

In this passage we see a man coming face-to-face with the Savior, showing interest in salvation and yet walk away without it. He was a moral man who obeyed the commandments of God all of his life but did not have the faith to value following Christ more than his possessions. Eternal life comes to us, not because we are moral, but because we seek Christ above all else, including our possessions.

Verses 1-15: Jesus has made His way to Judea as He is heading to Jerusalem to be crucified and there the Pharisees come to Him with a question about divorce in an attempt to trap Him. Jesus points out that God created marriage to be the permanent union of a man and a woman and that this union, created by God, should not be broken by man. The Pharisees bring up the “writing of divorcement” allowed in the Mosaic Law, implying that the fact that Moses allowed a writing of divorcement must mean that God approved of divorce. Jesus replied that divorce was allowed under the Mosaic Law only because of the sinfulness of the human heart and that divorce is not part of God’s original plan for marriage. The disciples comment to Jesus that perhaps it might be best to never get married, but Jesus replied that not everyone is able to be unmarried and still remain pure before God.

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

“And, behold, one came” – Luke says that this man is a “certain ruler,” indicating that he was a leader in the community and Matthew tells us in v. 20 that he is a young man. Later we find out that he is wealthy and so these descriptions are why theologians refer to this man as “the rich young ruler.” He comes to Jesus with a question about what he can do to obtain eternal life. As we will see in the next verses, he has kept the commandments (at least superficially) and so likely he was a good and moral man who was apparently not guilty of any “big” sins. Yet he had no peace or confidence that he had eternal life because he apparently senses that merely keeping the commandments is not enough.

“and said unto him, Good Master [teacher], what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” – He calls Jesus a “good master [teacher]” showing that he acknowledged Jesus as being a teacher but apparently did not see Him as the Son of God. The adjective “good” implies he believed Jesus was inherently good with no sin. We typically use the word “good” to assess performance or ability (“he’s a good singer; she’s a good cook”) and not as a description of the nature of a person. Jesus will call attention to this man’s use of the word “good.”

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God:* but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. 18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, 19 Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

“And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God*” – Jesus seems to be calling attention to the fact that this man is not recognizing Him as being the Son of God, a definite requirement for eternal life. It’s like Jesus is saying “You see me as just a good teacher and not as the Son of God. Still, you call me ‘good’ even though the only One Who is good is God Himself.” Recognizing God as the only One that is good also implies that all men are “not good” because they are sinners.

“but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” – Jesus points to God’s commandments as the righteous standard by which we are all judged. However, we are not able to keep God’s commandments perfectly, which is why Christ had to die in our stead on the cross. Jesus is not pointing to the law as the means of obtaining eternal life but is wanting this man to see the futility in trying to keep the law. The law shows us just how high God’s standards are, how inadequate we are in meeting them, and how desperately we need Jesus Christ to be our Savior:

Gal. 3:21-24 *“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”*

Romans 8:3-4 *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

“He saith unto him, Which?” - As he mentions in v. 20, this man has kept all the commandments he was familiar with. However, the reason he had come to Jesus was because something was still missing. He apparently hoped that Jesus would point out a commandment that he didn’t know about (or had overlooked) so that he could keep it as well and finally have peace.

“Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery...” - Jesus lists commandments 5 through 9 of the Ten Commandments which deal with human relationships. Jesus did not mention the tenth (“Thou shalt not covet”), perhaps because the man may have impatiently interrupted Jesus as He recited the familiar commandments.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

This young man says that he has kept all the commandments that Jesus has mentioned since he was a youth. However, keeping the commandments all his life had not given him peace in his heart and so you can almost hear the desperation in this man’s voice as he asks Jesus what else he needs to do in order have that peace and know he has eternal life. If we are honest with ourselves we will have to admit that none of us have kept God’s commandments perfectly and so perhaps knowing this fact about himself was at the root of this young man’s lack of peace.

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

The Greek word for “perfect” means “*to be complete; lacking nothing.*” The young man asked what he was lacking and Jesus addresses the core of what hindered him from having eternal life. Jesus knew that the man’s heart and affections were on his possessions and that this affection superseded his love for God. Thus Jesus focused on the young man’s affection for his possessions and instructed him to sell everything that he owned and give it to the poor so that he could follow Christ unhindered. He wanted the man to shift his affections from the treasures of this world to the treasures of heaven, of which Christ Himself is the foremost.

Matthew 6:31-33 “*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*”

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

The man demonstrated that he loved his possessions more than he loved God. He had realized that despite keeping the commandments all his life he still did not have eternal life. However his possessions were a higher priority in his heart than his desire for eternal life and he was not willing to give them up in order to follow Jesus Christ. **Luke 14:33** “*So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*” Christ has to be first in our hearts.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you” – As the young man walks away, Jesus makes a comment concerning the man’s situation to His disciples, likely shaking His head sadly as He speaks.

“That a rich man shall hardly [with difficulty] enter into the kingdom of heaven” – Jesus comments on how difficult it is for a rich man to be willing to turn his back on his wealth and set his affections on God. Money itself is not evil; the problem is in how unwilling our sinful hearts are to let go of the wealth through which we can obtain all that our hearts desire in this world.

1 Tim. 6:9-10 “*But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*”

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

After declaring how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus goes even farther and uses what was apparently common proverb of the time to express the impossibility of a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven. He is apparently speaking of a literal camel and an literal needle because, as one commentator said, there is no basis for the view that Jesus was speaking of taking a camel through a narrow gate. It is impossible for a rich man to stop loving his riches because of the sinfulness of the human heart.

25 When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

The surprise of the disciples was due to the Jewish belief that wealth was a sign of the favor of God. The disciples apparently believed that if those who obviously had the favor of God (their wealth) could not enter into heaven then what hope was there for the rest of us? Surely God’s standards were too high, they believed.

26 But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The lure of riches, which enable us to satisfy all the worldly desires we may have, is too strong for the human heart to ignore. The reason the lottery and other gambling venues are such big business is because of the vast numbers of people who want to win a fortune. The lusts of our hearts for money is so strong that only God can break it in order that we can love Him above all else.

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Having heard the instruction that Jesus gave to the rich young ruler to abandon all that he had and follow Christ, Peter starts thinking about the fact that he and the other disciples had essentially done that very thing. We may look as Peter’s question as a bit self-serving but it is a natural question that someone in his position might ask. He wanted to know if the benefits of following Christ was worth leaving behind all that they had. Had they made the right decision?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Greek word translated “regeneration” means “*renewal; restoration*” and refers to the time when Christ will restore the world after the destruction of the tribulation period. Christ will reign in glory on earth for a thousand years of peace and righteousness. During this time the twelve apostles will have positions of governing authority over the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus continues in vs. 29-30 and says that in addition to the governing authority given to the apostles, everyone who has forsaken all for Christ will not only gain eternal life but will be compensated a hundredfold in the kingdom for what they have given up. Also, those who pridefully place themselves ahead of others will be last in the kingdom and those that they tried to be ahead of will instead be placed ahead of them.