

Series:	Reference:	Title:	Date:
No Series	Luke 18:18-30	Spiritual Suicide	09.02.18
Website Writeup:			
What holds you back in relation to Jesus? What's got you stuck? Jesus is satisfied with nothing less than all of us. True blessing & life are found in His presence. Salvation is not a matter of morality & good works. Good works do not precede faith, faith precedes & produces good works. We look at all of this through the story of the Rich Young Ruler.			

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The Rich Ruler

¹⁸A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

²⁰You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'" ²¹"All these I have kept since I was a boy," he said.

²²When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²³When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." ²⁸Peter said to him, "We have left all we had to follow you!" ²⁹"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Woody Allen once said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it through not dying."

Immortality for some may be inviting. Life's good for some. But for others, eternal life would be a nightmare. Life stinks. All of us want life, not biological life, we've got that, we want the meat, marrow & meaning of life, substance, pregnant with joy & satisfaction. As Christians, it's summed up in those 6 encouraging words at the end of time, *'Well done, good & faithful servant.'* To know we're in God's will, He's pleased - we've made a difference.

The Rich Young Ruler, a story in three of the Gospels; Matthew, Mark, & Luke. They differ slightly, without contradiction. Reading all three gives a more complete mental image. For instance, in Mark it says this man ran up to Jesus & fell on his knees giving a little more insight into his heart. There's sincerity & need. Defenses have dropped. But it's also a tragic story of spiritual suicide. This guy had it all, qualifying as one of the

more religious people of his time; had everything going for him. However, he's one of the few people in Scripture who meet Jesus with a sincere question & walk away more destitute than when he came.

Christ's is a call of allegiance & transformation; a call of the heart. And when he calls, the question for anyone is...what holds you back?

The sincerity & fear this guy may've been feeling isn't all we know of him. He's a rich young ruler, enjoying the power & benefits of ruling life at a young age with his whole life ahead of him. Wealthy. Unhindered. Endless possibilities. One thing's missing & he feels it. All he owns & enjoys can't go beyond the grave & even now it's losing it's luster. In his humanity, he's limited & knows it, can't escape it. It's as if he's wearing the Iron Man suit without the little chest power pack in it - the suit alone does him no good. There's something beyond all this & he recognizes Jesus as having the answer.

He comes with a good question, to the right person. Kneels before Jesus & says, "*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Simple enough, but this is the only time anyone referred to Christ as '*Good Teacher*'. Unusual, since to refer to anyone as good flirts with blasphemy. Only God was good in the Jewish tradition, a term reserved for him alone. He senses something profound in the presence of Jesus.

Jesus counters, not by denying his own goodness, but by putting this man back on his heels, "*Why do you call me good? No one is good - except God alone.*" In other words, "*I hope you know what you're saying to me, because only God is good. If you call me good, then you call me God. And if you call me God, then I know your heart.*"

Jesus always targets the heart. No small talk, flattery, or build up. His words strike central to a person's being. Now, at first glance we may think Jesus is preaching a works based righteousness, since he goes directly to Exodus 20 quoting some, but not all, of the Ten Commandments. We may think he's telling us - to find God your good deeds have to outweigh your bad, but we'll find he's not saying that at all.

He actually quotes the second table of the commandments, those which have to do with our relationship with others. The first four deal with our relationship with God & the rest deal with our relationship to others. He recites Commandments 5-9, "*Do not commit adultery (7th), do not murder (6th), do not steal (8th), do not give false testimony (9th), honor your father & mother (5th).*"

He doesn't quote the 10th which is, '*do not covet*'. In doing so, Jesus deliberately elicits the response from this man of, "*All these I have kept since I was a boy,*" Jesus is leading him to an understanding of himself by **not** quoting the 10th commandment. It wouldn't have gone unnoticed. Everyone knew them by heart.

He's leading him to the one area in life in which he's not fulfilled the law. Maybe he's been a model Jew in all other ways, however, in his heart he has this one thing - his ultimate downfall; he covets.

Covetousness has to do, not only with wanting what your neighbor has, but also with hoarding wealth & greed. Jesus had said, you can't serve both God & money, and here stands one who's trying. Jesus asked him to do the one thing a covetous person couldn't bring themselves to do; give it away.

Realize, it's not a behavior Jesus is demanding (the giving away of money), but rather a sign his heart's changed towards Jesus in relation to wealth - a lordship issue. What if you had two bosses at work. One which knew very distinctly how to run the company. As a matter of fact he created the company from ground up. Under his leadership, the company would thrive. But there was a second boss with equal authority who isn't familiar at all with the company. As a matter of fact doesn't really care - he's in it for himself. And every time the good boss makes a right decision, the bad boss undermines it with a wrong one. Everyone would be left confused as to who to follow. That's the equivalent of us thinking Jesus can share governance of our souls with whatever idol we're holding onto. Our idols don't have the intimate knowledge of our beings & don't care. Jesus does & knows best - he must reign over all things in our heart.

We know, if we break any of commandments 2-10, we automatically break the first, "you shall have no other gods before me." He's made a god of his money, or at the very least, his comfort & safety. He's dishonest with himself, his outward religious life spoke of devotion to God, but his inward heart served something entirely different. The dichotomous spiritual life - The Carnal Christian, as if being so would even be possible.

Jesus, in all wisdom & love, directs this guy to his one glaring soul blemish, *"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor."* Jesus is convicting him on the 10th commandment. A person can be the best of human-beings doing almost all things well, but no one's morally perfect measuring up to God's Law 100%. We're not our own saviors, as Romans 3:23 says, *all have fallen short of the glory of God.* That's why salvation isn't a morality issue per se, it's a heart issue, trust, relationship & lordship issue. Jesus was the only perfect sinless person who died for us opening the way of reconciliation to God the Father. Only he opens that door, his perfect righteous record imputed to us - it's like we get a hand stamp from Jesus to get into the party.

Which is why intuitively we don't interpret this story to mean all of us have to give it all away to find relationship with God. Jesus didn't tell everyone to do this...

He told Peter & John to leave their nets. Matthew he told to leave tax-collecting behind. He told another man to leave his father. What's the one thing which convicts me - that which stands in the way of my relationship to Jesus & his lordship? Pleasure, comfort, safety, greed, self-righteousness, pride? It's not as simple as an action, or an outward thing like money - it's an attitude/position of my heart. To be wealthy isn't the issue, it's when your trust is placed on something like wealth instead of Jesus that it becomes problematic. Jesus doesn't tell everyone to do this - he treats us as individuals. He explores each of our hearts identifying the one idol which stands in the way of his having all of us.

Jesus led the woman at the well in John 4 to a point of understanding she needs the 'Living Water' he offered, which was himself. She asks him for it & did he tell her to go & follow the commandments & give to the poor? No, he said, *'Go call your husband.'* He knew what her heart issue was, she had had five husbands & the man she was currently with wasn't her husband. Revealing to her that her heart revolved around either pleasure, or an unhealthy emotional attachment to men. She was seeking fulfillment in the wrong place - her idol. Jesus then offered her true fulfillment, saying, "If you want me, you have to be all mine. I'll share you with nothing else; I'm a jealous god." Christ demands all & offers himself for us, but won't force that choice upon us.

What would marriage be if I said to my wife, *"I love you, but, I want a little something on the side."* Kim would have none of that! On my wedding day I had to turn back all the women lined up at my door, for sake of fidelity with Kim. She walked me to the altar with all my faults. You might call it grace, but not cheap grace; my life has to be reflective of my heart towards her; my commitment - fidelity. It's not that Jesus necessarily wanted this guy to give his money away, but to give up its control over him; that it would never come between him & Jesus any longer. That's the rub. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *"When Christ calls a man, He bids him to die."* And, Luke 17:33 says, *"Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it & whoever loses his life will preserve it."* But still it was a tall order, but let's remember, Jesus knew his heart, he knew this man would not let go of his idol.

There's a way to catch a monkey - tie a coconut to a tree, carve a hole just large enough for the monkey's hand. Inside, place some sort of food or prize. The monkey will insert his hand, grasp the item, but can't pull it out with a clenched fist. His reluctance to let go of the prize is his demise. What idol is in the clutches of your heart?

Haggai 1:5-6 says, *"Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."* In trusting in money, or anything else, it's never enough. Idols don't satisfy; whatever that thing is which stands between us & Jesus, will not only fail us, but has to go.

It's important to remember Jesus' words in John 10:10, *"I've come that they may have life & have it to the fullest."* Christ says to this man, *"You can't fulfill the law, I know your heart. Follow me & it is done for you, I'm your fulfillment; just be honest!"* If we're to find life, fulfillment, joy, blessing & freedom, they're to be found in the presence of Jesus.

When the man heard Christ's response, he grew sad, because he had great wealth; covetousness & greed were his downfall - the 10th commandment. He called Jesus good, equating him with God, but in the end wouldn't allow Jesus the lordship he deserved as God. He was dishonest with himself. Jesus looked at him & said, *"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye*

of a needle..." An impossibility. A camel, the largest mammal in their understanding, couldn't fit through the smallest opening in their understanding, the eye of a needle. Unmistakably, it's impossible for a rich man to get into heaven!

The disciples respond strongly, *"Who then can be saved?"* It was a common belief, the wealthy & powerful were most favored & blessed by God. If they couldn't be saved by their own merits, then who could? What it said to these guys was, not even the best of the best can get in. Therefore, they saw absolutely no chance for themselves. This is exactly where Jesus had wanted to lead the conversation; back to himself, back to their need of Him. Understand, this is the churchiest guy walking away from Jesus!

Their confusion comes in a misunderstanding of blessing. In their minds, blessing is showered on someone in the form of wealth & power. However, let's compare the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). He was rich & powerful in some way. What was his response to Christ? He immediately gave half his belongings to the poor & committed himself to paying back those he'd cheated fourfold! And Jesus said, *"Surely today salvation has come to this house!"* That rich man made it in, and he didn't have to give away everything! Was it only based on the action of giving away his wealth? NO! He'd found nothing else of importance as he stood in the presence of Jesus. He'd discovered all he'd ever been searching for in Jesus. Being blessed is living in the presence of Jesus! No one would've expected this transformation of Zacchaeus.

Extravagant action follows extravagant faith. It's not the action which saves. His action of giving all that money back didn't precede his faith, rather faith & joy come first leading to that good work. He loves Jesus first, then gives it all away! Not the other way around. Christ's love for him wasn't contingent on what he did, just like it wasn't contingent on the Rich Young Rulers actions. In the parallel passage in Mark, it states, Jesus looked at the rich young ruler & 'loved' him even though the man turned his back on Jesus. But being in relationship with Jesus means coming also under his lordship - Jesus loves everyone, but not everyone loves Jesus. Love is an action, decision, a choice, it's attentive & devoted. Jesus must reign since he's the Creator of the company which is me & knows best how to run my life.

The Disciples concern was, they'd left everything for him, was it all for nothing? But Christ answers simply, what's impossible with men, is possible with God. God can overcome those idols in our lives which have kept our hands in the coconut. Beyond them, we don't realize the blessings we're missing by holding onto them, not only in the future, but now. *"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."* Do we believe him? Are you willing to let go & trust he'll bring you greater things than your idol's ever brought you. Idols bring only spiritual death & bondage like a monkey caught in a coconut. The way out is simple, let go. But we can't, our sinful nature won't allow it. *Romans 7:14-25* says this (focus on vv24 & 25).

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The answer is always the presence of Jesus, not in the morality of avoiding the sinful action. In the presence of Jesus death subsides, demons flee, wrong desire is righted. In Him, we're transformed. Jesus loved this young ruler, he was trying to bring him freedom from bondage; life to the fullest. But the man turned his back, sad & walked away from the presence of Jesus; his hand caught in the coconut. If he'd stayed & asked the question of. "How?" maybe things would've been different.

"The saddest words of tongue or pen, are these four words; what might have been?" What might have been if he'd responded differently, "Jesus, I can't do it! I want to, but I'm battling my own self! Please do it for me!"

As Paul had written...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25a)

Woody Allen can achieve immortality through through not dying, it's found in Jesus. Would we choose spiritual suicide or the presence of Jesus?