

R12.2 June 2023 Blog Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler

“A ruler questioned Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’”
(Luke 18:18)¹

Before we consider the opening question above, let’s first revisit why the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write his Gospel. The first paragraph of Luke’s Gospel is one of the most compelling and captivating openings in the Bible. Luke is writing this gospel account to someone of importance because he prefaces the addressee, Theophilus, with “most excellent,” a title reserved in the language of the day for dignitaries. He makes it clear that this account comes from eyewitnesses of the actual events of Jesus’s life. Further, Luke explains the purpose of his writing with great clarity, “it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order...”² To top it off, he closes powerfully with these words, “**so that you may know the exact truth** about the things you have been taught.”³

Meditate on these words for a few minutes... “so that you may know the exact truth.” I would posit that knowing the exact truth carries with it responsibility and accountability. Time for a little more meditation and self-reflection because Luke of course was not only writing this account for the most excellent Theophilus but for everyone who would ever read his careful narrative of Christ’s life. This includes you and me.

With this opening as the backdrop for our June blog let’s fast forward in Luke’s Gospel to chapter 18 and consider the ruler’s question of Jesus, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”⁴ Jesus responds with a question and a statement, laying the groundwork to address the man’s real issue. Jesus asks the man, “Why do you call Me good?”⁵ He immediately makes the statement, “No one is good except **God alone**.”⁶ Jesus

¹ All scripture references in this blog are NASB95 unless otherwise noted

² Luke 1:3

³ Luke 1:4

⁴ Luke 18:18

⁵ Luke 18:19a

⁶ Luke 18:19b

makes it clear that every human being is a sinner. The ruler unwittingly and rightly referred to Jesus, God incarnate, as “good.” By implication everyone else is not good.

Continuing to lay the groundwork that establishes unconverted man’s position before God, Jesus lists a subset of the Ten Commandments: four negative/objective and one positive/subjective. Interestingly, the ruler does not ask about the other five commandments, but rather states that he has kept those cited since he was a youth. Of course, the man had not actually kept these commandments perfectly (nor have we).

The ruler was in search of what he could do, not Who he should serve. Jesus knew his heart and his problem, and He answered the man’s question in such a way as to put His finger right on the issue: “When Jesus heard this, He said to him, ‘One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’”⁷ Importantly, in His response to the man Jesus was not suggesting a works-based salvation, but rather total allegiance to the Lover of his soul.

We have no record of what the man said in response, but we do know that “he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.”⁸ Jesus diagnosed the man’s problem, it was a heart problem – the object of his hope was worldly wealth, not God. This is conjecture, but I suspect he thought he was “okay” and could manage holding dual loyalties. Scripture tells us this is not possible: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”⁹ Jesus, in His response to the man was telling him that He wanted undivided commitment, meaning everything, every aspect of the man’s life. Jesus wants this of you and me too.

“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in the world will keep it to life eternal.” (John 12:24)

⁷ Luke 18:22

⁸ Luke 18:23

⁹ Matthew 6:24 (NKJV)

“And He was saying to *them* all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life (soul) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?’”
(Luke 9:23-25)

“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.”
(Acts 20:24)

Applications:

1. Review Luke 10:25-37. Jesus had a similar encounter with a lawyer. The lawyer asked the same question of Jesus, but he had a different heart issue. What was it?
 - a. Take some time to consider whether there is anything that stands between you and sole/soul allegiance to Jesus Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal any defects in your commitment to the Lord. If so, repent immediately and turn to Jesus alone.
2. When Jesus saw how the rich young ruler responded to Him, what did He say? Read Luke 18:24-29. How did His followers respond to what Jesus said (vs 26)? What was their view of wealth? How should we, as committed followers of Jesus, view wealth?
3. What resources has God given you, and how are you using them for His purposes and His glory? Are you focused on God’s business of investing in people, recruiting them to the kingdom of heaven and building them up with God’s Word (evangelism X edification)?
4. Is “time” on your list of resources that God has given you? Consider Paul’s admonition from Ephesians 5:13-16: “But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.’ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil.”
 - a. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” – Jim Elliot (martyred in 1956 for the sake of Jesus in an Ecuadorian jungle)