

A Rich Man Meets a Man with a Treasure

Series: Journey to the Cross

Luke 18:18-29

March 19, 2017

Welcome again to worship. I'm so glad you are here.

I'm going to tell a secret about myself. I have a slight case of Agoraphobia. I get a bit anxious in big crowds – or at least trying to get into, then out of big crowds. So, for example, if we go to a Reds game, I already know where I want to park. And once parked, I grab Myra's hand and zoom, we are off. Weaving and dodging through the crowds until we get to the gate, then through that until we reach our seat. I usually then relax because I know where things are. Once the game is over, I am once again on a mission to get out of the stadium as quickly and efficiently as possible, and hopefully, remembering to grab Myra's hand again before I dart out. I am on a mission, and I don't like to be stopped and lose sight of that goal.

But that wasn't Jesus' style as He was on His "Journey to the Cross." In our study of Luke's account as Jesus has set His sights towards Jerusalem and His eventual crucifixion, He is willing to stop and change a person's life. And in our journey so far, a blind man met a healer and a little man met a big God. Blind Bart and old Zack were changed forever when they met Jesus on His journey to the Cross.

Today, we are going to see what happens when a rich man meets a man with a treasure. I invite you to turn in your bulletin to page 5 and follow along as I read from Luke 18, beginning at verse 18:

A certain leader asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to have life forever?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? Only God is good. You know the commands: 'You must not be guilty of adultery. You must not murder anyone. You must not steal. You must not tell lies about your neighbor. Honor your father and mother.'" But the leader said, "I have obeyed all these commands since I was a boy." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one more thing you need to do. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, "It is very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

When the people heard this, they asked, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answered, "God can do things that are not possible for people to do." Peter said, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, all those who have left houses, wives, brothers, parents, or children for the kingdom of God will get much more in this life. And in the age that is coming, they will have life forever."¹

We have a very interesting passage here today. There were many assumptions by and about this individual who asks Jesus about life forever, or eternal life.

But before we get into that, let's see what we can learn about this individual. Now, to this point, I've given nicknames to each of the people in our series. Blind Bartimaeus, I called Bart. Zacchaeus I called Zack. Today's man doesn't have a name. He needs a name, so I'm going to call him Richie Rich, from the cartoon character.

¹ Luke 18:18-30 (NCV)

Now, today's story is told in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as well as our passage in Luke. In Matthew and Mark, Richie Rich is characterized as a young man, a rich man, while Luke calls him some kind of ruler, a civic ruler maybe like a young Donald Trump, or possibly a religious ruler, depending upon the translation. Yet everyone agrees that Richie Rich is wealthy and has many possessions. He seems to be a person with whom life has been gracious. He's young, successful, and was morally upright. He followed the Ten Commandments all his life.

How many of us can say that? Have you ever committed adultery? Ever murdered someone? Ever stolen something? Come on Jesus, everyone steals at some point in their life. Ever told a lie about someone? Did you always honor your father and mother, especially in those teenage years? Most of us would fall woefully short of perfection on that list, but Richie Rich seems to be sincere in his claim that he has never done any of those things. A ruler, a politician, a rich man who has never committed adultery or murder or stolen or lied or failed to honor his parents? Richie Rich is the complete opposite of the Frank Underwood in the series, "House of Cards" or for that matter, most politicians, TV preachers, or rich men we have ever known. He is a good man.

Maybe that's why he addresses Jesus as "good teacher." He addresses Jesus in a way which, for a Jew, was without parallel. No Jewish rabbi was called "good" in direct address. The Rabbis always said "there is nothing that is good but the law." To address Jesus in such a way is an over the top form of flattery – comparing Jesus to God in goodness. Of course, we know Jesus is God and therefore is good, but Richie Rich is not saying it to affirm his faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Instead, he is trying to flatter Jesus, maybe because he thinks he himself is so good, and his position in society and his bank account and his moral life would seem to suggest as much. It's like he is saying, "Good Rabbi, meet a good man."

So I wonder if Richie Rich was coming up to Jesus with the attitude, "Hey Jesus, I've got it all: money, power, position. So when I ask you, 'what must I do to have life forever', I'm just making sure you and everyone else knows how good I am, and that You and I will check off the list all my outstanding qualities so that everyone will admire me."

We see here four ways Richie Rich sought the treasure of eternal life.

First, he depended on his heritage.

Richie Rich was a religious guy. The word Luke uses is *archon*, and is used to describe both civic and religious leaders. And he is definitely a Jew; he refers to Jesus as a Rabbi, the title one would give to a Jewish religious teacher, just like the ones he had sat under as a child in synagogue school. He grew up believing what he had been taught in the Scriptures, that the people of Israel were the chosen people, God's very own.

There are people in churches today who feel the same way. There are so many myths about what it means to be a Christian, to have life eternal. Some people believe, "I'm an American, therefore I'm a Christian." America's a Christian nation? Another says, "I joined the church, so I'm a Christian." If you join the Lion's Club, does that make you a lion? People say, "I was born in the church." If you were born in a car, does that make you a spare tire? People say, "I got baptized." You could be baptized in the ocean until every fish knows you by your first name but that's not going to get you to heaven.

People say, “I believe about God.” So does the devil. He knows there’s a God, but you’re not going to find him in heaven. So what’s the difference? It means to believe in Christ.

Jesus said in John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”²

So it is not whether you grew up in the church or in a church going family or a member of a church that gets you eternal life. You must believe in Christ as your Savior.

The second way Richie Rich sought the treasure of eternal life was that he depended on his morality.

As we have already mentioned, few of us could claim the kind of moral life Richie Rich led, to fulfill all the Ten Commandments. He says in verse 21:

“I have obeyed all these commands since I was a boy.”³

There are a lot of people out there who believe just like Richie Rich. As long as I do mostly good, am a good father or mother, don’t cheat on my spouse or at work, pay my taxes, volunteer with some civic organization, go to church as long as there is nothing else going on... as long as I am good, God’s got to let me in.

The movie “Saving Private Ryan” ends with Captain Miller (Tom Hanks’ character) sitting near a bridge after an attack by German forces. As his life is ebbing away, he pulls Private Ryan (Matt Damon) down toward him. Struggling for breath, he whispers, “Earn this, earn this.” And in the movie, as Ryan stands, his face morphs back into the present as a senior adult staring at Miller’s cross in the cemetery. Crying, he turns to his wife and says, “Tell me I’m a good man.”

Many people may believe that Christ died for them, but they have an attitude that Christ told them, “Earn this.” They spend their lives through religion trying to receive validation so that people will tell them, “You are a good man or a good woman.”

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.⁴

Grace is realizing that we can never earn Christ’s sacrifice for us on the cross. Our lives should reflect thanksgiving for what he has done instead of validation for being a good person. We can never earn salvation and eternal life. We can only receive it.

The third way Richie Rich sought the treasure of eternal life was that he depended on his leadership.

I have always been a leader, ever since I was a kid. Maybe it was because I was first born, I don’t know. I was elected to Student Council in the 1st Grade. I had no idea what it was, but I won the popularity contest to get there. I missed out on being Student Body President in 6th grade probably because I didn’t have a cool sign or promise a bunch of stuff like pop machines and pizza – good pizza – every Friday for lunch. I always organized the neighborhood pick-up sports games, like playing baseball or football or basketball. I was secretary/treasurer of our National Honor Society in high school. Even today, people see leadership qualities in me. I had only been a member of Dayton Pilots’ Club for 6 months, and I was elected to serve on the Board of Trustees,

² John 3:16 (NIV)

³ Luke 18:21 (NCV)

⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

and now I am the Secretary and Membership Officer. I've been elected to serve on the Mountaineer Christian Ashram Board of Twelve after attending just 2 Ashrams.

I say all this – not to brag – but to show that it is easy to think that when people consider you a leader, you must be special. You must have it together, have it made.

Fortunately, you all know that I don't. There is nothing of me that merits something special, especially eternal life. My leadership does not make me a future citizen of heaven; Christ does that.

Richie Rich believed that his role in society, his leadership, be it civic or religious, would prove that he was worthy of eternal life.

Finally, Richie Rich sought the treasure of eternal life because he depended on his wealth.

The people witnessing this encounter are shocked when Richie Rich walks away dejected. Look at verses 26-28

When the people heard this, they asked, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answered, "God can do things that are not possible for people to do." Peter said, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."⁵

Peter and everyone else, included Richie Rich, assumed that wealth was a sign of God's blessing, and that surely the wealthy were going to heaven.

We do this today. We seek role models in the rich and famous. We elect officials who have the money or access to the money. Look the Trump's administration: full of successful and wealthy business people. We gravitate to the belief that the wealthy, especially those that didn't cheat anyone, are really good people, certainly good enough for God. The Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs. Certainly they go to heaven.

We seek role models in the rich and famous, not the nurse or the teacher or the police officer or the construction worker that do the hard things.

GOING TO CARL REEDER'S VISITATION.

It is not wealth that gets you to heaven, and Richie Rich quickly learns that. Look at verses 22-25:

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one more thing you need to do. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich. Jesus looked at him and said, "It is very hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."⁶

This man's wealth made his life comfortable and gave him power and prestige. By telling him to sell everything he owned, Jesus was touching the very basis of his security and identity. He didn't understand that he would be even more secure if he followed Jesus than he was with all his wealth. Jesus does not ask believers to sell everything they have, although this may be His will for some. He does ask us all, however, to get rid of anything that has become more important in life than God. If your possessions take first place in your life, it would be better for you to get rid of them.⁷

This is the last fill-in:

He forfeited eternal life for one reason: not his wealth, but his control.

⁵ Luke 18:26-28 (NCV)

⁶ Luke 18:22-25 (NCV)

⁷ Life Application Study Bible, Luke 18:22-23

Richie Rich believed that all these things: his heritage, his morality, his leadership, his wealth, especially his wealth, were the things he could count on for security, for control. And that is why he walked away and missed out on life eternal.

COMMENT

This is my birthday today – my spiritual birthday, that is. 45 years ago today, I gave my life to Christ. At an altar at Grace United Methodist Church in Piqua, I knelt and surrendered my life to Christ. It's a pretty good day for a birthday. How about making this day your spiritual birthday as well, but letting go of the control of your life you think you've got to have, and giving it to Christ. Let go and let God lead you to life eternal.