matthew 19:22 and Mark 10:22 add,

... he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22 (NASB)

**Who Can Be Saved?** After the rich man left, Mark 10:23-27 gives more information about what happened next than Matthew or Luke. Since all Scripture is inspired by God, we must integrate all the information the gospels provide to understand what happened. So, if we read Mark 10:23 we learn that Jesus then spoke to the disciples after the young rich man left. Mark 10:23 says,

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” Mark 10:23 (NASB)

The Greek word for “looking around” is *periblepo*. It literally means “to look around.” That means that Jesus turned His head. The disciples were either behind Jesus or off to His side. Most likely they did not hear His words clearly. Therefore, Mark tells us that Jesus then spoke to the disciples and rephrased some of the comments that He had made to the rich man.

Mark 10:24-25 gives us more information about what happened next than Luke 18:24-25. Therefore, we will read Mark 10:24-25. It tells us what passed between Jesus and the disciples.

The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.” Mark 10:24-25 (NASB)

First, we are told the disciples were amazed at Jesus' words. Why were the disciples amazed? Before we discover the reason, we should notice that Jesus told them it is hard to enter the kingdom of God. How sad it is when some people present the gospel and make it sound so simple. We hear some say that all one needs to do is "believe" some facts about Jesus. They have forgotten that James 2:19 says the demons believe facts about Jesus too, and they shudder! Here Jesus said it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. The Greek word for "hard" has the idea of very difficult. So, Jesus has used an illustration to give us a principle. The idea is easy to understand. It is not hard; it is impossible for a camel to slip through the eye of a needle. It is not difficult for a rich man to enter heaven; it is impossible!

There have been many opinions about the camel and the needle. It appears that some people want to soften Jesus' statement. For example, some have proposed that the needle Jesus referred to was a small gate. So, it would have been just more difficult, but not impossible for a camel to go through the "needle." They claim that the needle referred to a gate that was difficult to pass through. But there is no historical or archaeological evidence that such a small gate existed in Jerusalem, contrary to the claims of some.

A second view is that the Greek word for "camel" came from an Aramaic word that means "thick rope." They say the Greek word for camel should be *kamilon*, which means "thick rope." But the Greek word in this passage is *kamelon*. It means camel. This view lacks evidence.

Both proposals minimize Jesus' statement. They want us to believe it is not impossible for a rich man to go to heaven. They want to make it easier for a rich man to enter heaven. But it is important for us to remember that Jesus has already said it is *hard* to enter heaven. Jesus is not trying to say that it is less hard. Jesus' illustration teaches that it is impossible for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God.

Verse 26 also helps us understand this point. We are told the disciples were astonished.

**They were even more astonished and said to Him,  
"Then who can be saved?" Mark 10:26 (NASB)**

Not only were they astonished, but they asked, "Then who can be saved?" They understood Jesus' illustration. Why did the disciples think that no one could be saved if it is difficult for the rich to be saved? The answer is found in ancient Jewish writings, such as Tobit 12:8-9.

Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold: for alms doth deliver from death, and shall purge all sins. Those that exercise alms and righteousness shall be filled with life.<sup>3</sup>

Compare this to Sirach 3:30,

Water will quench a flaming fire; and alms maketh an atonement for sins.<sup>4</sup>

This helps us understand why the disciples were amazed twice. The Jews believed that if anyone could enter the kingdom of God, the rich would be the first to enter.

**With God All Things Are Possible.** Jesus' point is that,

**With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God. Mark 10:27 (NASB)**

Men cannot save themselves. Notice that Jesus did not say it was hard or difficult. He now makes His point clearer. It is not possible for someone to save one's self. The rich cannot give enough money to the poor to earn entrance into heaven. It is not possible. Neither money, nor good works can save a person.

Jesus' message to the rich young ruler was that keeping the Ten Commandments would *not* save him. His money would not save him. He needed to give up everything and follow God—Christ. Those who are going to heaven will want to do that. That is also the message of Matthew 7:21-23. The young man could not earn his way into heaven by his good deeds

3. Tobit 12:8-9

4. Sirach 3:30

or with his wealth. In fact, his wealth was a hindrance. He would never yield himself completely to God. Wealth hinders our submission to God. We like our wealth and what it does for us!

**Conclusion.** Jesus' message is that people cannot save themselves! But God can save people. Only God can save the wealthy. Only God can save the middle class. Only God can save the poor. Only God can save anyone!! As John 3:3 states, people must be born from above.

People have such a distorted view of themselves. They think they are good and that God values their worthless "good deeds," if we want to call them "good deeds." We deceive ourselves. Jeremiah 17:9 says,

**The heart is more deceitful than all else  
And is desperately sick;  
Who can understand it?  
Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB)**

We are desperately sick. The rich man with all of his polish and sparkle was desperately sick from God's perspective. Only God is God. The rich man was not. That was Jesus' message. The rich man demonstrated that he was not good when he refused to submit to God, Who is truly good. God deserves our submission! God deserves our worship! God is holy!!!!

Yet, because we are sinners we do not truly seek God. The only reason anyone becomes a believer or a Christian is that the Holy Spirit has drawn them to Christ. John 6:44 tells us that Jesus said this,

**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me  
draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.  
John 6:44 (NASB)**

Jesus says that God the Father draws people to Christ. God the Father uses the Holy Spirit to draw people to Himself. John 6:37 quotes Christ,

**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the  
one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**

**John 6:37 (NASB)**

Here Christ reveals that when the Father draws someone to Christ, they come to Christ. There are no exceptions. Then verse 65 adds, that the rich, the middle class, and the poor cannot come to Christ unless God the Father wants them to come to Christ.

**And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you,  
that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted  
him from the Father." John 6:65 (NASB)**

Why must God help us come to Christ? The answer is that as sinners we do not seek after God. All our deeds are evil (Romans 3:10-12). So, God must help us. That is why Jesus said,

**With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all  
things are possible with God. Mark 10:27 (NASB)**

By believing that Christ died on the cross in order to forgive our sins, and was resurrected, we can have our sins forgiven. True belief is always accompanied by repentance and a desire for God to transform one's life. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says that then we become as righteous as Christ.

**He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,  
so that we might become the righteousness of God in  
Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)**

As a result, we gain eternal life. When we die we will go to heaven. I urge you to believe in Christ, if you have not already. Do not be like the rich, young ruler. Trust Christ to save you. The proof you have is your sorrow over your sins and a willingness to give up everything for God. You must believe that "all things are possible with God."