

Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16-26

(cf. Luke 18:18-27, Mark 10:17-27)

Key Theme: Use of the Law

[Core Gospel Concepts: Nature of Faith, Use of the Law, Justification]

THE STORY:

Now a man, a ruler, came up to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only one who is good – God. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments. You know them."

"Which ones?" the man asked.

Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."

"All these I have kept from my youth," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus looked at him and loved him, and he answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell 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 the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Optional Memory Verse: Matthew 19:26: *"With man this [i.e. being saved] is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Introduction Question (discuss with a neighbor)

Can you think of a person in your church or community who is a great model of someone leading a good life? Why do you think well of them? What about them makes them a great role model?

Teacher's Transition Statement

Today we are introduced to a man who seems like a wonderful example of someone who was living the right kind of life. Let's see how Jesus interacts with him and what he teaches him.

Learn Story Together (Listening Task)

- As you're committing this story to memory, consider these questions:
 - What did the young man think about his obedience to God's law?
 - How does Jesus respond to the young man? How does Jesus feel toward him? What detail indicates Jesus' heart posture toward the young man?

Basic Outline of Discussion (to help facilitator lead without reading everything)

- **Rich Young Ruler:** What was he like? What was good? What did he desire? How did he think he could get it?
- **Jesus:** How did he respond? What was most important to him? How did he feel about the man?
- **Riches:** What is Jesus' attitude toward our riches?
- **What are we trusting in?** What can we learn from this story?
- **Application:** What needs to change in my life after studying this story? What actions, attitudes, or beliefs? What are your riches? What do you need to sell?
- **Sharing:** Who needs to hear this story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (with some possible responses):

- **What was this man like? What do we know about him? His behavior, reputation, etc.? What was his reputation based on?**
 - *Rich, young, leader, or ruler. Had obeyed all the law, at least so he thought.*
 - *Very good man in the eyes of the community, judging by disciples' reaction at the end. Well thought of.*
 - *Reputation based on obedience, respectability, leadership, riches*
- **What was the young man seeking for? How did he think he would be able to get it? Why was he confident?**
 - *Seeking eternal life, the highest place in the kingdom.*
 - *Thought he could get it from doing good deeds, the more completely the better.*
- **How did Jesus answer him? Why did he answer this way?**
 - *Keep the commandments!*
 - *Jesus knew that eternal life was not earned through perfect obedience to the law, but he knew man's heart and thoughts and wanted to show him how his understanding was wrong, how he was depending on the wrong thing to save him: law-keeping.*
 - *It is as if Jesus said, "OK, if this is your method for pleasing God or earning eternal life, then this is how you have to do it – simply obey!"*
- **What was wrong with the young man's understanding of eternal life and how to enter it?**
 - *all based on his own performance, his own riches or gifts, that the more he did, the better his chances!*
 - *Did not understand his own sin, his own inability to truly keep the law in his heart.*
 - *Depended on himself instead of God*
- **How did Jesus respond when the young man asked what extra laws he could obey in order to be sure of his salvation? What did he feel toward the young man? Were his words to the young man meant to be hurtful or helpful? How?**
 - *He loved him.*
 - *Jesus' words to go and sell all would have felt difficult and unloving.*
 - *But he gave this advice in order to help the young man by challenging his way of thinking, and to help him find the true way to life.*
- **When Jesus told him "sell all," the rich young man went away sad. What does this tell us? How were his goals different from Jesus' goals for him?**
 - *Wealth was too important to him – more than gaining eternal life, more than a relationship with God. He depended on riches to give him comfort, provision, and a good reputation.*

- o *Jesus wants a relationship with lost sinners who come to him. He's not interested in us trying to make ourselves look perfect through good behavior. True obedience is built on relationship based on repentance and trust in the Savior.*
- o *Relationship with God through Jesus is the real treasure! Far superior than worldly wealth or reputation.*
- **Jesus saying, "Sell all your possessions" was another way of saying to the man, "To be saved, you need to repent." If the young man seemed really good in keeping the law, what did the young man need to repent of?**
 - o *He needed to repent of depending on all of his good deeds and the blessings he possessed to be in right standing with God.*
 - o *A funny way to say it would be, "You need to repent of all your good deeds and blessings."*
 - o *He also needed to repent of thinking he actually kept the law when in his heart he did not. (For example, he did not love the poor enough to sacrifice his wealth.)*
- **When the young man left, Jesus told them that it is impossibly difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why did they despair?**
 - o *"Who then can be saved?" They believed the same as the rich man (the same as the world believes) - that someone who is respectable, obedient, and rich surely deserves salvation. (This is the world's view.) If he was not good enough, then what hope did they have?*
- **Does God hate riches? Does God require every person to sell all his riches and be poor before they can follow God? So why do you think Jesus told the young man to "sell all"? What do you think Jesus knew about the man's heart that caused him to answer this way?**
 - o *His riches were hurting him! They hid from him his great need for a savior.*
 - o *He knew the man was putting all of his hope in his riches and his good deeds: how they met his needs, how they gave him a good reputation, how they made him feel righteous and worthy.*
 - o *He was trusting riches far more than trusting God.*
- **What do you think Jesus means by being a "rich" man? Does "rich" only mean having material wealth?**
 - o *No, he's talking of any kind of "riches," any blessing or gift, anything that someone depends on more than God to make himself righteous before God.*
- **Read Matthew 5:20-22, 27-28, 43-44. What do these verses teach us about trusting in our obedience to the law to gain life?**
 - o *God's standard is unimaginably high. It is sheer perfection.*
 - o *Therefore no one can obey perfectly enough to meet this standard. "It is impossible" for any man depending on his own strength, discipline, or ability.*
- **What hope did Jesus give the discouraged disciples? What hope did he give us?**
 - o *"With God, all things are possible." God's mercy is huge beyond our imagination. Even great enough to save a man who is "rich," when he stops trusting in his own "riches" and puts his hope in the Savior.*
 - o *Only Jesus himself would be able to keep the law perfectly. Only God could make salvation possible. Only if God becomes man and keeps the law for man, and man puts all his trust in the real law-keeper can man be saved or get eternal life!*