

The Rich Young Ruler

16And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Last week we looked at the parents bringing their children to Jesus, and the disciples response.

Lose the kids. They bring nothing to our cause. They are powerless. The disciples saw them as those of little value, and it is no accident that the very next story in all 3 synoptic gospels is this story of a man who in our world, and our way of judging worth, had great value.

Maybe we can be like Hollywood and add a scenario to set our stage. Set the scene, so to speak. It isn't in the Bible but it may have happened.

The usual crowd surrounds Jesus, listening and watching. There's no one left to heal because He's eradicated disease and demons from Judea but the parents are bringing their babies for a touch, a blessing.

Some distance away, the disciples see a man in fine clothing. They recognize him. He has some celebrity and everyone knows who he is. He's fine and tall and handsome. He and Saul of Tarsus were classmates at the feet of Gamaliel, and he has risen to a position of leadership in their nation like a rising star.

The disciples have a network and the first one who sees this man coming quickly alerts the other 11. Clear a path for this man. You people with kids, sorry, you'll have to give way. No more kids. Someone of value to us is coming this way. Everybody else, stand down.

In my hollywood version, Ben Affleck plays the part of this man. He is a man of fine intellect, good looks, wealth, every natural endowment. He's got everything.

Like Saul of tarsus, he's on the fast track at a very young age to be a chief in Israel. Saul is doing the same thing, but lacking the natural handsomeness, he's doing it with incredible intensity of mind. For this fellow, it's easy. Like King Saul in the old testament, he stands head and shoulders above other men.

And above and beyond the natural endowments is a fine temperament. He is moral. Gracious. Humble, in his way. He honors the law of God among his companions. He's a natural, and people just seem to respond to him. We've all met folks like this. We thought there were only 4 aces in the deck, but this fellow seems to have been dealt 5. Ever wish you were him?

That's our opening scene, at least the way I envision it.

Commentators call him the "**Rich Young Ruler**" and that is a composite of descriptors from all three synoptic writers.

Matthew, in his breathtaking brevity which sometimes leaves us wondering simply says; *16And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"*

Matthew's narrative is always and only about one thing. Jesus as King. And in true Matthew form, the details that Mark and Luke set the stage with, do not matter to him. He's simply, *someone*

Mark says; *17As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do*

to inherit eternal life?”

and Luke says; *18A ruler questioned Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*

Mark tells us, he bowed down before Jesus. And eastern tradition tells us that this was a custom in this land. An honor. But . . . it was from a lessor to a greater. Rich men didn't bow down before homeless peasants. That makes his act of reverence, remarkable. Noteworthy.

Here's a man who has everything, and the common folks in the crowd have cleared a path for him to get to Jesus, and with uncommon graciousness and humility he bows down. The greater to the lessor, or so it seemed to the onlooking world.

He asks a question that is uncommon in it's depth. It raises all kinds of questions about him. *“Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?”*

Again, we have some slight differences between how Matthew saw this and how Mark and Luke saw it.

All of the accounts have the word "good". And Jesus in His initial response is going to play off of that word. Good?

Mark and Luke say "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit. Matthew says' Teacher, what good thing shall I do to obtain.

More words. In Matthew's account he wants to possess eternal life. In Mark and Lukes account a different word is used. He wants to be allotted eternal life.

He wants life beyond this life. He's a jew, a believer in the old testament teachings that after this life, there is more. Reward for some, punishment for others. He believes it and he wants it. The good. The great. The reward. He wants to possess it now, but by his own words, it must be allotted to him by a greater authority.

He also believes that however this is allotted by God is somehow attached to goodness now. He's got everything else already. What good thing can I do that would sew this up for me? I want to own eternal life. I want to possess it now. I want it in my bank account along with all my other possessions.

He's seen the miracles. He's heard the teaching. We have to give him the benefit of the doubt that he believed this Jesus must have some obvious connections with God. And just to make it more real, he's just witnessed Jesus put him in the green waiting room while He finishes blessing every last kid.

I think his honor and his respect and belief are real. Jesus has connections. What's it gonna cost? I'd like to add eternal life. I'd like to own a reward in heaven. I'd like to add that to my wealth. Let me know how to do that. Tell me what it's going to cost me. 20%? 40%? Give me a number.

Jesus stops him dead in his tracks. He says' Whoa whoa whoa. Let's talk about this word **good** that you're throwing around. You say I'm *good*. *Good* teacher. You say what *good* thing can you do. You've got us both as equals. We're both good. I teach good. You're going to do something good. Stop right there.

Jesus is going to chop this tree down first. We are NOT both somehow equally purveyors of good. So in vs.; *17And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good;*

IF we're going to have this discussion, it isn't going to be as equals. Both of us good. Let's define good. *Why are you asking Me about what is good?* as if we were on an equal playing field. Good teacher, what good thing? First we'll nip that in the bud. *There is only One who is good*

He's a smart fellow. *There is only One who is good* and it ain't you. Your goodness is infinitesimal. It doesn't count for anything. It's a drop in the bucket. A speck of dust on the scales. No weight. Compared to that One. So there's that.

The German theologians of the mid 19th century would go here and make their argument that Jesus never claimed to be God. See, right here he says there's only One who is good. Excluding himself along with this man.

Is that what He said? Where did He say that? I'll tell you what He DID say. Recorded for us in the inerrant scriptures that those theologians did not believe in. He said I and the Father . . are one.

There is only One who is good . . . I and the Father are . . . One. I don't think the Rich Young Ruler caught on. This was a veiled claim to Deity. There are only 2 options here. Jesus is not good, like the ruler said, or He's God.

So Jesus levels the playing field first. We are NOT equals. We are NOT both good men having a discussion about good things. That's the groundwork for the answer. Only one person meets the standard of "good". God. He settles that, and then He says;

but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

WHAT???!! Jesus, Jesus, Jesus . . . don't you know you can't work your way to heaven?? Somebody sign Jesus up for a remedial class in Evangelism Explosion. That's the WRONG! answer!!

but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments . . If you want eternal life, be good. You're into good. Be good! Keep the commandments.

Remember now, Jesus has laid the groundwork and it revolves around this word good. And He's established that there is good, and there is Good. with a capitol G. There is God, good. And there is man's good. And there is a great chasm in between.

Give this guy some credit. He can quote the old testament. He knows Isaiah 64 by heart. He hasn't advanced to be among the rulers of Israel by nothing.

*5You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness,
Who remembers You in Your ways.
Behold, You were angry, for we sinned,
We continued in them a long time;
And shall we be saved?*

*6For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

He's known Jeremiah 13:23 from memory since he was a child. 23"*Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.*

I don't think the commentators and preachers of our day give this man the credit he's due. I think him and Jesus are connecting perfectly.

First, let's define good. God is good. Now let's set the standard for eternity. Go do good. At a level that is equal to God. You want to have eternal life. You like to talk about good. Go be good! Like God.

This isn't new for Jesus. Perhaps this ruler was in attendance at the sermon on the mount. When Jesus said, "*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*" That's the standard for eternal life.

The discussion is about the idea of Good. We're talking about good. Jesus says, if you want into heaven, *keep the commandments*, be good.

And to his credit, this remarkable young man says; can we get some definition. Some clarity. Can we zero in here. How good?

18Then he said to Him, "Which ones?"

I think I sense some exasperation here. It wasn't the answer the ruler was looking for either. I think he was expecting something along the

lines of "sell off 25% of your possessions and take the money to the temple and present it there to the priests, and God will take out His pen and write in your name in His book."

Not some indefinable go be good. How do we quantify that? How do I know when I've been good enough that I now possess the inheritance? Your answer lacks the necessary boundaries that I need for my question. I want to know that eternal life is bought. Paid for. In the purse. And I don't want to go to God's standard of good. I can't do that.

So he's grabbing at straws here trying to keep the discussion going. He needs to draw out an answer that is quantifiable. How much is this going to cost me? Be good is too unquantifiable. Help me out here.
18Then he said to Him, "Which ones?"

And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Don't murder. Don't cheat on your wife. Don't steal. Don't lie. Honor your mom and pop. Love your neighbor.

All of the 2nd tier commandments. Notice what's in and what's out. Jesus picks all the easy ones. These are what good people do. We love that word commit. It sort of excludes the internals. Like what Jesus defined in the sermon on the mount. Just look on a woman with lust and it's adultery.

Here, Jesus keeps things possible. For men. Good men.

That last one is iffy. Love your neighbor as yourself. That's impossible except on a *do not commit* level. I don't murder my neighbor. I don't steal his wife. I don't steal his stuff. I don't tell a bunch of lies about him. So on that level, I love him.

It's a good list. A purposeful one on Jesus part. Notice the one that

Jesus leaves out. Well, He leaves out a bunch, really. The first level or tier of commandments that require every breath I take in this life to somehow reflect the Glory of my Creator. Those are impossible. Jesus kindly doesn't go there.

But of the second level ones, there is one commandment that goes beyond the physical level of commit or don't commit. Jesus leaves that one out too. He's making it particularly easy for this good man. This good wealthy man. He doesn't include in His short list; *You shall not covet.*

That's inside our brain. That's inside us. In our heart. That's the one that Paul says annihilated him. Paul says; Romans 7
7What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET." 8But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

It's notable that Jesus left that one off the list. Just the surface do's and don't's. Nothing that probes the soul.

20The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

Ahhh!! Now Jesus has him right where he wants him.

Stop for a minute and think of the one thousand ways we would screw this same situation up!

A rock star from the community shows up in our church. He stays after the service. He waits until everybody is gone. He says, Pastor, what must I do to own eternal life. Possess eternal life. Only happens on TV, right?

Maybe we take him to the philipian jailer in Acts 16 *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

Or maybe we go the Romans road and end up in Romans 10 *that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;*

This man believed in Jesus. Jesus was standing right in front of Him. He even believed at a level that he thought Jesus perhaps knew the answer to his question.

We'd have this guy praying and signing a card so fast we'd get to lunch on time. We'd fast track him and he'd be an elder in no time.

Jesus doesn't do that. And in our own defence, we aren't God. We can't see inside men's hearts. Jesus can, and He perfectly steers this man exactly where He wants him.

Jesus says. Be good. How good? Pretty good. Moralism.

Jesus has this man engaged at a level we'd never get to. Not on our own in any case. Maybe the Holy Spirit could get us there.

You know, we sit and watch American Idol. What would it be like to have it all. Good looks. Talent. A fine honorable temperament. Morality. Wealth. Esteem. Career is way beyond your peers. A young ruler who has been dealt a hand that is far beyond any hand we ever got.

He's got it all! What would that be like? Well, he's going to tell us.

20The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

His answer just makes my eyes tear up. I have everything, and I'm empty.

Only Jesus could have gotten him here. I've got it all, and I'm empty, Jesus.

We're pulling for this guy. I mean who doesn't want Ben Affleck in the

kingdom! Right? We're at the point in the movie, we want this guy to win! Come on. We want the outcome. So does Jesus; Mark tells us, right at this point; *21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said*

vs. 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete,

Stop right there. The ruler who has everything acknowledges that, he doesn't in fact have everything. *what am I still lacking.* I'm incomplete. And Jesus says, *If you wish to be complete* teleios

We get our word telescope from the root of this greek word. A telescope like the one the old sea captain has in the movie, and he pulls the sections out, perhaps 4 nested sections and they all hit their stops and the telescope is complete.

It means finished. Complete. Mature. Perfect. This man has everything, but he's still empty. Jesus is going to address his question. How to be full.

go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

OOPS! Another wrong answer for Jesus. He really needs to take an evangelism refresher. Go do stuff to be saved.

There's a whole branch of what calls itself the church that believes Paul's gospel is different than Jesus' gospel. Ultra dispensationalists who will tell you what Paul said is different from what Jesus says. And Paul supercedes Jesus.

Once again, Jesus is God. We are not. Jesus can look right inside a man's soul, we cannot.

One of the best books in my library is an old volume by G. Campbell Morgan, actually it's my mom's copy I think, and it's called *The Great Physician*.

Campbell Morgan (he would be a natural enemy of our clan MacDonald

on scottish turf, but all that is behind us now) visits all of these encounters of Jesus with different individuals and develops how Jesus tailors the ensuing discussion to match perfectly with who each individual is!

Jesus doesn't tell the widow with 2 mites in the treasury in the temple; *go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.* She doesn't have any possessions. Definitely not her hang up. He doesn't tell the 10 leper's *go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.* He doesn't tell Zaccheus who was also rich, up in the tree *go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.* The physicians prescriptions are tailor made. Different for each person, each case.

In this case, however, this young man comes and says, what's it going to cost me to have what I lack? And Jesus says, what you lack, is Me, and it will cost you everything to gain **ME!**

Talk about going for the jugular.

Was it too much to ask? Too high a price? Unrealistic?

Can you imagine, the eyes of Jesus, full of love for you, trained upon you, and the cost to have **that** is, all of your idols.

You know, most of us go into this deal, thin, dumb, and happy. Clueless. And we find out later, this is going to be more costly than I thought. He gets out the chain saw and starts trimming. Ouch. But every dead branch He lops off makes us happier. Healthier. More complete, not less.

This guy asked for the price up front. And Jesus gave it to him, both barrels. Was that unreasonable?

Again, nothing new here. Matthew 13. We were there a few months back;

44“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Jesus doesn't come without cost. I don't care what the radio preachers have been telling you. He will cost you every idol. Period.

22But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

What a bummer! We were pulling for this guy. Pay the price. Come on in. We want you. Jesus wants you! But he got out his abacus and calculated the price and said, sorrowfully, I might add, he was sad, but he got to the sum and; it's too much. I can't pay that much.

Not a happy ending. Not the one we wanted for him.

Is the cost unreasonable? Listen to Jeremiah 33:

1Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying, 2“Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it, the LORD is His name, 3‘Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’ 4“For thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah which are broken down to make a defense against the siege ramps and against the sword, 5‘While they are coming to fight with the Chaldeans and to fill them with the corpses of men whom I have slain in My anger and in My wrath, and I have hidden My face from this city because of all their wickedness: 6 ‘Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them; and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth. 7‘I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first. 8‘I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which

they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me. 9‘It will be to Me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.’

That's just the blessing on earth. That's just the promise for Jerusalem. So much blessing, so much good that the nations will tremble at the blessings. That's not even heaven. That's here. In heaven, Paul says there are no words to describe the riches of the blessings.

1Cor. 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. The wealth of the riches cannot be described.

Jesus price tag was not unreasonable. In fact numbers haven't been invented that could quantify the value that this man could have bought with his pittance of earthly wealth.

I want to pose several questions for us as we close:

Is Jesus gospel different from Paul's? I alluded earlier to Saul of Tarsus. I said this young ruler and Saul were on the same path. The same fast track to being a ruler in Israel.

Paul, we know, didn't get the same cards dealt that this man did. He wasn't pretty. So he made up for it by his passion and his intellect. Paul was a driven man. He had much in common with this wealthy ruler. But a day came when the **same** price was required of him. Listen to him tell it to king Agrippa. Acts 26;

9“So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10“And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11“And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and

being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

12“While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14“And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15“And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’

*19“So, King Agrippa, I did **not** prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,*

Two men. They could have been classmates. They were both on the fast track. Both got a summons from Jesus. One took the summons, the other did not.

Was it worth it? Was it worth the price paid. To put it like Martin Luther did in his hymn; to ***Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;***

That's what Paul paid. Goods, gone. Kindred, gone. Status, gone. Position in this world, gone. Ultimately, it cost him, and indeed, all of the apostles save John, his life.

Is the price too much? Listen again for a moment to what Paul said to the church at Philippi, and therefore, also, to us directly, and then we'll be done. Listen to all the parallels with the young ruler; Ppn. 3:

4although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

7But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Is Pauls gospel different? Absolutely not.

One final question. Is our gospel different. Is Jesus still requiring ALL of our individual, and therefore different for each person, idols today, in order to have Him?

You wonder why the guy sitting in front or behind you seems to have a vibrant personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, and you do not?

Which gospel did you respond to?