

THE RICH YOUNG RULER (Mk. 10:17-22)

Mk. 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? **18** And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. **19** Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. **20** And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. **21** Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. **22** And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Mt. 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? **17** 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. **18** 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, **19** Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **20** The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? **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. **22** But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. ... **Lk. 18:18** And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? **19** And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. **20** Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother. **21** And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. **22** Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. **23** And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

Here is a young man who wants to become a follower of Jesus. He has done well in life and succeeded in everything he has applied himself to for **Mk. 10:22 & Mt. 19:22** he had great possessions and **Lk. 18:23** he was very rich.

Underlying his search was a quest for satisfaction, in particular, *self*-satisfaction, **Mk. 10:17** what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? He was 'forward-looking' and progressive. He saw 'eternal life' as a 'possession' he could achieve, just as he had achieved so many others. It was like another 'string to his bow'. ... Indeed, that is how this young man had done so well for himself, for he was always on the lookout for anything that would advance his development throughout life.

That's very commendable, you may say ... we ought to encourage more young men and women to be like that. ... Okay, so let's take a good honest straightforward look at this young man. We begin by commending him for coming to Jesus ... but before we say too much, why did he come?

... The world is full of people who are searching. ... No matter what they have, they are looking for something more. ... They follow anything that promises fulfilment, and purpose, and happiness, and love, and the meaning of

life. ... What about when it comes to searching for God though ... is there any interest in them for searching after Him? Well, not really because, as Paul wrote, **Rom. 3:11** *there is none that seeketh after God*. People are looking for all kinds of things ... but they are not looking for God, because that is how His Word describes it!

And it is not only in the secular sphere we see people *searching*, for we also see them searching for the ‘spectacular’ even within religious *and Christian* circles. For many, God is ‘a ticket’ to potentially better and more exciting prospects of life here on earth ... even healthier and wealthier. They would claim to be seeking after God ... but they are seeking after Him for their own reasons ... in such a way *they* want to have all the benefits. ... They might look Christian, and look religious, and make all the right sounds ... but ‘lift up the covers’ and it becomes very obvious that what they have is simply masquerading as a means to fulfil their end, which is self-satisfaction ... like this young man whose life revolved around *himself*.

His encounter with Jesus turned out to be more than he reckoned though because, basically, this young man was compelled to work out what was more valuable and important to him ... whether he wanted the riches and influence he had, and the comfortable lifestyle he enjoyed ... or whether he was willing to give it all up for God to enter his life. ... Which was the more important? It was a question only he *personally* could answer.

... Here was his main priority ... I want to belong, - first and foremost, he wanted to be somewhere he would belong. It is often the case where people spend so much time on themselves ... they might have everything they have worked for ... and yet, they don’t belong. There is emptiness inside, - a void and a vacuum that is not being filled. Yes, this young man was a professional ... but he craved for something very important that was missing in his life.

He had high standards. Because he was religious, he would have insisted upon doing things right in the workplace. He never committed adultery, he never murdered anyone, he never stole, he says he never told lies, and he respected and honoured his parents. ... On the outside, he claims to have led an exemplary life.

That is very commendable, and plausible ... but, hold on a minute ... all those qualities should not really be anything out of the ordinary for ... how many of

us have committed adultery, or murdered anyone, or stole, or perjured ourselves, or dishonoured our parents. Surely any decent person would not do those things! ... Surely this was your regular 'sabbath-going-to-synagogue' young man.

So, you might say, he didn't have all that much to give up, to follow Jesus. Well, whatever Jesus was going to offer him would inevitably cost ... It would cost him his possessions. If he wanted eternal life, - because of the kind of self-centred young man he was, - it would cost him his egotism/pride. But the sad fact was that he wanted eternal life as an 'add-on', and not as a 'take over'.

Any love he said he had for God was beginning to be swamped by the greater love he obviously had for himself. And he loved what he had on this earth far more than what he contemplated he would gain in Heaven. ... This young man wanted to inherit eternal life, - life after this present life, at the best possible 'rate' he could get ... without having to change himself or his circumstances too much, - and he asked Jesus, "What do I have to do to get it?!" ... Jesus, I go to the shop when I want to buy bread ... and I go to the bread counter, and I buy it. Then, I need milk ... and I go and I buy it ... So Jesus, "what do I have, - where do I have to go, - so that I can get everlasting life?!"

He is like a young man who could have plenty to say, if you would let him ... but Jesus stopped him in his tracks and took charge of the conversation. ... I wonder how we would have dealt with this man. ... He believed in eternal life, - that is a good starter for he did not have to be convinced there is a life after this one ... many people do have to be convinced, but this young man didn't. ... He began well for he believed in an 'after-life ... We would probably have 'gone easy on him' and gradually 'reeled him in' ... Well now, here's all you have to do, - you are almost there, - let's sit down and say 'the prayer', and you make 'the decision', and that's it ... hey presto! You're a Christian! ... But as Jesus demonstrates, he *wasn't* almost there for he was as far away spiritually as he could be! ... And obviously Jesus saw it!

Instead of 'battering the young man up' and leading him into some 'airy-fairy' confession of faith, Jesus made clear to him he had yet a long way to go if he was to understand what eternal life was all about, and if he wanted to receive it.

Jesus was on the eastern side of the River Jordan in the region known as Perea, and He was walking along the road that would take Him to Jerusalem and to Calvary. And then *Behold* (Mt. 19:16)! ... Along comes this rich young man running. He would have been well-dressed, and well-spoken. You could tell by looking at him how he was a credit to his parents ... maybe to the point of him being a little *spoiled* (?!). He would have been highly thought-off for his duties would have included being in charge of the synagogue. He was a wise young fellow ... and well-liked.

He had done well for himself. He is where he wanted to be at that early stage in life ... and yet, he had a void inside him he just could not fill. He is afraid that if he was to die he would not go to Heaven. ... And, to be fair to him, *that* ought to worry any sensible living human being for if you do not know for certain where you will end up in eternity ... if it is not Heaven, it will be Hell ... and you want to know now so you can do something about it!

It is good he came running, - especially bearing in mind the type of upstanding citizen he was. ... And to run to *Jesus* ... well, he has to be commended for that too. In front of all those people, he knelt down on the dusty road at the feet of Jesus. ... Here is a young man at the top of his society, and he is on his knees before Jesus ... the same Jesus the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to silence and to kill ... No wonder Matthew begins with , *Behold!*

And even the way he spoke to Jesus, *Good Master*, - he recognised Him as a rabbi and a teacher ... and not only a teacher, but a *good* teacher! ... He called out, in front of everyone, Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ ... ἀγαθε comes from ἀγαθός from which we get the girl's name 'Agatha' which means 'virtuous'. This was how he greeted Jesus ... good, virtuous, honest, righteous, honourable Master!

And there is the urgency in his question, *what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* He had thought about this question ... and the arrival of Jesus gave him the occasion to find an answer ... and he took that opportunity!

... To explain about eternal life and the Jew ... The Jew tries to work hard, so that through personal achievement they can gain eternal life. They believe we are presently in the 'world of doing' (*Tikkun Olam*), where we seek to do sufficient righteous acts to get us into Heaven. However, the reality is, - they believe, - we are probably not able to do everything that's necessary ... Therefore, Judaism leaves room for the possibility of some form of after-death

purification, - a kind of purgatory (II Macc. 12:43-46), - to prepare them perfectly for the ‘world to come’ (*Olam Ha-Ba*) which they believe is a place similar to the Garden of Eden. ... This is how this young man had been brought up to believe, and was hoping to achieve eternal life.

... That is not how Jesus taught about eternal life, though ... You and I believe we have received eternal life as a gift of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. We have not done anything to earn it or warrant it, - our eternal life was given to us freely when we trusted in Christ as our Saviour, **Jn. 3:36** *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life*. We don’t have to wait to see if we have done enough ... and we don’t have to go to a purgatory because our entrance into Heaven does not depend upon our works, but on the *work* of Jesus Christ.

The Jew, on the other hand, sees the need to work for it himself. So, therefore, Jesus and the young man were coming at the subject of eternal life from very opposite directions, - Jesus *gives* eternal life by His grace, whereas the young man believed he had to *earn* it by his works.

So, that is how the young man is coming to Jesus. He is full of a spiritually-complex ‘muddle’ made up out of eagerness, urgency, doubt, emptiness, and a massive dose of uncertainty ... hence the force behind his question, *what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* ... Well, he has come to the right One ... *Jesus*, the way, the truth, and the *life* (Jn. 14:6)

He described Jesus as ‘good’. Now, of course, we know Jesus is good ... but the young man did not know what we know for he did not know Jesus is not only good, He is God! He knew Jesus was good, - or at least, claimed to be good, - because he was wearing the clothes of a rabbi ... and the young man, - who was a leader in the synagogue, - was brought up to repect rabbis

Therefore, the young man is using the term ‘good’ in this context ... as he would to any other *good* person. ... Indeed, the young man also reckoned himself to be *good* ... and for him to do that was to put himself on a par with Jesus. This was a *good* young man asking a *good* Master a *good* question. ... But obviously the word ‘good’ had taken on a new meaning that was different to how God considered it.

... The man had only just met Jesus ... how did he know if Jesus was good or not?! Jesus, - if the Pharisees were to be believed, - was a product of

Beelzebub for He was a deceiver (Mk. 3:22)! ... So, how was the young man to know whether Jesus was 'good' or not?! ... At least Nicodemus could give a well-considered answer as to why *he* believed Jesus to be good, **John 3:2** *Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him ... but this young man couldn't for he was approaching Jesus on a whim!*

Even though he was on his knees asking Jesus how he might inherit eternal life, - a most important question, - ... there is faith required, and to a degree, the young man was willing to exercise faith ... but do you see what was absent? ... There was no mention of repentance. He was on his knees but he was craving eternal life without repentance. He wasn't considering the effect of sin in his life. He believed himself to be 'good' because he never committed adultery, or killed someone, or any of the other sins Jesus mentioned. ... And he did not repent at the feet of Jesus for he did not acknowledge he had anything to repent of. ... Jesus told him, **Mk. 10:18** *Why callest thou me good? [why 'bandy' the word around when you don't know what it means?]* there is none good but one, that is, God

Even though he was on his knees, the young man was occupying the throne of his own heart. He did not acknowledge his sinfulness in the presence of the holy God. His eyes were blind as to who *he* was and to Who *Jesus* was. He would most certainly have rejected 'out-of-hand' the doctrine of total depravity for he did not see himself as sinful, as how God saw Him. Therefore, he had nothing to be saved from ... and that is why he 'skipped' the need for salvation and 'jumped ahead' to wanting his inheritance of eternal life.

But there can be no crown without first coming to Christ in true believing faith ... and the young man totally dismissed all that. And he did what the fallen human nature naturally instructed him to do for he was sure he was good enough, and he did not need the kind of answer Jesus gave him. ... He didn't believe he was a sinner ...

So Jesus tested him, and he responded, **20** *Master, all these have I observed from my youth.* Now, unless this was an extraordinary young man, either he was telling a lie or he was devastatingly deceived! He thought he was *so* good ... even after Jesus had told him there is none good but God. In other words, he had rejected the words of the Saviour and the grace of God had not penetrated

his soul for there was no acknowledgement of his sin and, therefore, he saw no necessity to repent before God.

It was a very sorry sight ... This young man had come to Jesus with a most important question, and he fell on his knees ... but that was only as far as he was prepared to go! He wasn't a sinner for he was a good person. He saw no need to accept what Jesus was saying because it didn't fit what he wanted to believe. He wanted eternal life, but on his own terms ... he wanted salvation without the Saviour.

Of course, - no matter what he said, - he had broken the Law ... more times than he was willing to confess! He might have been controlling his sin on the surface, - as far as everyone looking on at him was concerned, - but inside, he had broken the Law of God, for he was rejecting what God says about the human nature and the sinner's need ... and he was heading towards Hell.

How bad was this man? How good was he? He himself gives the answer in v. 20, *And he answered and said unto him [Jesus], Master, all these have I observed from my youth.* ... He couldn't see it, or if he could, he wouldn't admit it. He got up from off his knees, turned his back on the Saviour, and walked away ... *That* tells you what kind of a man he was, - he was a fool for he had the opportunity to believe in Jesus, but he threw it away.

He walked off down the road ... back to his synagogue, and back to his vain religion. He returned to his 'faith' that gave him some measure of thinking he was good enough ... and he left Jesus behind.

Being cast away forever from the presence of God will be all the worse for those who had the opportunity to believe, but rejected it, **Lk. 12:48** *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.* ... If you have heard the Gospel often, and each time you turn your back on it and walk away, - as this young man did, - Hell will be all the worse. ... And Jesus told him, in words that must have echoed in his ears, **Mk. 10:21** *One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.*

... You want treasure in Heaven, - you want eternal life, - well, here is how you can get it, *come, take up the cross, and follow me.* ... But that was not the answer the young man was looking for because it required too much ... more

than he was willing to give. He simply wanted to add Jesus 'on', but instead, Jesus required him to become a follower. ... The young man decided he would not do it for it was too costly.

Indeed, this young man claimed to worship God ... but the only 'god' he was worshipping was himself. He had himself on the throne of his heart, along with the wealth and riches he had worked hard to accumulate. ... Just think of how great a servant of God he would have been if he had given his life to Christ that day ... He could have put all his energies into serving the Saviour, but he wasn't prepared to love the Lord with all his heart, and mind, and soul ... and so he refused Christ ... and he walked away sad, grieved, and miserable.

Keep watching though, for as he walked away Jesus stood and continued to observe him, **Mk. 10:21** Then Jesus beholding him *loved* him ... With the purest of Heavenly love, Jesus *loved* that young man ... more than that young man ever knew for that young man was a precious lost soul needing to be saved. He had been offered the free gift of salvation, but he had 'turned it down'.

The purpose of becoming a Christian is to bring God glory for the way God shapes you into living your life for Him. There has to be a change for if there is no change, there is no conversion. ... Some people say they belong to Christ, but they don't really ... because they are like this young man, - they come to *take*, and not to *give*. Jesus wanted this young man to *give* all he had and become a full-time child of God ... That is the only kind of person who becomes a Christian, - one who repents of their sin and receives Jesus Christ as Saviour, and commits to Him as their Master.

As we complete our study, I trust there is none who falls into the same category as this young man. I trust there is none who wants to use Jesus and His salvation for their own purposes ... I can tell you, it won't work. An old hymn says, "*Sinners* Jesus will receive; Sound this word of grace to all ... Christ receiveth sinful men, Even me with all my sin; Purged from every spot and stain, Heaven with Him I enter in." ... There is only one way into Heaven, and it is the way Jesus leads. It is by the way of the cross, when, - by His grace, - you come as a repentant sinner believing He died *there* for you. You take Him as your Saviour, and you live for Him as your Lord.

This was a foolish young man ... and I pray there will be no such fools among us today. Amen.