

“Lessons from the Rich Young Ruler”  
Mark 10:17-22  
(Preached at Trinity, February 20, 2013)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Tonight we come to an account that is found in all three of the synoptic Gospels.  
Mark 10:17; Matthew 19:16; Luke 18:18
2. After our Lord’s teaching on divorce he entered into the home of one of the disciples. During that occasion He taught His disciples once again of the importance of humility and selflessness in His Kingdom.
3. In all three synoptic Gospels there is the distinct impression that this takes place immediately following Jesus blessing the little children. And once again He will teach on the nature of entering into His Kingdom.
4. While on the road, suddenly a young man came running up seeking the answer to a most important question. As we compare the Gospels we learn several things about him. Mark, as usual is brief on details.
  - a. **Matthew 19:20** tells us he was a young man
  - b. **Matthew 19:22** tells us he was wealthy, in fact very wealthy – Matthew said he had “much property”
  - c. Luke described him as a man of prominence, a ruler or a man of authority –  
**Luke 18:18 NAU** - "A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"  
ἄρχων - ruler, prince, chief, magistrate, chief ruler  
Thus, we refer to him as the “Rich Young Ruler”
  - d. In addition, Mark implies that he was virtuous – **Mark 10:20 NAU** - "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."
5. He had a keen interest in his soul. He had lived a virtuous life, yet had been unable to find rest for his soul. He was interested in obtaining eternal life and he came seeking Christ to find the answer.
6. Tonight I want us look closely at the account of this young man seeking salvation for his soul because ultimately he went away unconverted. It has much to say about how a person comes to Christ. It should be a wakeup call for the multitudes in our generation who practice a decision oriented evangelism.
  - a. Every major evangelism program used by our churches focuses on leading the sinner to make a decision for Christ – usually by praying a prayer.
  - b. This passage demonstrates clearly that salvation is not based upon a mere interest in eternal life but upon a total surrender of one’s self to the essential being of Christ

- I. Let's Begin by Looking at What the Rich Young Ruler Did That Was Right
- A. He came publicly – Jesus was on the highway with His disciples
1. This was in contrast to the religious leaders of John 12  
**John 12:42-43 NAU** - "Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."
  2. It is essential that we confess Him publicly. In other words, to openly live out the claims of Christ upon our life.  
**Matthew 10:32-33 NAU** - "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. <sup>33</sup> "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."
- B. He came with zeal and fervor – he came running  
**Mark 10:17 NAU** - "As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
1. There was a sense of urgency
  2. He came with a high reverence for Christ  
 He knelt in reverence –  
**Mark 10:17 NAU** - "As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"  
γουνυπετέω - to fall on the knees, the act of imploring aid, and of expressing reverence and honour
  3. He referred to Jesus as "Good Teacher"
    - a. To call Jesus teacher was not that unusual. His preaching and teaching was well attested to by this time.
    - b. But the addition of the word "good" is remarkable. Nowhere else do we find this address for Christ.
- C. He came with a sincere concern for his soul  
**Mark 10:17 NAU** - "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
1. He came asking the greatest question a man might ask
  2. He came with a high respect for the law and obedience to God  
 "what shall I do"  
 He had obviously be raised well  
**Mark 10:20 NAU** - "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."
  3. He came seeking eternal life and believed there was something he must do to obtain it.
- D. In other words, he came running with zeal; with a high reverence for Christ; with great interest in the condition of his eternal soul.

- II. Jesus' Gospel compared with much of modern teaching
- A. Most churches would see this man as an excellent church prospect
1. He was young, wealthy, prominent, virtuous, and zealous  
And he was interested.
  2. For many today he would be an excellent candidate for leading through the sinner's prayer.
  3. Examining a profession of faith demands great patience and discernment.
- B. Jesus immediately began exposing this young man's heart  
**Mark 10:18 NAU** - "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."
1. It was in the form of a rebuke but we are not told why
  2. Some say that perhaps Jesus detected flattery in the young man. He was sincere in his desire for eternal life but he was not sincere in recognition of who he was talking to.
  3. Perhaps it was his misunderstanding of the Godhead – of the deity of Christ. This is partly right.
    - a. The young man did not recognize the deity of Christ. But there was a greater principle Jesus was teaching here.
    - b. The Rich Young Ruler was looking at Jesus as only a man. With this presumption Jesus brought him to consider carefully the difference between human goodness and God's goodness.
  4. In this single statement Jesus was declaring the infinite greatness of God as reflected in the first four commandments.
    - a. This single statement was designed to make him reexamine his qualifications for eternal life. It was a statement to cause him to examine the nature of true goodness—the infinite contrast between human goodness and God's goodness.
    - b. In this one statement the young man was convicted of breaking the first four commandments – but he didn't see it.
- C. Second, Jesus exposed the self-centeredness of the Rich Young Ruler  
The Rich Young Ruler's focus was upon self  
"What must I do, that I may have eternal life"  
"These things have I kept from my youth up"  
"What lack I yet?"
1. This is the problem with much of today's theology  
"God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life"  
"Accept Jesus as your personal Savior"
  2. Much of today's evangelism has a focus upon the individual and his needs and desires
  3. Jesus' Gospel was God centered.  
Jesus focused upon God, His holiness, His law
  4. This young man was only interested in what would benefit him. He was not at all interested in giving up his idols.

- D. Jesus had no problem reconciling law and Gospel, faith and works
1. We are saved by faith alone apart from human works but this doesn't mean that the Gospel is void of any life changing pursuit of Christ. The Gospel is not void of repentance where we forsake our idols
  2. Jesus clearly taught the demands of the Law.
    - a. His Gospel message began with the Law. Gospel preaching holds forth the Law
    - b. Jesus held forth the second table of the Decalogue. He replaced the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment with "Do not defraud" which would be the behavioral application of the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment.
  3. What must I do to have eternal life? Obey the Law. All of it . . . perfectly.
    - a. The young man sincerely believed he had kept the Law But he didn't understand the Law.
    - b. The truth is he had miserably broken the Law which he was about to find out.
    - c. No one can keep the Law, which drives us to Christ.

### III. Where did the Rich Young Ruler Go Wrong?

- A. He had only a superficial view of Christ – He called Him "Good Teacher" but He did not see His true greatness.
1. This is witnessed by his unwillingness to follow the command of Christ.
  2. He didn't see Jesus worthy of forsaking all else to have Him.
- B. He had an improper view of the Law
1. He actually believed that he had obeyed the law—thus he really had no need of a savior.
  2. He had no understanding that he had offended a holy God
  3. Jesus came to save sinners  
**Mark 2:17 NAU** - "*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"
  4. This young man was blind to his sin
- C. After pointing the young man to the holiness of God and the virtue of His law Jesus finally gives the ultimatum – He calls for the young man to repent of his sinful rebellion against God. He commanded him to turn from his idolatry.
1. Jesus knew the young man's problem  
His material possessions enslaved him - He was in love with his money
  2. He had not really kept the commandments  
He did not love God supremely?
  3. Jesus calls him to repentance - Repentance is essential to the Gospel
    - a. Jesus gave him several imperatives: "Go" "Sell" "Give" "Follow"  
It was a command for a radical change in lifestyle; a radical change in what he saw as precious.
    - b. Wasn't Jesus calling him to a salvation by works rather than to trust Jesus alone? NO!

- c. In reality Jesus command was “Trust Me alone.” You will find infinite treasures in Me.  
And this is exactly what the young man could not do and would not do.
4. He was not willing to follow Christ at all cost - Jesus told him, "and come, follow Me." **V.21**  
By rejecting Christ he forfeited eternal life.
5. He could not follow Christ because he was enslaved by his wealth
- Jesus’ command was particularly suited to this young man
  - Not every wealthy person is commanded to divest himself  
Abraham – **Genesis 13:2** – “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”  
Joseph of Arimathea
  - It is our view of our wealth that is the problem  
Abraham gave Lot the choicest property  
Joseph of Arimathea gave his new tomb for Jesus
6. Further illustration – An example of two men were called to make a sacrifice – Abraham and this young man  
Abraham was called to sacrifice his son – the child of promise  
The Rich Young Ruler was called to sacrifice his possessions  
Which one trusted God?
7. The Gospel’s demand:  
**Matthew 16:24-26 NAU** - "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. <sup>25</sup> "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
8. The paradox is that the man that loses everything gains everything  
The one who follows Christ finds true wealth.  
He becomes the possessor of “Treasure in heaven”  
Paul said:  
**Philippians 3:8 NAU** - " More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,"
- What was valued before conversion completely paled in the light of Christ
  - Ultimately this text points us to our need for the fulness of Christ.

#### Conclusion:

We should always search our hearts: Have we forsaken all to have Christ? Is He our greatest treasure.