

Afraid to Let Go (Rich Young Ruler)

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Text: Mark 10:17-22¹

Date: September 19, 2010, 10:30am

Series: Mark (What if God were One of Us?)

Introduction: Open your Bible to **Mark 10:17-22**. This morning we are talking about “Afraid to Let Go”.

There are things in our lives that we need to let go of, and we are afraid. We know they do not please God, but we justify it. We put off till later what God would have us act on now.

Today we come to the story of the rich young ruler who holds on to his riches and loses his soul. There is a blindness about him that we are all prone to.

This morning we want to pay careful attention to how Jesus Christ, who is the Greatest Evangelist and Missionary, evangelizes in here in Matthew 19. If there was ever a place to find a straightforward presentation of the Gospel according to Jesus, we would find it here, but *what we find is unexpected*.

This man is so typical of the deceiving blindness that is in all of us. He has a great need – He’s a great sinner. He knows he lacks eternal life. But he just can’t see himself as that needy. His riches will help him. He’s ok without Jesus. He has religion. He has morality. He has riches and comfort. He’s a good guy. Well respected.

Before we start condemning this man, let us look inside and see this in ourselves.

- I. We are all **Seekers** (vs. 17). We are all seeking joy and contentment. Jonathan Edwards said that mankind is geared to “avoid and to remove” all that causes “uneasiness” and to “choose and seek what is more easy and agreeable”. This is his definition of “free will”. We freely choose that which brings us joy and contentment, and we usually choose our highest joy. This man runs to Jesus and says he wants “eternal life”. We are all in his shoes. Who wants to suffer eternally?

Verse 17, “And as he [Jesus] was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?””

A. Look at his **position**.

He was rich. **Mark 10:22** says that “he had great possessions”.

He was young. **Matthew 19:20** says he was a “young man”.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

He was a synagogue ruler. Luke 18:18 says he was “a certain ruler”. The word ruler here is *archón* and refers to his status in the synagogue.

So it looks like he was a Jewish religious leader—devout, honest, young, wealthy, prominent, highly respected, and influential. He had everything except the most important thing.

B. Look at his **passion**

Mark 10:17 says that he “a man ran up and knelt before him.”

This young synagogue ruler seemed genuinely concerned about his own soul. Here was a crowd of people that no doubt knew exactly who he was, and yet he publicly runs and kneels. This is not the way a dignified leader would act. Something was at work here in his soul—he confesses publicly that he does not have eternal life!

He had done everything right, and yet he did not have confidence, peace, joy, or any settled hope whatsoever. He certainly felt a deep sense of restlessness. He had no assurance that he actually possessed eternal life. That passion will either drive you to Christ or it will drive you crazy.

C. Look at this man’s **principles**.

Here we see the ultimate seeker! Listen to the question he asks Jesus. “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” He had not yet even heard the Gospel presentation! If you and I were to meet this man on the street, we would say that he is ripe for salvation, and ready to fall off the vine! Before Christ said one word to him, this man was “ready to sign the card, raise his hand, walk the aisle, or whatever”.² He already believed the basics:

1. He believed in God’s existence.
2. He believed that the Bible was inerrant and trustworthy.
3. He believed that he would meet God on Judgment Day.
4. He was concerned about eternity.

And yet despite all these things, he had a sense of his need: he had a great sense of anxiety, a lack of fulfillment even amidst all his success, and he was concerned about what happens when it all ends.

To the human eye, this was the ultimate evangelistic prospect in the world! He was willing and eager and it seemed this was a divine appointment!

² John MacArthur. *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Word of Grace: Panorama City, CA, 1988), 78.

II. We all need the **Savior**. “And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” (vs. 18).

Here this young man comes and asks eternal life from the Source of Life Himself. Yet in the end he ends up walking away in blindness, holding on to his riches. He won't let go! They bring him too much comfort and security.

This wasn't just anybody this rich young ruler was speaking with, this was the One in whom “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). He is the very essence of goodness. There was no spot found in Christ. He is the holy, holy, holy God of Isaiah.

Can I tell you something? Jesus is good and Jesus is God! He is all you need. Why do you call him good? Do you know who He is. He's not come just to be your friend or the one you turn to in times of distress. He has come to be your all. He has come to not only wipe away your sin but to satisfy your every need. He is good! He is God! He is great and beyond our comprehension.

This young man came to the right place and to the right Person. But Jesus will do us NO GOOD if we do not let go of this world and find Jesus to be our all sufficient all in all.

Transition: The Lord gave this young man a test. He had to choose between all that he loved in this life (in this case his possessions) and Jesus Christ. He failed the test. Let's take a look at this rich young ruler. We'll call him the “ultimate seeker”.

III. We all know this world is not **Satisfying**: “eternal life” is ultimately what we are looking for! (vs. 17).

The young asks the most important question in all the world: **verse 17**, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” We also read in **verse 22**, “he had great possessions.”

This man had all he needed on earth, and yet there was something else he needed that wasn't available on earth.

Whatever you are holding onto for satisfaction is not enough. Now we are going to get personal. Let's talk about what we are holding onto. You may not have great possessions, but there are things in our life that we are afraid to let go of.

There are things we don't want to let go of because not only do we have a hold on them, these things have a hold on us!!

- Control (Manipulation). Do you huff and puff when you don't get your way. Do you sigh and manipulate? Do you give the silent treatment? Do you clam up or blow up. Do you manipulate? Are you willing to take advantage

of people and use them? Are you able to belittle people with no conscience? Does your need to control things in order to be happy?

- Maybe it's some **sinful pleasure**. It could be a bit of TV. It could be you are controlled by alcohol. It could be that there is something that the world might regard as innocent but it leaves you feeling like you are not right with God. You need to let go. But you are afraid to let go.
- **Friendships**. You might have an unhealthy friendship that is taking you away from God. I've seen this too many times steal a person's heart away from God. Are you headed that way? Do friendships have a hold on you?
- Unhealthy **family** relationships
- **Work**. You can't find a job, and you are getting ready to compromise your convictions for money and security. You are willing to compromise the Lord's day for money and security. Don't do it. You may get a job offer that will compromise your conscience, providing a service that Christians ought not be involved in. Don't do it. Let Jesus be your all in all. Does work have a grip on you?
- It might be **Financial security**. You think if you work hard enough you'll be able to control all your problems. You might be neglecting your family, your church and you are a slave to your finances or your standard of living instead of seeking first God's kingdom.

We can do without everything in this life. But we cannot do without Christ. Can you say, "For to me to live is Christ" (**Philippians 1:21**)?

IV. We all need Christ to uncover our outward **Shell** (vs. 19-22).

Now we are going to see how the Lord reveals this man's idols. It's how he shows us our idols. Any time you see Jesus in the NT using the Law, He is intensifying it so that we see our need for Him. It is so bright. He shows us that the only answer to our sin and sorrow and dissatisfaction with life is Himself! Check it out in verses 19-22.

A. Look at the Master's **light** of the Law.

Mark 10:19-22, "You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

Christ tells this man to "Keep the commandments." He is showing this man the standard of a holy righteous God! The Law reveals our ultimate NEED for Christ! That is exactly what **Galatians 3:24** says, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith." Like a good teacher, the law is our guardian and tutor that brings us to the most important matter. Our need for justification by faith. Paul says in **Romans 3:22**, "through the law comes knowledge of sin."

B. Look at the Man's **moralism**. Verse 20, "And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth"". This man's moralism had him blinded. Moralism is having the outward form without the inward devotion. God doesn't want our empty words and our empty worship. He wants us from our heart to depend on Him.

C. Christ not only gives this man the Law, but He **intensifies** the Law. Verse 21-22, "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." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Anything we cannot live without is an idol. Christ gets at the heart of this man. We demonstrated what he lived for.

Application: What do we live for? What do I live for? Can I say the only thing that brings me real satisfaction is Christ? Or am I just a moralist? Do I just use Christ as a nice addition to my life?

Now there's a rich young ruler in all of us. There's moralism in all of us. We cling to the external form and wink at God. Our heart is far away from Him at times. He knows it, you know it, but we don't want anyone else to know it.

Let's come clean today and not hide behind moralism. Let's circumcise our hearts today. Let's cut to the tender part and be vulnerable today.

This man was afraid to let go of his possessions.

1. Look at the irrationality and blindness of sin. This man had great possessions that would expire at the end of this man's life. Yet he still trusted in them instead of Christ. Maybe he thought he'd follow Christ LATER. Listen, if you do not follow Christ now it is likely you may never follow Him.

These riches would do this man no good after death. Life is so short, and yet this man like many would rather hang onto this world for its warmth than get eternal comfort in Christ. **It's like trying to warm yourself with a ticking time bomb. It may bring you some comfort, but at what cost?**

What is it that you are holding onto that you are afraid to let go?

v. We all need **Salvation** "sell all...follow me" (vs. 21-22).

Mark 10:21-22, "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." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

A. Jesus loves sinners. He knows we are weak and cannot help our selves. He came not to call the righteous but sinners. He came not to condemn us but to save us.

Now look at what the text says. It says he loved this man. God loves sinners. It does not say God loves the elect. Of course that is true. But God loves all mankind. We need to come to a passage like this and take comfort.

B. God understands the situation you are in, and He is offering you the best option and only lasting option for you life. You can blind yourself holding onto all this world's treasures. But when will you come to the final conclusion that Jesus is what you are looking for? He's all you need.

This young man displays his outward shell of moralism and says, "I'm moral!" "I've kept the law my whole life!" ! So what does Jesus say? "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."

C. We are all infected with this **moralism**. It's that in you that says, "I'm ok. I read my Bible. I go to church. I love God. Ok fine. But is He what you life for in your heart of hearts? Or is He secondary. Can you say with all your heart and soul, "Take the world but give me Jesus"?

D. The need to trust completely in Christ alone. This seems like an unusual response. Why didn't Jesus just tell him "Trust in me"? In fact that is exactly what Jesus was saying. "Trust completely in me" was exactly what the Lord was telling him. Jesus gave him a command to "sell all and follow" him. Remember Jesus said in **John 14:15**, "If you love me, keep my commandments." You see, without complete confidence in and self-surrender to the One who was issuing the order, the rich young ruler could not be expected to sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor. This was the test of genuine faith! Jesus made exactly clear what he was asking this man to do. It was a challenge to trust **only** in Him, and to "come and follow me" (verse 22).

Just as **Luke 14:33** says, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." This is really a command of the heart. Nothing must come between or before your love for Christ. Renounce it all. Stop living for all but Christ.

What is this man's response?

VI. Our ultimate **Sorrow** or happiness lays in the balance.

This young man "went away sorrowful" (vs. 21-22).

Mark 10:21-22, "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." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Christ let this man go. He didn't pursue him. He gave the light of the intensified Law, and the man was not humbled. He would not budge. The man left in his self-righteousness and pride.

Why did he go away sorrowful?

This man left, not because he heard the wrong message, not even because he didn't believe, but because he was unwilling to forsake all that he had and commit himself to obedience. He had faith, but it didn't go far enough. It was superficial faith that was not willing to trust Christ.

This man loved his riches more than his soul! This is the ultimate loss. Unless he turned to Christ in repentant faith before his death, this man went to hell. Why?

We are called in our hearts to love Christ—look Christ's righteousness for your justification. Look to Christ's riches for your wealth and satisfaction. Never be content with superficial religion

Conclusion: What are you hanging on to? What is it that is in your heart? I know of a man last year, Dr. Greg Baker of Faithway Baptist Church and college. Here was a man who could preach, but he was holding onto this world. He was loving adultery and sinful pleasure. He became eaten up with guilt. Instead of humbly coming to the Lord and confessing his sin, he decided to keep the control of his own life. He took a gun and committed suicide. His heart-his desperate heart condition eventually revealed itself.

Now for most, our heart condition will not be revealed until the day of Judgment. Let me ask you, do you have hold of something, and really it has hold of you. You are afraid to let it go. You need to let it go. And by God's grace you are saying, I want, I need, I desire nothing but Jesus. Take this area of my life Lord. I don't need it. I need you.

Are you afraid to let go of something in your life? I'm asking you to grow in your trust for Christ. Trust Him! If you need Christ as Savior, receive Him, welcome Him as the center of your life today.