

The Rich Young Ruler, Part 4

Luke 18:22-25

Well, you can turn in your Bibles to Luke 18 as we continue Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. We come to verse 22 in the text and point three in our outline. The Savior and his instruction. In verse 18 the ruler had asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And we read here in verse 22 after his investigation "When Jesus heard this." Heard what?

Well, the result of his investigation versus 19-21, he heard this, he heard what he needed to hear, and now he's going to answer the man's question. "When Jesus heard this, he said to him one thing you still lack sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And then come follow me." Now, as we mentioned last time, I think it's probably still true today that when we read that, we find that pretty stunning. We're left to wrestle with what Jesus really meant by what he said.

One thing you still lack. You want eternal life? You want assurance, eternal life? Sell your stuff. Give it away. Become a beggar and a, then come follow me. You'll have treasure in heaven. Come, follow me. Really? Um salvations through poverty? Are the social justice warriors right? After all, we're supposed to become radical. Give it all away. And then? I guess beg off the government to get money. What is Jesus saying here? What does he mean by what he's saying?

Well, as I said, he's answering the man's question, but I wanted to correct a couple of thoughts. Some people see Jesus here as being pretty, pretty stern in his response to the man. They see Jesus as seeing right through this man's spiritual pretension. And I'll just say he does, see through this man's spiritual pretension. He sees the man's self-reliance, that he trusts in his works, that he elevates himself, and necessarily by elevating himself, demotes God.

And so, as this view goes, Jesus rattles him with this impossible demand, he shocks him. He exposes his pretentiousness and sends this false seeker away. Because after all, and it is true Romans chapter 3, "There is no one who seeks after God."

Listen, all these seeker ministries, mega churches that are built on appealing to the felt needs of seekers, that is a false paradigm completely because Romans says, "No one seeks after God." So who's right? Them or Bill Hybels? Or I should say Jesus or Bill Hybels, Romans or Bill Hybels, Romans or Rick Warren?

They see Jesus as being stern, as shocking his senses, as exposing the fact that his seeking is false. I think all that is done, true. But I have a hard time seeing sternness in Jesus here. I don't see that. What Mark noted in Mark 10:21 paints an entirely different picture, and it really does set the proper tone through which we need to see this, interpret this, understand this. "Jesus looking at him, loved him and he 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." There's no sternness in this, it's love.

However we understand this, our interpretation has to take into account a genuine love of Jesus for this man, a love that addresses him sincerely and straightforwardly. That really draw, does address his concern here, that really does answer his question. There are others who have a hard time seeing Jesus

make such an impossible demand, so they want to kind of file off the hard edges of what Jesus says.

And they say, well surely this is a test, right? I mean, does Jesus raise an impossibly high bar just to expose his love of money? I mean, you can't possibly expect this level of commitment, divestment of personal wealth, abandoning civic responsibility just to become a Christian, just to follow Jesus as disciple. I mean, Jesus can do that, sure, but would he?" He didn't really require a personal impoverishment of all his other disciples when he called them to discipleship, did he? No, he didn't. Jesus didn't command the total liquidation of all assets for all of his disciples as a prerequisite for all discipleship.

Many were counted as disciples and followed him as disciples, who didn't divest himself of all their wealth. In fact, Luke 8:1-3 shows a number of women who are financially connected who had those resources and helped support Jesus' Ministry. I mean, how did they eat, when they're on the road? Some appointed as apostles, they didn't sell all. Down in verse 28, Peter said, "See, we've left our homes and followed you." Jesus, answered Peter. We'll see this next week. He answered

Peter with words of comfort and assurance, right? He's affirming him as a true disciple. He's an apostle.

These two Epistles have some of the richest comfort and encouragement you can read in all of Scripture. But we notice about Peter and John 21:3 after the resurrection, Peter is getting ready to go back after the resurrection, to do what? Fish, he's going back to fishing. That's his occupation before Jesus called him into discipleship. So Peter had a fishing business. He had boats, nets, tackle, all the necessary equipment. So Peter had not sold all, hadn't divested himself of all his property and all his stuff and all of his business. Yet he's still a disciple, he's still an apostle.

What does this tell us? Tells us that this is a unique case, this is a unique account. And we can see that as evidence by all, the fact that all three synoptic gospel writers record Jesus' encounter with a rich young ruler. They see this as unique, as remarkable, very important. There are lessons here. So what are they? What's going on here?

At the most basic level, we need to start with this, that this is a confrontation with the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is a confrontation with the Lordship of Jesus Christ, because as the Lord, Jesus has every right to make whatever demands that he wants to. He can say whatever he wants, he's sovereign Lord.

"All authority has been given unto me," Jesus said. And we've all had to reckon with that fact, haven't we? Whoever refuses to accept the Lordship of Christ is not a Christian. But the rich young ruler he had to come face to face, and reckon with the demands of Jesus as Lord, he had to reckon personally with the authority of someone who is infinitely his superior by every single measure. The man may have been rich, verse 23 says, "extremely rich." What do we make of his wealth? Whatever it was, whatever his portfolio was, whatever his bank account said, whatever his holdings are, what do we make of his wealth in light of what Jesus just offered him?

Treasure in heaven? I mean, who do you have to be to offer treasure in heaven? Got to be the owner of the treasure, right? The young man's wealth is a paltry sum, whatever it is, in comparison to what Jesus owns, it's a mere pittance. It's

laughable. Man may have been young, strong, capable. Consider the one standing before him, the Almighty. The one who's coming forth is from old, Micah 5:2, from *olam*, from ancient days.

What is youth and strength in a creature compared to this ancient creator? This man may have been a ruler. He had authority over his synagogue. Standing here, though, in the presence of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, this man needs to realize he's exercising authority that's been delegated to him by this Christ. So Jesus speaks to this rich young ruler as the Supreme Lord to one of his earthly vassals.

As Jesus, he didn't come just to exercise authority and oversight of his role as a synagogue ruler, Jesus comes to command this man's heart, to direct his entire life. The rich young ruler, he has to come face to face at this point with someone who is his better by an infinite margin, and he needs to submit himself, and do so immediately, and bow the knee. So it's certainly, clearly a confrontation with the Lordship of Christ. But there's more going on here as well. When Jesus commands the rich young ruler, he's not issuing some arbitrary command. This

isn't arbitrary, it's not disconnected with what the man was actually asking.

He's not saying this just to test his heart, just to elicit a response, just to provoke something. I mean, all that is true. But it's not just to do that. It's not an arbitrary command. In telling the rich young ruler to divest himself of his riches, listen, Jesus is actually loving him. He is truly addressing this man's question, and this man's deepest need, and he is truly offering to set him free. How do we know? Because Jesus said, "one thing you still lack." One thing you still lack. What's the one thing? What's his deepest need? Again, think about who it is who's asking the question. Consider what Jesus just exposed in taking his spiritual temperature when feeling around for a pulse.

Nothing there, right? No pulse, which means no life. So when Jesus says one thing you still lack, the commands that follow, there are four commands but one thing he needs, commands that follow are targeted, they are graciously aimed, they are love motivated, and they are specifically designed to address this man's one need. Jesus commands this man, he's addressing

the question he asked in verse 18, if the rich young ruler will trust the good teacher here, if he'll submit to Jesus, if he'll obey him as Lord, his question about eternal life, his question about assurance, will be settled once and for all.

Look back at verse 22. Notice how Jesus here, he provides this man a complete remedy for his lack of assurance about eternal life. Complete remedy, leaving nothing out. But this remedy comes in two stages. Sell all that you have, and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me. Two stages in the remedy, two pairs of commands.

First, sell and distribute, and second, come and follow. First stage in the remedy, sell and distribute. Second stage, come and follow. In the first pair of commands you see the offer of eternal life, and in the second pair of commands, it's the pathway of assurance of eternal life. And together this is the whole package. This is the complete remedy. It's the complete answer to this man's question and it addresses his deepest need.

Jesus is speaking, as we said, he's speaking to an unregenerate man. He's speaking to a complacent man. And he's complacent not because he's truly at ease before God, but he's complacent because he's truly dead before God. He's dead in his trespasses and sins. He's got no movement because he's got no life. No assurance of eternal life because he has no eternal life. It's proven to be unmoved by the law, with no joy in God's law, no sense of God's goodness. He is utterly unaffected.

So no love of God and therefore no love of man. So what the man needs at the deepest, most radical, most basic level, he needs life. He needs religious affections, and those are found only in a new nature. Where's that new nature come from? From God. That new nature comes only by the grace of God, by the miracle of spiritual regeneration. It's the work of the Spirit of God, being born by the spirit he is, he would be able to believe. He'd be able to love. He'd be able to rejoice. And so, Jesus says, first two commands in verse 22, "sell all that you have and distribute to the poor," and then Jesus attaches this gracious promise for him to believe, "and you will have treasure in heaven." Done. You'll have it. Get rid of your stuff.

Don't worry about your stuff. Don't let your little tiny hands cling onto your stuff. It's so small. Don't you realize I'm opening the treasure vault of heaven to you? Just believe me. To obey those commands, obedience wouldn't give life, but to obey those commands would be evidence of life. Because he would need to trust Jesus. He would need to put his faith in Jesus. He'd have to believe what he says in order to do what he says. Does that make sense? Obedience would not give faith, but it would be the true evidence of faith. As Paul says in Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only [what?] faith working through love."

So all that you have. Man. This is not, go empty your savings account and go give that away. This isn't cash in your life insurance policy or your health insurance or whatever policy and give that away. This is a comprehensive matter in the Greek, all things, as much as you possess. Put it all up for sale, is what Jesus is saying. The way Jesus states this, it is absolutely extensive. He is to liquidate all his assets. Think about this for yourself. I mean, businesses, real estate, vehicles, farms and fields, family holdings. Do an estate sale. Get rid of all the furniture, the fine China family heirlooms,

forks, and spoons, and even your knickknacks. Sell the house, and leave nothing out.

By liquidating all that he has, and then Jesus says distribute to the poor. He doesn't simply say give to the poor, that is, take all that pile of cash and go put it in the marketplace and walk away. No, the verb involves him. It says, go and distribute. So Jesus is sending him into the highways, and the byways, and into the alleyways to meet these people, to see them in their need, to love them, and to dole out money with wisdom and care. Listen, that's what Jesus did, right? Village after village, town after town, Jesus preached the Kingdom of God. He healed the people of all their infirmities, all their ailments and diseases, all their sicknesses, he cast out all their demons. He mixed with the people. He touched them. He even touched the lepers.

And he distributed divine mercy individually and particularly, meeting particular needs. What's he doing? Jesus, he's pulling this man into his work. Looking at this again, taking another run and coming at this from the outset, we need to see that this is a direct confrontation with this man's

idolatry, with his idolatry. Jesus is saying, "If you want to inherit eternal life you need to kill your most familiar and most cherished idols and it's going to cost you. Topple your idols, chop them up, burn them, throw the powder into the river and be gone forever."

Man, this is a lot for this guy. He was extremely rich, verse 23. There's a lot to do. There's a nexus between his wealth, his family, his social standing, his esteem, his prominence, his position of authority, his place in the community. Listen, all that is tied together, and his wealth is the cord that weaves through it all and then fastens it securely. His wealth accounted for everything. By doing what Jesus commanded here, sell all that you have, think about this, can you imagine the blowback that's coming his way from other people? I mean, think about the outcry from his family. Think about if you did this.

Think about if Jesus looked you in the eye and told you to go divest yourself of everything. Liquidate all your assets. I mean, that's going to be a hard conversation with the wife, isn't it? Honey, hand over the credit card. We don't know if he

had a wife and kids, but can you imagine, as the one controlling and managing, not only just his own families personal assets, but his family, his extended family, their assets managing those assets. His decision is going to affect all of them and it is going to anger them.

To add to the offense, he's got to take all of that stuff, and this command to distribute the proceeds of selling everything to the poor, that's going to put them in the company of the most reputable people in, in the town, the *Amhara Arets*, the lowest of the low, the unclean ones. In his mind, in the mind of all of his Jewish contemporaries, certainly in the mind of his family and his friends, wealth is an indication of divine blessing.

You know the opposite is true also for them, that poverty is evidence of a divine curse. "Leave the place of blessing and go to the place of a curse and mix with them," Jesus is saying. It's a shocking behavior that he's commanding. If he takes this course, if he obeys Jesus, he is setting a course for offending his family, which is going to ruin his reputation, which is going to diminish his social standing, reduce his esteem, his

prominence, not long before he loses the rulership in the synagogue, that's going to be gone. He's no longer going to be sought after, no longer respected, no longer admired. He's gonna become a pariah in the city that once loved, and admired, and respected, and adored him. It's going to have no place there.

Jesus offers the assurance of eternal life in what he says. Jesus provided two stages to the remedy of this man's condition, sell and distribute. And here's the second one, come and follow. In the first stage, the offer of eternal life, which is by faith working through love, and in the second stage Jesus offers the assurance of eternal life. And how does he offer assurance? Lifelong discipleship, come follow me. What's he doing? Jesus is calling him to the same discipleship that he's been offering to everyone else.

Luke 9:23, if anyone, anyone, rich or poor, young or old, ruler or beggar, anyone. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, that's the one who will save it." No one comes to Jesus. No one finds salvation. No one possesses eternal life

while at the same time holding fast to his life, and his job, and his ambitions, and his money, and his wealth, and his prerogatives, his status, his personal opinions, his love of influence and prominence.

Listen, all that's gotta go. "Deny yourself," Jesus says. And when coming to Jesus, divesting yourself of all personal prerogative when that offends others, when that offends those who are closest to you, like your own family, Jesus said, Matthew 10:37, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Even your closest relations, they need to be put on the block.

Comes across even stronger in Luke's gospel, doesn't it? We went through that, Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he, he cannot be my disciple." Is Jesus being unkind? Is he being overly stern? Is this unreasonable?

No, not at all. Remember Mark 10:21? "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him." Loved him. Jesus loves people and he loves his own, his elect, with a particular love, a redeeming love, with a zealous love, and a jealous love. And he loves us like that for God's glory. He loves us like that for our good. Listen, he, like his father, will countenance no rival. There can be no competing affection in our hearts, no idol, no other God before him.

So what Jesus intends to secure for this poor soul, this rich young ruler, who in ex, by external measure seems like he's reached the pinnacle of everything you can reach in this life, and he is a poor, decrepit soul. The lost. And what Jesus intends to secure for this man is to deliver him from his idols, to set him free from his stuff.

He wants to unburden him from his, unburden his soul and give him the gift of eternal life. And he wants to let him experience the joy of that life in lifelong discipleship in following him. It's a privilege that he's offering him to know Jesus Christ as savior, to follow along after him as Lord, to

follow on, walking in his steps, and to know both the joy, and the suffering of Jesus Christ.

Make no mistake, there is suffering in this path. Look down at verse 31, "Taking the twelve aside, he said to them, 'See, we're going to go up to Jerusalem and everything that's written about the Son of Man by the Prophets will be accomplished.'" Notice he doesn't say, I'm going up to Jerusalem. He says we. That is, if you're my disciple, you're going with me. For he, now it's singular, himself. "He will be delivered over to the Gentiles, he will be mocked and shamefully treated, spit upon. And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."

He's going there. You guys are all coming with me. You're gonna be there. Are you gonna claim me when I suffer and die? Are the reproaches that fall upon me gonna spill over to you too? Listen, there's joy in walking with Christ. Through the scorn, through the rejection, through the suffering, through the ignominy of the cross. Following him as Lord, through lifelong discipleship. That's the path to constant encouragement. That is the path to full assurance and the faith.

Colossians 2:2-3, "That we would reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And Jesus is offering this. To this man. This gift of unburdening his life, of disentangling his affections, of unhitching his soul from all that bound him, and gain the joy of eternal life and walk in freedom of Christian assurance.

So will he make the trade? Whatever he has by way of wealth, even extreme wealth, will he trade what he has now in exchange for what Jesus promised, which is treasure in heaven? Sounds like a great bargain to me. Missionary martyr, Jim Elliott, said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

So true, but sadly we have to add a tragic footnote to the end of this encounter is this fourth point in our outline. Number four, the ruler and his rejection, verse 23, "But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich." Luke doesn't include it, he doesn't tell us this, but the

man actually turned around at this point and he walked away. Didn't even stick around. No follow up questions are recorded, and so he walked off the pages of Scripture. Never to be heard from again. Matthew 19:22 says that "when the man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Mark 10:22, "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." And then Luke 18:23, "But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich." All three synoptic writers, who use some form of the verb *lypeo*, which means to become sorrowful, to become sad, even to grieve, experience deep distress. And then, once again, we're indebted to Mark's Gospel for another very descriptive verb, *stygnazo*. It means to be dejected, to be gloomy, and that's noted by the downcast expression that came across his face.

It's an evidence that he became appalled in his spirit, even shocked. Remember last time? He said that Jesus exposed the heart of this rich young ruler in his attitude toward the law of God and the fact that he neither rejoiced in it as a true believer does, and that he didn't have any conviction from the

law at all, which would really have been a prelude to saving faith, conviction of sin. And remember how Jesus basically said, "What's your experience in keeping the law?" And the ruler answered in verse 21, "The law, check. Got that down. All these things I've kept from my youth is in the law."

Listen, Jesus, that's not what I wanted to talk about. I'm coming to you and I'm asking what I can do. As in I got the law down. What more can I do? That's what I want to know, what great work? This ruler's ascendancy to prominence was through almsgiving. Through charitable donations he contributed to building projects, community improvement, political campaigns, mega donor, used to being courted by the famous, those who see him as a means to get stuff done. But Jesus has disappointed him here on all counts.

First, Jesus becomes rather pedantic about the compliment. He tried to pay him good teacher, and he kind of picks apart his use of the word good. He asked about mundane matters of law keeping, treating him as if he was still a schoolboy. And now this is absolutely impossible command, I mean, come on, "Sell all distributed to the poor, come, follow me." That is

completely depart from the life that he's had, which is not only financial suicide, but family suicide, social suicide, political suicide. It's death in every way imaginable.

Don't you realize what my money can do for you? You're headed to Jerusalem. You're the Messiah. I got money to contribute to you. Absurd, just too much. So, dejected by the saying, downcast and disappointed, he went away sorrowful for he had a lot of stuff. He's extremely rich. but Jesus issues a warning to the rich, and by extension to all who love the things of this world who are whether rich or poor.

And by the way, you don't have to be rich to love money. I'd actually wager that it's more common for the poor to have problems with covetousness and greed and longing for richness, riches than the rich do. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad in verse 24, said "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." Why? Because they're so entangled into it. Because it did insinuate itself all through their lives like tentacles. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.

Why? What's the problem? They just don't have the heart for it. The good seed fell into thorny soil, didn't it? And Jesus said, "Those for whom the gospel falls among the thorns. They are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they're choked out by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit doesn't mature, and like this man, they walk away."

Picture Luke paints here, along with Matthew and Mark, he got just again. It's no wonder all three synoptic writers record this encounter, but this picture that's painted here is absolutely tragic.

This man is in deep, deep bondage. Like many wealthy people are, his heart is hopelessly ensnared. It's entangled by the world. He's enslaved to sin, to self love, to pride. He's used to being in charge. He's used to telling people what to do. Desperate to cling to all that influence, desperate to have that prominence. This is a warning to us all, isn't it? Wherever we are in life, wherever we are in the social scale, social ladder, it's a warning to every single one of us. The rich young ruler, he's virtually looking out through the cold iron bars of his prison cell. He's trapped. He can't even see it.

He's looking out and right next to where he stands, Jesus has taken out a key and he's unlocked the door to his cell, and he's swung that door open wide and he's motioned to him to come outside, and he's called to him to come outside and to come into freedom and to joy and to live in the power and certainty of eternal life. Inexplicably, the man reaches out and closes the door to his cell. And then he turns and locks the door with the key and throws the key out, and then walks back to the back part of the dark, dank corner in his cell to sit in his filth and remain in his stank and hunger and thirst, and eventually die there, a prisoner of his own choosing.

It's such a shockingly tragic picture. And again, folks, this story is not a parable. This is not a story that Jesus told a fictional account, and it illustrates a deeper principle. This actually happened, and it's such a powerful record of what actually happened. But it does teach a deeper principle. What holds on to your heart? Rich young ruler here is a real man. He's a real human being. He's got an immortal soul. He is meant for so much more, but he opted for the scraps.

He traded eternal life treasure in heaven for temporal gain. For rotten moth eaten, corroded junk, James chapter 5. What about you? What about you, my friend? I asked you at the beginning. What would you be willing to give to be fully assured of eternal life? It's true, Jesus has not looked you in the eye as he did with this man and commanded you to liquidate everything distributed to the poor and follow him. But could he?

Does he have that right in place in your life? If he exercised that right to issue this command to you, would you obey it? Truth is, our resolve is tested every single day with much less dramatic and more mundane sorts of commands. Wives, submit to your husbands; husbands, love your wives; children obey your parents; parents, raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We're called to the daily sacrifice of self. The daily mortification of sins, the daily pursuit of holiness, and the fear of the Lord.

Truth is, in obeying any of God's commands, whether they seem to us to be small or great, they all require us to kill the idols of the heart. All of them requires to turn from temptation and die daily to self, don't they? All obedience to him requires

to love God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, to love our neighbors as ourselves and all of that. Every single command, seem it small or great to you, all of it is impossible, impossible, apart from divine grace, working through faith and love.

Consider this, though Christian, when we find within ourselves by the grace of God, when we find righteous affections, loving what God loves and hating what God hates when we define within us the desire and the will to do what God commands, when we find within ourselves a love for God, a love for his word, a love for others, rejoicing in righteousness and truth and justice. When we are mortifying sin, when we're walking in the truth, when we're eager to be obedient to the truth, we count that joy.

When we see the spirit of God producing in us fruit of the spirit fruit in our lives, when he's producing good works in us, bringing glory to God and blessing other people. When we say with Peter verse 28, "See we've left our homes and followed you." One of the greatest benefits of all of that, my friend, is the joy and the confidence that comes from Christian assurance.

That's what Jesus wants to provide, and that's what we'll turn our attention to and learn more about next time. Let's pray. Our Father, you have been so kind to us. Showing your goodness to us every single day. Indeed your mercies are new every morning, and great is your faithfulness and even in our day, with all of our technologies and all the benefits of the modern world, we have most of us, a copy of your word written in our own language, translated into our own language, into our own tongue, and we can read and study and understand and rejoice in your goodness.

We can learn your commands for ourselves and be eager to obey them and do them, and we by the grace that you've provided in Jesus Christ, by the faith that you have allowed us to exercise because of spiritual regeneration, you've allowed us to hear your word. You've allowed us to see your goodness. Our hearts respond to the truth, and that is by your grace and by your mercy. And we have given ourselves to you. We, like Peter say, "See we we've turned away, we've denied ourselves, we've taken up our cross. We're following you. We are only doing what we've been commanded." And yet you're pleased to say to us, well done. Continue to come and follow me.

And so we pray that you would be pleased to continue to show us your Grace in Christ, that you continue to conform us to Jesus Christ, that we would every single day die to self, mortify sin, pursue obedience to your commands and live our Gospel life in this world that so desperately needs to hear the message Jesus, our Savior and Lord, preached to this rich young ruler, please help us to be living this out. And to be faithful in our articulation of this gospel for your glory and for the good of many we pray in Jesus name. Amen.