

The Rich, Young, Ruler

Luke 18:15–30 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: The account before us today can be found in all three of the Synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Each of these Gospel writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believed this story was integral to the life and message of Jesus.

CONTEXT: Remember that we pick up as Jesus is making His way to Jerusalem to face the cross.

TEXT: Luke 18:15–30 (ESV)

15 Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them.

Mark tells us that little children were running to Jesus, and Luke adds that babies were being brought to Him as well.

ILLUSTRATION: The Pastor who mentored me early in ministry taught me not to neglect the appropriate use of physical touch. We live in a day when people are so lonely and desperate for the approval of another human being that lives can be changed by something as simple as a hug.

The ancients understood this. Physical touch was an integral part of the worship experience. They laid hands on those who were set apart for preaching; they laid hands on those who were sick, and they greeted one another with a Holy kiss.

Now, Let me clarify - in our culture, if you kiss someone, they will likely call the law on you. But don't let our cultural hangups cause you to miss the power of the ministry of touch.

- Jesus touched the leper.
- A sick woman sought to touch the hem of his garment.
- When Jesus was raised from the dead, Mary embraced Him tightly.

So, of course, these parents wanted Jesus to lay his hand on the brow of their babies.

15b And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

The tense of the verb is best understood as a conative imperfect, meaning, the disciples attempted unsuccessfully to rebuke them.¹

16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, **“Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.**

¹ Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 453.

So, the preachers are rebuking the parents, and Jesus is rebuking the preachers. Mark's account adds that Jesus was indignant with the disciples.

Our Lord is angered by the misappropriation of a rebuke. Just because something gets on our nerves doesn't mean it gets on His nerves. In fact, some of the things that get on our nerves greatly bless Him. We must remember that.

[¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.](#)

NOW, there was something about that statement that rattled the cage of a young man in attendance that day.

Luke 18:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

When we take the composite accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we know that this man was a ***Rich, Young, Ruler***.

Now, this young man had four distinct advantages working in his favor at this point...

1. Four Advantages

First of all...

A. He Came to the Right Person

I'm sure as a man of wealth, this young man had access to the top Rabbis and the Chief Priests; he may have even had access to the Court of Herod himself. But for some reason, he knew what so many people have yet to understand -

As Peter said in **Acts 4:12 (ESV)**

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

So make no mistake, this young man got that right... He came to the right person.... Not only that...

B. He Came with the Right Attitude

Mark 10:17

¹⁷ 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?”

- **He Ran** – Very few times in my ministry have I seen a man or woman run to Jesus. Typically we have to reason with them, then eventually they come... not this man... he ran to Jesus... in front of all his peers and neighbors. That says something!
- **He knelt** – He bent his knee to Jesus, acknowledging that he was before a superior, humbling himself as one would before a king.

He came to the right person.... He came with the right attitude...

C. He Asked the Right Question

Luke 18:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, *what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

He wants to go to Heaven; he wants to be saved. He had everything this world could offer, but something was missing, and he knew it. Deep inside, he knew things were not right with God.

He came to the right person.... He came with the right attitude...He asked the right question...

D. He Had the Right Morals

¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.* ²⁰*You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’”* ²¹ And he said, “*All these I have kept from my youth.*”

Now, Jesus didn’t argue with him, and neither should we. He said he had kept these commands, and we must give him the benefit of the doubt.

This wasn’t the prodigal’s son... he wasn’t spending his wealth on riotous living. He was a fine young man. He played by the rules. He had a stellar reputation.

So, get the picture, He came to the right person.... He came with the right attitude...He asked the right question...He had the right morals.

OH! We would sign him up and dunk him the same day! Repeat this little three-sentence prayer, and you are in! In fact, we may fast-track him to teach Sunday School. We may even make him a deacon.

But Jesus understood the second point, you see, while there were FOUR ADVANTAGES, there were also...

2. Three Obstacles

A. The Obstacle of Wealth

Matthew 19:22 tells us...

²² ... he was one who owned much property.

- There is something about wealth that gives us a false sense of security.
- We feel as though God has smiled upon us; therefore, he must be pleased with us.

ILLUSTRATION: Caitlyn was in the play “The Sound of Music”. There is a song in that movie when Maria realizes she is going to marry the wealthy captain that says what so many of us think...there is a line that says...

*Somewhere in my youth or childhood,
I must have done something good*

What’s the idea? God must be pleased with me for giving me wealth.

Riches can really distort a person’s perspective. We gain wealth because we are good at one thing typically. But how many of us have met someone who gained wealth and suddenly thought they were an expert on all things?

ILLUSTRATION: This time of year - you will see the celebrities coming out of the woodwork telling us who we ought to vote for. What makes them think they have a superior understanding of government? A hit song? A lead role in a movie?

Wealth can do that to a person.

Proverbs 18:11

¹¹ A rich man’s wealth is his strong city, And like a high wall in his own imagination.

This young man had the disadvantage of wealth...

B. The Obstacle of Youth**Matthew 19:20 (NASB95)**

²⁰ The young man said to Him,

There is something about youth that makes one feel invincible. I think that is why we send young men to war. We don’t send 40-year-olds into battle. Why? They aren’t about to charge that line... they know what could happen.

With age comes the haunting specter of death, but not so with youth. But young man, let me warn you that it is very doubtful that Christ will be meaningful to you later if He has no value for you now.

C. The Obstacle of Authority

Luke 18:18 tells us he was a ruler.

Something about being the guy other people turn to causes us to think we have all the answers.

- It is very difficult for a counselor to go to counseling.
- It is very difficult for a teacher to be taught.

That is one of the reasons Scripture warns against making a novice a teacher... Something about authority **solidifies one's belief system**.

He had 4 Advantages, He had 3 Obstacles. Jesus gave him...

3. Three Directives

The first thing Jesus does is wage war on his idols. You see, you can't come to Jesus with an arm full of other gods. That was the beauty of the little children... they came empty-handed to the Lord. That is why when Jesus said, "To such belong the Kingdom" it struck this young man to the heart... that was the one thing he was incapable of doing.

Directive A....

A. Reject Your Idols

Notice how Jesus counsels the young man...

¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

Now get that - Jesus says, "If you aren't going to call me GOD, don't call me GOOD".

You cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven until you are ready to own Jesus Christ as your GOD.

He is not an advisor, he is not simply a good teacher, he is not simply a good example... He is God of very God. He is Lord of all or He is nothing... you must understand that fact.

Notice what Jesus does next...He quotes him the man-to-man commandments...

²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'"

He didn't quote to him the first command, "have no other gods before me". That would have ruled him out.

In evangelism, before you say the hard things, you must be willing to grant them any area you can.

In Acts 17:22 (ESV) Paul speaking to the men of Athens a city which we are told had more idols than man...

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

So Paul granted them that they had made a zealous effort in religion, misguided as it was. Jesus here does something similar. He establishes the fact that this young man had made an effort to keep the law of Moses.

²¹ And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, **"One thing you still lack.**

Mark 10:21 (ESV)

²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him...

So get that, Jesus looked him in the eye and loving leveled with him...
Love and Truth are a powerful combination.

What Jesus is about to say will be very difficult for this young man to hear. Jesus knows that. Jesus knows exactly how he will respond.. but he says it anyway.

21b. **Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor.**

In other words, get rid of your real god... your wealth.

People always ask, "Pastor, would Jesus ever call us to do that?" Certainly, if wealth is your god, you must lay it down to follow Christ.

It may not be financial wealth for you - perhaps it is -

- **Academic Wealth** - you want to follow a Jesus that fits into your tiny brain. Jesus would say, lay down your degrees and come as a child.
- **Relational Wealth** - you want to follow Jesus, but you know it will cost you friends. You want to hedge your bets and bend your convictions in order to get you the most likes. No, Jesus says, your love for him must make every other human loyalty look like hatred.
- **Career Wealth** - would following Jesus as GOD make it difficult for you to do your job? We see this every election cycle, men and women failiing to speak convictionally about what they deeply believe to be true, instead they edit their message for the sake of an election.
- **Religious Wealth** - This may be someone who was raised as a part of another religion and they have to understand that they must lay it all aside to follow Jesus. But it could also be people who have done everything in the church except be born again. If I were the devil, I'd rush people through the Baptisty and get them in a position in church asap. Why? It pollutes the body, and it damns the soul.

Reject your idols...

B. Receive the Benefits

22b. ...and you will have treasure in heaven;

Give up that which you cannot keep to gain that which you cannot lose.

You see, in the long run, we all believe in the prosperity Gospel. Eventually, every follower of Jesus will possess wealth beyond his wildest dreams. In the short run, it may cost you everything you have. But the deck is stacked, the odds are eternally in your favor.

You must give up, to go up. He who would save his life shall lose it, but he who loses his life for the sake of Christ shall find it.

Reject your idols, receive the benefits...

C. Respond to Jesus

22c. ...and come, follow me.”

Now that is the Gospel according to Jesus - follow me. Lay aside your idols... and follow me.

BTW, have you done that?

I didn't ask if you had said a sinner's prayer.

I didn't ask if you had been baptized.

I didn't ask if you were a church member, or a Sunday school teacher or a deacon or a preacher...

Have you laid aside your idols and followed Jesus?

Look at how the young man responded...

²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.” ²⁸ And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹ And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”



CONCLUSION/INVITATION: There is a painting that once hung in the Louvre museum in Paris, painted by Friedrich Moritz August Retzsch. Today, the painting is popularly known as “Checkmate.” It is now in private hands, having been sold in a Christie’s auction in 1999.

The painting depicts two chess players. One is Satan, who appears arrogantly confident. The other player is a man who looks forlorn. If Satan wins, he wins the man’s soul.

In the 1800’s, a chess grandmaster named Paul Morphey visited the Louvre and was captivated by the painting. The legend goes that Morphey studied the painting, Five minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour. Morphey stood there and looked, and then he broke the silence of that museum with a shout, “**YOUNG MAN, MAKE THAT MOVE**”.

There was a move that the artist who painted the painting had not seen. The Move that Morphey saw, the master saw, the only move that could be made.

I don't know enough about chess to tell you what it was, but I know enough about this to tell you friend, there is one move that you can make. Lay aside your idols..., and follow Jesus.