Let’s have a look on a passage found in Matthew 19:16-22 It is the story of the rich young ruler.

16Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

17So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

18He said to Him, “Which ones?”

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 *your* mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

20The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

21Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

22But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Many times we read the story of the rich young ruler and we ask ourselves why is that Jesus answered Him in such a way? Why is that it looked so hard to him? To many others He made a different kind of invitation or just told them to follow Him, but it looks like He made it so hard to this man, by telling him to sell everything, to give it to the poor and follow Him. Something that even if we were in his place, would esteem as something hard to do. But before focusing on this part we also need to see other factors that might have caused Jesus to answer him in this way. One of them is that the young rich ruler seemed as a man that already considered himself of being good enough for the kingdom. He knew, he was lacking something and wasn’t probably quite sure if he had eternal life and that’s why asked Jesus how to obtain it. If we try different ways or we try to earn it by ourselves, as how probably he was trying up to that point of his life, we will never be really sure we have it. At the answer of Jesus to observe the commandments, he quickly said that he already kept everything from his youth. We can stop by for a moment and meditate on this. No one really is able to observe everything specially before knowing Jesus and receiving the salvation as in the case of this man. I am speaking about any common person. Yes, there are people who consider themselves good, but no one really is, as the Bible tells us in Romans 3:10.

10As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;

What actually prevents people from knowing God and repenting is this, that they already esteem themselves of being good persons. Jesus instead came for those who were sick, because they are in a need of a doctor, not those who are well (Matthew 9:12, 13). Those who are fine, I mean those who think already of being righteous, don’t need it. It will be difficult for them to acknowledge their need. The young rich ruler was one of them. The other thing is that he asked Jesus what needs to be done to obtain an eternal life. We know that there is nothing that can be done for it. The Bible tells it. Yes, there are things that can be done after someone receives the salvation, but speaking about the salvation itself, there is only one way, and this is through the sacrifice Jesus did on the cross.

8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, 9not of works, lest anyone should boast.  Ephesians 2:8, 9

Here in this verse we see that it says expressively that we are saved by grace and not by works, not by anything we can do. It is a work of God. He does it, we just need to ask for it with faith.

So, why is that Jesus answered in such a way to the rich young ruler, telling him to sell everything and give it to the poor? Because He answered him accordingly to the way the ruler approached Him. He asked Him what good thing can he do, so that he may have eternal life (Matthew 19:16). “You want me to tell you what needs to be done? I'll tell you then and you’ll see how hard it is if you want to earn your salvation.” We can think that this was the way in which Jesus answered him.

We know anyway, that it is impossible to be done in this way, through doing something. Sometimes people are focusing on what Christians are doing, on their lifestyle, on how to live the Christianity and not on the way they received it. They might be amazed by the way how some Christians treat the others or how good were they and how they handle some situations and the way they forgive. They don’t realize that all of this points to Christ. That if they are such persons today, it is because of Jesus, it is because of the salvation they have received and its redemptive work. This is what also Christians should do. They need to live in such a way, to be able to awake the interest in other people, to provoke them to wonder and thirst for this way of life. That’s why they are the salt of the earth. What is very important also, is when they are approached or asked for their style of life, to point at Jesus, who is the fountain of this salvation.

So we see that the young ruler wanted to receive this in a different way, by works, by something that he can do, as he probably was used to achieve whatever he aimed to in life and also considered himself good enough for it. Jesus instead, knowing his heart, told him something that was really going to be impossible and difficult for him to do.

He actually wanted to bring him into a condition in which he can say: “I can’t. This is hard”. And so it happened, but instead of going away, he was supposed to go to Jesus and repent saying that he can’t do it by himself. Jesus wanted to make him see his incapability, as he already thought that he can do everything and that he was a good person. He had probably to stay and say: Jesus, I can’t do it by myself. The answer of Jesus was according to the question he received, was according to how the ruler approached him. You are asking what you can do, well, I’ll tell you what you can do. I’ll tell you how believers could live – denying themselves, their free time, living in famine, in persecution, and you’ll see how hard it is. You’ll see that no one is capable to live in this way by his own strength. The people who live in this way, understand what salvation is, because they have it and they didn’t just seek for it for their own benefit, as how probably the rich young ruler was doing. We all can have this attitude. Not everybody who believes in Jesus, lives obviously always in such a denial in this way. Some people might live in an abundance and riches, but still not holding unto them. Paul said that he has learned to live in any situation through Christ who strengthens him. Both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need (Philippians 4:12, 13).

The young ruler probably didn’t do everything else right as he thought, but Jesus told him something that He knew he wasn’t able to do. He also told him something that is actually the fruit and the result the gospel brings sometimes in someone’s life. There are people who indeed do that for the gospel, or are disposed to do other things like suffering persecution or being missionaries in some other far away place or even being disposed to love their enemies. This is not equal for everyone however, it depends on each one’s calling. These are things in general, that if you ask anyone, almost everyone will tell that it is something hard to do. This is the difference between those who have really received and believed in the gospel and those who are just hearers. The true gospel will always make you to give up or do something that you wouldn’t have done in other circumstances. This is obviously produced by the love of God in people’s lives. This is not a way to be saved, but the result of having received the gospel which is done by faith and repentance. Something that the rich young ruler had missed as he was trying to achieve it by doing something good. He was doing it the other way around, with the good deeds first and receiving after the salvation by that, which is not the right order.

By this I mean that God starts requiring the most of the deeds, after receiving the salvation. I am saying the most of the them, and this is a huge part, and we are referring to the good deeds including helping someone, or spreading the gospel, because what He could obviously require in a way from us before we receive the salvation, is to pray to Him, to read His word, to ask Him for repentance and to come into our life, which I don’t know if we can add to the other group of deeds. This is also something that should accompany us all along our Christian life. **We mustn’t do anything else or take a further step if we are not certain and sure that we have this**. The most important however is that all of this should be done by faith.

Why is then that Jesus gave him such an answer? Because in this way he could realize that it is hard to do something to be saved. He was not going to think anymore that he can do something. He could have probably come back and say: Jesus, I am not capable, forgive me. I am not as good as I thought.

To receive Jesus is a freedom. He uplifts our burdens. He gives us a new life. It is not hard to bear what He tells us to do when we are with Him. Christianity is not all about doing things or observing commandments. The main core of Christianity is knowing Jesus. Then someone will start also observing His word and giving up things.

The main message of this story is not giving up our money or other things. The main message is to know that we can not do it by ourselves. That for us is impossible, but for God – possible. We cannot be good and godly persons by ourselves. That’s why at the end of the story the disciples asked: “Who then can be saved?” and Jesus told them that “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”, meaning that this is possible with God alone. The question is to have an eternal life and life in abundance. Can we imagine how good is that?

Many times we see the obstacles of the things that we need to give up or leave if we want to live in a Christian way, but this is the other way around. First we need to know Jesus. To believe in Him and to repent, to acknowledge that we are not good by ourselves. The rest will come later. Many persons just see the things they need to give up and that discourages them and don’t want to approach Christianity for this reason. But let’s try first to know Jesus, to know Him really in our hearts, to read His word. Let’s first try this and decide later to do it or not, to follow Him or not. He is first demanding our heart and faith.

This is the reason why He answered in such a way to the young rich ruler. To make him understand that he is not just as he though and that he cannot do anything by himself. By doing this, He gave him actually a chance to return later on with a different attitude and idea of himself, and in this way to approach the situation in a different way. He was probably going to come more humble and to repent. In one of the gospels says that Jesus loved him and said him what he needed to do.

21Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” Mark 10:21

Jesus tells us things that might break us sometimes, because He loves us and wants to bring us to the right path. There wasn’t any other way for that man to receive an eternal life, if he first didn’t realize that he cannot achieve it by something he can do. Not even the answer “it is by faith” was probably going to make any effect on him, but rather something that was going to show him how incapable is he.

What He tells us is for our good. He doesn’t want to reject us. He is giving us opportunity. We just need to examine ourselves on the light of what He is telling us and not to get discouraged, if what we hear seems tough sometimes. It is for our good. We just need to know that what is impossible with men, is possible with God.