

“...like a child”

Part 2 - *The Rich Young Ruler*
(Mark 10:13-31)

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
of Menomonie Wisc.
on November 26th, 2017



Mark 10:13 -31 *Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. 14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." 16 And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them. 17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" 18 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. 19 "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" 20 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." 21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." 22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. 23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "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." 26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" 27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." 28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." 29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, 30 "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 "But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

In part 1 of this passage, we heard Jesus call us to receive the Kingdom of God as a child. The simple dependence and faith filled approach to a life with Christ. How complicated we can allow our lives to become! And how we clutch to any and every control we can have over it: the reluctance to surrender the perceived oversight and management of our movements...the “strings” of our lives.

Again, let us not artificially place a lengthy period between verse 16 and verse 17. The life of Christ was a seamless presentation...a “one man play” acted out on the world’s stage, the first act leading to the second act and so on. So bearing in mind the previous discussion on marriage and divorce...complete with life corrections on the issues of commitment and faithfulness, He goes on to tell us how it ought to be done with the approach and receptivity of a child. Now He will paint a picture of the difference between these two lives and the two approaches: clinched fingered control, and the humble surrender of the child.

In verse 17 and on, Jesus is going to drive home His message with this fella that has now entered the scene from stage left. The man begins his contact with Jesus with a question...a question that is often asked even today, and with a question that is on the lips and the hearts of most of humanity: “*What do I have to do to go to heaven?*” Note that he asked what he had to *do*, not what he had to *be*.

Throughout history man has done the dance of decision, and many will in fact spin that waltz their whole life and will be dancin’ right on into eternity. How many have been so close and yet will still miss that bus to eternity with Christ because they were just unwilling to give their all, which is simply the price of admission without exception. How many will spend a lifetime attempting to ‘negotiate a better deal’ so they might yet embrace elements or levels of the world while still pleasing a gracious Savior?

- **Judas Iscariot** – He kissed Heaven’s gate and still went to Hell – **Matt. 26:49; Acts 1:25.**
- **Felix** – He checked out this salvation thing, but he wanted to wait for a more convenient time – **Acts 24:25.**
- **Herod Agrippa** – He walked clear up to the very door of Heaven and still turned away – **Acts 26:28.**
- **Festus** – He heard the details of the Gospel and called them the ravings of a mad man – **Acts 26:24.**

As far as we know, all these men died and went to hell despite at some point being so very close. They stood as the scribe in Mark 12, whom Jesus Himself said “...*you are not far from the kingdom of God.*” But the old saying goes “close only counts in horseshoes and grenades.” Because no one is bound for heaven on a razor thin track...no one “barely” gets in. God has always worked in the realms of the emphatic...the absolute... and what we call the “black-and-white.” Today...*at this moment*, you are very saved and quite firmly in the hand of God and your passion shows it, or you are lost...possibly even while sitting each week in a church pew.

Most folks are either unaware of the parameters and the “negaters” of our stand with Christ, or have chosen to turn a blind eye and to do so at the most extreme cost imaginable! Let’s take a leisurely stroll through scripture and attempt to simply “touch the tip of the iceberg” on this overwhelming subject:

- Romans 8:9(b) NLT “...*You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them **do not belong to him at all.***”
- 1 John 4:20 NLT says “*If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, **that person is a liar**; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?*” (note: “hate” in original language means “to detest.” One should be very careful not to rule out such a passionate opinion concerning another saying “well, I don’t *hate* them...I just don’t like them at all...” Proverbs 26:23-24 says “*Smooth words may hide a wicked heart, just as a pretty glaze covers a clay pot. People may cover their hatred with pleasant words, but they're deceiving you.*”)
- 1John 2:4 “*He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, **is a liar**, and the truth is not in him.*”
- 1John 3:17 “*But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, **how does the love of God abide in him?***”
- James 1:26 “*If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, **this person's religion is worthless.***”
- Matthew 7:21-23 “***Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*”
- Revelation 3:15-16 NLT “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, **because you are lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, **I will vomit you out of My mouth.***”
- 1 Corinthians 13:2 “*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, **but (if I) have not love, I am nothing.***”
- Romans 16:17-18 “*I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. **For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ**, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*”
- Luke 14:26 “*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, **he cannot be my disciple.***”
- 1 Timothy 5:8 “*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is **worse than an unbeliever.***”

Such a scriptural journey as this goes on and on, for the Bible is quite clear on this matter. Paul wraps the whole idea in 2 Corinthians 13:5 saying “**Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!**”

This young man was certainly a righteous and moral individual. He did the right things and adhered to the “standard” set forth by religion. Furthermore, we must also give this rich young ruler some credit, for he is indeed doing what few are willing to do. He ventures forth where “few men fear to tread.” He is asking Jesus for “an evaluation...”

Once the initial question was posed, Jesus replies with a question of his own. It’s easy to sit in church on Sunday and snack upon the day’s menu. It’s quite another thing to be so spiritually confronted “face-to-face,” especially in public! That’s why many of us attempt to avoid the gathers and fellowships where such dialogue might ensue. If no one asks the questions, then we are able to avoid uttering those damning answers!

Jesus replies to the man's question, asking him "why do you call me good?" Similarly He has asked in the past "why do you call me Lord?" He asked that question for essentially the same reason He is asking this one. The question Jesus poses isn't saying that He isn't good, but He is saying that to accept Him as good is to accept Him as God. If He is "good" then He is God, because, as Romans 3:10 says "No one is righteous--not even one." Ironically, accepting Jesus as "good" isn't generally a problem. The majority of folks today have no problem receiving Christ as "good." They just don't want to accept Him as God. This man looked to Jesus as the one who could tell him how to achieve eternal life, but not as the one who could actually give it to him!

The question the man asked was "telling" from the first: for the problem was that his focus is on "I" and "do," instead of on "Jesus" and "done!" Jesus once again goes to Scripture to answer questions of the Spirit. He is drawing this man into a dialogue where He will expose the truth that he seeks to make evident. However like so many who have followed, this man will not want it once it is heard. For he was confusing a *personal relationship with God* with his *religion!* He was a rich, young, and very *moral* man who was going to hell. He was a "good" man, and he was lost. He followed the rules of religion though he didn't know the *purpose* of those rules that he had so subscribed his righteousness unto! What was the purpose? Galatians 3:24 says "**Therefore the law was our tutor (schoolmaster/guide) to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.**"

His meandering eventually came to an end, as Jesus "calls him out." Jesus was not condemning riches per se, but for this young man, He was condemning the reluctance to let go of them! Note "*There is one thing you lack...*" When God sought that men "have no other God's before Him" there was no question that He knew what those gods were! These elements that were listed here in the man's answer, while great practice, were essentially directed toward the *horizontal* relationship with his fellowman. Good stuff indeed, but they were not enough to give him a right standing before his Creator!

Don't get me wrong however. Saying that Jesus was not condemning riches specifically is not a free pass to indulge and withhold our finances or anything else for that matter. While some people can indeed juggle fire, most of us will get burned in the trying! Jesus is quite blunt about this, saying that it was "*easier for a camel to get through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.*" Now please do not confuse the term "Kingdom of God" as merely fanciful words meaning "*the heavenly afterlife.*" The Kingdom of God is not something we are waiting for, but something that is here today into which we may enter today and live in in the present.

It is "*easier for a camel to get through the eye of the needle than for a rich man to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.*" It's not that it can't be done, it's just that it is highly *unlikely*, and extremely *hard!* For with earthly riches come an inevitable false security, a pride and self-satisfied self-entitled mentality.

Jesus, as he often did, was again speaking in a hyperbole. He sometimes spoke in "over-the-top" terms because He wanted to stack the odds for getting His point across. A common claim concerning this passage was that this "eye of the needle" was in reference to a small gate in the walls of Jerusalem which was used for security. An enemy could not storm the city through this gate as a camel had to pass through on its knees in order to enter. The problem with this theory is that such a gate did not exist for several years *after* Jesus made this statement. No, Jesus meant a *real* needle! He may have been somewhat satirical, but He was very serious about His point!

We also must be clear on another nuance here also...and that is that this passage is not meant to somehow say that because one has riches that they are less *allowed* into the Kingdom of God. The point is rather that with those riches, one is truly less likely to *seek out, surrender to, and thus achieve eternal standing* in that Kingdom!

Despite the issue that separated them, the text tells us that like the children in the previous story, Jesus still loved him! That's why a person's repeated rejection of God's loving grace is such a tragedy! Because it is firstly refused, even if subtly, and secondly because the offer remains still. An "open door" begging for reconciliation! But this man would not become like those children and approach Christ and life in the simplicity of a child. He would not receive the kingdom in such a manner. He wanted his money and the perception of life control that goes along with it. And one does not need to be rich in the classic sense to fall under that spell! He would thus be denied access to the Kingdom of God...here and now, as well as the life after.

Jesus told the man to take up the cross, and follow Him. **Here was the answer!** Not the endless seeking after money, but the dying of self and living for Christ and *as* Christ. The answer lay in actually following Him! The man went away sad and sorrowful, *but he went away*. He was sad and sorrowful but not repentant and not *converted*. He left with his money and possessions: rich and *lost*. I would dare say that it wasn't the money specifically that held his heart, but what the money would bring him. It was his independence...his control over his own life. To go **where** he pleased, **when** he pleased, and **how** he pleased...never dependent upon God or another. Never would someone have to be dependent upon him: he was "free." Ro 1:22 "*Professing to be wise, they became fools.*" Whatever you are unwilling to give up automatically assumes the place of God! The famous missionary Jim Elliot once said "**He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose!**"

The man went away "grieved." He grieved because he had had a conversation with the real Jesus. Not the "pop" version of TV and "Jesus-lite" fellowships. When you talk to the **real** Jesus...when you know the real message of the gospel, it is sure to disturb you every time! It will disturb you because a life with Christ will demand more of you than you ever imagined, and will reward you greater than you ever dreamed. A conversation with the real Jesus will always result in one of two actions. Surrender or run and hide.

In order to be a disciple of Jesus Christ we must be *more* than just *willing* to give everything, but actually stand separate from it! That certainly changes our perspective. Like Peter, when so confronted we are apt to wonder about what we are doing! Peter suddenly wonders about himself and the sacrifices that he perceives he has made. So now, hearing this, Peter was worried. Jesus just took the opportunity to clarify His position on the matter. Basically, Jesus was simply saying that you cannot give more than God.

"So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.'" (Vs 29-30)

Further evidence that this Kingdom to which Jesus refers is not waiting for us at the end of earthly life, Jesus tells us that this reward is waiting for us *now in this time*.

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!" Mal 3:10 NLT

We cannot rule out the nature of this passage. We are so apt to make decisions in our lives based on financial well-being instead of what God really wants us to be, and how and where He wants us to serve. We are unwilling to face the fact that our "well-being" on this earth is ultimately in the hands of God. All of this passage does not release us from the call to work and provide, but it does prioritize our decision process and the motivations behind it. It is ultimately a matter of who is in control. Many a believer will openly say "amen" to such a promise, while other folks will quickly put it out of their minds! Because once again, such a meeting with the real Jesus can be disturbing. I think it is supposed to be so.

Jesus is not an investment plan, but He is indeed the finest of securities! The bottom line is this; do we trust God's handling of our lives, or shall we attempt the fruitless fight to keep control of our lives and destinies? Are we *disciples* or will we only follow as long as He leads us where we want to go?

"...many who are first will be last, and the last first." Oh how true the words! This is the way the Kingdom operates! I have seen gifted and worldly talented individuals never do much of anything for the kingdom, because they quietly believed they knew better than God. They thought they had their lives under control...*their* control. Then I have personally witnessed those with bad habits, weakness of flesh, no training or formal education, no popularity, clout or prominence move the world for Jesus Christ.

Do I have an explanation? Perhaps because when you have nothing, you have nothing to lose. **THIS**, was the point Jesus was trying to make. Like a child...Jesus is saying trust me and **jump**...