

THE RICH YOUNG RULER**MARK 10:17-31**

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February 10, 2002**

Today we will consider the story of a man who is like many people today. The man in our story is a man who aspired to live the kind of life that many of us aspire to live or our parents hope that we will end up living. MATTHEW 19:20 tells us that he was a young man, and LUKE 18:18 says that the young man was a ruler which means that he had a high position in society. And, of course, he was wealthy.

Two days from now many people around the world will be celebrating the Lunar New Year. Millions of people will proclaim the traditional New Year's greeting to one another. Translated into English, those words mean "Congratulations and be prosperous!" I used to think that such a greeting was like a joke. But, after a while, I began to realize how the greeting accurately reflects the value system of the society to which most of us belong. It is a society where prosperity is used as a standard to measure the value of human life. It is a society where children are expected to become like the man in our scripture reading, who even at a young age, held a high position and was very prosperous.

So the man we are looking at in today's scripture reading really represents people from the world to which most of us belong. And because there is so much similarity, it does us good to see how Jesus dealt with this man.

Please take another look at the story and notice, first, that it takes place right after Jesus finished teaching people about the qualifications for entering the kingdom of God. He said, if a certain person wanted to enter the kingdom of God, that person needed to become like a child. A childlike attitude, an attitude that admits it does not know but hungers to know—that's the kind of attitude God is looking for. Shortly after Jesus taught this truth, the rich young ruler ran up to Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

There is a good chance the rich young man heard what Jesus had said and seen what Jesus had done. In all likelihood, the man ran to Jesus because the things Jesus did and said had stirred some desire within his heart. He really did want to know how he could inherit eternal life. He was not just trying to test Jesus. He really wanted to know. Therefore, it seems that he was coming to Jesus with a right motive. And, that is the first positive thing I want to say about the rich young man.

And before I talk about some other positive things about this man, I think there is a lesson we might be able to learn as we consider what caused this man to come to Jesus. What can move the hearts of people who are like the man in our story? I am talking about people who are considered good and successful and prosperous. Our story seems to be telling us that even people who seem to have everything can still have a longing to come to Jesus. Success and prosperity and a record that is clean from wrongdoing as defined by the world. These things can deaden a person's sense of need for forgiveness and their sense of need for strength to overcome temptation.

Think about it. How many people you know fit are satisfied with their wealth and position in life want to seek Jesus because He can forgive them for the wrong things they have done in the past? And how many people do you know in this category want to seek Jesus because He can give them strength to live a life that is more godly than the one they are now living? Most of the people we know have gained their high status in society and their wealth through hard work. They have played by the rules. From the time of their childhood, they have been driven by their parents to do well in school and work hard to achieve. Why should they feel guilty about that?

But, there is still one thing that most of the satisfied, prosperous people who belong to our society still lack. They lack the security that comes from knowing what will happen to them after they die. I know that many people say they don't believe in a heaven or hell, but many more people still do believe in heaven or some kind of existence after death. It may not be as hard as we think to convince the satisfied man that entrance into heaven requires more than the money and position for which he has worked so hard. Deep down in the hearts of those around us, I believe there is a longing to be secure about the life which awaits us on the other side of the grave. I believe this is what moved the heart of the rich young ruler, and this is the first good thing we notice about him.

And, there are other positive things I want you to notice. MARK 10:17 says that, when the man came to Jesus, he "fell

on his knees before Him.” As we all know, Jesus did not hold any high position in society like the man in our story did. This means that the rich young ruler was also a humble man. He did not have to kneel before Jesus; and when he did, it was an act of humility.

And, the young man also had good judgment. He recognized that Jesus was good, and his judgment was correct. We have to remember that many of the rulers and religious leaders during that time saw Jesus and were not able to recognize that He was good. So credit must be given to this man for his judgment.

His motive for seeking Jesus seemed to be good. He was a humble man. And, he had good judgment. And then, there is another positive thing we need to recognize concerning this man. It is the fact that he was really a good person. In MARK 10:19, Jesus listed six commandments, all dealing with how men ought to love one another. Then, in MARK 10:20, the rich man said, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” When He heard the man say that, verse 21 says, “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” If the man had been lying, we would expect Jesus to look at the man with indignation. But, Jesus looked at him with love, and this would indicate that the man was not lying. He really was a good person.

I think that if there were ever a person who deserved to get to heaven based on merits, this man was the one: good motive, good behavior, good judgment, and a humble attitude. All these things added to his high position and his prosperity represent ideals that have been placed upon many of us sitting in this auditorium from the time of our childhood.

But, the man had a problem. His problem did not have to do with his relationship to other people. The relationship he had with other people was good. His problem had to do with his relationship with God, and Jesus knew it. Therefore, Jesus said some words to the young man that would help him notice his problem. The words are recorded in verses 18, 19, and 21. First, take a look at verse 18. In that verse Jesus said, “**Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.**”

I believe there are only two ways to interpret what Jesus said. One way is to say that Jesus was admitting that He was not God. It would be to interpret Jesus as saying, “No one is good except for God, so you shouldn’t call me good, because I am not God.” This is one way that people have tried to interpret what Jesus was saying.

The other way to interpret verse 18 is to say Jesus was trying to make the young man realize the fact that He was God. It would be to interpret Jesus as saying, “Why do you call me good? No one is good, except for God. Who do you really think I am? If you really believe I am good, then you must believe I am God.”

So which interpretation is correct? Did Jesus mean that He was not God? If so, then He meant that He was not good. Did He mean that He was good? If so, then He meant that He was God. These are the two possibilities that exist for us to consider.

In my mind, there is no doubt that Jesus said these words in order to make the rich young man realize who He was; namely, the only true God who made heaven and earth. Throughout His ministry, Jesus claimed to be without sin; and on many occasions, he claimed to be equal with God. These claims are especially noticeable in the Gospel of John. JOHN 5:18 says that the Jews were trying to kill Jesus, because He was calling God His Father and making Himself equal to God. In JOHN 8:29, Jesus talked about His heavenly Father and said, “**I always do what pleases Him.**” Jesus claimed to be without sin and He claimed to be God.

In MARK 10:18, Jesus was not trying to deny that he was God. To do that would be to deny what He had been claiming to be true throughout His ministry. What Jesus was trying to do was to make the rich young ruler notice who He was. This was the first thing Jesus did to make the young man recognize his problem.

The second thing Jesus did to make the young man recognize his problem was to ask him if he knew the Ten Commandments, and then quote the last six commandments. When the Ten Commandments were first written, they were written on two stone tablets. Recorded on the first stone tablet were four commandments. These four commandments recorded what man’s relationship to God should be. Or we could say they told people how to love God. The second stone tablet contained six commandments. These six commandments declared how people should treat one another, or we could say they told people how to love one another. When Jesus quoted the last six commandments, he knew the rich young ruler had done well in keeping them. He did not quote the first four commandments, because He knew the man was not obeying them with his whole heart.

With His look of love, Jesus acknowledged the man was keeping the last six commandments. But when Jesus said, “**One thing you lack, go sell everything you have and give to the poor,**” He was acknowledging the fact that this man had failed to keep

the first four commandments. His relationship with God was not right.

And, how was the man violating the first four commandments? The first commandment tells us that there is only one God, and we must worship and serve Him only. We must not allow anything to replace God in our lives. The second commandment forbids us from depending on carved images to worship God. Anything that is placed between the soul of a man and God is an idol, and it must be swept away. The following two commandments which tell us not to use God's name in vain and to take time worship God on a weekly basis are impossible to keep if you don't get the first two right.

When Jesus was talking to the rich young man, He recognized the fact that he had done well in keeping the last six commandments, but he told him he lacked one thing. The thing he lacked was his obedience to the first two commandments. Something had come between him and his God, and he needed to get rid of it. That something was his own wealth. His wealth had become his idol, and Jesus told him to get rid of it. If he could get rid of this idol, then he could have treasure in heaven.

And then, notice what Jesus said right after he told the rich young man to get rid of his riches. At the end of verse 21 Jesus said, "**Then come, follow me.**" It's as if Jesus had said to the man, "You still must do one thing to enter into God's kingdom. You must get rid of your idol of wealth, and then you must replace it with Me." If Jesus were not God, then He was telling the man to replace one idol with another. So now we see why it was so important for the man to understand who Jesus was. Jesus was telling the man to get rid of the thing that had become his idol and replace it with Himself.

That was the moment of opportunity for the rich young man. If he had decided at that moment to obey the words of Jesus, he would have found the strength to be set free from the idol that kept him in bondage. But, verse 22 tell us that "the man's face fell, and he went away sad." What Jesus was asking him to do seemed too hard. His wealth was too great, and to get rid of it would require more will power and emotional strength than he possessed.

Jesus knew how hard it would be for this man to get rid of his wealth. In verse 25 Jesus said, "**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.**" By saying that, Jesus was really saying it is impossible for a rich man to rid himself of his idol so that he can enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed to hear this. If it is impossible for a rich man to get rid of his idol so that he can enter into the kingdom of heaven, then is it possible for any person to get rid of his idol so that he can go to heaven? The disciples asked Jesus, "Who then can be saved?"

Please notice how Jesus answered this question in verse 27. He said, "**With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.**" Yes, it is impossible for a man to get rid of an idol in his own strength. No man has enough will power and emotional strength to get rid of the thing that has either replaced God or come between him and his God. It is only after a man enters into fellowship with God that he can find the strength he needs to get rid of his idols. God does not remove our idols for us; rather, He gives us the grace and strength to remove the idols ourselves. The main point that Jesus is trying to emphasize is not that God is able to do impossible things. That goes without question. The main point is that man is able to do impossible things with God. A man with God can do the impossible thing.

Jesus stood before the rich young man and asked him to do the impossible thing, but He did not ask him to do it alone. He said, "**come and follow me.**" It's as if Jesus had said, "Be with Me. Come with Me, and with Me you will find the strength you need to get rid of your idol."

We don't get rid of our idols just by temporarily removing them for us. A rich man cannot get rid of his idol just by selling his things off. There has to be a change of heart and mind for people to really change their living habits. I may be able to convince a certain person to sell his material possessions and donate the money to the church, but only God can cause that person to slow down his frantic pace of life so that he will have the time and energy to worship and serve God the way he should. Just because a certain person gives a lot of money to a church does not mean wealth is no longer that person's idol. Many people still have wealth as their idol; but they do not feel bad, because they give lots of money to the church. But, God wants our devotion more than He wants our money.

In the same way He stood before the rich young man, Jesus stands before all of us and tells us to let go of the passion to keep up with the standards of our society. He tells us that we must be willing to live at a lower standard—if that is what it takes—to have enough time and energy to worship and serve God. He promises to help us if we will only enter into fellowship with Him. He says, "**come with me and follow me, and you will find the strength you need.**" Such a change of lifestyle is impossible

if we rely on our own strength. But with Jesus we can do the impossible.

The disciples may have had a lot of faults, but the thing which made them great was the fact that they had decided to give up everything to follow Jesus. By making that decision, they would find the strength day by day to obey all of God's commandments. And they would also discover that everything they gave up would be replaced a hundred times over. The family and friends they left behind would be replaced by many more people who would become their spiritual family. They would be welcomed into the homes of many people who love God even though they, themselves, would never purchase their own home. All the deep longings of their hearts would be fulfilled, because they would know the love of God and eternal life. And nothing, not even persecution, could cause them to lose their eternal life.

The challenge is before each one of us. By choosing to be with God, we choose eternal life. By deciding not to follow Christ we reject eternal life. The world tells us to serve the idol of wealth, because that is the way we get ahead in life. But Jesus calls us to be with Him and to rid ourselves for this idol. In the world's eyes, this will put us in last place. But the world is wrong. What the world considers to be first place in priority is really last. And by worldly standards, that which is last in priority is really first. Anyone who has given up everything to follow Christ knows this to be true.

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Application: Most of us have to struggle with the problem talked about in this sermon. Are you able to share about your struggle and allow others to either benefit from your testimony or use their spiritual gifts to help you?