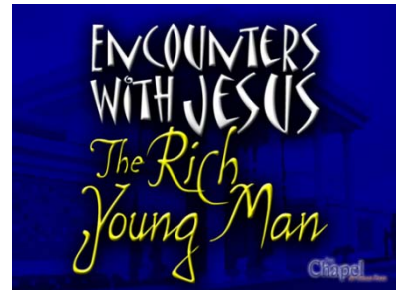


Sermon

Dan Neary

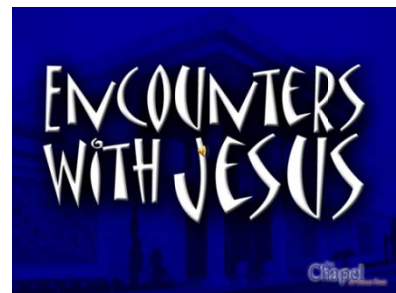
Encounters With Jesus: The Rich Young Man

This is the second sermon in our series “Encounters With Jesus” that will take us up to Advent and the Christmas season. I’ve been looking forward to this series; it gives us an opportunity to look deeply into **relationships** that Jesus had with all kinds of people. We are *all kinds of people* who encounter Jesus, want to encounter Jesus more, want to help others encounter Jesus... so we can approach this series with the expectation that we’ll find something especially meaningful from each sermon.



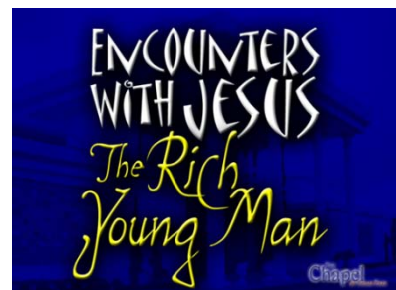
There are all sorts of theological reasons that we can explore that would explain questions like “why did God show up as a human person?” The theological reasons are very important; the meaning of words like incarnation, atonement, redemption, propitiation, imputation, are all worth our study.

But with these encounters, we can ask simple questions like “what if God was one of us?” More accurately, we can see that God was one of us; Jesus walked among the likes of us. There were real encounters, real relationships, that changed the lives of real people. It might be easy for us to think of these episodes as story time, fables in a story book that are meant to teach us or soothe us or entertain us. But they are not. These are accounts of the real man, Jesus, sharing life experiences with real people.



This specific encounter with **The Rich Young Man** has a lot to teach us. We could dwell on a number of theological themes, including:

- Eternal Life
- Obedience to God’s Law in General
- The List of Specific Commands Found in this Passage
- Obligation to the Poor



But what I hope to do this morning is to focus on this human encounter between these two men: Jesus and this Rich Young Man.

Let’s think of this as a Tale of Two Sons.

- Jesus, the Son of God
- And this Rich Young Man... who had to be somebody’s son... in fact let’s give him a name. How ‘bout Rich.



The Tale of Two Sons: Jesus and Rich.

What do we know about Rich? To get the full orb picture, it helps to look at the parallel passages in Luke (chapter 18) and Matthew (chapter 19). There's a technical term for these gospels that have so much in common (Matthew, Mark, and Luke): synoptic gospels.

- Each of the synoptic gospels makes it clear that Rich was rich.
- Luke call's him a ruler, which likely identifies him as a landowner
- Rich is a religious fellow who knows and keeps the commandments
- Rich is convinced that Jesus is special, calling him Teacher and expecting Jesus to be able to lead Rich to eternal life
- Matthew describes Rich as a young man.

I think it is important that we reflect on just that: a young rich man. There are all sorts of ways to become a rich old man. But there is one predominate way, at least on legal way that is predominate, that a young person, especially in the ancient world, would be rich: inheritance.

We know that Jesus was, and is, the Son of God. Rich was very likely the son of wealthy parents. Rich was rich by inheritance.

It is precisely that word, inheritance, which makes this passage so very interesting to me. This episode opens with this most fascinating question; Rich asked Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

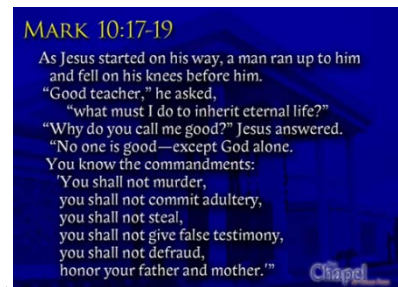


"Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹

If Rich were to ask Dan (Dan, who is not nearly as much like Jesus as he ought to be)... Dan might have said: "Rich, what must you do? What did you do to inherit your great wealth?" Since when is inheritance about what you do? Getting an inheritance is mostly about who you have relationships with. There are all sorts of things one must do to keep an inheritance, or grown an inheritance... but the getting of an inheritance isn't about doing, it is about knowing. It is about the people you know, the ones you are related to by blood, or marriage, or even friendship.

But Rich didn't ask Dan, he asked Jesus... and Jesus didn't exactly "slap him down." He did quiz Rich with his first response:

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone."²



¹*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, 1984, 1993, 2011)

Jesus essentially said, “Rich, who do you think you’re dealing with here?”

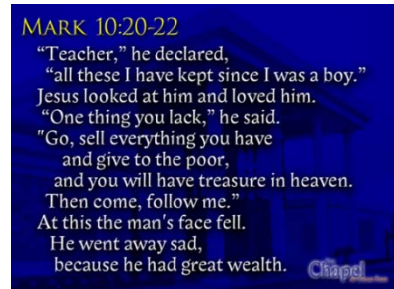
Jesus started with the conventional wisdom, try to please God by keeping his commandments.

¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’^{a,3}

Rich responded simply:

²⁰ “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”⁴

Again, I suppose it is good that Rich was asking Jesus about all this instead of asking me. Wouldn’t you want to say, “Well, duh, Rich! You’ve been doing everything you know to do, but you aren’t satisfied... yet you still think there is something more you can do.”



Verse 21 here reveals, yet again, how superior Jesus is to my impatience, and small mindedness.

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him.

The account in Matthew indicates that Jesus wanted Rich to be *perfect* or *complete*.

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said.⁵

When Jesus said “one thing you lack” it wasn’t judgment. There was no condemnation. Jesus look at Rich, loved Rich, and wanted to help Rich, so Jesus gave Rich what we might call constructive criticism and Jesus pledged to help make Rich complete.

“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”⁶

Let’s look at this carefully:

²*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:18.

^a Exodus 20:12-16; Deut. 5:16-20

³*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:19.

⁴*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:20.

⁵*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:21.

⁶*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:21.

- Sell everything
- Give to the poor (notice that Jesus didn't say give all the proceeds to the poor)
- Treasure in Heaven (remember, Rich said that his concern was about eternity)
- Follow me

Follow me! Had Rich made a different choice, we may have had 13 disciples to study instead of 12. Jesus opened the door wide, giving Rich the same invitation he gave the 12 apostles, follow me.

Rich asked a relationship question: "how can I inherit eternal life." Jesus was offering a relationship with the One who could provide eternal life.

But unfortunately, of course, Rich did not accept the greatest invitation anyone could ever have.

²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ⁷

Rich is one of the few people who met Jesus, and the only one in our series of 8 encounters, that went away in worse shape than he came. He wouldn't do it. He couldn't do it. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus then went on to say "Children, how hard it is^b to enter the kingdom of God! ⁸"

When we say yes to one thing, it usually means we have to say no to something else. Sometimes when we say yes, we have to say no to everything else. It is hard to take a chance when we have so much to lose.

There are certain decisions that are easiest to make when we don't have much to lose.

For example, the choice to commit oneself to a controlled fall down the side of a snow covered mountain is best made when one has little to lose. I doubt I'll ever be a very good skier, mostly because I learned when I was 6'2" tall. It is a long way down from up here... and it hurts when I fall down. I worry a lot when I ski, because I don't want to fall down, and it is way too hard to get back up.



⁷*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:22.

^bSome manuscripts *is for those who trust in riches*

⁸*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:24.

Little kids, on the other hand, don't seem to care very much about falling down. They bomb straight down the mountain with little regard for gravity. They wipe out and then jump right back up again. It doesn't really hurt to fall down, and it is simple to spring right back up. They learn how to really ski without fear, so when they get old, and big, they have the skiing skills they learned when they were young.



I think this is what Jesus was getting at with what we see in verses 23-29

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is^b to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”⁹

Coming to faith is a lot like this skiing metaphor. “It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” And, it is hard for old, big Dan to learn how to ski.

Not impossible, but very hard.

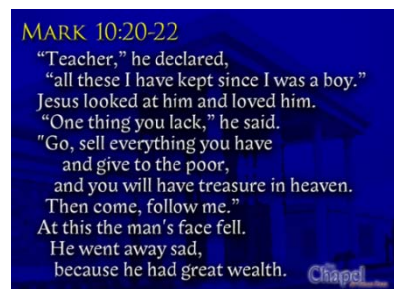
We know this to be true. Revival is more apt to break out among the poor than the rich (unless, of course, you convince the rich that they can get richer... but that is an entirely different sermon).

The same is true about youth. We could go to the stats and prove that it is way easier to win kids for Jesus than bring adults to faith. When we think we have too much to lose, too much money, too much respect, too much intelligence, too much of anything... it is hard to enter the kingdom of God.

Rich must have thought there was too much to lose.

- Sell everything you have
- Give to the poor
- Get treasure in heaven
- And enter into a relationship with Jesus

I wonder if Rich really was all that rich. I wonder if, when



^b Some manuscripts *is for those who trust in riches*

⁹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984). Mk 10:23-31.

confronted with this loving observation from Jesus, Rich did a bit of an inventory and realized that he didn't have all that much after all.

Let me illustrate. I, for example, have a big title that gets associated with a fair amount of money. Trust me, I'm not bragging about being the Executive Vice President of anything, mostly because I know exactly what that means. But I occasionally get treated a bit like royalty because others are impressed by it all. They assume that an EVP of a \$26M operation has some sort of clout... and sometimes they are foolish enough to ask me to exercise this imaginary clout. Yes, I have some stewardship responsibility for the \$26M operation, but very little of that wealth is discretionary. If someone said "sell it all and follow me" I'd quickly realize that I don't really have much to sell.

I wonder if Rich was in the same boat. He probably had all of the trappings of wealth, and even had some wealth that really was his to use at his discretion, but I'm guessing that most of his money was tied up in business, and really belonged to his family.

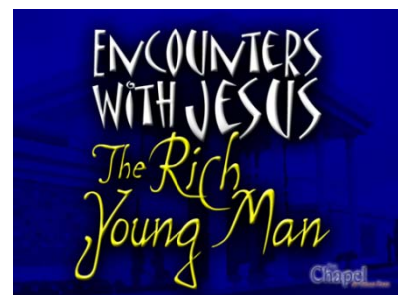
It could be that Rich didn't want to deal with finding out that the "all he had" wasn't really all that much.

Let's go ahead and ask the big question right now: so what? So what! We're rich! In case it has escaped us, in the grand scheme of things, from a global perspective, even the poorest among us are very wealthy.

We are so very susceptible to thinking we have too much to lose when we are confronted with invitations from Jesus.

I want to be very careful here because I know so many of your stories. I know that many of you have given up a lot, everything really, to follow Jesus and pursue the calling He has placed on your lives. I'm not Jesus, but really friends, I am looking at you today and I love you.

I want to encourage us all to be careful not to think we have something that is too precious to lose. We have riches, we have respect, we have well thought out positions, we have pride and position and ambitions... none of these are too much to lose. We have ministries, and children, and retirement plans... none of this is too much to lose.



Jesus looks at us, and loves us, and wants us to be complete. Jesus wants us to be with Him in Heaven for eternity. And I think we want that too... and we can count on Jesus to have the same answer for us that He had for Rich: Everything.

You've heard it said that there is a God-sized hole inside of each of us. We all have this longing, like Rich, to fill this little God-sized hole. **What a bunch of boloney!** There is not **little** hole. We don't gather up all our stuff, all our wealth and plans and ambitions and positions and respect, and find that there's just one little piece left in the jigsaw puzzle of life that God has and will plop in to make us complete. That is what Rich was looking for... and Jesus essentially said **boloney**. The answer isn't a new gadget you add to your bag of tricks. Jesus said, "Take your hands off everything else, and come with Me!"

It is the same answer for us. That was the answer Jesus had for us when we first came to faith, and it is the same answer He has for us with every subsequent step of faith.

Jesus, would you do for us what you did for that rich young man? When we come to You in pursuit of eternal life, would you tell us what it is that we should lay down at your feet? What do we need to take our hands off of today? We know that when we lay anything down for You, You offer us a rich relationship with You in return. Give us courage to follow you. Give us courage to say no to ourselves, so we can say yes to You! Help us to say, with the old song, "I surrender all."

