

The Rich Young Man

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[0:00] So as we begin, let's pray. Lord, may the words we've just heard fall on good soil! May we hear them, understand, and respond in whatever way we need to this morning, so that we may bear fruit and that we may be participants in the kingdom of God, following Jesus with hearts unhindered, but open to all that you have from heaven.

In our lives. Amen. So today we begin this summer series looking at meetings with Jesus, not kind of ECC meetings with Jesus, but, you know, encounters along the road.

And I hope that we will discover through a sort of diversity of encounters with the questions that they have, the needs that they had, and we might find ourselves encountering Jesus and allow him to speak to us and to meet us.

And so today, as we've just heard, Jesus meets a rich man. And as we go through, just some points to hopefully help you see what we're going to be covering this morning and the terrain of this.

So first of all, we'll see that he's a good man. The good man. We've got the things up, Pauline, sorry. Perfect. Just so you know where we're going. The good man, the heart-searching challenge, the sad response, and the rich heart of God.

[1:37] And we'll explore that together. But I hope that gives you a little bit of a framework as I whittle on. I mean as I talk. And what I've got to do is find a Bible. I've got the all-important thing there.

So, it starts. Firstly, we discover, I think, that he is a good man. He is a good man. And that's important. Just then, a man came up to Jesus and asked, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

And we know from the conversation that follows, as well as the other accounts of this meeting that are written about in the other Gospels, that we're dealing with what we would call, I think, a good, respectable young man here.

No doubt a person of influence, good standing in society. You can imagine if this scene was set today, you would find him to be a law-abiding citizen.

And he's the kind of guy that, when he's on the train and his mobile phone goes off, he doesn't just take it there. He gets up and he goes to the end of the carriage and receives his call there. That kind of gentleman. Okay?

[2:50] That's the kind of person we're talking about here. He's thoughtful. He's well-behaved. Hasn't got any skeletons in the closet. In fact, quite the opposite. He's reliable and genuine.

And perhaps he works in a respected local trade. He's a businessman. And he's made himself a good income and a good business with a good reputation.

He lives in a nice house. Nothing excessive. He's got a nice car. Enjoys good holidays. And what's more, he gets involved in local charities.

In fact, he's a churchgoer. And not just a churchgoer. He's a regular attender. And he is a member of the church council. Well respected. That's the kind of person we're talking about here.

And he comes across Jesus. And you'll see if you read the verses just before this. He would have watched Jesus interact with children. In a way that would have been surprising to people.

[3:47] As Jesus gets children brought to him. And he lays hands on them. And he welcomes them. And he treasures them. And I think the guy would have been touched by that. He was a good guy.

And then he sees an opening to approach Jesus. And that's what he does. And he says to him, Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

He's respectful. He's thoughtful. And I think he genuinely wants to know. And so Jesus' heart-searching challenge, through a series of questions that he then puts back to this man, may be

a surprise to all of us.

They certainly were to the first disciples standing around Jesus. Because there's no doubt that Jesus could see beyond this polite and earnest question.

Polite man and earnest question. And he sees into the man's heart. And Jesus really wants to help this guy. He really wants to help this guy.

[4:53] And as he often does, he answers a question with a question. In fact, a series of questions. And they become, as I say, a heart-searching challenge.

How does Jesus respond? Why do you ask me what is good? There is only one who is good. Now, Jesus knew, and that man knew, that goodness was the prerogative of God.

That's where all goodness comes from. Only God is good. And there's the first challenge. Does this man really know who he's talking to? Because if you read on, or anywhere in the Gospels, you'll see that when other people come towards Jesus, they usually have a slightly different response.

For example, in chapter 22 of Matthew, the blind men come to Jesus, and they say, have mercy on me, son of David. It's as if when they recognize the goodness of Jesus, the son of God before them, they, in comparison, recognize their lack, and they ask for mercy.

They don't come, and try and manufacture something on their own. And that's the first sign, that Jesus has understood what's going on here.

[6:14] He asks, what good thing must I do to eternal life? And Jesus immediately points and says, well, only God is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments, he says. So, you can imagine him thinking, okay, I'm a good man.

I've got this. I know I've been a law-abiding citizen all my life. Which one is Jesus? And notice the list that Jesus gives him. You might have noticed that as Hen read it.

They are all the laws that demand something from us in relation to others. So, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, honour your father and mother, love your neighbour as yourself.

What does he miss out? I mean, it's an interesting selection of laws that Jesus puts there. Jesus misses out, perhaps, two of the big ten. The first two.

Have no other gods before me, and do not worship other gods of your own making. Misses that one. And even, he doesn't say what's normally his favourite summary of the law, which is, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul.

[7:24] He's only mentioned, love your neighbour as yourself. Why? Because he understands how this man's heart works. All these I have kept, the young man said.

What do I still lack? You see, throughout the whole of his life, this young man has been performing to get what he needs in life.

And he has the same mentality about achieving eternal life by doing another good thing. And he has come to Jesus thinking, well, if I just get that little bit of guidance from him, I will get those extra brownie points.

I will make the grade that I need to to enter eternal life. And it's almost as if Jesus plays him at his own game.

Because he says to him, if you want to be perfect, if we're playing the perfect performance game, if you want to be perfect, young man, do something, do another thing. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

[8:29] Then you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. So is it that he does just have to do one more thing and then he would have ticked that off his list?

Giving away his money in order to get eternal life? I don't think so. It's because Jesus knows this man's heart and he knows where this man's treasure really is.

And it's revealed by the man's sad response. Verse 22, when the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth.

So is Jesus anti-money? Is he against having personal wealth? He talks about money a lot, Jesus. I mean, scholars tell us that one out of every ten verses in the gospel, that's about 288 verses, deals directly with money or riches or wealth.

And nearly 42% of his parables are about money or using wealth as something to teach us spiritual lessons. Because Jesus understands that wealth is one of the biggest traps in not trusting in God's goodness and grace.

[9:52] So it wasn't that Jesus was prescribing to this young man just one more commandment to do and then you've got it. By giving this heart-searching challenge, he was revealing to the man where his heart really was.

It wasn't by doing something else that we gave him the last points on the board. But Jesus understands that it's our doings that reveal our heart's desire.

And this young man could not do what Jesus was asking him to do. He was not prepared to let go of his wealth and follow Jesus and follow Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life.

Instead, he had clearly grown dependent on his own wealth and his own resources to get him through life and thought that this would help him in the kingdom of God.

And despite whatever religious or societal good behaviour and good things he was doing, it was actually his possessions that he was living for and perhaps even he was using his religious devotion as a means of making sure he was doing alright.

[11:09] Actually, if I can get God's blessing and receive the things that I really want, that seems to be a good way to go about it. And so what he possessed, and we don't know what his bank account was like or where his holdings were, but it was clearly too important as part of his identity to believe that he might be able to give them away.

To lose them, as it were, would be to lose his life. And just chapters before this, Jesus famously said, what good is it if someone gains the whole world but loses his soul?

Or what can anyone trade for their soul? And so Jesus, seeing into this man's heart, seeing really what he was living for, in some sense what he was worshipping, gave him this heart-searching challenge.

and the man walked away sad. And as he walks away, Jesus says to his disciples, truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again, I tell you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Now this was surprising to those around Jesus.

[12:35] In fact, they were astonished, shocked by what Jesus was saying. Because surely the man who just walked away was a man who was blessed by God.

Surely wealth and influence are a sign of God's blessing. You know, Jesus, haven't you read some of the Proverbs? Haven't you seen Abraham, Isaac, Jacob?

How did they get blessed? Because they were righteous. What's going on, Jesus? You just sent him away. He would have been really good in the kingdom of God and he's just gone away. But I can almost imagine Jesus going on a little bit of a sort of Bible journey with them, saying, well, look at those characters.

Look at when it goes wrong for them. When by acquiring stuff, be it land, cattle, women, it becomes the over-desire of their hearts and each time it leads them away from God rather than towards them.

To have money is not a bad thing, but for money to have you is a very bad thing. So, folks, this morning, if you are rich, and I'd have to say that if you have food in your fridge, clothes on your body, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world's population, that makes most of us here rich, we must be aware of the dangers Jesus is laying out here.

[14:10] Are we in danger of living for something other than God, even when our churchgoing and our activities seem to suggest otherwise? How do we know, how might we know, if we're trusting more in our riches, and I include that our comforts, our lifestyle, and the associated status that comes with it, how do we know that we're relying on those things to the extent which is endangering our souls?

Well, the test is this, folks, how generous are you in giving it away? How generous are you in giving it away? Let's start with 10%.

Are you willing to give that back to God? To give it away, to entrust it to others, to be used on other people's benefits? Now, you might want to quibble with the percentage because you may feel that's an inappropriate use of the Levitical law.

Okay, try 12%, try 15%. Go, you know, you pick a figure. But what's really holding you back from giving away your money? Is it the maths or is it your heart?

Does it make you sad to think about what that might mean? If it makes you sad, then just like this rich young ruler here, we need to check our hearts.

[15:33] Now, I recognise that life is complicated. We've already prayed this morning about those who hit the summer thinking about the difficulties of finances.

And I certainly don't want to be coming away legalistic about kind of amounts. But this, we can't miss what Jesus is saying here. This is about our hearts and this is about our involvement in the kingdom of God and being part of eternal life.

And it's certainly not about amounts because if you remember when Jesus enters the temple, he sees a widow who gave a little amount but generously in comparison to all she had.

And when he saw a richer person give a large amount but in comparison to what he had it cost him very little. Jesus was quick to honour and praise that poor widow.

In fact, the most generous people are quite often the poorest because their hearts have not come to rely on money to give them the security and the comfort that money seems to offer us.

[16:36] So question, Christchurch, do you trust in the goodness, the security, the provision of God that you don't feel you need to protect yourself with or sustain yourself with those things by your lifestyle or by your income or what you have, your possessions?

Can you give it away? Can you give it away freely? Does your bank balance worship the Lord or does it worship your self, your ego even?

Uncomfortable, isn't it? I bet you're thinking, I wish the vicar would talk about sex again. This is really uncomfortable because we're also not familiar talking about money very often.

But Jesus was uncomfortable. This was deeply uncomfortable then. but he cared enough about people's souls and their belonging to the kingdom of eternal life than he did about upsetting them. So in the spirit of Jesus, I challenge you today. The more we trust in our riches, the less we trust in God and the less, you know, the less our appetite is for him and the things of his kingdom, they diminish by the day.

[17:55] There is that absolute risk as we accumulate wealth. So how can we do something about this? I've laid down a pretty big challenge. What would motivate us to give generously and more importantly, joyfully?

This man went away sad. The Lord loves a cheerful giver. How do we become cheerful in giving away abundantly? What might a heart that is dependent on God look like and that is able to be released from being dependent on stuff and our possessions?

What would enable us to follow Jesus unhindered by the burden of a money-needing heart? Well, the answer on one level is very simple.

You need to receive the riches of God from the rich heart of God. You need to receive the riches of God. That is the better replacement for money, for the riches, for the status, for the comfort, for the lifestyle, whatever it is that we often find ourselves living for and those carrots being dangled around us that we might try and follow.

Even our education system and our society points us towards, yes, you must have more, have more, have more. No. Can we live for and receive the riches of God?

[19:25] And can I tell you what's going to help? It's when we see Jesus and we know what he has done for us. Jesus Christ gave up the infinite riches of heaven to come to earth.

He lived on earth in relative poverty but he continued to be rich in his relationship with his heavenly father. But as he went towards the cross he became stripped away of so many things and in many ways he became bankrupt in order to pay our debt of sin towards God.

He poured out his life on us. He generously gave wiping his account out and if you like being subject to hell's bailiffs.

But the bank of heaven was still his. He rose to life on the third day and he rose a spiritual billionaire heir of all creation and he offers to those who follow him every spiritual blessing.

That's what it says in Ephesians. Every spiritual blessing. All the riches of heaven on free credit. we don't have to earn it. We're not even asked to be paying back our debt.

[20:48] Jesus has done that. This is a gift. Grace received by faith. And the riches of God come to us.

He gives us a deposit of his spirit. That's the language the Bible uses. A deposit a down payment of his spirit to live inside our hearts. Making us hungry for more of him.

Placing our treasures in heaven. Heaven which we are able to inhabit now and will onwardly go for eternal life as we wait for the renewal of all things when heaven fully unites with earth.

Do you see how God is all about giving to you? He gave his only son. He pours out his riches to us. All the time he's abundantly wanting to give to you. He can meet all your security, comfort, peace, joy needs if we just are able to open our hearts to let him.

And if that is how rich God is towards us will you let him take control? Will you surrender your hearts to him? Open even your bank accounts to him?

[22:05] Will you treasure him above all else? Because I tell you what, he's worth it. I'm going to finish with these words that we've already sung this morning.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small. Love, so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Let's just have a moment of quiet. Just allowing the spirit who's been speaking to you perhaps to highlight something that's been important, to perhaps bring home that challenge, the challenge of Jesus here.

I'm aware from some that there will be people with financial difficulties, real problems that they're dealing with, and can I ask you please reach out for help, to chat to myself, the wardens, we want to stand alongside you and I recognise this isn't easy and it's a terrible place to be stuck in financial debt and I just want to say to you please reach out and that's not a thing of shame and maybe this invitation is for you.

There may be some of you who say you know Lord I want to test my heart, I want to see how generous I might be.

[23:53] I have to confess folks I am yet to transfer my giving from my old church to the new one so there's a small backlog, it won't be huge but I am more than a widow's might as it were but there may be some practical things you think you need to do, you need to get your house in order in order to give back to God, the first fruits God encourages us to give, give back to him in thanks, maybe that's something you need to go away and think about to do.

But above all folks, and I think this applies to every single one of us, will you receive the riches of God this morning? Will you receive, perhaps for the first time, perhaps for the nth time, the grace of God poured out to you, his amazing love, his love that makes us rich, that makes us treasure him above all else because he's so good.

Holy Spirit, just make your people sing with joy because of how much you mean to us, because of how great you are, how worthy you are, and may our hearts and our lives just reflect that truth.

And Holy Spirit, help us with whatever change we need to make, whatever phone call we need to make, whatever friend we need to chat to, would you not allow that challenge, that invitation to be taken away from us by a cup of coffee and a Sunday lunch today.

Generous God, fill this place with your worship and your love, and we offer you our praises and ourselves, our whole lives to you. In Jesus' name.

[25:52] Amen.