

Encounters With Jesus(6) A Rich Young Ruler - Disappointed with Jesus!

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[0 : 00] And we're going to look this evening at verses 17 to 22 of this chapter. Verses 23 to 31 are very closely attached, but we don't have time to look at the whole passage tonight, so we're just doing verses 17 to 22.

It's another encounter with Jesus. We've been looking at some of these encounters with Jesus that we find described in the Gospels. We've seen five or so already, different types of people with different circumstances, but all coming to benefit from an encounter with Jesus, benefit in different ways, benefit mentally sometimes, benefiting spiritually, sometimes physically, but always in some way or other having a benefit from having met with Christ.

And what we're doing, as the Gospel does anyway, is really applying that spiritually to ourselves because we've seen so many features of these encounters that are actually spiritual in their significance as they would apply to our own lives.

But this one is different, different in this sense, that here is a man who came to experience an encounter with Jesus, a conversation with Jesus, and ended up walking away from him.

It didn't benefit his life as far as we take it from these verses. There's nothing else to indicate that somehow or other later on he might have had a change of heart. All that we're going on is what we have here, that he met with Jesus, and he ended up walking away from Jesus, disheartened, we read in verse 22, and sorrowful with what Jesus had said to him.

[1 : 41] Instead of this encounter with Jesus being a success in his experience, a benefit in his experience, he just left.

And having met with Christ, he just remained as he had been. He had the same advantages as others that we've seen, the same Jesus, the same emphasis by Christ in his teaching, the same person, and yet he chose to remain as he was.

And it should be no surprise to us that in the world that we live in, and ever since the gospel began to be proclaimed, there are people who do not benefit in a proper way from an encounter with Jesus.

Remember the last time that we mentioned that every time we actually sit under the gospel, we are having an encounter with Jesus. It's a new encounter. It's something that we come because of the nature of the gospel, the nature of God's word and its reliability, we're actually, as all of these people were, in a spiritual way confronted by Jesus tonight, we have an encounter with him once again.

And there's a great question attached to that. What benefit will it be to me tonight and to you tonight, whatever circumstances we may have in life, and we've seen already that Christ is more than able to handle whatever circumstances we have in a way that will actually benefit us eternally, benefit us in time in this world as well.

[3 : 17] And it's no surprise, therefore, if people actually came to know of an encounter with Jesus and turned their back on him and really just walked away from him, it shouldn't be a surprise if, through the preaching of the gospel on the likes of us, by the likes of us, mere human beings, sinful human beings, that we find some people still unpersuaded and even, perhaps even turning, we trust not, but it does happen, turning their back on Jesus also.

Now, there are two things we're going to focus on in the passage tonight about this man. When we read the three accounts we have in Matthew and Mark and Luke, we read that this man was a young man, he was also a rich man, and he was also a member of the nobility.

We don't know exactly what kind of office he had, but he was, if you look at Matthew and Luke as well, as I'm saying, you can see these are three features of this man's life.

He was young, he wasn't an old person, he was relatively young at least, he was of the nobility, he was a ruler, not probably a ruler of the synagogue, probably too young for that, but he was a ruler, he was, let's just say he was one of the nobility.

And he was also someone who was obviously very rich. The three accounts we have all speak about him having these great riches, great possessions, great material wealth.

[4 : 47] First thing, here is a man who was sincere and upright, but he was not saved. He was sincere and he was upright, but he was not saved.

And we'll look secondly, at here's a man who was disappointed and sorrowful with what Jesus said to him, but he was not persuaded to change his mind.

Sorrowful and disappointed, but not persuaded. Firstly, sincere and upright, but not saved.

Now he comes to Jesus and he's very sincere and he's very upright. He doesn't engage in any duplicity. He doesn't, he's not here as a hypocrite.

He's not like others, actually. We don't read that he was here to try and catch Jesus out, like you find others in accounts of confrontations with Jesus. We simply read he was a man who ran up and he knelt before him.

[5 : 45] He fell down on his knees before Jesus in an attitude of real pleading or of earnestness. And he said, what good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

That was how he addressed Jesus, good teacher or good rabbi. Wouldn't have been customary, actually, in those days to attribute the word good or join the word good to the word rabbi because they had so much respect for rabbis.

They wouldn't have said anything other than rabbi. But here's a man who says, good teacher, good rabbi, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. Now that's, of course, something, as you know, that's provoked a lot of controversy in terms of trying to work out why did Jesus say this?

What did Jesus mean by this? What was Christ's motive in saying, there's no one good but God, so why are you asking, why are you calling me good? No, he wasn't at all suggesting that he wasn't actually good himself.

[6 : 52] Jesus was not saying, you shouldn't attribute that word to me because I'm actually not good. Of course not. He is God. We know that from many another passage. What Jesus is doing is really getting this man or trying to get this man to question in his own mind why he's using this word good.

good. What is the standard by which he is using this word good? Because he's really seeing Jesus as nothing much more than a human teacher who has a certain amount of ability, and he's obviously heard of him or heard him before, and heard about his reputation, or perhaps seen some of his miracles, but he's using this word good of him.

And Jesus is saying, why are you calling me good? Is the goodness that you speak of, is it something that you're using in this word good in relation to the goodness of God?

Are you beginning with God in your definition of goodness, or are you just saying this as a matter of course? Of course, that's something we ourselves have to take account of as well.

There's many people that use the word God, or even the words good God. And in a sense, they're similar to what Jesus was saying about this man here.

[8 : 09] Why do you call me good? Why are you using the word God? Why do people use such phrases as good God? Why do people say some things like, Oh my God.

Sadly, it's used very lightly, very often, and used without much thought given to it. And certainly, on the part of some at least, it doesn't come from any real relationship with God.

It's just a manner of speech. It's an exclamation. And it's done without really thinking deeply about what it is that's being said. And here is Jesus saying, To this man, you've called me good.

Well, why do you call me good? No one is good except God. He needs to really think about it. And now that's what he's putting before us as well. We have to actually see why we're using such words about God.

How we're using the word God. I'm not talking here about using God's name in vain, or using it as a swear word. Nothing like that. That's not what we're saying.

[9 : 17] But when we're actually using the word good about God, or any words about God, how deeply are we thinking about that? Are we really engaging our minds when we're calling God good, or holy, or just?

Any of these attributes that are spoken, that are stated in the Bible about God, when we speak of God in those terms, are we really thinking of it? Are we just going through the words as if, well, they're there as a matter of form.

We know it's something that the Bible says about God. But have I thought about that? Have I thought what's meant by that God is holy, that God is just, that God is loving?

Any of these words that are descriptions of God. So that's really what he's doing with this young man. He's not himself denying the attribution, the attributing of goodness to him, to Jesus.

Jesus is not doing that, but just getting the man to think about what he's saying. That's so important for ourselves, isn't it, too? That we use our thoughts, our minds, that we engage our mind when we're dealing with God and our relationship with God, that we're serious about it, that we stop over it, that we study it, that we just don't trot things off our tongues because we're used to the words.

[10 : 41] And then, you see, he says to the young man, you know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, don't bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

And very interestingly, Jesus is choosing the commandments that have to do with human relationships. The second part, if you like, of the Decalogue of the Ten Commandments, where, beginning there with, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, don't bear false witness. He doesn't have them in the exact order, but he's focusing on those that have to do with our relationship to each other, whether it's to parents, to spouses, to children, to our neighbors, whatever.

And Jesus, as he puts this to him then, hears what the young man has to say. He said, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.

All these I have kept from my youth. There's no hesitation whatsoever on his part to say, Teacher, what you're saying, I have actually done. And there's probably, in his mind, a great sense of relief at this point.

[11 : 51] Because he's convinced, you see, that it's by doing things himself that he's going to enter into the kingdom of God. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

That's what his mind is set upon. That's what he has stuck in his mind is the way to enter into the kingdom of God. And now that Jesus has said things that he can now actually say, I've done all these things ever since I was a youngster.

I've kept them from my youth. He's probably quite relieved and maybe feeling quite good about this and really beginning to feel quite positive about his relationship to God.

He's ticked all the boxes that Jesus has put before him so far and he's quite satisfied with that.

Have you asked this young man at this stage, well, how's it going with you?

He would say it's great. Life is good. Nothing to complain about. And then Jesus actually goes and responds to that.

[13 : 01] But before we look at that, there's plenty of people in the world, maybe some here tonight, who don't have a problem ticking boxes.

Ticking boxes of things that we do. There are plenty of people in the world that imagine that being a Christian is being brought up in the Christian church in a Christian congregation and coming from a Christian family and not departing from, in a general sense, what it is to live a Christian life in this world.

You're ticking the boxes. I've never killed somebody. I've never committed adultery. I've never done any of these other things. I've never stolen anything in my life. I've never deliberately defrauded anybody.

And as far as I know, I've not gone out deliberately to dishonor my father and mother. I've kept all of these. I'm a Christian. So many in the world would say that if you ask them tonight, are you a Christian?

They would say, yes, I'm a Christian. Why do you think you're a Christian? What's the ground of your assurance that you're a Christian? Well, they would just start ticking off these boxes and say, that's what I've done and that's what I've never done.

[14:12] Surely that's a Christian life. And when you put beside that what many people actually think, that human beings are basically and essentially good, gone a little bit wrong here and there, but there's nothing really essentially wrong with us that can't with a little bit of tweaking and a good bit of effort on our part really be put right, especially if you ask God for a little bit of help along the way.

That's generally what people think of human beings rather than to think that we are sinful, that we have depravity attached to every single faculty of our being, spiritual and physical.

When you put that together with ticking off these boxes, it's no wonder that people actually have great confidence that they're already Christians, that they're not sinners anymore, at least not in the way that we would think of sinners in terms of not being able to pick, tick these boxes.

And yet, this young man, he's just not quite satisfied, is he? Because when you go to the account that you have of this incident in Matthew's gospel, after Jesus had responded to him and he says, all these I have kept from my youth up, in Matthew's version of it, Matthew 19, verse 20, you'll find that there's something else he said that Mark doesn't record, but it's important.

What yet do I lack? What yet do I lack? Why did he ask that? Why did he add that when he said, all these I have done, I've kept these from my youth upwards, what yet do I lack?

[16:03] You see, there's this perception in this young man that yes, he's able to take off all these boxes, and yet deep down there's just, just something, yes, yet that leaves him unsatisfied.

He's maybe not able to put his finger on it, but he realizes actually life is not just quite as good as he would make out. There's something yet that he lacks. And if only he could get there's something else that he lacks, he would have more confidence perhaps than that he is right with God, that he is indeed in possession of eternal life.

And so Jesus responds to him again. That's our second point that we've come to. Sincere and upright, but he's not yet saved. He's sincere and upright, he comes respectfully to speak to Jesus, to think about Jesus.

He comes to ask Jesus this very important question, and Jesus responds in the way that we've seen. And then he says about these commandments, all these I've kept from my youth up, what yet do I lack?

What is Jesus going to say? How is Jesus going to deal with this issue that now is before him?

Well, he comes to speak to him in this way, which leads to the man being disappointed and sorrowful, but not persuaded.

[17:24] Jesus, you see, looked at him, or looking at him, loved him, and said to him, you lack one thing yet. Now, Jesus, looking at him, loved him.

Before we actually look at what he said to him, look at what's said about Jesus and his view of this man and the motion of his heart towards him.

Jesus, looking at him, and that's a word which literally means looking intently at someone, fixing his eyes upon him, because, you see, there was much about this young man that was attractive to Jesus.

There was a certain degree of morality about him. There was a certain attractiveness in the way that he was concerned about his soul and concerned about eternal life and interested in how Jesus would answer these questions about this very important matter.

In other words, he drew Christ's attention to him. Jesus fixed his gaze intently on him is what really is meant. And then you read that he loved him.

[18:40] Jesus, looking at him, loved him. He didn't just give him his full attention, his heart was drawn towards him.

I know a lot of people will theologize and try and focus on this statement, which has been again discussed many, many times down through the years.

What does it mean that Jesus loved him? How can Jesus love somebody if he ended up walking away from him and not accepting him? What is this word love? And surely this word love is a different word to the word that's used when Jesus loved his people who came to be saved and came to be followers of him, or God's love for people that ends up in their salvation.

It's exactly the same word in the Greek text of the New Testament that's used here and used elsewhere for the love of God towards his own saved people.

That doesn't mean that there isn't a distinction to be made theologically between God's eternal love for his people and what is said here Jesus fixing his gaze loved him.

[19 : 48] But you must not minimize, out of respect for reformed theology or whatever else it is, you must not minimize the impact of this word. Because it really then leads to lessening the tragedy of this man turning his back upon Jesus.

This man turned his back on Jesus, on the Jesus who had loved him. The Jesus whose heart had gone out to him. He loved him because he saw that this man was so close to being saved.

He saw that this man was respectful of the things of God. He saw that this man knew things about the kingdom of God and about God himself.

He saw that his motives were good. He saw that he was just really that close. Jesus looking at him loved him.

You see, it's making the point. We'll look in a minute at him turning his back on him, but it's making the point. Can you turn your back on the love of Christ?

[21 : 00] Can you turn your back on Jesus as he looks intently at you with a look of love, with a look of affection towards you as he was towards this man?

Can you turn your back on that? Yes, he can turn your back on a preacher, of course. We're only sinful human beings seeking to do the will of God in preaching the gospel. But the Jesus that we preach is the Jesus that's described here, that Jesus looking at him intently loved him and said to him, you see, it's out of his love for this man, out of this intent regard that he has for him, and this love that's mentioned here towards this young man.

It's out of that that he says, you lack one thing. Christ is not here being deliberately obstructive of this man. It's actually the opposite. He's not saying to this man, actually, there's so much yet wrong with your life, and looking at it in a purely negative way.

What you're reading in Mark's gospel is that Jesus, looking at him intensely, loved him and said, you lack one thing. It's out of loving him that he said, you lack one thing.

Tonight, if you're here and you're not saved, if you're sincere and upright, which I'm sure you are, if you live your life as a decent human being, and through the gospel, the gaze of Jesus is set upon you, and the regard of Jesus, as mentioned by Mark, is also set upon you as he looks down on this audience tonight, can you turn away from that look of love?

[22 : 54] Can you possibly turn your back and walk away when you know that this is the Jesus that you've had an encounter with?

That's what he's saying to us. But he's saying to him in this look of love and the drawing out of his heart towards this young man, he's saying, you lack one thing, sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me.

Now when Jesus says, sell all that you have and you will have treasure in heaven, give the proceeds of all that to the poor, come and follow me and you'll have treasure in heaven, it doesn't mean that that is something in principle, that it's a universal requirement for discipleship, that we, in order to begin to follow Jesus properly, that he demands of us that we just get rid of most of our material possessions and make ourselves deliberately almost poor or poor, so that we can really appreciate what it is to depend on Christ.

He's not saying that. What Jesus is doing is focusing on priority. Because this man's got a problem. And the problem that this man has is that he has a God in his life that he's not willing to get rid of in order to have God in his life.

Sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and follow me. In other words, Jesus is saying to him, there's one crucial box that you haven't yet ticked.

[24 : 36] And it's the most important one of all. And that box is that you come to accept yourself for what you are as a needy sinner and accept God and come to put him first before the God that you presently have in your life, the God of your great possessions.

He was putting that God before the other God, before the God, the living God, the true God. And follow me really literally again means, take the same road as I'm on.

Now that was too much for this man as we'll see. But that's essentially what the gospel is to you and to me tonight. It doesn't matter whether we're rich or whether we're semi-rich or whether we're poor. That's not really the important thing. You mustn't take from this that Jesus is simply denouncing rich people and denouncing the possession of riches. In the remainder of the passage what he's doing is, when riches are your God, they are blocking the way to eternal life.

That's what he's saying. When materialism occupies your heart instead of God, when that's put ahead of God, when that's put above God, when that's put before obedience to Christ, when that's

put before coming and following him on the way that he is on, on the way of honoring Christ and honoring God and being submissive to God, and taking eternal life on God's terms, not on ours, it's not a matter as this young man thought it was of doing things to inherit eternal life, Jesus is saying to him, no, you've got to get rid of that notion.

[26 : 23] In fact, you've got to get rid of the things that you're so attached to. And over which you're saying, I've done all these things already, and I've got plenty of material possessions, and I'm rich, and of course, actually for the Jews in those days, and maybe even to an extent nowadays, to actually have great possessions was a sign of God's favor.

And this man would have been thinking along those terms, where he would be saying, well, look at what God has given me, look at my life, it's filled with all of these good things, it's not that I neglect other people, but I have these great possessions.

Ah, yes, but Jesus is saying, would you get rid of him for me? The answer to that is no. If you do that, he says, come and follow me, join me on the road I'm on, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And he's not willing to tick that box. He leaves it unticked. He doesn't want to depart from his goods, from his riches.

So he departs from Jesus instead. And in fact, he's disappointed. He's disappointed and sorrowful, but not persuaded to accept Jesus and what he's saying.

[27 : 51] See, verse 22, disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. There he is, this great possessions, this very rich young man, this member of the nobility, had everything going in life in a material sense, in a way of social status.

Everything is there. He's got everything in that respect that he needs. More than he needs. But he lacks this one thing, that he's not prepared to really just think through and accept his need of. And so he comes to be disheartened and sorrowful. These two words are really very strong. The word sorrowful is actually used very often in a situation of bereavement, situation of loss, where your heart is full of sorrow, the sorrow over loss, the sorrow that you experience through losing a loved one.

That's the kind of word, that's the very word that's used here by Mark in describing this young man. He went away sorrowful. He had a bereavement in his heart, if you like, the pain of bereavement in his heart.

It was just too much for him. He went away crushed. I don't know what he expected, really.

Probably expected that Jesus would say, well, you're really doing very well. Just keep on that course that you're on.

[29 : 13] Just try and improve on things day by day. Don't depart from that course of life that you're on, and it'll be fine. You will have riches in heaven. You'll have eternal life.

Instead, Jesus is saying, you don't have it. You need something else that you don't have. You need to come and realize, actually, spiritually, your life is empty.

Without me, without God, really, in your life, without getting rid of this God that's occupying your heart. He went away sorrowful and disheartened.

You see, actually, when you think about it, what he said about these commandments that Jesus had said, that spoken to him about, do not murder, do not commit adultery, and so on.

He said, all these I have kept from my youth. It's just incredible, isn't it, that when you go back to the first commandment, actually, this young man hadn't ever got past the first commandment, though he was so confident that he had kept all of these.

[30 : 26] He said, you shall have no other gods before me. He couldn't take that box. And he didn't want to.

Because he didn't want to get rid of the God that was occupying his heart. And that's where he's at. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful.

This God that occupied his heart was blocking the way to eternal life. Now you put together again these words, Jesus looking at him, loved him.

And then immediately, go to verse 24. Just read that. Let's just read that and see the impact of that, the way that Mark puts it down. Jesus looking at him, loved him.

Disheartened, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He turned his back on this Jesus who had just spoken to him, these amazing words. These words that were intended to lead him as he received them into eternal life truly.

[31 : 37] But, he doesn't want that. Oh, he wants eternal life. He wants eternal life by doing things that will lead to inheriting eternal life.

But, he can't have it that way. Neither can you, neither can I. You see, it's inherent, it's natural to our thinking as fallen sinful human beings that somehow or other, we will be able to reclaim what we lost in Adam.

That we will be able to do it. What must I do to inherit eternal life is a question that came in in the Garden of Eden after Adam had fallen. And, you can only answer that in the way that Jesus here and elsewhere answers it.

In John chapter 6, you have the same sort of idea where the Jews came in. What works, what must we do to be, what must we do to be doing the works of God?

This is, Jesus says, this is the work of God. You see, the thought behind the question is the same as it was for this young man. What must I be doing? How can I be doing the works of God?

[32 : 51] And how can I be sure that I'm doing the works of God to earn his favor? And Jesus said on that occasion in John 6, as you know, this is the work of God that you believe on the one that he has set.

That's the way in. That's how you lay hold of eternal life. You can spend your whole life trying to do it yourself and inevitably that will fail because I'm not good enough and you're not good enough.

But he is. He is the good teacher. He is the perfect savior. He is the one who in the gospel looks towards us tonight with his heart drawn towards us as lost sinners and says, come and follow me and let me occupy the first place in your heart and you will have treasure in heaven.

Doesn't it make you think that here was a man who could not, who could not just release his grip on the God that occupied his heart, not even in the presence of Jesus loving him and advising him and counseling him what he needed in order to have eternal life?

Is there any God with a small g between any of you and eternal life?

[34 : 40] Is there really Jesus saying, think about that. Think deeply about it. Question your own soul of it.

And if there is, there's only one thing to do. You get rid of it and put Christ in its place and put God where he should be in the foremost place and you will have treasure in heaven.

May God bless this to our hearts tonight. We're going to conclude by singing Psalm 62 Psalm 62 on page 80 Tune this time is Heron Gate We're singing from verse 7 to verse 12 Psalm 62 at verse 7 My honour and salvation rest on God my rock and mighty fort O people trust in him always to him alone pour out your heart The low born man is but a breath the high born man is but a lie weighed in a balance side by side they come to nothing but a sigh Do not seek after wealth by force or triumph in ill-gotten gain and even though your goods increase set not your heart on what is vain my God has spoken I have heard that you are strong and loving Lord each one according to his deeds you will assuredly reward these verses my honour and salvation rest on God my honour and salvation rest on God my walk and mighty fort

O people O people trust in him always to him alone for our dear heart the Lord the Lord born man is but the way the Lord born man is but the way within a balance side by side they come to nothing but a sign do not seek after wealth by force or triumph in ill-gotten gain and even though your goods increase set not your heart from what is vain my God my God has spoken

I have heard that you are strong and loving Lord each one according to his deeds you will you will assure any reward I'll go to the main door this evening after the benediction Lord help us to be thankful for all that you give to us in the spiritual food of the gospel and help us to be thankful now as we do give thanks and for the food prepared for us for the fellowship we ask that you would bless that to us we pray for Turkel as he comes to speak to us this evening we ask him Lord that we ask you that you would give him of your spirit and enable him we pray to speak as he would desire from his heart to our benefit and bless us all as we come together in fellowship and we ask now that your grace and your mercy and your peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit will be our portion now and evermore

[39 : 24] Amen