

# Gospel of Matthew

## 19:13~24

### *The Child and the Rich Man*



The disciples of Jesus were men of their place and time. Children were to be seen and not heard. They were certainly not to take center stage. It was thought improper! But people were bringing their children to the master to be blessed. The disciples thought this was a misuse of Jesus' time. But He disagreed and, *man*, did they catch it from Him when He caught them reprimanding the people who brought the children! Jesus had been enjoying them. They were delightfully shy, and cute, and a welcome relief from the endless lines of the sick and diseased! Instead there were these small malleable egos before Him. They had a huge array of possible futures ahead of them because they had not made enough personal choices yet, good *or* bad, to determine what sort of person they would become – good or evil! That was refreshing to Jesus. He was used to mingling with adults in whom the future was pretty much locked up tight! They were already beyond the formation point of who they had made of themselves! If they were hard-hearted - sceptics and scoffers. The fact that they were this way could easily have happened because their parents had not shown them love, and bitterness had entered into them and they had begun early-on to exhibit anti-social behavior – hostility toward others. But others with the same type of difficult family background had learned from the bad examples of others who and what *not* to be like, and had made decisions from early-on that made them positive people, open, trustworthy, and likeable! That last one is not common, but it happens - and it always has.



Jesus was wooing the desperate, the troubled, the worried, the powerless people to Himself. But they were a difficult mix of humanity and He could look even deeper into their hearts and see the hidden things – things no one else could see, or would ever want to! The self-sufficient, the complacent, the healthy people did not need Jesus or want Him. That is why the commentary of the Gospels on Jesus was that He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. I don't believe it means that He was a sad man. But He saw into the sadness of the hearts around Him!



He saw the brokenness of minds, emotions, bodies! Shattered hopes and dreams, disappointment, shame, fear! He looked and saw the broken children in them - who these people had once been but could never be again. He knew their stories of hardship, disappointment, failure, and grief without the telling of it. He saw the betrayals of love and friendship that many of them had had to live through and how it had warped and re-wired their young brains – throwing them into a world of suspicion, self-protection, and even aggression – because as we all know, “the best defense is a good offense”!

But after a steady diet of adults, the children were a brief respite for Him. They had hope. The future still held alternatives for them. They yet looked at the world with open wonder and expectancy! They did not know yet that they should not talk to strangers, and that adults could often be mean, condescending, and perpetually disapproving. The disciples were proof of that! But best of all, He didn't have to always be proving Himself to these little people! They accepted Him without the hard skepticism/cynicism that they would develop in just a few short years. So He loved these moments with other people's kids. They warmed to Him easily!



Also notice that these children were brought to Jesus by adults – parents, grandparents, even friends of the family I would suspect – but obviously adults that believed. They brought the children to be touched and blessed by Him. What an awesome opportunity! I definitely would have been first in line with my boys, or now, my grandchildren. There is nothing in the world that I want more for them than to know Jesus, and to grow to love Him, and to follow Him with all their heart! That means ***everything*** to me! Oh to have been able to have had them touched and blessed by the actual physical hand of

Jesus! But that, of course, is not possible, at this time. But we do have the Holy Spirit, and it is possible to have them touched by Him if they will know and trust Jesus!

\*One of my grandchildren, probably around 6 or 7 years old, was having a very difficult time with attitude, with selfishness, with obedience, with getting along with others - until one day something clicked inside of Him and he gave His heart to Jesus! It was a day his parents noted and celebrated. They called us and we celebrated too! But the important thing is that it made all the difference in the world in his life! He is not perfect, but his life took a wonderful turn after that – ***very*** noticeably! His attitude changed, his behavior began to change – immediately – and has persisted to this day! Karen and I were commenting recently that he is such a wonderful kid and a delight to have around. But we know where this is coming from. It is coming from Jesus! ***Jesus*** touched the life of our grandchild, and when he gave his life to Him, the Holy Spirit made His home in Him, leading Him and giving Him a spirit of love and cooperation - and it is a wonder to behold – a thing to celebrate even as the angels celebrate!

Listen, today we still bring our children to Jesus to be blessed by Him – just not in person. But there is still faith! There has always been the centrality of faith! Jesus said, “***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed***”. In faith we see Him, learn to trust Him as we trust no other, and give ourselves to Him completely! Faith begins with the parents! They introduce their children to Jesus in their own home. Then we bring our children to church where they learn more of Jesus and are challenged repeatedly to turn their lives over to Him! Ideally, they will also receive support from other children who have already taken that step! And they will learn to support the faith of other children, not just be supported. So when they finally understand and surrender to Him, and the Holy Spirit comes alongside, so begins their life in the Kingdom of God – of placing themselves under His rule! What a difference-maker that is for them!!! Our church does is not pretentious enough to take credit for the difference. Jesus does that! But it will take parents, grandparents, or friends to bring the children here and involve them in our youth<sub>4</sub> programs! Who would deny the children every opportunity to come to Jesus and be touched by Him?!



I'm going to leave that positive note and move on to the next not-so-positive one. Here, it says that a man came to Jesus who we later in the story learn was wealthy, but there are details that the writer of Matthew has left out. In the interests of saving space, so many details are left out of the stories. I love getting more details if I can!

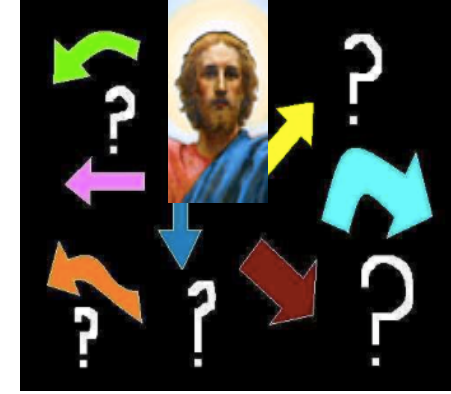
**[Mark 10:17-25]** In the face of the known skepticism and hostility of the religious establishment, the man **knelt** before Jesus. He honored Jesus, addressing Him as “***Good Teacher***”. It is obvious that he was a “good man” – meticulously/conventionally, keeping the Law of Moses. Jesus “***loved Him***” upon seeing him.

**Luke 18:18-30** adds only that the man is a “***ruler***” or lord – reiterating that this man was used to privilege/status, power, and wealth.

So this wealthy young ruler came to Jesus. By His own account He is already a good man, and is just looking for some advice on what Jesus thought were the most important things in the Law of Moses! It was a commendable enough question. Jesus answers Him by basically saying that He should obey ***all*** of the 10 commands, although He names only the last six. The first four – about loving God exclusively and prioritizing Him are obviously a given! He recognized that the man was asking about what Jesus thought about what was important to God *in the treatment of other people*. People of power are notorious for not treating the people they deem beneath them, with any degree of interest or kindness. So you have to give this man points for being interested in what God thought about the issue. He also had always kept these laws of God, but his own accounting, but something still gnawed at His soul. Something wasn't right! There had to be something more!

So although Jesus had love for this man, it did not alter the fact that He went ahead and attacked the very thing that would always keep the man from truly following Him. “***For Where your treasure is there your heart will be also***”. He could not be the king of this man if the man loved other things more than He loved Jesus! The things we love most in our lives rule our desires and affections – and that is true of everyone! When we consider following Jesus, we have to first ask ourselves “what do I love best about my life?” Once we identify that, we then have to ask ourselves if we could love Jesus enough to give that up if we had to. Like most people of privilege, this man had a great affection for all the unusually large advantages he had in his life.

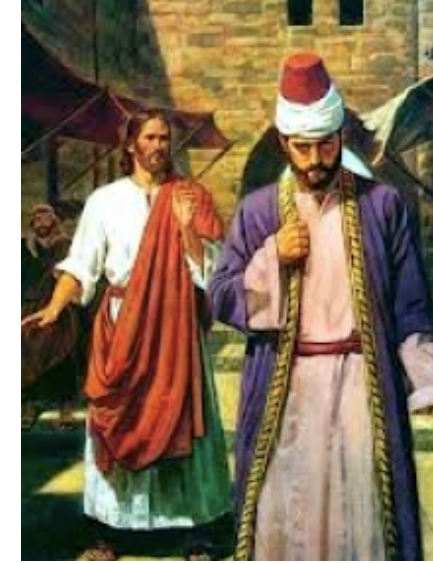
What he lacked was relationship. You can't have a relationship with your own power or privilege, or with your possessions. Self-focus does not satisfy in any deeper sense. Possessions can be nice, but they are not meant to take the place of the relationship with God! We were created and placed on this earth to have fellowship with our Creator! He created into the fabric of our souls the need to be connected with Him! It is our sole, overriding purpose in existing! We will be forever asking with this young man "***what do I still lack***" until we find that means by which we can fulfill that foundational need.



We see the results today of a society that has moved further and further away from its Creator. People are becoming increasingly angry, frustrated, and hostile! They are lashing out at politics, at Judeo-Christian morality, at any kind of conventional Christianity! They are blaming the white race and especially white men for every perceived evils on earth, it seems! They are disgusted with capitalism and fiscal inequality. I have to warn that this type of anger and hostility fueled the murder of roughly ***100 million people*** in the last century – in Russia, and then the Soviet Union, and then in Asia – Viet Nam, Cambodia, China, all around Africa, and even parts of South America!! This has all been human-caused tragedy – a bloodthirsty anger spilling forth upon the earth, an anger that knows no bounds and knows no mercy. It is a frantic striking out at something – anything and anyone – and feeding the fantasy of some freakish utopia where everything is perfect and some political figure will save the day and make it all better! Which, of course, never happens! The fly in the ointment of that dream is that anyone who gets in the way of it is destroyed! How can they logically hope to build utopia on the dead bodies of millions and ruined lives of so many ***more*** millions?! In the end it has only leaves poverty, suffering, and a colorless/hopeless existence! Something is driving such terrible rage! It is this question – "***What do I still lack***" – that I believe is at the bottom of it all! Why do I still have this big ache in my heart? After all my political correctness and new righteousness, why am I still so unsatisfied? Why does my anger and frustration and hate grow until it bursts like a boil!

We know the answer is Jesus because we have experienced that same thing! ***He*** connects us to Himself through the Holy Spirit and thus, through Him, to God the Father! By way of the cross, He reconciles those who were separated from God because rebellion and sin. He brings us into God's Presence – into His heart – into His approval and love, and of course, under His authority.

But here is the really sad thing about this story. Jesus invited the young man to follow Him. It had an important catch to it though. He told the young man that to follow Him, the things he had formerly loved most about his life must go. When you follow Jesus, that is the decision that must be made! By His supreme and ultimate act of taking on humanity and mortality, and then going all the way with the cross where he allowed Himself to suffer beyond imagination and die, He has merited being number one in the lives of all who would put their trust in Him – who trust Him to deliver life and life eternal with God in His heaven!



I can imagine that the young man's breath caught in his throat when he heard the requirements of truly being a part of the kingdom of God. He was stunned, and for a moment he was frozen in place, contemplating for a moment what life would be like without the rich trappings that he was used to. To just give it away?! It seemed unnecessarily extreme to him! His face fell. He didn't even try to negotiate, but turned and walked away dejected and troubled!

Most people would at least try to negotiate in a similar situation. *"I will give you this, that, and that, Jesus, but you let me keep that over there, and this too, of course!"* Then they try to follow Him, but they are always hobbled by the things they won't give up! So they hobble along behind, with their other loves in life holding them up, dragging them down! They limp along, wanting to follow but finding the effort following Jesus but traveling heavy, exhausting! But they just can't imagine life without those things so they persist. They always follow Jesus with a pronounced limp. They are always straggling along behind.

The really ironic thing is that Jesus doesn't normally ask someone to give all their stuff away and be dirt poor, or to swim the deepest ocean or climb the highest mountain, or to go somewhere they do not want to go. But He also does not want someone who have a full list of priorities that He isn't on, or where He is listed somewhere near the bottom, or where He even comes in second to something or someone else!

