

Rich Young Rulers

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[0 : 00] Our passage tonight, Mark chapter 10, verses 17 through 22, continues a larger section of Scripture where Jesus teaches about who enters His kingdom and who is unable to enter His kingdom.

! Receiving and then entering the kingdom are different ways to talk about who receives salvation and eternal life. In Mark chapter 10, verses 13 through 16 last week, we saw that the kingdom belongs to people who approach Jesus like a small child.

In other words, the kingdom belongs to people who recognize that because of their sins against God, they are doomed unless Jesus intervenes on their behalf. We saw last week that Jesus saves those who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without Him.

We'll see a much different situation in tonight's passage, so let's go ahead and read Mark chapter 10, verses 17 through 22. It says, Here's the main idea for this passage.

To receive eternal life, people must make following Jesus their top priority. Once again, to receive eternal life, people must make following Jesus their top priority.

[2 : 15] Because Jesus purchased believers with His blood, we must recognize that we owe Him complete obedience. This passage describes an actual encounter between a wealthy, influential young man and Jesus.

Christ's response to Him demonstrates that superficial interest in eternal life must be confronted. The man was confronted with the choice between himself and God, between fulfillment in this life and fulfillment in the life to come.

He never questioned the truthfulness of what Jesus said. He just walked away. When it became clear that what Jesus was offering was going to cost Him His pride and His possessions, He decided that the price was too high, even for eternal life.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all introduce us to the man whom we know as the rich young ruler. The description of him as a rich young ruler comes from putting all three accounts together.

All three mention that the man was rich. Only Matthew chapter 19 verse 20 tells us that he was young. And only Luke chapter 18 verse 18 mentions that the man was a ruler, possibly an official in the local synagogue.

[3 : 34] The man we see tonight was completely opposite of the people who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without Jesus. Sadly for him, the rich young ruler also has a completely different outcome when this encounter ends than do people who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without Jesus.

We'll break tonight's passage into five sections. The first section comes in Mark chapter 10 verse 17. And there we see the concern revealed.

So we'll look at the concern revealed first. Let's read Mark chapter 10 verse 17 one more time. And as Jesus was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

This incident took place in the southern part of the region known as Perea, located east of the Jordan River. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem for the final time where He would die and rise again.

One day as He was setting out on a journey in that region, something unexpected happened. In fact, if you look at Matthew's account, Matthew 19.16 introduces this account with the Greek phrase that's translated, And behold.

[4 : 54] Several things about this rich, influential man who had achieved much according to the religious system of his day would have shocked the bystanders.

He ran up to Jesus. Middle Eastern men of status avoided running. Running necessitated gathering up the long robes worn by both men and women, exposing the legs.

Exposing the legs was considered undignified and even shameful. The man also knelt before Christ, assuming a humble, worshipful posture in the presence of the one whom the religious establishment hated and sought to kill.

The man addressed Jesus respectfully as good teacher. This young man seemed at first to be the ideal seeker. Some people must be persuaded of the basic truths of Scripture's teaching about God, about heaven and hell, and about eternal life.

But apparently no such convincing was necessary in this man's case. The first thing this young man did when he ran up to Jesus was to ask Him how to obtain eternal life.

[6 : 02] Look again at the question the young man asked. He said, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? This man calls Jesus good.

This was an astounding tribute indicating the impression that Jesus had made on him. The Jews referred to God as good, but never spoke this way of one another except in a qualified sense. Only God is good in the absolute sense of the word. The rich young ruler was awed by Jesus, and he had an extremely important question to ask Him. His question is one of the most significant in the whole Bible and for all humanity, and that, of course, is how do I get eternal life?

In the Bible, the gift of the life of God is called eternal life, entering the kingdom of God, having treasure in heaven, enjoying the age to come. And it is the life of God and life with God.

It's the privilege of being a member of God's kingdom, and it must be received with faith in Jesus and the reliance of a little child in Jesus. The man's question implies he believes that eternal life is something that you must work for because he says, What must I do?

[7 : 17] Christianity, though, is a done relationship. Eternal life is never achieved. It is received as a gift based upon what Jesus already has done for believers.

The young ruler must have both a change of theology and a change of heart if he is to inherit eternal life. The question also is unusual because most Jews would have no doubts about what to do.

Most Jews would have said, Observe the law. Probably the man had heard Jesus' teaching that mere obedience to the law was not enough. It was natural for someone who may have inherited some of his wealth to ask about inheriting eternal life.

Let's move to the second section of the passage now. In Mark chapter 10, verse 18, Jesus responds to the man's question. As usual, Jesus responds differently than we might expect.

And in Mark chapter 10, verse 18, we see the compliment redirected. The compliment redirected is what we'll look at next. Check out Mark chapter 10, verse 18 again.

[8 : 30] And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. Jesus answers the young ruler's question with a theological question.

Jesus puts the focus of the issue where it must be, and that's on God. The young man's starting point was wrong because his starting point was himself when he said, What must I do?

The rich young ruler was no doubt a good man by the standards of his day. He saw in Jesus another good man whose insight into spiritual matters could perhaps solve some lingering questions that plagued his soul.

Jesus forced the man to look to God for any hope of genuine goodness and eternal life.

Furthermore, Jesus implicitly confronted the young ruler with his evaluation of Jesus.

To call Jesus good is to call him God. Is that really what this man meant? He challenges the young ruler to think clearly and to choose his words carefully, and that's a challenge all of us should accept.

[9 : 35] This man used good in relative terms, but Jesus forced the man to think about goodness in absolute terms. Humans typically use a relative standard for goodness.

For example, our standard for good dogs is much different than our standard for good people. A good dog would be a dog who generally obeys and is housebroken, but hopefully we have a higher standard than that for a good person.

When we think about whether we are good, we often consider ourselves good if we're better than openly horrible people. For example, we might think that, well, at least we're all better than Hitler.

But God sets an absolute standard for goodness, and God's standard is the standard that God meets himself. That is total sinless perfection. The man needed to see himself in the context of

God's perfect character.

Jesus' response was a veiled claim to deity here. The man unwittingly calling Jesus good needed to perceive Jesus' true identity as God himself.

[10:46] When this young man called Jesus good teacher, his words were accurate, but he did not understand why those words were accurate. Jesus exposed that incomplete understanding by making the man think about why he called Jesus good.

Notice that the man never directly replied to Jesus' question here. However, peek down at verse 20. When the man speaks again, he addressed Jesus simply as teacher.

By dropping the word good, the man showed that he failed to see Jesus as God. The third section of our passage is in Mark chapter 10, verses 19 and 20.

In this section, Jesus sets up his answer to the man's question. And in this section, we see the commandments reviewed. The commandments reviewed is the next thing that we'll look at.

Let's read Mark chapter 10, verses 19 and 20 again. Jesus said to the young man, You know the commandments. Do not murder.

[11:54] Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother. And he said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.

The commandments that Jesus cites here come from the second table of commandments. Those are the commandments that address how people should interact with one another.

Obedience to those commands dealing with human relationships are more easily verified in a person's conduct than are the earlier commandments. The command do not defraud technically is not part of the Ten Commandments, and it may represent the commandment not to covet or the commandment not to steal, either one.

But perhaps it is an appropriate supplement applicable to a wealthy person. Before his conversion, the Apostle Paul had been much like this religious sinner.

The Apostle Paul was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

[13:08] That's what Paul said about himself in Philippians chapter 3, verses 5 and 6. But as Paul wrote in Galatians 1, 13 and 14, he also was a rising star in first century Judaism.

He said there, for you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

But as Paul was enabled by the Spirit of God to truly understand the law, Paul saw himself for what he truly was. Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans chapter 7, verses 7 through 13.

Here are Romans 7, 7 through 13. What then shall we say, that the law is sin? By no means. Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.

For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, you shall not covet. But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.

[14:21] For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died.

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.

So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and righteous, and good. Did that which is good then bring death to me? By no means. It was sin producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

Paul learned something very important that everyone needs to learn. Divine revelation in the law demonstrates and defines God's perfect righteousness, holiness, and absolute goodness.

It's the standard to which all who would achieve salvation by their own righteousness can never attain. The law shows sinners how perfectly good God is and how utterly evil they are, and it produces guilt, fear, dread, remorse, and the inevitable reality of divine judgment.

[15:38] God's law is our tutor or our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. That comes from Galatians 3, verse 24.

But like most of the Jewish people of Jesus' day, this man in Mark 10 had twisted the law into a means of establishing his own goodness and righteousness. We can tell that the man had twisted

the law into a means of establishing his own goodness and righteousness by how he responds to Jesus.

Look what he said in Mark 10, verse 20 again. He said, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. J.C. Ryle said, The spiritual blindness here exhibited is unhappily very common.

Myriads of people who claim to be Christians today have not an idea of their own sinfulness and their guilt in the sight of God. They flatter themselves that they have never done anything very wicked.

They have never murdered or stolen or committed adultery or given false testimony. They cannot surely be in much danger of missing heaven, they believe. But they forget the holy nature of the God they are dealing with.

[16 : 53] They forget how often they break his law in temper or imagination even when their outward conduct is correct. They never study such parts of Scripture as Matthew 5 or at any rate they study it with a thick veil over their hearts and do not apply it to themselves.

The result is that they are wrapped up in self-righteousness. Like the church of Laodicea, they are rich and have acquired wealth and do not need anything.

Self-satisfied they live and self-satisfied too often they die. J.C. Ryle lived from 1816 to 1900.

But apart from some of the old English wording in that quote, the quote sounds like it could have been written this morning. Listen again to a couple of the sentences from Ryle.

He said, Myriads of people who claim to be Christians today have not an idea of their own sinfulness and guilt in the sight of God. They flatter themselves that they have never done anything very wicked.

[17 : 59] Warren Wearsby said, This explains why Jesus pointed the young man to the law of Moses. He wanted him to see himself as a sinner bowed before the holy God. We cannot be saved from sin by keeping the law.

The law is a mirror that shows us how dirty we are but the mirror cannot wash us. One purpose of the law is to bring the sinner to Christ and that is what it did in this man's case.

The law can bring the sinner to Christ but the law cannot make the sinner like Christ. Only grace can do that. Wearsby is correct that the law is a mirror that shows us how dirty we are but the young man here in Mark chapter 10 failed to understand his own filthiness.

Far from being convicted by his inability to attain the perfection required by the law this young ruler like other legalists was convinced that his law keeping vindicated his righteousness.

His claim to have kept all these things from his youth up to that moment revealed his utter failure to understand his sinfulness. His self-righteousness had blinded him to the law's revelation of his sin.

[19 : 11] To him as to the Pharisees and to the rabbis the law was concerned merely with external behavior. It was that mistaken notion that Jesus corrected in the Sermon on the Mount.

If he had truly understood the law he would have realized as Paul came to understand that the law condemned the hatred lustful thoughts covetousness lies and dishonoring of his parents that were part of the fabric of his wretched heart.

Instead of keeping the law as he imagined he violated it daily in his mind which is as wicked as lawless behavior. Multiple times in the Sermon on the Mount which came before this encounter Jesus said that thinking about a sin in your mind is the same thing as committing that sin.

the young man had yet to understand that. The young man's reply to Jesus sounds arrogant and it was yet in his soul the young man knew that he was missing something.

We know he believes he's missing something because Matthew's account of this same event notes that the man asked one more question after he told Jesus he had kept all the commandments.

[20 : 23] Listen to Matthew chapter 19 verse 20 Matthew chapter 19 verse 20 says the young man said to him all these I have kept what do I still lack?

So that's the proof that he knew he was missing something. He said what do I still lack? Perhaps he'd expected Jesus to prescribe something that he needed to do to earn God's favor or to make up for anything missing.

The man's earlier question of what must I do to inherit eternal life seems to indicate that he was ready to do almost anything to earn eternal life. The word almost is the key to that last sentence.

The man seems to have been willing to do many things but he was unwilling to make following Jesus his top priority. And in our next section Jesus will expose that unwillingness.

Moving on to Mark chapter 10 verse 21 now we see the fourth section of our passage tonight. In that section we see the commitment required.

[21 : 33] So the commitment required is what we'll look at next. Jesus answers the man's question about what he still lacks. Here is Mark chapter 10 verse 21 again.

And Jesus looking at him loved him and said to him you lack one thing. Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

Before we dive into what Jesus said consider what the first part of the verse tells us. It says Jesus looking at him loved him. If someone had the audacity to tell us that he had kept all the commandments we might be more likely to call the person a liar.

And we would be correct to call that person a liar. We know that from our own experience and from the experience of everyone else that everyone sins. And the Bible also tells us that everyone sins. Romans 3 23 says for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. First John 1 8 says if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[22 : 52] We might have been less surprised had Jesus responded to this man similar to how he later responded to the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23. Here's a sampling of the woes that Jesus pronounced on the scribes and Pharisees.

These verses are Matthew chapter 23 verses 23 through 28. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 23 verses 23 through 28.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you tithe mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law justice and mercy and faithfulness those you ought to have done without neglecting the others you blind guides straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside they are full of greed and self indulgence you blind Pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness Matthew chapter 23 verse 28 certainly would have applied to this rich young ruler that's where Jesus said so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness but here in Mark chapter 10 verse 21 the text says that

Jesus looked at the man and loved him Jesus reaction shows us that unlike the scribes and Pharisees this man recognized that he was missing something for eternal life so Jesus realized that the man's questions were earnest and sincere J.C.

[25 : 06] Ryle said Jesus love beyond doubt was a love of pity and compassion our Lord looked with pity on the strange mixture of earnestness and ignorance which the case before him presented he saw with compassion a soul struggling with all the weakness and infirmity entailed by the fall the conscience ill at ease and aware that it wanted relief the understanding sunk in darkness and blinded as to the first principles of spiritual religion just as we look with sorrow at some noble ruin roofless and shattered and unfit for man's use yet knowing many a mark of the skill with which it was designed and reared at first so we may suppose that Jesus looked with tender concern at this man's soul Ryle continued we must never forget that Jesus feels love and compassion for the souls of the ungodly without controversy Jesus feels a particular love for those who hear his voice and follow him they are his sheep given to him by the father and watched with the special care they are his bride joined to him in an everlasting covenant and dear to him as part of himself but the heart of

Jesus is a wide heart he has abundance of pity compassion and tender concern even for those who are following sin and the world he who wept over unbelieving Jerusalem is still the same he would still gather into his bosom the ignorant and self righteous the faithless and impenitent if they were only willing to be gathered we may boldly tell the chief of sinners that Christ loves them salvation is ready for the worst of people if they will only come to Christ if they are lost it is not because Jesus does not love them and is not ready to save his own solemn words unravel the mystery he said in John 3 19 people love the darkness rather than the light and he said in John 5 40 you refuse to come to me that you might have life Jesus read this young man's heart he saw the turmoil that his next words would bring so

Jesus his own great heart of love went out to the young man we need to have the same type of concern for the souls of the lost as Jesus shows here Jesus showed his love for the rich young ruler

by how he answered the man's question Jesus said you lack one thing go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me Jesus issues a command to the young man to sell all that he has to give to the poor and follow him and then gain riches in heaven this command reflects the wisdom of another world the way to become truly rich is to give riches away these words will help expose the young man's blindness he has claimed that he has kept all the commandments and so Jesus effectively says okay let's start with the first commandment that commandment is you shall have no other gods before me what if the young man's money was all gone and everything that comes with it respect admiration mansions servants freedom to do whatever he wants will he give it all up to follow

Jesus or has money become his God this command echoes what Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount listen to Matthew chapter 6 verse 24 Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 verse 24 no one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other you cannot serve God and money the one thing the man lacked was devotion to God had this man truly trusted in the goodness of God he would have welcomed Jesus command as best for him the command to sell all and give to the poor should never be universalized and applied to every professing it pertains to the need of a particular person here but this command should never be ignored either other persons may have to give up other things to follow

Jesus perhaps a vocation a style of life a sinful passion or even a relationship this call is not to poverty it's a call to discipleship which takes many forms discipleship however is costly it involves sacrifice it involves obedience it involves following the example of Jesus it also involves reward something that is mentioned here in verse 21 and expanded upon later in verses 29 through 31 the reference to treasure in heaven also echoes the sermon on the mount listen to what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 through 21 here are Matthew 6 19 through 21 Jesus said 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!

[30 : 50] is there your heart will be also here in Mark chapter 10 verse 21 Jesus quickly and skillfully! showed where the man's heart was the man valued his earthly possessions more than he valued the opportunity for eternal life so the question is would the man realize that and repent or would he hang on to his earthly wealth the man makes the wrong choice and we'll see that in the final verse of tonight's passage so far we have seen the concern revealed the compliment rejected the commandments reviewed and the commitment required in our last verse tonight we see the conditions rejected the conditions rejected are the last thing we'll look at here is Mark chapter 10 verse 22 again disheartened by the saying he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions

R.C. Sproul said the Greek word translated as disheartened communicates several nuances he was downcast appalled shocked and devastated so this one who ran to Jesus walked away from him in sorrow yes he actually walked away from Jesus the pearl of great price was standing in front of him but he turned his back on Jesus he was like a man who would not trade a wooden nickel for a billion dollars and even that is a poor analogy he thought his own possessions were worth more than Jesus he preferred his own bank account to the riches of the kingdom of God of all the people who ever came sincerely to the feet of Jesus this man is the only one recorded to have gone away worse than he came the man went away sorrowful because he was unwilling to give up his great possessions he illustrated what Paul would later write in 1st

Timothy chapter 6 verse 10 here is 1st Timothy chapter 6 verse 10 for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs we often look at the first part of that verse but we miss the second part of the verse where it says it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs that exactly is what the rich young ruler did in our passage tonight so what a contrast is found in tonight's verses between the rich young ruler and the little children that we looked at last week the children possess nothing but Jesus is blessing but the kingdom of God belongs to people such as they are people who recognize that they are helpless and hopeless without Jesus the rich young ruler seems to possess everything both financial attainment and moral accomplishment but he walks away from the kingdom the Bible says the rich young ruler was a wealthy man in reality he was bankrupt that's the condition of all men naturally we are all debtors to God who have no hope of paying what we owe God requires from us that we be

holy even as god is holy the minute we sin we are infinitely in debt to the righteousness of god but we keep on sinning storing up wrath for ourselves on the day of wrath the tragedy for the rich young ruler was that the answer to his debt problem was standing right in front of him christ was the only possible debt relief for him likewise christ is the only possible debt relief for us and he is at hand waiting for us to call on him for his help that's what the gospel is all about christ pays our debt and he gives to us his righteousness which is the only thing that will satisfy the demands of god's law by faith when we put our trust in christ alone we receive what we need to get into the kingdom of god so we inherit eternal life through christ and like any inheritance it's a gift not a payment that we earn remember the main idea to receive eternal life people must make following jesus their top priority this entire section emphasizes that riches make being a disciple difficult but the rewards of discipleship are worth much more than material possessions jesus never taught that wealth is evil jesus never taught that poverty is better than riches jesus never taught that only the poor can be saved jesus did teach that discipleship is costly and that wealth often is a hindrance to repentance and acceptance of the gospel you may have noticed that the lesson is titled rich young rulers that pluralization of rulers is intentional this episode actually features two rich young rulers one of those rich young rulers the one directly identified by the passage shows us what behavior to avoid the other rich young ruler shows us what behavior to emulate by now have you deduced to that second rich young ruler is the second rich young ruler is jesus in his earthly incarnation jesus was in his early 30s here and before he came to earth jesus was rich far richer than this young ruler could possibly imagine as the son of god jesus had lived for all of eternity in the glory wealth love and sweet fellowship of his father what jesus asked the rich young ruler to do was familiar to jesus jesus had already left all his riches behind as paul says perfectly in second corinthians chapter eight verse nine look at what paul says in second corinthians chapter eight verse nine for you know the grace of our lord jesus christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich do we as believers truly grasp the significance of what jesus sacrificed for us when we think of jesus's sacrifice we often go straight to jesus's suffering and death on the cross we tend to forget everything that jesus gave up just to take on human form and come to this earth as a baby listen to second corinthians chapter eight verse nine again for you know the grace of our lord jesus christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you by his poverty might become rich jesus knew why he had given up those riches jesus knew that he had come down from heaven to follow god's will listen to john chapter six verse 38 this is a quote from jesus and jesus said in john six verse 38 for i have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me jesus can demand that his followers be like him because jesus already has done everything that jesus ever asked us to do but jesus has done even more than that here's what paul told the philippians in philippians chapter two verses three through eight philippians chapter two verses three through eight say do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves let each of you look not only to his own interest but also to the interest of others have this mind among yourselves which is yours in christ jesus who though he was in the form of god did not count equality with god a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross we read john six thirty eight earlier but the verses following it give us a glorious promise the same promise that jesus would have fulfilled for the rich young ruler if the man had been willing to follow jesus listen to what jesus said in john chapter six verses thirty eight through forty for i have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that i should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day for this is the will of my father that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life and i will raise him up on the last day let's pray father we thank you for the reminder in this passage that even all the riches of this world could never come close to the riches of having eternal life with you and your son in heaven and eventually the new earth and a new heaven when we are tempted to place anything above that help us get our priorities straight and help us realize that our top priority should be following jesus in jesus name we pray amen you and your son and