

The Rich Young Ruler

by

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Matt. 19:16-22

Matt. 19:16-22, “*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*”

The story of this young man is one of the most interesting, and yet, one of the most tragic to be found in the New Testament.

He came to Jesus expectantly and left Him sorrowfully.

This is one of the most disappointing stories found in the New Testament.

No story of any prospective disciple of Jesus begins more hopefully than this one. One moment we see him coming to Jesus; the next moment he has gone away, holding on to his great wealth with a broken heart.

Let us consider the following four things about this story:

- Who this young man was.
- His hopeful question.
- Jesus startling reply.
- His sad departure.

Who this young man was

From the world’s point of view.

He was young.

Matt. 19:20, “*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*”

Youth is something that this old world values very highly. This young man possessed youth; he stood at the morning of life.

This is the best time in life to give one's self to Christ; before a lot of bad habits settle in.

Eccl. 12:1, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;*"

Timothy started at a young age working with the Apostle Paul.

1 Tim. 4:12, "*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*"

He was a ruler.

Luke 18:18, "*And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*"

He had a place, prestige, and power; hence, he was a man of influence.

He had wealth.

- Matt. 19:22, "*But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*"
- Luke 18:23, "*And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.*"

It goes without question that this old world considers wealth to be very worthwhile. Money is condensed energy; money talks.

However, he was not rich toward God.

Luke 12:21, "*So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*"

From heaven's standpoint.

He was an earnest man. He came running to Jesus.

Mark 10:17, "*And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*"

He came with great enthusiasm to Jesus.

He was a humble man. He kneeled before Jesus (see verse above). He came in the spirit of humility; he had no false pride.

In kneeling, he recognized Jesus as being divine and entitled to worship.

Others had come to Jesus that their bodies might be healed, but here is one pleading for his soul.

He was a respectful man.

He addressed Jesus as “Good Master”.

Matt. 19:16, “*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*”

“Master” was a title which the Jews were in habit of applying to their religious teachers.

Thus, he came in the spirit of a disciple to learn wisdom from the “Great Teacher.”

He was an honorable man.

Matt. 19:20, “*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*”

Hence, he was a man with a clean record.

“*What lack I yet?*”

If you judge him by the world, he had youth, influence, and wealth.

If you look at him from heaven’s viewpoint, he had earnestness, humility, respectfulness, and morality.

Hence, he would stand high in the world and morally good in the view of heaven.

Most people would say that he is good enough for heaven.

But morality alone is not sufficient in God’s sight.

- John 14:6, “*Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*”
- Acts 4:12, “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*”
- Rom. 6:17, “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*”

There are a lot of good, moral people in the world that have never obeyed Christ; have never obeyed the doctrine of salvation that He authored.

The young man's hopeful question (really two questions)

Matt. 19:16, “*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”*”

He had doubtlessly been taught by Jewish teachers that men are to be saved by doing something.

- Micah 6:6-7, “*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*”
- Matt. 19:20, “*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”*

But one thing may mean everything. Like a key to an automobile; a main spring to a watch; or a rudder to a ship.

He did not lack youth, influence, wealth, or earnestness, humility, respectfulness, or morality.

But he had missed eternal life — that life which comes only from knowing God through Jesus Christ.

John 17:3, “*And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*”

Jesus' startling reply (a two-fold demand).

Matt. 19:21, “*Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*”

“If thou wilt be perfect” (“complete”).

“If you will supply that which is lacking and make your obedience complete.”

“Go and sell that thou hast” (consecrate your all to God).

Why? Jesus saw that he made riches his idol. Jesus wanted him to dethrone the idol in his heart.

“And come and follow me.”

This was essential. What Jesus was after was not the selling and giving.

He was after the young man to follow and help him, just as he had requested other disciples.

Matt. 4:19-22, “*And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*”

The young man’s sad departure

Matt. 19:22, “*But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*”

How unlike the way he came to Jesus.

He who came “*running and kneeling*” with such high expectations, now walks away slowly with a sad countenance.

Thus, he failed to become a disciple of Christ.

But why did he go away?

Not because Jesus had been unkind to him.

Mark 10:22, “*And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*”

But because “*he had great possessions*”.

He tried to hold onto the treasures of both worlds.

Matt. 6:24, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*”

He loved his wealth and position more than his own soul.

Matt. 16:26, “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*”

The deceitfulness of riches choked out the word of Jesus from his heart, and so blinded his judgment that he could not obey.

Conclusion

Note the words of Jesus to his disciples immediately following this incident:

Matt. 19:23-24, “*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go*

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Then the disciples were *“were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?”* (Matt. 19:25).

No one can be saved who refuses to meet the conditions of salvation.

Anyone who will, can be saved.

Rev. 22:17, *“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

If you ask, as did this young man, *“What ... shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”*

Today, the Lord commands you to:

Believe of the Lord Jesus Christ. Heb. 11:6, *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”*

Repent of your sins.

- Luke 13:3, *“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”*
- Acts 17:30, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”*

Confess the name of Jesus.

- Matt. 10:32, *“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”*
- Acts 8:37, *“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*
- Rom. 10:9-10, *“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

Be baptized for the remission of sins.

- Matt. 28:19, *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”*

- Acts 2:38, *“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”*
- Acts 22:16, *“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”*

You now face the same Christ that this rich young ruler faced. He had his chance and threw it away; you still have yours. The Christ that yearned for him, now yearns for you. The Christ that invited him to serve him, now invites you. What will your answer be?

