

THE RICH MAN

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As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

This very familiar passage from Mark 10 is such a great story, and full of important lessons for us to learn. In response to the rich man's question about how to inherit eternal life, Jesus outlined the requirements for living a respectable life by quoting from the Ten Commandments. Notice they're mostly negative commands: Don't do this; don't do that. The command to honor our parents is actually the only POSITIVE one. Jesus supplied these laws as the basis of a respectable life.

And you know what I've always loved? The rich man, not hindered by any false modesty, felt perfectly free to say, "I'm already doing that! I AM respectable."

That may well have been true, actually. He had never knowingly done anyone any harm. He had all of his "Do nots" in perfect order. But in commanding the man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, Jesus was asking, "Well then, what have you DONE? With all your possessions, all your wealth, all your respectability, have you ever gone out of your way to help others, give to others, in a positive and sacrificial way?"

Many of us believe that respectability is enough. If we can stay current with our "Do nots", if we can NOT do certain unacceptable things, then we're okay. Respectability? Absolutely! I recommend it. But respectability is not Christianity. Christianity focuses on what we DO, and not so much on what we don't do.

Jesus offered the rich man a challenge. "Get out of this focus on moral respectability. Stop looking at goodness as consisting of NOT doing certain things. Take yourself and all you have and spend it on others. Then you will find true happiness now and for all eternity."

It may well be that the rich man had never stolen, or defrauded anyone, or committed adultery, but neither had he been – nor, evidently, could he MAKE himself be – positively and sacrificially generous. In a way, Jesus was confronting the man with a basic question: "Do you really want eternal life? Do you really want ME?" And the man was saying, "I do, I do ... but not that much."

So should we immediately log on to eBay, sell all we have, and give it to the poor? Of course not! Jesus wasn't making a rule. In fact, the scripture says he looked at the rich man, and loved him; he does the same thing with us today. He knew the heart of the rich man, and what it needed, and he knows our hearts, too. And we're all different. Each of us has something we cling to, seemingly unable to give up, that hinders us from complete love and surrender to Jesus. And because he loves us, Jesus will challenge us, and heal us.

Remember: Jesus didn't condemn, judge, punish, or get angry. He looked at the man, knew him, and loved him. We are safe with him. Open your hearts and let him have his way.