

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

Mark 10: 17-31

The main point of this story is that we should let God be in control of every aspect of our lives. This story is about where our hearts are and true deep repentance. What are we trusting in more than God? Maybe you think that just not doing a few bad things is good enough. Or maybe you have a deep problem that you are either not aware of or you don't want to admit.

Let's think about these points:

1. At least the man fell to his knees before Jesus. He was probably a member of some ruling court (Luke 18: 18). So, this shows that he at least had some humility. This is a good start because Jesus said in Matthew 5: 3, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"
2. The man flatters Jesus by calling him good, but Jesus does not accept his flattery. Maybe he thought that if he said something nice to Jesus he would get a nice simple response. Instead of flattering the man back Jesus told him the truth. The question for us is, "Do we want to know the truth or do we just want to be told nice things that make us feel good?"
3. The man's question has a good part and a bad part. It is okay to seek to know how to gain eternal life, but it is very important to also know that one cannot be good enough to **earn** eternal life.
4. Jesus would not accept the man calling him good, not because he was not good, but because he wanted the young ruler to think deeply about true goodness. He wanted him to realize that the only goodness that can save is perfect goodness like God's perfect goodness. So, you may say you are a good person but do you really know what you are saying when you say this? The ultimate standard for goodness is the goodness of God and this is perfect goodness. No one can have this goodness unless God gives it to him.
5. When Jesus mentions the commandments he seems to be testing the young man to see just how deep he is thinking. When the man answers he says he has kept all the commandments Jesus mentions since he was a boy. But I wonder if he was thinking deeply about these commandments or just thinking on the surface and in the strictest terms? Maybe he had not literally murdered anyone, but had he ever hated someone in his heart enough to kill them? Maybe he had not committed adultery, but had he ever lusted after another woman in his heart? Jesus said in Matthew 5: 28 that if you lust after someone like this, you have already committed adultery in your heart. Maybe he had never actually stolen anything, but had he coveted the possessions of another? By the way, the 10th commandment was against covetousness. Maybe he had never actually given false testimony against anyone else, but had he ever said things that left the wrong impression about another person? Maybe he had never literally defrauded another person, but had bragged on the donkey he was selling a little too much and maybe didn't tell the buyer all the problems the donkey had. Maybe he had never publically dishonored his father and mother, but maybe he had spoken to them disrespectfully many times in private. One thing that Jesus always did was challenge people to think below the surface and look deep into their hearts.
6. Jesus was not just trying to humiliate this young man because the text says, "*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*" Here we see a little deeper what true love is all about. True love does not always tell the other person what they would like to hear. True love goes deeper than this and tells the other person what they need to hear.
7. When Jesus told him what he lacked it was not another commandment to keep. It was to give up the one thing that he was holding onto that was preventing him from following Jesus – his possessions. What one thing are you holding onto that is preventing you from following Jesus? Is it your possessions like this man? Is it your tradition? Is it your belief in evolution? Is it your desire to be in control of your own life? Is it your self-satisfaction in your own goodness. Some people actually even think they are almost as good as God himself.

Jesus is saying, "Do not let anything interfere with realizing your own sinfulness and your need to follow him. Realize that the greatest investment you can make is when you invest in spiritual things." Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

8. The young man chose to walk away from the truth because he was holding on too tight to his wealth. He went away sad. Jesus was not so afraid of making people sad that he compromised the truth. He told people the truth and if they walked away, they walked away. Notice that Jesus did not run after him and soften his message. He let the young man go. We don't promise to always teach you something that will make you happy but we do promise to do our best to tell you the truth in love.

9. When Jesus talks about the impossibility of a rich person entering the kingdom of God he is saying it is impossible for a rich man to enter into heaven by his own power or through his own goodness. Then, of course, the obvious question is, "Who then can be saved?" This is what the apostles of Jesus asked and it was a good question. But Jesus' answer is also a good answer because God can empower us to do what we simply cannot do on our own. We cannot save ourselves but when we give ourselves to Jesus in simple faith, repentance, and baptism God saves us by his grace. He makes us good before God even though we still make mistakes because of our sin and our own weaknesses.

10. Peter says in essence that they (the apostles) are not like this rich young man because they had left everything for Jesus. Jesus answers him and says that they will be rewarded for their obedience. But when Jesus says, "*But many who are first will be last, and the last first*" he is warning them that even they could fall. Yes, they have left everything to follow him, but if they begin to have too much pride in this and not be constantly vigilant, they could become those who are of the last. Remember that later Peter denied Jesus and Judas betrayed him. Initially following Jesus is not enough. We must remain faithful to the end. This calls for patient endurance, vigilance, and a deep awareness of how weak we are and how much we desperately need Jesus.

11. Jesus then boldly heads out for Jerusalem knowing what awaits him. How could he have such boldness and confidence in the face of his upcoming death? Others who followed were astonished and afraid. After the initial excitement of beginning to follow Jesus comes the shocking news of what this really means. This is the third time that Jesus predicts his death. Following Jesus is not taking the easy way. It is not always avoiding hurt, pain, suffering and persecution. It is not always protecting yourself. It is not always looking out for number one as many people say. It is not even always avoiding the possibility of physical violence. It is not always defending your rights. The most important question we need to ask ourselves in following Jesus is, "What is the right thing to do that is best for the kingdom of God?"

What is the one thing that is standing in the way of your following Jesus?

It is easy if you just think that Jesus was a good man and was not God. But if you understand the truth that he has been given all authority in heaven and earth, can give life to the dead and that rejection of him is a matter of life and death, it is no longer easy to reject him. Neither is it easy to follow him because if you do choose to follow him, he demands your total allegiance. He said that if anyone would follow him, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow him. He must make a daily decision to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. Following Jesus is risky but it is also rewarding.