

The Rock: 08-28-2022

A year with the master

The encounters

Title: The rich ruler

Scripture: Luke 18:18-30

(Black bible Pg. 824 ESV)

Theme:

Is it possible to ever walk away from an encounter with Jesus, and remain unchanged?

Introduction:

We are looking at the rich "young" ruler this last Sunday of August, as we continue with the encounters of Jesus.

This young man starts off actually with a very good question. Though he's going to discover it is a wrong question to ask, because the answer is a difficult one, at least for him.

Much like the woman at the well from last week, we find Jesus wanting to get to the heart of the matter, which is a matter of the heart, actually.

Proper focus, proper use and holding onto of things in life. To put it another way, ask the question: Do I own my stuff, or

does my stuff (whatever that stuff may be) own me?

Always a good question. It applies here as well as to our tithe, doesn't it? We learned that two weeks ago. It's not that one offering was better than another, but rather, who owns your heart?

The same is said of that beautiful story of the woman at the well. So many ways she tried to deflect and distract, but Jesus kept digging.

It's a matter of the heart. "Ok, so your life is a mess. I'm here to tell you that I have come to fix that mess. You just need to acknowledge the reality of your situation."

God, remember, is no respecter of persons. So, for us to see through Jesus' eyes into the restoring and redemptive heart of God, is to look beyond the externals, and into the heart.

Our culture places so much emphasis on the external, on the natural, "worldly success". This is nothing new, it has been this way in most cultures.

What is our degree? How big is our house? What kind of car do we drive? Where do we live? Our "stock", our family and such.

There is nothing wrong with things, or even the ability to have those things. Rather, are those things our end-all be-all? Are they what make us who we are?

You see, what this encounter is not telling us, is this: Wealth is bad, success is bad, things are bad. Too often we come to this encounter and see just that.

Why? Because it's easier to just think that way. It seems to be what Jesus is saying:

-Luke 18:24-25 (ESV)

"Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Building from that statement, the thought process goes to, "wealth is bad, being rich is bad, and having nice things is bad."

None of that is actually here. Why do I say that? Well, I'm glad you asked, because that is what we are going to try and unpack this morning.

The Story:

Jesus once again, teaching those following Him, has given the example of having a faith which trusts God and endures. We see that through the nagging and persistent widow. (Luke 18:1-8)

She wanted justice and until that happened, she was not going to stop bothering the judge, reminding him that she was right and he had responsibilities.

To the Pharisee with a proud heart looking down on a defiled tax collector. (Luke 18:14)

-Luke 18:11 (ESV)

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.'"

"I may not be all that, but hey, at least I'm not him!" Can you imagine praying like that? So heartwarming, isn't it?

He needed to self-reflect and realize that he was actually his own worst enemy because his heart was wrong, even though his actions were right.

To the goofy disciples who can't seem to get it right. "Send them kids away, Jesus

is too busy doing ministry for that stuff." (Luke 18:15-17)

But Jesus, rolling His eyes I am sure, reminds them that people (kids included) are ministry.

"See John, I told ya! Send them away. What were you thinking? Mom was right about you; you just don't get it." "Shut up Andrew, ya momma's boy! You always were her favorite."

Somewhere in that crowd a voice is heard, obviously near Jesus. Watching Him and listening to what He is teaching -an honest question as I said, comes forward:

-Luke 18:18 (ESV)

"And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus, always wanting to get to the heart of the matter, is less than subtle. Not a tact people like very much today in this age of, "Don't say anything that may hurt my feelings of offend me and my perceptions."

-Luke 18:19-21 (ESV)

"And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do

not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother. And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth."

Don't call me good! Strange, because if anyone qualified as good, Jesus would be the one. But no, it is God alone who is good.

Jesus goes right to the Moral Law again. Remember Matthew 5:17-20 and Jesus fulfilling it all?

He runs down all the externals and how this guy is to behave. The Moral Law (Ten Commandments)

"Oh, good, I've got them down! I'm in then, right? Oh, the hope that it would be that easy. Just do the right things, be a good person. All good things for sure, and we should do them.

God's grace toward us should drive us toward them. Yet, it seems that is not really all that God is after. He is not after your performance capabilities. No, He is after you. A much harder thing to handle sometimes, as we are going to see.

Because Jesus, just as He did with the woman at the well, turns onto the road that He knows this ruler needs to be on.

-Luke 18:22 (ESV)

"When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

It's interesting that Jesus doesn't just say, "No, you are a mess." He simply says that he is missing the important thing. In other words, this ruler was doing all of those things right.

So, it wasn't as though his life was a mess. It seems that it was the opposite. He was leading a very good and pious life and honestly asked the question.

Yet, that still isn't enough or what is important. God's grace doesn't measure us up in that way. Success or failure. Rich or poor. Big house or small. Education or not.

No, He digs deep into the heart of the matter, which is ultimately a matter of the heart. Yours and mind. Who owns us? How are we growing spiritually, in Christ?

That is the challenge here. A successful, wealthy ruler (absolutely nothing wrong with that) is being told to do the one thing Jesus knows is keeping him from "inheriting eternal life."

Sell all you own -distribute to the poor
- then you will have treasure in heaven.

Does this then mean we too have to sell
all we own? After-all, it sure looks like
rich people with lots of stuff are going
to have a hard time getting in.

No. Why would I say that? Because, Jesus
is walking this ruler toward the one
thing that he loves more than God -his
"success", his stuff.

Money, things, success are not bad!
Certainly not in and of themselves. Yet,
when they rule us, when they become the
end-game as it were. What happens then,
is that they become the objects of our
affections. Taking the place only God
deserves.

THAT was this man's problem, and when
Jesus confronts him with this challenge,
it reveals his heart. Make God supreme,
inherit eternal life. Great, how? Give up
your stuff. Why? Because it's getting in
the way.

"Really give me your heart. Because right
now you're just checking the boxes. The
object of your affections are your
things, your success and your money."

All the things our Good God has given
you.

-James 1:17 (ESV)

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

All the ability and faithfulness you have to do and earn and accumulate these things, well, even that comes from God.

But these things have taken God's place in your heart, almost as if you were a self-made man. You are worshipping the gift, and not the giver.

There is nothing wrong with stuff, or even wanting stuff. So long as our hearts are turned toward God in that attitude of thankfulness, knowing it is He who provides even our abilities to earn it.

Anything that gets in the way of our love for Jesus, no matter how good, becomes bad. Why? Because it is more important to us than He is.

Radical? I don't think so. Yet, in our world's perspective as in this ruler's, yes! Very radical indeed. Yet, from the Kingdom's perspective, it's just proper posture before God and living.

Now, it's important that we turn to Mark's gospel and see what he records of this incident.

-Mark 10:20-21 (ESV)

"And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, **loved him**, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

This is the whole point: Can we have an encounter with this Jesus and walk away unchanged? Yes, we can. Yet, that never changed God's heart toward us as His image bearers in this world.

Jesus looked at him and LOVED him. Jesus was lovingly demanding a different kind of response from him, but didn't get it. Jesus LOVED him still.

It is vital that we remember the love of God in these moments. Moments of "harshness" it seems, or discipline from Jesus.

God's love and grace need to be always in the front of our minds in order that we see these things as growth pieces, because of God's goodness.

IF we miss this, and simply get angry and offended because it seems mean and harsh, we miss the point and our growth opportunity. Frankly, this is why people still walk away just as this ruler did.

John 6, for example, is a great place to really see this. (Homework)

The people want to make Jesus King because he filled their bellies. They had a need met, and thought that was good, and it was. Because every good gift comes from the Father of the heavenly lights. Let's make Him king and we can get food all the time.

But Jesus turned and taught in a very harsh and direct way, not to be mean, but rather to drive people to the truth, to grow them in God the Father and challenge them to have a right focus.

The same thing is wrong with this ruler. He wants something from Jesus, namely eternal life, Yet, it is clear that he wants it on his own terms.

But we can never be right with God on our own terms. That is why we need Jesus and that is what is so beautiful about grace.

Is it hard for a rich man to enter heaven? Yes. But it is just as hard for a poor man who clings just as tightly to his stuff. Grace is sufficient for them both. What is the posture of our hearts?

-Luke 18:23-27 (ESV)

"But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely

rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

With God, all things are possible. That is grace, that is mercy. In Christ, we are all sinners saved by grace. We are debtors to mercy alone.

Philip Yancey, in his memoir: "Where the light fell", which I just finished reading, finally understood this in his genuine conversion encounter with God.

Being brought up in an extremely fundamental Christian home, with a very demanding and critical mother, he had learned how to perform, to check the boxes.

Yet, he had come to realize that made him nothing but bitter, cynical and mad at God. Thinking God was some sort of malevolent dictator who punished harshly for every wrong, always, and hated pretty much everyone.

Until that moment when, in college, at 17, God lovingly confronted him in the

story of the good Samaritan. He said that it dawned on him that he was the wounded man, and that Jesus was trying to be that good Samaritan, and all he was doing was cynically "spitting" in the face of Jesus.

He writes this about his heart and mind after that genuine conversion moment when he finally realized God wanted him, and not all his checked boxes and successful performances:

"Like Marshall (his brother), I finally expect God to crush me someday...Yet from the Bible I am learning about a God who has a soft spot for rebels, who empowers such people as the adulterer David, the cheater Jacob, the whiner Jeremiah, the traitor Peter, and the human-rights abuser -Saul of Tarsus. A God whose Son makes prodigals, heroes of His stories. Could that God find a place for a cynical sneak like me?"

-Where the light fell: Philip Yancey Pg. 233

Yes, he could, and did. That is just what he wanted for this ruler, and it's why, even in rejection He loved him.

He loves you. He loves me. God gave us Jesus, and Jesus allowed Himself to be given. He poured out His grace and mercy

and love upon us, and challenges us to look at our hearts and ask: Who owns us?

All things are possible with God -that is why He wants nothing to get in the way of your relationship with him. All the stuff is good, remember He gave it to you. But it needs to be in its proper place in our lives and in our hearts.