

Encounters with Jesus IV - The Rich Young Ruler

It's too much. It's just too much. I want to do what he asked me, I really do. But he asked me for the one thing I can't give.

I've been a good man all my life. I was successful enough in my studies and in my business that they made me a member of the ruling council, even though I am still young. I guess they could see that I followed the law perfectly and did all the right things

But I often wondered—was that enough? I mean really—was it enough? I got very concerned about it. What if there was something more I should be doing? It seemed like there should be more. I mean, I keep the ten commandments—don't worship other gods or make images of them; don't take God's name in vain; don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery, don't give false testimony; don't covet; honor father and mother; keep the Sabbath day. Every single one of them I've kept since I was young. Not many people can do that. Even so, I wanted to be sure of my place in the faith, and I wanted to be sure of what would happen to me after death.

So Jesus is in town. We've been talking about him quite a bit at the council meetings. He's that rabbi, the son of Joseph, who has quite a following. He's been making outlandish statements and stirring up trouble. But he also has a tendency to make a difference in people's lives. People claim that he's been healing the sick and making blind men see. And people are saying that he's been sent by God.

So I thought it might be a good idea to ask him about what I need to do to make sure that I have eternal life. I don't have anything to lose, and if he really is from God, then I have a lot to gain if there's something I'm missing.

So I heard he was in town and I spent today trying to find him. I looked for quite a while, and then I finally saw the crowd around him. I pushed my way through and I threw myself at his feet.

"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"†

Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone."†

And then he started to answer my question. "You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"†

I replied, "All these I have kept since I was a boy."†

And then Jesus said, "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."†

Sell everything? Everything? I'm wealthy. I have so many things, and I live a comfortable life. Jesus roams from one city to another, imposing on the hospitality of others. I give hospitality to others. How can I give that up? Treasure in heaven sounds great, but how do I know that I'll really have it? And how does that help my life today? And just think about how many people I'm able to help and all the things that I can do for the poor. I can't give that up, can I?

Really, how can he ask so much of me? I've done everything that God has ever commanded. I am living a good life, according to the law. And what about Abraham? And Solomon? They had riches so far beyond mine, and God didn't ask them to give up their

wealth. How can God possibly expect more of me?

No, I can't do it. I just can't do it. It's too much. And I refuse to believe that's what God requires for me to ensure eternal life.

Jesus must have known what I was thinking, because he looked at me and 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 than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."†

The people around him asked, "Who then can be saved?"†

Jesus answered, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."†

And that's when I left. I'm heartbroken about it, but there it is. And I truly believe that God will reward me for my righteous living, even though I haven't sold everything I own.

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† Quotations taken from Luke 18.

The full story can be found in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18. The portions that are not quoted from the Bible are a fictionalized account of the rich young ruler based on the Bible and commentaries that interpret and explain his story.

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Discussion Questions

- What did you notice about this story?
- What did you wonder about?

- Why do you think Jesus reacted to the man's statement that he was good? What point do you think Jesus was trying to make?

- What did you notice about how the man defined his life of faith? Do you think he was right or wrong?
- How did Jesus challenge his perception?
- Why did Jesus ask him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor?
- Do you think that was a lot to ask?

- What do you think held the man back?
- What do you think he would have gained if he'd chosen to do what Jesus said?

- How does his story compare to the blind man's story? Do you think that what Jesus asked him to do was easier or harder than what he asked the blind man to do?

- What kind of life was Jesus inviting the man to? What do you think that life would have looked like for the man?
- What does it mean to "believe" in Jesus? Does it require more than thoughts? Does it require actions? What kind of actions?

What kind of life is Jesus inviting you into? What are you holding back from him? Write or draw the answer below.