



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 19:16-30

Topic

Jesus emphasizes the difference between human goodness and His saving grace in His call to the rich young ruler to follow Him

Title

"Goodness, Graciousness, Great Call to Follow"

Introduction

"Americans today, compared to 55 years ago, own twice as many cars and eat out twice as much per person, but we don't seem to be any happier because of it."

That's a quote from a 2013 article, "The Psychology of Materialism & Why It's Making You Unhappy."

According to the American Psychological Association, the overall well-being of Americans has, if anything, declined since the 1950s, while our consumption has only increased.

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Another quote: "Compared with their grandparents, today's young adults have grown up with much more affluence, slightly less happiness and much greater risk of depression and assorted social pathology. Our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being" (David G. Myers, author of *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty*).

We live in a consumer culture and a **lot** of Americans struggle with materialism.

The story of the rich young ruler touches, obviously, on materialism. There are two mistakes people commonly make when studying this story:

1. One mistake is to believe Jesus' demands upon the rich young ruler to give everything away applies to **everyone**. Jesus never made this a general command to all who would follow Him, but especially to this one rich man whose riches were clearly an obstacle to his discipleship.
2. The second mistake is to believe this applies to almost **no one**, certainly not to us, when we are clearly living in a consumer culture and there are those today for whom the best thing they could do for themselves spiritually is to radically forsake the materialism that is *ruling* and *ruining* them.

The rich young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." It's commonly noted that he was possessed by his possessions, rather than the other way around.

Building upon that, I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 What On Earth Possesses You?, and, #2 What In Eternity Will You Possess?

#1 What On Earth Possesses You?

(v16-22)

It's hard to talk about money and materialism. It's always the other guy who is rich - *not* me, *not* us.

It's true that God does not demand of everyone what Jesus demanded of the rich young ruler. In the Bible, Abraham, David, and Solomon were all incredibly wealthy. In the New Testament, Joseph of Arimathea and Barnabas were men of wealth who did right with their riches.

At the same time, there are severe warnings about the love of money, and how we handle the money and possessions entrusted to us.

1Ti 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

I suggest, here at the beginning of our study, that you not immediately make either of the mistakes I mentioned, but allow God the Holy Spirit to apply His Word to you, in your situation.

Mat 19:16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us this man was rich. Matthew tells us he was young (v22), and Luke tells us he was a ruler. Hence, he is the rich young ruler.

"Ruler" probably refers to his official position in the local synagogue. This guy was a sincere, religious man, keeping the Law of Moses blamelessly. If you were a Jewish parent, he's the guy you'd want your daughter to marry.

He wanted to know "what good thing" he must do. There was an ongoing dialog and debate among religious Jews about the Law of Moses. It contained some 613 commands, but the Jews were always trying to determine which *ones* or *one* was the greatest command.

The rich young ruler approached Jesus as if He were another rabbi, in order to solicit His opinion on which is the greatest commandment.

Mat 19:17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Before answering his question, Jesus challenged the rich young ruler regarding who he thought Jesus was. Either Jesus was good, or he ought not to have called Him good; but, seeing as there is none good but God, Jesus - **Who is good - *must be God.***

A lot of well-meaning people have questions they'd like Jesus to answer; but they don't really believe Jesus is God. In fact, He has answered all the questions that need settling in order for you to be saved and, afterward, to serve Him.

But the one really important question is always the one Jesus is asking people by His Holy Spirit, "Who do you say that I am?"

Jesus said, "if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He was not suggesting that a person could be saved by keeping the Law. You have to take His statement in context. As we will see, He was using the Law as it was intended - to show the rich young ruler how he fell short of the perfect righteousness that the Law demands.

We ought to use the Law just that way - showing folks why the Bible says that, although they may seem good, or at least less bad than others, they are nevertheless sinners who fall short of the righteousness of God.

Mat 19:18 He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, " 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER,' 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' 'YOU SHALL NOT STEAL,' 'YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,'

Mat 19:19 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER,' and, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "

On another occasion, later in Matthew, when asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus will say, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (22:37-40).

Here, He mentions five of the six commandments that govern a mans relationship with his fellow man, as well as the summary of the Law from Leviticus. That's because Jesus wasn't so much answering the rich young ruler's question as He was using the Law to convict him of his sin.

Mat 19:20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

He wasn't being boastful or arrogant. It *was* possible to keep these five commandments, at least outwardly. And, in doing so, others would say that you were fulfilling the one commandment from Leviticus, to "love your neighbor as yourself."

The apostle Paul, for example, when reviewing his life in Judaism said, "according to the righteousness stipulated in the Law *I was blameless*" (Philippians 3:6 NET).

The rich young ruler had it all. I'm guessing he was ruggedly handsome on top of everything else. But he remained troubled. He was sensing eternity in his heart, but with no assurance of his salvation, since it was by works.

Mat 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

This might sound like salvation by works, except for what we read in the next verse:

Mat 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Here we see his heart exposed by the very Law he claimed to keep. He hadn't murdered anyone; he hadn't committed adultery. He had not stolen, or born false witness. He respected his parents. Overall, he seemed to love his neighbor as himself.

But *inwardly* he coveted and lusted after riches.

He preferred his earthly possessions to eternal life, and no amount of commandment-keeping was going to be able to save him from the natural, sinful bent of his own wicked heart.

I wonder if this is why, when reviewing the commandments, Jesus did not mention the tenth, "thou shalt not covet." It was the one commandment which the rich young ruler could not have honestly said, "this I have kept from my youth," because his heart was captivated by his great possessions.

Jesus demonstrated how to use the Law. You show a person that if they perfectly keep the Law, they *can* be saved; but that observing it outwardly is *not* keeping it, and that **everyone has broken God's Law in their heart.**

The rich young ruler, brought to see his own heart and challenged to make a decision, chose earth over eternity. "He went away sorrowful," still sensing eternity in his heart, but unwilling to repent and bring forth the fruits of repentance which, for him, would mean divesting himself of his wealth.

He was "sorrowful" while yet retaining his "great possessions." The things of earth cannot substitute for the things of the Spirit your heart longs for.

His love of money kept the rich young ruler bound to earth, rather than freed for eternity. Money may not be the issue for you; but, before we talk about other things, let's be sure.

Forget about whether you think you are rich or poor and concentrate on your giving to God. According to a recent article I read,

- Tithers make up only 10-25% of a normal congregation.
- Only 5 percent of the US tithes, with 80% of Americans only giving 2% of their income.
- Christians are only giving at 2.5% per capita, while during the Great Depression they gave at a 3.3% rate.

God is probably not asking you to give Him every penny. But if you give nothing, or next to nothing, to God, it is an indication that your possessions possess you in a fashion similar to the rich young ruler.

Maybe possessions are not a problem for you. Is there *something* else, or *someone* else, that possesses you in a way that is hindering the call of Jesus to fully follow Him?

You might frame this with a different question, namely, "What is it you would refuse to give-up for Jesus if He asked you to?"

Jesus has every right to demand that we sacrifice for Him. After all, He left Heaven for us, to save us, while we were yet sinners in rebellion against Him.

But more than that, Jesus knows that whatever, or whoever, we covet in our hearts can never satisfy our deepest longings, because only He can do that. If we insist on holding onto that which we covet, we will find ourselves "sorrowful" in the end.

For some of us, there is one thing that we seem to continually struggle with, that hinders our full devotion to Jesus. But for us and for others, there can be more than one thing, or the one thing might change over time.

The apostle John was writing to believers - disciples - when he said, "keep yourself from idols" (First John 5:21). The devil utilizes the world to tempt our flesh with all manner of things that divide our hearts and hinder our devotion to The Lord.

Each of us, individually but with the Lord's help, must answer for ourselves the question, "What possesses **me**?"

When we do, we should expect Him to show us things we must sacrifice, or give away, or leave behind. If we never or rarely have a rich young ruler encounter with The Lord, we're just not listening to the still small voice of His Spirit, because this side of eternity, our hearts are too susceptible to other influences.

#2 What In Eternity Will You Possess?

(v23-30)

What happened to the rich young ruler? We don't know. All we do know is that he had an encounter with the living God but chose to reject eternal life.

Mat 19:23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
Mat 19:24 And again I say to 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."

Prosperity is, apparently, perilous. For one thing, it gives a person a sense that God must be blessing him, which can give their heart a false sense of assurance that all is well in their walk with The Lord.

For another thing, riches can hinder a person's dependence upon God. Who needs God to act when you're able to provide for yourself?

God promised Israel He'd prosper them for their obedience, but it was always when they were prospering that they promptly forgot God, and instead went after the idols of their neighbors in the world.

Mat 19:25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Like all Jews, the disciples equated riches with God's favor. In addition, we've seen that the rich young ruler was an exemplary Jew. If he couldn't be saved, who could?

Well, it wasn't that he *couldn't* be saved, but that he *wouldn't* be saved because he refused to repent and give evidence of it by doing what The Lord asked of him.

Mat 19:26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The salvation of anyone - rich or poor - is impossible except for the intervention of God. God draws men and women and children to Himself, by His grace operating on their hearts, revealing their sin and showing them the Savior.

Salvation is all of God, but that does not cancel out your responsibility. By His grace The Lord frees your will to receive Him by faith, or to reject Him. His grace is not irresistible but requires a decision on your part.

One theologian puts it like this:

We speak of the will of man being freed by grace to emphasize that people do not have a naturally free will when it comes to believing in Jesus, but that God must graciously take action to free our wills if we are going to be able to believe in his Son whom He sent for the salvation of all. When our wills are freed, we can either accept God's saving grace in faith or reject it to our own ruin. In other words, God's saving grace is *resistible*, which is to say that He dispenses His calling, drawing, and convicting grace (which would bring us to salvation if responded to with faith) in such a way that we may reject it. We become free to believe in Jesus and free to reject him.

Seeing that the rich young ruler would have had to sacrifice all his possessions to follow Jesus got the disciples wondering what a person would gain thereby.

Mat 19:27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"

I don't think there's anything wrong with Peter's question, as long as you keep it in perspective. You shouldn't sacrifice only to gain, or only if you're going to gain. But there's nothing wrong with knowing what is in store for you in eternity.

Even Jesus, when we read about His sacrifice on the Cross, knew that by it He would gain by bringing many sons to glory. We read of Him in Hebrews that, "for the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2).

Mat 19:28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The "regeneration" was Jesus' way of describing the Kingdom of God on the earth. God had promised Israel an earthly kingdom; and Jesus came offering it, as its King. The Jews, however, rejected Him and, when they did, it delayed the establishing of their kingdom.

Jesus would be crucified, rise from the dead three days later, then ascend into Heaven after another forty days. There He waits to return in His Second Coming to establish the kingdom on the earth.

It will last for one thousand years and, during that time, the earth will, indeed, be regenerated. My favorite phrase to describe that process is "streams in the desert," derived from Isaiah 41:18, "I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water."

During that thousand-year kingdom, also called by scholars the Millennium, Jesus will "sit on the throne," ruling over the earth from Jerusalem. His disciples will "sit on twelve thrones," co-ruling with Him, "judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

That's what Peter and the boys could expect during the kingdom age. Leading up to it, Jesus promised them spiritual resources.

Mat 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

This verse, at least the bulk of it, describes your spiritual resources **now**, on the earth, while you are asked to make sacrifices and surrender all to Jesus.

A relationship with Jesus must take priority over every human relationship and, ultimately, it could cost you your family and friends.

Likewise, as with the rich young ruler, you might be asked - either directly by The Lord or indirectly through persecution - to give up your "lands," and other possessions.

But whatever you sacrifice on this earth, waiting for the kingdom, will be compensated by your spiritual family. You find, as a believer, you have millions of people who can function, emotionally and physically even, as brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives, and children. In other words, you are a member of a huge, loving, even if sometimes dysfunctional, family of believers.

And they should help you, physically, if you need them to.

By the way - can I get back, just for a moment, about the stats on giving by Christians? In that same article, the author said,

What would happen if believers were to increase their giving to a minimum of, let's say, 10%? There would be an additional \$165 billion for churches to use and distribute. The global impact would be phenomenal. Here's just a few things the Church could do with the kind of money:

- \$25 billion could relieve global hunger, starvation and deaths from preventable diseases in five years.
- \$12 billion could eliminate illiteracy in five years.
- \$15 billion could solve the world's water and sanitation issues, specifically at places in the world where 1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day.
- \$1 billion could fully fund all overseas mission work.
- \$100 – \$110 billion would still be left over for additional ministry expansion.

Notice the words that close verse twenty-nine, "and inherit eternal life." That's the greatest reward of all. It reminds us that, even though we will enjoy spiritual resources in abundance on earth, times will still be tough, but we are looking beyond earth, beyond even the Kingdom of God on the earth, to eternity.

"**And** inherit eternal life." What an understatement! As if it's not the greatest news a sinner could hope to hear; or that a suffering servant could hope to cling to.

Mat 19:30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

In other words, our methods for judging spiritual success are frequently wrong. In the Jewish culture of the first century, the rich young ruler was thought to be "first," and the disciple of Jesus "last."

But in the kingdom, the simplest believer is ahead of the rich young ruler.

I came across this quote: "some people are so poor that all they have is money."

If you are not a believer, what does it profit you to gain the whole world if, in the end, your soul is lost?

If you are a believer, you are rich in faith, and have all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and have a glorious entrance into eternity awaiting you.

Live in ways that reflect the joy of your salvation.