

The Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30

Matthew 19:16-30

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to him, “Which ones?” And 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 mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁰ The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” ²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” ²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰ And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is ^[a] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ^[b] “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” ²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or

mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Luke 18:18-30

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” ²¹ And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” ²⁸ And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹ And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers^[a] or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

3 Lessons:

We cannot keep all of the commandments

- 1. The rich young ruler comes to Jesus and says to Him that he has kept all of the commandments from His youth. Is this possible or correct? How does Matthew 5:20-48 help us to understand the extent of the law?**

The law that was given in Moses time was to show the true nature of the heart. We cannot keep the law in deeds, let alone in the inner parts of our hearts. Jesus explains in Matthew 5 that the deeds the we do that break the law are simply a manifestation of our heart that wants to break the law. This sin is so much a part of us, that we cannot overcome it on our own.

Matthew 5:20-48 - ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Anger

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Lust

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart

Divorce

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Oaths

³³ “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God

³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

Retaliation

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Love Your Enemies

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Be Perfect

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- 2. The Rich Young Ruler truly believes he is a “good person” He looks at Jesus as a teacher, and calls him “good” also. Jesus points out the difference between God and man in Matthew 19:17. God is “good” and man is inherently evil. Does this belief that man is “good” skew the rulers view of God? Is this belief prevalent today?**

Man is evil not good. This is a fundamental concept that is so often overlooked and disbelieved in society today. Many people believe, like the rich ruler, that they are “good” at their core, and God will not sentence a “good” person to Hell. The ruler came to Jesus and wanted to know what else he had to do. He considered himself good before God, and thought that maybe he was just missing one thing. He wanted to know what that one more thing was that he needed to do so that he could have eternal life.

Jesus’ response reveals that the ruler’s problem was not just his deeds, but his heart. All of our sin problem stems from the heart

Jeremiah 17:9 - ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

The ruler wanted eternal life, but really he wanted it on his own terms. Because the ruler believed that he was inherently good, he thought that he must do certain things to earn the favor of God. This is not true. Because man is inherently evil, there is nothing we can do to earn the favor of God.

Example – Think of a two-year-old. We don’t have to teach them to be bad, we have to teach them to be good.

Today, many people believe like the rich young ruler that they too are good. Many people refuse to accept Christ because they feel that they are “good” and God will not sentence a good person to Hell. This belief is a lie and is responsible for the delusion of many souls.

3. **How does this belief that man is “good” enable the ruler’s reliance on his accomplishments and his deeds rather than seeing the gift of forgiveness and repentance?**

Scripture is pretty clear that we all have sinned. The following verses (and many others) tell us that the nature of man is evil and full of sin.

Psalms 143:1-2 - Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my pleas for mercy! In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness! ² Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

Romans 7:17-18 - ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

Isaiah 53:6 - All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Romans 3:23 - ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The belief that man is essentially good is dangerous because it denies the root of sin, and is the foundation of a belief that we can achieve salvation by works. If I believe that I am a sinner at the core (like the Bible teaches) then even if I live a life of perfect deeds (which is impossible), then I will still be a sinner condemned to hell.

Our riches can blind us to God and become an idol

- 4. The Ruler asked Jesus for what He must “do” for eternal life. Jesus responded listing all of the commandments that deal with actions. He believed he kept all of them. Finally, Jesus told him to sell his possessions and follow him. Is this a necessary step for salvation? How is this instruction to the Ruler also a caution for us today?**

Jesus was addressing this man’s heart issue. The ruler had many possessions, and worshiped them (i.e. he loved his possessions more than he loved God). The ruler placed his hope for eternal life in things he could buy or do. His view that he was essentially good promoted his conviction that he could do something to enter Heaven. This is a false view and Jesus overthrows this in His response.

Jesus tells him to sell all he has because He realizes that the man loved his possessions more than God. The ruler went away sad because he learned that He could not let go of the money and possessions that he worshiped.

Matthew 10:37-39 - ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Luke 14:26-27 & 33 - ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

What would you not let go of if God asked you to?

- house, job, family, reputation?

Below is a chart of the commandments that Jesus asked the ruler to keep alongside the 10 commandments from Exodus 20

Exodus 20	Matthew 19
No other Gods	
No carved images	
Not take God's name in Vain	
Remember the Sabbath	
Honor Father & Mother	Honor Father & Mother
Not Murder	Not Murder
Not commit Adultery	Not commit Adultery
Not Steal	Not Steal
Not bear false witness	Not bear false witness
Not covet	
Leviticus 19:17-18	
Not hate your neighbor, love as self	Love you neighbor as yourself

Salvation is impossible with man, but possible only through a work of the spirit

- 5. In Jesus time, a rich man was considered to have received God’s favor or blessing. The statement that Jesus makes in vs. 23 would seem to contradict this. The disciples were confused and could not understand the meaning. Is verse 23 really telling us that wealth on earth will prohibit a person from entering Heaven?**

No, but it is dangerous. Jesus refers to wealth many time in his ministry, and in most cases mentions it as a caution. He warns that money is a hindrance to a right view of God and man, and that if we love money more than God we will not be able to follow Christ.

Luke 14:33 - ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

1 Timothy 6:10 - For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Matthew 6 tells us that if we love money (or keep our focus on it) then we will contaminate our whole body (everything we do) but if we focus on Christ then our motives will be pure- love God and serve Him, and we will have treasure in Heaven.

Matthew 6:19-24 - ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^[e] destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.^[f]

6. In what way is our Salvation (acceptance of Christ) impossible with Man? Do we sometimes try to persuade or convince others of the reality of Christ? Does this fly in the face of this understanding?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 19 that salvation is impossible with man. This is because we do not seek God of ourselves – we seek our own pleasure.

Romans 3:10-12 - ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Man, in his sinful state will not seek after God unless God does a work in his heart to open his eyes to see the reality of God and man’s sinful state. Until that happens we are masked in a life of pride, and self-worship. God is the one who opens our eyes that we may see the truths of Scripture.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 - ¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Salvation is not a matter of convincing somebody (on a rational level) of the truths of Scripture. It is not a product of one hearing the right sermon and responding – it is a work of God in the heart of man. God specializes in the tough cases, and promises to bring all to repentance that He has called. God is the one that bears the responsibility of opening the eyes and hearts of our loved ones to hear the message of the Gospel.

Because of this we should pray all the more that the hearts of our families and friends might be saved.

Romans 9:19-10:1 - ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’
there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel^[a] be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.” ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

10 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Paul responds to this truth with a petition to pray. Our response should be to pray for our family and friends that God would open their eyes and that they might see. Jesus promises to bring all that God has given Him to repentance – this is a great truth that we can lay hold of. He will accomplish His work in the lives of those that He calls.

John 6:37-40 - ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”