

The King And The Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16-26

Introduction

In chapter 19 Jesus devotes a great deal of time to the subject of discipleship. You might think what does marriage and divorce and children have to do with discipleship? Discipleship begins in the home. Discipleship requires dependence, humility, love and obedience. The qualities and characteristics found in children are much more difficult to find among the rich, the independent, the self-sufficient, the selfish, the disobedient.

We have learned that Jesus cares about your marriage, Jesus cares about your children and of course Jesus cares about you.

In the passage Jesus is approached by a rich young ruler. A series of questions are asked and answered. In those questions and in those answers we are given further insight into the subjects of discipleship and salvation. Not all encounters with Jesus have happy endings. This is one of those rare occasions where a person meets Jesus; questions Jesus and is worse off for the experience! Can you imagine having the opportunity to meet Jesus—ask these very questions and walk away sorrowful, unrepentant, unregenerate, unfulfilled?

The first mistake lies in this man's failure to discern the true identity of Jesus. The second mistake lies in his failure to discern the destiny of Jesus. His third mistake was his inability to truly evaluate his own spiritual condition. This young man knew something was wrong. Something was wrong deep in his heart. Something that money, prestige, power and fame could not fulfill. Yet he was either unwilling or unable to come to grips with his great sin and therefore his need for an even greater Savior from sin. This of course leads to his most tragic mistake. Jesus points to this young man the way to eternal life and the young man rejects the Savior's final words; "come and follow Me" (v.21).

A Mistaken Case Of Identity (vv.16-17)

Matthew 19:16–26 (NKJV) 16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

The event must have had a profound impact on the disciples because the incident is recorded here and in Mark and Luke. In Luke 18:18 we learn "Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, Good Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

It would seem there were Jews who thought that some singular act might secure salvation. The man is asking the right question. And Jesus will give the right answer.

17 So 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."

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Jesus confronts him on the meaning of just one word—"good". Some might think; "Why nit-pick over the significance of one simple word? Why does the precise meaning of words matter? How can the meaning of one word alter your whole perception of some important doctrine or teaching or reality? Here Jesus makes a startling statement; "Either I am a man like any other man, bad at best a sinner like the rest—or I am God. Jesus is either a bad man or a good God. Jesus is not denying His divinity. **He is calling into question the young man's theology and His view of Jesus and His view of God.**

Who is Jesus? Certainly the man respects Jesus. He calls Him "Good Teacher". He bows. Mark mentions "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, **knelt** before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life" (10:17).

He is polite. He asks a sincere question. He must have believed Jesus had some authority and insight into the question being asked. I believe he comes to Jesus like so many—for insight and information. For direction and guidance. "If I perform some good work, build some school, contribute some cash, establish some foundation or far reaching charity, alleviate suffering, God will like me. God will approve of me. God will accept me.

In the conversation Jesus immediately draws attention to Himself. Why do you call Me good? What do you really know about Me? What do you really know about goodness?

The man's first mistake; **he is confused about the identity of Jesus.** Jesus is dropping a massive hint. Tell me what you know about Jesus. Tell me what you think about Jesus. So many people fall short in their understanding of His identity. Jesus said 'only God is good.' How do we respond when people tell us that Jesus was 'a good man' possibly the 'best man' the 'ideal man'. The first step in a right relationship with God is a proper understanding of who Jesus is! Richard Halverson said that Jesus Christ is God's everything for man's total need. What a great statement. Unless you understand who Jesus is—how can you come to Him for cleansing, forgiveness and eternal life?

Remember the question? "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Jesus says; "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."
In the Old Testament we are told that those who keep the commandments will live.

A Mistaken View Of Eternity (vv.18-21)

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.' "

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Jesus quotes the commands that God required for people to get along with one another. Jesus refers the man back to the law.

Jesus does this so that the man will see his own sinful condition. The young man is aware that something's wrong. Something's not quite right. Something is keeping the man from a right relationship with God or assurance from God or the assurance that He has eternal life.

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

The young man kept the rules. He observed the law. Almost certainly his good deeds outweighed his bad deeds. Loving your neighbor meant helping your neighbor. His life was marked by goodness and decency.

Paul kept the rules. Paul wrote that he was 'blameless' or faultless in keeping the externals of the law. Paul observed the rules. This is what he thought until he realized the full implications of what the law had to say about covetousness (**the lust or the desire for more**). The Bible teaches that if you are guilty of breaking any single law you are guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10).

What does the rich young ruler have?

We need not dwell on the obvious; wealth, youth, power and influence. What about the not so obvious?

Clearly he has a winning personality. He even has a measure of humility.

He seems to possess sincerity and courtesy and passion.

The young man has courage—evidenced by coming to Jesus and asking the question! The young man has a clean record; "All these things I have kept from my youth".

The young man has a noble goal; "what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

What does he still need? What does he still lack?

In part—a sense of His own sin. This rich, self-sufficient, powerful, influential person does not have a sense of his own wrong doing—and therefore wrong being. **Only a sinner needs a Savior.**

The man's response is remarkable. "All these things I have kept from my youth."

Never lied. Never cheated. Never stole. Never misrepresented another's testimony. Always obeyed mother and father. No sexual impropriety. Loved his neighbor.

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Is that true? Jesus does not challenge his response—but rather pushes his response to the next level.

21 Jesus 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.”

The word translated ‘perfect’ does not mean without fault or sinless. It means complete or fulfilled or genuinely pleasing to God. In one sense the man is being asked to provide proof of his claim—of keeping the commandments.

In the passage Jesus answers the rich young ruler’s question; what do I lack? Why make the request to liquidate his earthly assets—give to the poor—and then generate heavenly assets?

And then the invitation; “. . . come, follow Me.”

In Mark’s gospel (10:21) we have this added insight; “Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”

Jesus loved him. “I know. Jesus loves everyone.” True. But the expression is highly unusual. Peter in telling the story to Mark must have remembered the tenderness, the affection, the love in both His voice and His eyes and His tone and His demeanor. There must have been so much that was ‘lovable’ about this guy. **Jesus knew the outcome. Jesus knew the end result. Jesus knew he would reject the offer. Jesus knew he would forsake the greatest adventure of all.**

Why care? Why love him? Why make the emotional effort? Don’t do it Jesus. He’s not going to come. He’s going to reject you.

The love of Jesus is real, genuine. Genuine and sincere love is willing to give tough advice. Jesus tells the truth. The love of Jesus is not superficial or insincere.

Wait—I thought you could come as you are! You can. But you must be willing to admit your sin. Repent. One Bible writer (Cole?) says, “Not even for one whom he loved, and whose discipleship he desired, would the Lord lower the demands of discipleship to make an easy convert”. Jesus says “I love you.” You say, “Let me keep what I have.” Jesus says, “I desire that you follow Me.” You say—“I can’t go where you are going.” I want to keep what I have. Jesus will not let this man keep what he has—because there is something on the throne of his life other than Jesus.

You might think; “yes Jesus demanded the rich young ruler give up his riches because they were keeping him from following Jesus! But that’s not true about me! My riches aren’t keeping me from Christ. I have no riches.” What do you have? Jesus demanded the man give it up. What do you have? Your sin? What do you have? False gods? What do you have? Power, position,

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possessions, passions? Jesus is not interested in sharing the throne of your heart. He wants to sit on that throne.

For a split second the universe comes to a crashing halt for this young man. Time stands still. All eyes and ears are upon him! See him on the road. See him at the feet of Jesus. His heart his pounding and his mouth is dry! He knows Jesus is no ordinary Rabbi. He has made extraordinary claims and is now making extraordinary demands. There is something pleading in his heart. There is something insisting that Jesus is the missing puzzle piece—Jesus is what is missing in his incomplete life. The adventure of a lifetime lay before him. The opportunity to forever change your life, change the world, change the future. Jesus loved him. Jesus issued a personal invitation to “come” and “follow Me”.

“What should I do?” His head is screaming and his heart is torn. What should I do? Follow Him. What about the money? Follow Him. What about the title? Follow Him. What about my family. Follow Him. What about my future? Follow Him. “Oh, my—there is so much money—lands—inheritance—all that my family and their family has worked for—surrender? Give it up? Throw it away? I don’t know. I’m not sure. I need time.

A Mistaken View Of Possessions (v.22)

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

Sorrows take many forms.

There are many ways to soothe sorrows.
Possessions were a hindrance, a distraction.

The text tells us; “. . .he had great possessions”.

All that wealth must have sat on his soul like a weight, a ton of gold that could not be moved by human effort. **In reality the young man had no wealth whatsoever. It had him. It owned him. It controlled him.** His heart was deceived, trapped, encumbered. The man was overcome with sorrow. For him it was possessions and money. And all that possession and money promises.

What hinders you?

Possessions? Fears? Anxieties? Religious background? Failure? What crowds your heart? What possesses your soul? Who sits on the throne of your heart. What hinders you? Despair? Unbelief? You believe nothing? You trust no one? **The request Jesus makes brings the truth to light! The young man loved his riches. The young man relied on his possessions! He**

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loved all that they could buy. He wanted God's blessing! But he didn't want God. He wanted eternal life! But at what cost? The cost is always the same. Everything.

Jesus wants everything.

Are you willing to give it up?

Are you willing to accept the invitation of Jesus to “come and follow Me”?

A Mistaken View Of Possibility (vv.23-26)

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The emphasis of Jesus is not temporary prosperity, wealth or accumulating assets.

24 And again I say to you, 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.”

We might call this the parable of the impossible.

We have all heard countless sermons on the subject of wealth. One of the themes of our passage is the unpleasant and unwelcome subject of the disadvantages of wealth.

Paul wrote Timothy (1 Timothy 6:9-10); *“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.”* The very next words—in context reads “. . .for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

The disciples were themselves blown away by the teaching of Jesus. They had entertained the false theology that riches were a sign of God's favor and blessing. Jesus says wealth can be a handicap. Jesus suggests the privileged are underprivileged and the underprivileged are privileged!

One sixth of the New Testament is devoted to warnings about riches and wealth!

We are familiar with the parable of the rich man and Lazarus! Wealth does not always help one go to heaven! Does the Bible teach about health and wealth and even list a health and wealth church? The surprising answer is yes! In Revelation 3:17—Jesus says; “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked?

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26But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Conclusion

G. Campbell Morgan wrote; “One thing thou lackest. Lack it no longer.”

Do you lack Jesus? Do you lack His favor? Do you lack His approval?

The rich young ruler by rejecting forgiveness accepted condemnation. By rejecting Jesus he accepted wrath and judgment. By grasping this life—he let go—of eternal life. What happened to the rich young ruler? Did he come back? Was he given another chance? We are not told. If he continued to trust riches and reject real relationship with God in Christ—then he never found what he was looking for. Jesus is asked by the people “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28-29).