

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS #2

“The Curious Case Of The Rich Young Ruler”

Introduction

The Lord has called us to be His disciples and to make disciples. All 3 synoptic gospels contain the account of Jesus' interaction with someone who seems to be sincerely seeking eternal life. This little encounter is counter-cultural and full of surprises. I call it...

I. The Curious Case of the Rich Young Ruler

Mark 10:17-22

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Mark 10:17-22 KJV

A. What We Know About This Seeker

1. We have to read all 3 accounts to know why we call him the “rich, young ruler.”

a. Mark tells us he was rich, (Mark 10:22); Matthew tells us he was young, (Matthew 19:22), and Luke tells us he was a “ruler”, (Luke 18:18)

a. Here’s a guy who had it all going for himself

b. But more than that, he was serious about God

2. Mark tells us he came “running” to Jesus and knelt down before Him; no one is dragging him to church; he’s a true “seeker”.

a. The fact that he “knelt down” shows respect, which is a good thing.

3. Besides all that, all 3 Gospels tell us what he wanted he was asking the right question!

“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

4. You would think this story will have a happy ending; but....

B. Then The Surprises Begin!

1. Instead of answering the question, Jesus asks him one...

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

Mark 10:18

a. Don’t misread this!

Jesus didn’t say, “Don’t call me good”, but “call me good for the right reason.”

b. The problem is that many people want to relate to Jesus as a *good teacher* instead of as *God*.

c. The man used the Greek term for “teaching master” instead of the term for “ruling master”! He was looking to Jesus to teach him something instead of to be His Lord.

“Christ would have the young man either know Him to be God or to not call Him good.”

Matthew Henry

d. When I meet non-believers who tell me they believe Christ was a good “Teacher”, I always remind them that Jesus says He is God; so would a

“good” teacher lie? If He’s a good teacher why would you not believe His teaching?

e. The truth is that even our churches are full of people are comfortable with relating to Christ as a Teacher, because that allows them the freedom to decide whether to do what He says or not.

f. The problem is that we have “rich young rulers” in the Church who will come running to Jesus the Teacher but run away from Jesus as LORD.

2. The 2nd surprise is Jesus’ answer to the question, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

a. We would say, “You don’t need to do anything; just have faith in Christ. (Which is not a bad answer).

b. But Jesus went another way, quoting him the Law:

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

Mark 10:19

c. When Jesus knows someone is coming to Him as a Teacher instead of as God, He refers them to the Law, because the commandments are designed to make us see our need for God’s mercy. But not this one...

And he said to Him, *"Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."*

The Gospel of Matthew adds a question...

“What do I still lack?”

Matthew 19:20

3. People who try to be confident in commandment keeping always feel like they’re falling short! He knew something was missing.

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."

Mark 10:21 NKJV

4. Another surprise to us is how high Jesus set the bar of discipleship; which makes us wonder if we set the bar too low!

a. If we had a rich young business owner who came running to the altar seeking eternal life; someone who'd been reading his Bible and keeping the commandments, what would we do?

- Tell him he was still lacking?
- Tell him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor?
- Offer him a cross? (Beware: Many popular modern Bible translations like the NLT, NASB, NIV, and ESV leave out the phrase “take up the cross”!)

b. We would be thinking, “*But if we tell him that, we’ll lose him.*” And we might be right.

And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Mark 10:22 KJV

But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

Mark 10:22 NASB

c. 400 years ago, the great Puritan Bible scholar Matthew Henry commented on this passage:

“He was sad...sorry that he could not be a follower of Christ upon easier terms than leaving all to follow Him; that he could not lay hold of eternal life and keep hold of his earthly possessions, too.”

d. Jesus does not demand that each and every one of us go out and sell everything today...but would we do it if He did?

e. Or would we be like the rich young ruler, treating salvation like an auction?

“He bids for what he wants, yet goes away grieved because he cannot have it at his own price.”

Matthew Henry

5. About 30 years ago, many churches in America decided to make Jesus “cool” so more people would come to services.

Slide: The Cool Church

- a. Everybody began to dress down
- b. Worship services were kept to 20 minutes and included secular pop music with Christianized lyrics
- c. Sermons were shortened and only upbeat encouraging sermons were allowed
- d. The main idea was to do everything possible to make sinners comfortable and be non-confrontive with the preaching.

6. This became known as the “*seeker-friendly church*” movement and the age of the “mega-church” was born.

a. In truth, some of what they did was good. People should be able to wear jeans to church and it’s certainly good that sinners feel welcome!

b. But after 30 years of “seeker-friendly” services, one famous megachurch (with over 25,000 in weekend attendance) did an in-depth survey of their members and published the report in a book. The Senior Pastor, who by the way is a great man of God, wasn’t happy with what he found. His bottom-line:

“The seeker-friendly church produces numbers, but not disciples.”

Pastor Bill Hybels, Willow Creek Community Church

7. And making disciples is what it’s all about!

8. The Bible says Jesus “looked” on the rich young ruler and “loved” him; but he did not lower the bar of what it would mean to follow Jesus on to eternal life!

II. The Big Surprise

A. Jesus Doubles Down

1. After watching a great potential church member walk away, you would think Jesus would have had second thoughts about calling for such a radical commitment. But instead, he “doubles down”!

Mark 10:23-25 NASB

23 And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is 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."

2. Another surprise. After watching the rich young ruler walk away, Jesus now offends His disciples!

And they were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?"

Mark 10:26

a. They obviously knew that Jesus was not opposed to prosperity; some of His favorite friends were wealthy!

b. He was not saying you couldn't have riches and go to heaven; He was saying if riches have you you can't go to heaven.

Mark 10:27

Looking upon them, Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

"By God's power and grace, a camel can go through the eye of a needle!"

R.C. Sproul

3. Now the disciples are on defense, wondering if *they* are OK!

Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

Mark 10:28

a. Peter seems to be reminding Jesus of how they have walked away from everything to follow Him, as if they have made some great sacrifice.

4. But Jesus saves the biggest and best surprise for now...

B. Nobody Who Gives God Everything Really Gives Up Anything!

Mark 10:29-31

29 Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30 but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life."

1. Jesus uses "Truly I say to you" or "verily, verily" verses when he's going to tell us something that our natural mind finds hard to believe. Unpack this...

- a. No one
- b. Leaves anything
- c. That they do not get back 100 fold IN THIS LIFE plus ETERNAL LIFE in the age to come!

2. When you go back and seriously study the various verses on the "cost of discipleship", Jesus sounds difficult and demanding!

- a. Leave *anyone* who holds you back from following Me
- b. Give up *everything* you have to follow Me
- c. But know this...

3. No one give up anything 'BUT THAT HE SHALL RECEIVE 100 FOLD'...

"No one has ever sacrificed for the Lord without being richly repaid. If the Cross is only contrasted with earthly pleasures lost, it may seem hard and threatening. But when the Cross is weighed in the balances with the glorious treasures to be had through it, even the Cross seems sweet."

Walter Chantry

4. If this is really true, it is no wonder Jesus boldly asks us to be willing to give up everything!

B. What Was Jesus Really Offering The Rich Young Ruler?

1. Eternal life.
2. 100 fold return on his wealth (if he would be willing to leave it)
3. But more than that...He was offering him an APOSTLESHIP!

a. Jesus was actually offering him a special place with Himself!

4. We know the names of the Disciples: Peter, James, John, Bartholomew. But we do not know the name of the rich young ruler. If he had been willing to give up his riches, surely we would know his name!

C. Conclusion: The Curious Case Of The Rich Young Ruler

1. The curious case of the rich young ruler might explain why the Gospel is not thriving in America.

2. Compared to most of the world, we are all pretty much all rich young rulers.

3. So the call to follow Christ in our culture is in completion with the “one thing we lack”; the willingness to let go of our goodies to lay hold of eternal life.

4. The good news is that we lose nothing by doing it; we gain everything!

D. Altar Call And Prayer