



## Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler

Luke 18:18 - 27



A rich young ruler came to Jesus to ask how to inherit eternal life, but after he talked to Jesus, he made a tragic decision. The ruler chose to hold onto things of much lesser value than the eternal life that Jesus offered. This week, we will read about his poor decision and how we can choose the ABUNDANT life Jesus has for us every day.

## Day #1: No Longer Perfect

Pretend it is a hot day and you are really thirsty. You have been outside playing and you run inside to grab something to drink. You open the refrigerator to see there is one ice-cold can of Coke left. "Perfect!" you think to yourself. You pop it open and right at that moment your little brother grabs it from you and spits right in the can! Yuck! Would you want to drink that Coke now? No way. It is no longer perfect. It has spit in it! What if your mom added more fresh Coke to the yucky Coke? Would this make it good again? Would you drink it then? No. What if your mom offered to pour it into a glass and remove the spit with a spoon? Would that make the Coke acceptable? No. There is no way to make the Coke perfect again.

Similarly, not one of us is perfect, because each of us has sinned (Isaiah 53:6). Our **imperfect** condition separates us from God who is perfect (Psalm 5:4). There is no way for us to remove the sin once we have committed it (Jeremiah 2:22). There is no way that adding good works to our life will make us perfect again (Ephesians 2:9).

Many people think that God judges us by weighing our deeds on a big scale. They think that as long as the good things we do outweigh the bad things we do, we will be acceptable to God. This is NOT true! You will not find this concept anywhere in the Bible. Also, many people compare themselves to others. They think they will be acceptable to God if they do fewer bad things than someone else does. This is also a false belief! God judges us according to whether or not we are perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Many years ago, God gave "the law" so that we would know what God's standard of perfection is. The law is contained in the Ten Commandments and many other rules that God gave to Moses. Before God gave the law, people did not understand how serious their sin was (Romans 5:13). After the law was given, people understood that God's standard is perfection (Deuteronomy 31:12-13). The Bible tells us that no one can obey all of the law perfectly. God gave the law so that everyone would understand that he is a sinner.

✝ *So it can't be said that anyone will be made right with God by obeying the law. Not at all! The law makes us more aware of our sin. - Romans 3:20*

The law is like a mirror. When we look at it closely, we can see ourselves as we really are. The mirror cannot clean us up. It can only show us that we need cleaning. Likewise, the law cannot make us perfect. It shows us we are not perfect, and shows us we need God's help to meet His standard of perfection.

✱ Ask God to help you understand that none of us can keep the law. Thank Him for giving the law to help us understand that we each sin and we each need a Savior.

## Day #2: Key Question

One day a rich, young ruler came to Jesus. He did not understand that no one could keep the law. He thought he was keeping the law very well. The young man asked Jesus what he must do in order to go to heaven.



*A certain ruler asked Jesus a question. "Good teacher," he said, "what must I do to receive eternal life?" - Luke 18:18*

Jesus was about to confront his wrong beliefs. Jesus reminded him of the commandments.

*"You know what the commandments say. 'Do not commit adultery. Do not commit murder. Do not steal. Do not give false witness. Honor your father and mother.'"*

*"I have obeyed all those commandments since I was a boy," the ruler said. - Luke 18:20-21*

The man was proud of his own efforts to keep the law, but Jesus knew the man really fell short. The Bible tells us that Jesus looked at the young man and loved him (Mark 10:21). Jesus wanted the man to see that he needed God.

*When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "You are still missing one thing. Sell everything you have. Give the money to those who are poor. You will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow Me." - Luke 18:20-22*

Now, here was a commandment the man couldn't keep. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3) Jesus knew that the man loved what he owned more than he loved God. The man had allowed his possessions to become the most important thing in his life. We will look at the man's response tomorrow.



One sure way to know if there is something you value more than you value God is to ask this question: If God asked me to, would I give this thing up? If the answer is, "No," that thing has become a god to you. Ask God to give you eyes to see this thing in the proper perspective. We are commanded to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Luke 10:27). Your relationship with God should be the most important thing in your life.

## Day #3: Sad Response

Let's think for a moment why the young ruler's possessions had become so important to him. Certainly, he enjoyed the things his money could buy. He surely ate wonderful meals, traveled in the finest caravans, and lived in a royal palace. He could afford servants to take care of all of his needs. But, more than likely, it ran even deeper than that. He probably saw his wealth as not only what he owned, but also it had become part of *who he was*. He was respected because he was rich. He spent time managing his investments. His money gave him power over other people. And, perhaps the hardest thing to overcome, was that his money made him feel secure. He probably felt, as many adults do, that because he had money saved up, he could trust that money to take care of him and his family. Many people feel that having money makes them independent. They believe that if they have money they do not need anyone, not even God.

So, the rich young ruler was faced with a commandment that he had broken. Would he give up the thing that had become a god to him?



*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. - Mark 10:22*

### Day #3 continued:

Sadly, we see that the young ruler chose to walk away from Jesus. He could not give up the wealth he had accumulated and the security it provided him. The Bible tells us the man's face fell and he went away sad. Why did the expression on his face fall? Because, up until that point, he felt he was doing really well. He thought he was on his way to heaven because of the good deeds he had done. Until Jesus held up "the mirror" of God's perfect law, the man thought all that mattered was what people saw on the outside. But the Bible tells us God knows the secrets of our hearts (Psalm 44:21). Like all people, this man fell short of God's perfection. Now, he knew he needed God, but he chose not to follow Him.

This man went away sad because he would not leave his fortune. He did not realize that his wealth had come by God's hand, and that his wealth could vanish in an instant (Job 1:21). The man could not give up the security he felt because he was wealthy. But, ironically, the only true security any of us have is being in God's care. The ruler chose what was temporary over what is eternal. He put his trust in his fortune instead of depending on the One who provides everything we need. This young ruler placed his faith in his belongings, instead of placing his faith in God. He did not realize that his value did NOT come from what he owned. He was valuable because Jesus loved him!



Ask God for the wisdom to value only what is valuable to Him (Luke 16:15). Know that **you** are valuable because God values you (James 2:5)! He takes great delight in you and rejoices over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). Ask God always to give you the strength to choose what is eternal over what is temporary.

## Day #4: Free Will

Throughout the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we can see that Jesus had authority over all things. Everything obeyed his commands.

**Objects obeyed Him.** The first recorded miracle of Jesus was when He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). And, we have seen that Jesus multiplied a small lunch into food for thousands of people (Luke 9:13-15).

**Nature obeyed Him.** One day, Jesus saw a fig tree with no fruit on it. Jesus commanded the tree never to bear fruit again. Matthew 21:19 says, "Immediately the tree withered."

Another day, Jesus and the disciples were in a boat, crossing a very large lake, when a terrible storm started up. The disciples were afraid they would drown. The disciples called on Jesus to help them.



*He (Jesus) got up and ordered the wind and the huge waves to stop. The storm quieted down. It was completely calm...They were amazed and full of fear. They asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the waves, and they obey Him." - Luke 8:24b-25*

**Sickness obeyed Him.** The Bible records over 30 specific people whom Jesus healed, in addition to the times when Jesus healed groups of people. Jesus healed all types of illnesses. We have seen that Jesus returned those with leprosy back to perfect health (Luke 17:11-19). Another such time was when Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth.

*...He (Jesus) spit on the ground. He made some mud with the spit. Then He put the mud on the man's eyes. "Go," He told him. "Wash in the Pool of Siloam." Siloam means Sent. So the man went and washed. And he came home able to see. - John 9:6-7*

**Demons obeyed Him.** The Bible tells us that even evil spirits confessed that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 1:24; Matthew 8:29). They knew who Jesus was and the spirits had to obey Him. They were silent when Jesus told them to be silent, and they went wherever Jesus told them to go (Luke 4:35). One day, Jesus even commanded evil spirits to go into a heard of wild pigs, and they obeyed (Matthew 8:30-32)!

**Even death obeyed Him.** One day, Jesus saw that a widow's son had died. Because of Jesus' compassion for the young man's mother, He touched

### Day #4 continued:

the man's coffin and told the man to get up. Imagine everyone's shock when, instantly, the man began to speak (Luke 7:11-15)! Also, Jesus' good friend, Lazarus, had been dead four days when Jesus commanded him to come out of his tomb.

*Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." - John 11:43-44*

There is only one thing in all of creation that ever **dared NOT to obey Him-man**. We see in the story of the rich young ruler, a man who did not do as Jesus told him to do. He did not sell all of his possessions and follow Jesus. We see other times when people did not obey Jesus' instructions (Mark 7:36). This is because God gave people the freedom to choose (Joshua 24:15; Deuteronomy 30:19). When we choose not to obey, it is sin.

We may wonder why God gave us free choice. Let's look at it this way. If a mother were to find a paper in her young daughter's book bag that said, "I love my Mommy." It would fill the mother's heart with joy. But if the mother found out that the child's teacher *forced* the child to write the phrase, the words would suddenly mean nothing. They would be just marks on a paper. The words would only please her mother if the child *chose* to write them. Similarly, it delights God when we *choose* to obey Him and praise Him (Deuteronomy 30:8-10; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 147:1; 1 Peter 2:9).



It is your **choice**. Will you choose to follow Jesus?

## Day #5: Only By Grace

The outcome of the young ruler's story could have been very different. We have seen men who gave up everything to follow Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their fishing boats (and the greatest catch of their lives) right on the beach (Luke 5:11). Levi left his highly profitable job as a tax collector (Luke 5:28). The rich, young ruler could have done as the disciples did. He could have left the things that stood between him and God, and followed Jesus. Following Jesus is the **ONLY** way to have a truly abundant life (John 10:10) and the **ONLY** way to gain eternal life (John 3:36).

It would have been very difficult for the ruler to leave what he perceived to be so much, but God had so much more in store for him! Did you know that God does not expect us to have the power to do what is right on our own? It is only by the **GRACE** that God gives us that we can do what is right!



*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. - Titus 2:11-12*

In fact, without God's grace, no one would even *want* to do what is right.

*For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. - Philippians 2:13*

God gives us the **desire** and the **ability** to do what is right! The rich ruler should have confessed to Jesus that he had made his wealth the priority in his life. Then he should have asked Jesus for the strength to put God first.

Jesus loved the man and wanted to set him free. If the man had followed Jesus, instead of being a slave to his belongings (Luke 16:13), the man would have been free to serve God. For, even people with great sums of money spend much of their time worrying that their money will slip through their hands. If the young ruler had put God first, he would no longer be consumed with earning and investing. He would no longer worry about his money running out. He would rest in the care that his Father would provide. He would live in the peace that God's word promises to those who place their faith in Him (Psalm 29:11).



Each of us must realize that we are **HELPLESS!** Without God, not only are we **not able** to do right, we are **not even willing** to. Dear child, rest in the **GRACE** that God gives when we admit to Him that we need Him.

*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. - James 4:6b*