

The Rich Young Ruler



Jesus Answers The Rich Young Ruler

The key to understanding why the Lord Jesus answered the rich young ruler who asked about inheriting eternal life, is found in Luke's gospel. Before we go there, this is what happened:

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

At the end of Jesus' dialogue with that man, the Lord told him:

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:21-23)

Did you ever notice that Jesus, when talking with other unsaved people about their salvation, never told them what he said to the rich, young ruler? He told Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, Matthew and unnamed people something much different. Why? Because not all unsaved people have the same hindrances to salvation. Here is what he said respective-

ly to these other people:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:14-18)

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." (Luke 19:5)

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. (Mat 9:9)

I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. (Luke 13:3)

The key is this: the rich young ruler had a major hindrance to his salvation that these others didn't have. That hindrance to his salvation was his wealth and accompanying greed. It was similar for the Phar-

isees, who probably didn't have wealth close to the rich, young ruler. This is what the Lord told them:

Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you." (Luke 11:39-41)

The Pharisees who were full of greed and wickedness were told the same salvation truth Jesus' told the rich, young ruler because they both had the same hindrance to salvation—greed. For them to overcome greed (a form of idolatry) they would have to unload all their wealth to the poor, then start to follow Jesus. Great wealth for such people is, therefore, not a spiritual blessing, but an actual hindrance to their salvation. That, however, doesn't mean that all rich people are filled with greed and wickedness. If that was the case, then Abraham, Job and other wealthy people couldn't have been godly as they were. Did you know Joseph of Arimathea was rich too, yet he was Jesus' disciple (Mat 27:57)? [The same Greek word is used to describe him as for the rich, young ruler.]

Jesus Warns About Riches

Jesus uniquely warned the rich about their great wealth and how that could block their salvation and bring them woe:

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. (Mark 10:25)

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. (Luke 6:24)

Getting back to Zacchaeus, please know he was wealthy and got saved after his attitude about riches changed:

A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

(Luke 19:2) ... But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:8-10)

One final point, Jesus gave two of his teachings specifically for the rich. One was the parable cited in Luke 12:16-21 where Jesus ended that teaching with:

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:20,21)

The other teaching of the Lord that was given with the rich in mind was The Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Jesus' audience for that teaching is revealed five verses before he gave that teaching:

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. (Luke 16:14)

In other words, at least in part, Jesus wanted those who were rich to know about a rich man that ended up in the fiery torment. His money, therefore, was not the ultimate answer. The same is true for us today:

Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death (Prov. 11:4)

Remember these important spiritual truths regarding Jesus' teaching about the rich young ruler.

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