

The Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16-30 "Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and *your* mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and

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

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. "And again I say to you, 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." When His disciples heard *it*, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly

I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. "But many *who are first will be last, and the last first.*"

It might surprise you to learn that I have something in common with this young man. No, I'm not rich.

Well, maybe I shouldn't tell you this, and I would appreciate it if you didn't spread it around, but actually I'm working on my second million.

That's right, my second million I gave up on the first one a long time ago.

No, I'm not rich.

However, even though our young people might find it hard to believe, there was a time, way back in the ages past, when I was a young man.

But it's not the age of this young man, and certainly not his riches, that we have in common.

No, it's the question he asked . . . **"what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"**

In fact, his question takes me back to the time when I was about 18 years old, living in my parents' home, and was a member of my parents' church, the United Church of Canada.

I sang in the choir, held an office in the young people's group, and I *thought* I was a Christian.

However, even though I had heard the Bible stories in Sunday school, and even though the pastor referred to a few verses of Scripture as the text for his message, I had no idea that Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection were of any benefit to me.

No, I was as ignorant of the good news of Christ's salvation as any lost soul in the jungles of Africa.

And then, one day, an idea popped into my head.

I said to myself, "Here I am a Christian (for, indeed, I thought I was) and I've never read the Bible for myself."

I also wondered if there was something in there—some rule or requirement I could fulfil—that would guarantee my entrance into heaven.

Somewhat like the young man's question,
wasn't it?

As I think back to that time, I sometimes
wonder where that question came from.

Maybe the prayers of my grandmother—the only
grandparent I ever knew—were being
answered.

I really don't know, and, to be honest, I
really didn't know my grandmother that
well.

Up until the time I was eight years old, our
family lived on a farm west of Embro.

The little red schoolhouse I went to was on
the corner of the field next to our
house, and right across the road was the
cottage my grandmother lived in.

I hardly ever went there, and she only
visited us about once a year.

We didn't look forward to her visits.

My grandmother belonged to the Brethren, and we were nervous what she might say.

One time she gave me this little New Testament.

On the inside cover she has some Gospel stickers.

One is a picture of a doorway and it says **Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life,** and so on.

In the other one is a clock that says, **Now is the accepted time of salvation,** and on the back is a lighthouse saying that Jesus is **the light of the world.**

When I get to heaven, I would like to talk to her about that, and finally get to know my grandmother a little better.

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Getting back to the time when I was 18 years old.

We had left the farm when I was about eight and were living in Woodstock.

As I mentioned, I began wondering if there was something in the Bible I *didn't* know.

Well, there was a Bible on the coffee table in our living room, but it was there more or less as a symbol or decoration.

To be honest, I didn't feel comfortable picking it up.

However, there was a small Gideon New Testament and Psalms in my dresser drawer.

It had been given to me years ago when I was in Grade 5.

So, I picked it up and began to read.

When I finished Matthew and started Mark, I said to myself, "Why, this is the same thing all over again."



Of course, I had no idea that it took four separate books to properly portray the Lord Jesus.

I continued reading, but I really can't say I made any important discoveries.

However, my mother, who apparently knew more about the Gospel than I did, and noticed I was reading the Bible a lot, took me to a Youth for Christ meeting in our high school.

I couldn't understand why she would take me there, as I always thought the kind of people who went there were a little strange.

However, over the process of time, and as I now owned my own car, not only did I attend the Youth for Christ meetings in Woodstock, but I went to a few in London.

And it was there that I understood the good news of Christ's salvation, and accepted Him as my Saviour.

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Getting back to the rich young ruler, the first thing we notice is that, inspite of his riches, and no doubt considerable prestige, he didn't seem to be a proud man.

In fact, Mark 10:17 tells us he "**came running,**" and "**knelt before**" Jesus.

Obviously, he looked upon Him as a great teacher, but I don't think he recognized Him as his Messiah, and certainly not the Son of God.

Returning to our text in Matthew 19:16, we find him asking a question that no doubt was much on his mind . . . "**Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?**"

Certainly, that would be the type of question that anyone schooled in Old Testament Law would ask.

But what about the answer?

In view of what we know about man's sinful condition, why would Jesus say . . .

"But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." And when he asked . . .
. . . **"Which ones?"** Jesus said, **"`You shall not murder,' `You shall not commit adultery,' `You shall not steal,' `You shall not bear false witness,' `Honor your father and your mother,' and, `You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"**

Of course, Galatians 3:21 makes it clear that . . . **"if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law."**

But, has there ever been such a law?

Well, in view of man's sinful condition, we can safely say there has not.

In fact, that's not even the purpose of God's law.

No, its purpose is to point out man's sinful condition and his need of a substitute.

And as we know, that substitute is pictured in the tabernacle and its sacrifices.

Or, to put it in the words of Galatians 3:24

. . . **"the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."**

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So, when this young man came to Jesus with his question, the Master faithfully directed him to the tutor (or schoolmaster) that His Heavenly Father had supplied. . . **"if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."**

That was step one.

But as you will notice, Jesus only directed him to the six commandments that relate to his fellow man.

*Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, and so on.*

So, even if we disregard his obvious responsibility to God, had he kept the laws concerning his fellow man?

Well, he *thought* he had . . . **"All these things I have kept from my youth."**

And, no doubt, as far as man was concerned, his reputation was stellar.

But, what about God?

If you want to get into God's heaven, you'll need to pass God's inspection, won't you?

How would he measure up under those conditions?

Well, in Matthew chapter five, Jesus gives us an insight into the way God looks at things.

One day when a multitude was gathering,  
Jesus went up into a mountain and sat  
down with His disciples and began to  
teach the people.

He spoke of the ***poor in spirit*** who would be  
blessed in His coming kingdom, and the  
*righteous* who would never experience  
hunger anymore.

And then He switched from the material to  
the spiritual, and to God's way of  
looking at things.

In Matthew 5:21-22 we find Him saying. . .

**"You have heard that it was said to those  
of old, 'You shall not murder, and  
whoever murders will be in danger of the  
judgment.' "But I say to you that whoever  
is angry with his brother without a cause  
shall be in danger of the judgment."**

And then, in V 27-28 we read . . . **"You have  
heard that it was said to those of old,**

**'You shall not commit adultery.'** "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

So then, as He continued teaching, the crowd gradually came to the realization that God didn't look at their sins in the same way they did.

It was a startling revelation, and one they had never considered.

And I wouldn't be surprised if the rich young ruler hadn't thought about it either.

Had he searched his heart, the very heart that God was looking at, he would have never said . . . **"All these things I have kept from my youth."**

In fact, if he had considered Jesus' initial response a little more carefully, he

would have realized his question had been already answered.

You see, even *before* he asked the question.

. . . **"what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life,"** Jesus pointed out, and I might say, quite forcefully, that . . . **"No one *is* good but One, *that is, God.*"**

That rather rules out the possibility of *qualifying* for heaven on the basis of your good works, doesn't it?

And, in spite of his outward success, I think Jesus' comment gradually sunk in, for we find him asking the question . . . **"What do I still lack?"**

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At this point, I would like to point out something that is not recorded in Matthew's Gospel.

Mark 10:21 says “. . . **Jesus, looking at him, loved him.**”

Yes, Jesus really *loved* this young man, and He wanted to take him under His wing.

In fact, if my memory serves me correctly, I believe this young man was one of only two men—other than the 12 disciples, of course—who received a personal invitation to follow Jesus.

Obviously, he couldn't be one of the 12 apostles.

They are a select group who will someday rule over the 12 tribes of Israel, but he did receive a personal invitation.

Of course, there was the scribe, perhaps with stars in his eyes, who said . . .

“Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go,” but that was a little different.

In that case, it was his enthusiasm, not Jesus' invitation, that motivated him.

But would enthusiasm be enough?

As a scribe, he was used to a comfortable lifestyle.

Now he would be relying on Someone who could not provide such accommodations.

And Jesus was very clear on that point.

In fact, He said . . . **"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head."**

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Yes, it would be a big decision.

And it was a decision that the disciples had already made.

Some of them had been fishermen, one was a tax collector, and one was a doctor.

Such a choice would have meant quitting their job and the income it provided.

Somehow, we might have gotten the idea that all of Jesus' disciples were young

bachelors, footloose and fancy free, but there's no basis for that assumption.

For instance, in Matthew 8:14 -15 we read .

. . **"Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them."**

Yes, Peter had a mother-in-law, and unless he was a widower, he also had a wife, and perhaps children.

And no doubt this would have been the case with many of the disciples.

How could they provide for their families if they followed Jesus?

The fact is, there were those who contributed to the material needs of Jesus and His disciples, and no doubt the needs of their families.

And, at least when Judas wasn't dipping into the bag, such an income would be sufficient, but it wouldn't be excessive.

When Jesus and His disciples were not near friends, such as Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, they wouldn't be staying at an inn.

Many nights they would have slept under the stars, rolled up in their robes, in all kinds of weather.

Yes, there would be hardships.

And, although it's not recorded in Matthew, Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus asked the rich young ruler to "**take up the cross**" in addition to following Him.

What does that mean?

Well, in the case of the 12 disciples, we already know what it means.

It means sleeping under the stars in all kinds of weather.

But, that was only the beginning.

It would mean—instead of sharing an immediate and important place in Jesus' kingdom—they would be the servants of all, endure persecution, and, in most cases, martyrdom.

Yes, following Jesus would not be easy.

However, that was only one side of the coin.

If they followed Jesus, they would enjoy opportunities that they had never dreamed of.

They would be pillars in the church of Jesus Christ, and, someday, they would rule over the 12 tribes of Israel.

And so it is with all who will follow Jesus.

In this world, they will have tribulation, but the rewards of their faithful service will be beyond belief!

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And this was the future that Jesus wanted
for this young man.

If he followed Jesus, he would be weaned
from the dead works of the law, and, in
time, would be a partaker in the eternal
life he was seeking.

But there was a problem, and it was a big
one.

Yes, there was a huge stumbling block in his
way—that left untouched—would bring about
his downfall.

So, with love in His heart, Jesus said . . .

**"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what
you have and give to the poor, and you
will have treasure in heaven; and come,
follow Me."**

As you might have noticed, Jesus didn't say,
*Give up your wealth and you can earn your
way to heaven.*

No, there's only one way to get there, and it has nothing to do with good works. But good works are important.

In fact, Ephesians 2:10 says . . . **"we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."**

And, 1 Corinthians chapter 3 makes it clear that God is far more interested in the *materials we use* than the impression we make.

Certainly **". . . no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."**

But having said that, we have the choice between constructing a grand edifice to our own glory out of wood, hay and straw, or, motivated by our love for Jesus, working in gold and silver and precious stones.

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On the other hand, we could dedicate our life to an entirely different pursuit. Jesus discourages such a choice, and especially in the case of a Christian.

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

Certainly, it is Christ's work, not ours, that secures our place in heaven, but the *destination* of our life's work is our responsibility.

Wouldn't it make sense if it ended up in the same place we did?



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I heard about a man who walked in to an airline counter and said, "I would like to travel to England, and I would like my baggage to go to Hong Kong."

The clerk said, "I'm sorry sir, we can't do that."

To which the man replied, "Why not? That's what you did the last time I flew with your airline."

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So you see, Jesus wasn't making an unreasonable request.

He was simply giving this young man the opportunity of turning his stumbling block into a heavenly asset.

You might say Jesus was asking him to melt down his worthless idol and lay its *gold* at His feet.

It was a big decision, and one Jesus doesn't ask everyone to make.

No, He doesn't ask every rich man to give up his riches.

For instance, Abraham was a rich man, so was King David, but their wealth wasn't an obstacle.

You see, the real problem isn't money, it is **"the love of money"** that **"is a root of all kinds of evil."**

In fact, it is the love of anything, be it wealth, the approval of friends and family, our reputation, or some cherished ambition . . . just *anything* that takes the place of the Lord Jesus.

Yes, the first commandment is just as relevant in the case of the Lord Jesus as it is in the case of His Father . . .

**"You shall have no other gods before Me."**

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And as far as the rich young ruler was concerned, his riches would be an insurmountable obstacle.

Would it make sense, humanly speaking, to sleep out in the open, like the disciples, when he had enough money to afford the best hotel in town?

How could he depend upon the Lord Jesus when he had such a backup plan?

No, He must make a decision, and he did . .

. "when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

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I'm sure you have been following this young man's encounter quite carefully, but at this point, I would ask you to pay very close attention.

In fact, it was the events that followed his departure, and particularly Jesus'

reaction to his departure, that drew my attention to this scripture.

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As the young man walked away, I don't think he was the only one who was sorrowing. No, I can almost see the tears in Jesus' eyes as He turned to His disciples and said . . . **"Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. "And again I say to you, 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."**

"When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished . . ."

Why were they so astonished?

Well, I think it's because they held the common belief, as we often do today, that riches are a sign of God's approval.

Certainly, that can be the case, but it's not always so.

In fact, many of God's dear saints possess very little of this world's goods.

However, even though their astonishment might not have been well founded, the disciples had asked a good question . . .

"Who then can be saved?"

Yes, it was a good question, but I don't think they were prepared for Jesus' answer.

Turning to His disciples, to get their full attention, Jesus said, **"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."**

Did He really say that?

Did He really say—not only is it hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven—but as far as man is concerned, it is an impossibility.

Yes, He did.

Now, I realize, most everyone here

understands the truth of Jesus' words.

You have settled that question long ago.

But there might be someone here this morning who is thinking . . . "What about the multitudes of people who believe they can sufficiently obey God's commandments to gain an entrance into heaven, or, at least, if they haven't quite obeyed all of God's Laws, they can do enough good works to put themselves on the plus side of the ledger?"

What about them?

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Let me hasten to say that God's Word

absolutely refutes the idea that we can *work* our way to heaven.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of**

**yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, (look at that little word, it's a *gift*) not of works, lest anyone should boast."**

And Titus 3:5-6 plainly teaches us that it is **"not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior."**

And in addition to this, the Son of God—Who certainly should know what the criteria is for getting into heaven—made it quite clear, that **"With men this is *impossible*."**

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So, why is it so impossible?

It is impossible because God is entirely righteous, and man is entirely sinful.

And as you might have guessed, those two conditions are not compatible.

But it wasn't always so.

You see, in the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His likeness, which among other things, meant they were entirely sinless.

However, under the influence of Satan's lie, they rebelled against their Creator.

That's when sin entered the world and became part of human nature.

In fact, this change is recorded in Genesis 5:1-3 **"This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son**

in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."

You see the transition?

Adam was created in "**the likeness of God.**"

However, after he had sinned and was cast out of the garden, he "**begot a son in his own likeness,**" and "**after his image.**"

Seth was created in the likeness of his father, and, unfortunately, so were the rest of us.

Yes, we are sinners by *inheritance*, and we are sinners by our own *actions*.

Now, I realize most everyone here is fully aware of that fact.

And, of course, most everyone would admit they're not perfect, but neither is anyone else.

After all, we haven't robbed a bank, or committed murder, or lied under oath.

How bad does sin have to be before it will
keep you out of heaven?

We talked about that a few minutes ago,
didn't we?

Remember Jesus' words concerning God's view
of our sin?

He said hatred is just like murder, and
lusting after a woman is just like
adultery.

No wonder Romans 3:23 draws the conclusion
that . . . **"all have sinned and fall
short of the glory of God."**

And no wonder Romans 3:10 confirms the fact
that . . . **"There is none righteous, no,
not one."**

Yes, when Jesus told His disciples—with men
it is *impossible*—He was right on the
money.

But He told them something else, didn't He?

He also told them that. . . **"with God all things are possible."**

Yes, **"with God all things are possible,"** but all things are not easy.

God can't snap His fingers and simply say, "I will forget about your sin."

Romans 6:23 tells us that the **"wages of sin is death,"** and those wages must be paid.

And by the way, not only are we talking about *physical* death, which we are all familiar with, but we are talking about *spiritual death*, separation from God, lost forever in hell.

Yes, the **"wages of sin is death."**

But praise God, **"the gift of God** (there's that little word again) **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."** Romans 6:23

But how could such a gift be resident in the Lord Jesus?

How could God be righteous, and at the same time justify the unrighteous?

Well, believe it or not, the prophet Isaiah foretold such a gift.

He even explained how it works.

And so, why don't we just turn together to Isaiah 53?

I know you are all pretty familiar with your Bible, but if you're having trouble, Isaiah 53 is right after Isaiah 52.

No, it's right after Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and then comes Isaiah.

And here we see, you might say, the inner workings of what was done on the cross.

Isaiah 53:11: "**He** (that is God) **shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied.**"

Yes, Jesus' sacrifice would completely satisfy a righteous God.

Does it satisfy us, or do we want to add something else to it?

And then, Isaiah goes on to say . . . **"By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities."**

Did you hear that? **"He shall bear their iniquities."**

It's the only way anyone can be justified.

And because Jesus paid the full price of our sin, God could **"demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."** Romans 3:26

Can you imagine a love that would compel Someone to sacrifice His own Son to save those who were His enemies?

Can you imagine a Son who would trade places with such sinners and allow them to trade places with Him?

It's hard to believe, but 2 Corinthians 5:21 confirms that very fact:

"For He" (that is God) "made Him" (Jesus) "who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

That's the cost of the free gift that is offered to you today.

And these are the conditions under which you can receive it.

You must *forsake* your sins—the sins that nailed Jesus to the cross—and you must acknowledge Him as your Lord and Saviour.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the (what?) "gift of God" (it's a gift), not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9

No, you cannot be saved by works.

Jesus was right when He said . . . **"With men this is impossible."**

And that awful *impossibility* made something else impossible.

Remember Jesus' words in the Garden of Gethsemane?

"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."

But it wasn't possible

Because God is **"not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance,"** He had to remain silent.

The **"wages of sin is death,"** and those wages must be paid.

And knowing the cost—that awful cost—Jesus immediately responded . . .

"nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

You see, be it God or man, there are only two ways, two choices.

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36

So, what should we do?

Well, the apostle Paul gives us the answer.

He says . . . **"The word is near you, in your mouth** (you might say it's right on the tip of your tongue) **"and in your heart"** (because God put it there) **"(that is, the word of faith which we preach):** (and now, here it is) **"that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."**

Not, *might* be saved . . . **"you will be saved."** Romans 10:8-9

That's His part . . . **"you will be saved."**

Your part is to believe and receive the Lord
Jesus.

"Who then can be saved?"

You can, because of Jesus.