

**The Memoirs of Peter**  
**The Rich, Young Ruler (Part 1)**

Mark 10:17-27

February 20, 2011

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Tonight we come to one of the most famous stories in the New Testament, the story of the rich young ruler. Now, to put some context on this story you have to begin by, sort of, putting yourself back in time. In first century Judaism wealth was something good. It was something to be sought. It was welcomed. And that was because they embraced what theologians call a retribution theology. Retribution theology simply teaches that there is a direct correspondence between your circumstances in this life and God's blessing and favor. So, if you're wealthy, if you have much, then that's a sign that God is pleased with you and therefore you are enjoying His blessing.

You say, where did that idea come from, wealth as a sign of God's blessing? Well, you remember God promised to bless the descendants of Abraham and if you go back and look you can see that there was material blessing that was a part of that. It wasn't the main part of it, but it was certainly part, and this is where they constructed this, sort of, retribution theology. For example, of Abram, it's said in Genesis 13:2, "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold."

The same thing is true for his descendant Isaac. Genesis 24:35, "The LORD has greatly blessed my master," his servant says, to Rebecca and her parents, "so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys." It's reiterated in chapter 26 that Isaac became very rich and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy. The same thing is true of Jacob. In Jacob's life, in Genesis 30:43 it says, he "became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys." And so the story goes.

There were other examples in the Old Testament of those who knew God's favor and who also enjoyed, along with God's grace in salvation, material prosperity and wealth. And so that, by the time Jesus preached in the first century, in first century Judaism, wealth was practically equivalent to godliness. One commentator writes, "rabbis like Hillel and Akiba, who rose from obscurity and poverty to wealth and influence, are commended without embarrassment." It's a wonderful thing that they're rich and prosperous because that's a sign of God's obvious blessing in their life.

You can see the, sort of, predecessor here to the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel of our day. There are still people who try to connect faith and wealth. They sell what we call the prosperity

gospel, a strange mixture of Jesus Christ and faith in Him, sometimes not always, along with, He wants you to be wealthy. That's really what He wants for you.

In this passage that we begin to look at tonight, Jesus will destroy such a view, whether it's the first century view or the contemporary one. Instead of being a spiritual advantage, Jesus wants us to know that wealth can easily become a roadblock to true salvation. Let me read for you this account. Mark 10, beginning in verse 17,

As He was setting out on a journey, [*that is, as Jesus was setting out on a journey,*] a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 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.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving for he was one who owned much property. And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

I want us this week and, Lord willing, next Sunday night, to see this story unfold. There's so much here. There's so much more than meets the eye at the first reading. And I want us to begin to unfold it tonight by looking at a man who appears to be a seeker. We talked a couple Sunday nights ago about, are there really any seekers? And the short answer is, no. No one seeks for God. If someone is genuinely seeking God it means God has first sought him and made him a seeker.

But here we meet a man who on the face of it appears, if ever there was a genuine seeker, to be one. Notice verse 17 begins, "As He was setting out on a journey." Now, let me remind you of the historical context here. Jesus and His disciples are traveling toward Jerusalem. Just to remind you, after the raising of Lazarus, Jesus moved just north of the city of Jerusalem, where you see me pointing there, down just north of Jerusalem. Then, shortly before the feast of

Passover, He and His disciples went up to Galilee, joined a large group of pilgrims coming down for the feast, and then comes down the Jordan Rift with those pilgrims coming to the Passover.

Somewhere here in Perea is where we catch Him now, on this side of the Jordan Rift Valley. He's heading down, the next stop will be Jericho, where Zacchaeus comes to Christ. But we're in this yellow area marching down the Jordan Rift with those who are going to partake of the Passover. It's spring, they're on their way to the Passover, and this is Jesus's last Passover, the one at which He will be crucified.

In fact, when we read this account it is just a few days before the triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. They are here in Perea. Notice verses 10 and 12 tell us that they were in a house. Probably, as they were journeying down with these other pilgrims, they had prearranged to stay at the house of one of Jesus's disciples, somewhere in this region. And so after a long day's journey they arrive at the house. Jesus teaches His disciples there. But then probably the next morning, as they were preparing to leave that house and that town and continue their journey toward Jerusalem, some parents heard Jesus was there and these parents bring their children and we went through that story in verses 13 to 16 as Jesus urges them to bring the children and He blesses them.

After that, after He blessed the children one by one, Jesus and His disciples finally try to set out on the next day's journey. But, before they can make any progress, something else happens that stops their progress immediately. Look at verse 17 again, that morning as, after He blessed the children, "As He was setting out a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" First of all, I want you to consider this seeker as far as who he is. Mark simply refers to him in the original language as "one," "one ran up to Him" or "a certain one ran up to Him." Matthew tells us that he was a young man. The Greek word for young here usually refers to someone between puberty and marriage.

Luke calls him, "A ruler." We can't be sure what that means, but probably, even though he was still very young for the role, he had become so influential in his community that he served as one of the lay rulers of the synagogue, one of the men who determine who would read and who would teach, in the local synagogue there in Perea. That meant that at a very young age he'd already become very influential in his community.

Later in the story, both Matthew and Mark tell us that this man "owned much property" and the Greek word that's used implies land or real estate. We don't know if he inherited that property or if he was an investor and managed to develop his wealth on his own, but regardless, he was into property and he was not just wealthy. Luke says, "he was extremely rich."

But apparently this man's influence not only grew out of his great wealth, but also his having the wisdom, even at a young age, to invest his life in things that mattered, to invest his resources in the service of the synagogue, and in the pursuit of a life of obedience to the Torah, the

Scriptures, and the worship of the true God. Honestly, if you met this man he'd be the kind of man you'd want your daughters to marry, sincere, honest, wealthy, spiritually-minded, service-oriented, well-known and well-liked, very influential at a very young age. He was one of the best of human beings. That's who he is.

But notice what he does. Verse 17 says, "this man," who is all those things, "ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him." Now, there are two things very unusual in that expression. First of all, he runs up to Jesus. Clearly there is an urgency, there's a passion in this encounter. In the culture, the Hebrew culture of the first century, mature men, young or old, mature men did not run. And the older you were, or the more influential you were, the less you hurried, because you were the important one. Everyone else varied their schedules to accommodate you. To rush or to hurry, to run, would undermine your dignity.

By the way, that's what is so amazing about the story of the prodigal son when that wealthy father representing God sees his son, the prodigal, coming and he gathers up his gowns and throws dignity to the wind and runs across the village to welcome home his repentant son. It's a beautiful picture of God and His response to the repentant sinner.

That's what this young man does. Influential, a ruler in his community, but he runs, he throws decorum to the wind and he runs to find Jesus. Apparently Jesus only spent one night in this town on His way to Jerusalem and this young ruler learns about Jesus's presence there at the last possible moment. He has just enough time to get there before Jesus leaves for Jerusalem. So he runs.

The other unusual thing in what this man does is that he knelt before Jesus. This was not done before the rabbis. This is not typically done when you entered the presence of a rabbi. It was a sign of great humility, of acknowledging someone to be your great superior. It suggests that this young man had a deep respect for Jesus. It's likely that he had heard of Jesus before, heard of His teaching, heard of His miracles, and he desired to meet Him and to talk with Him. And early that morning, perhaps in morning prayers, maybe he heard that Jesus had stayed the night in their little town and He'd even received some parents with their children and blessed them, but He's about to leave, He's about to move on in His journey to Jerusalem. So this young man runs to find Jesus and then, in a sign of his humility and his respect for Jesus, he does what he wouldn't have done to any other rabbi, he kneels down before Him.

Now, what does this wealthy young ruler want from Jesus? Well, there's a question that's apparently troubled him for a long time. Look at what he asks. There's no parallel in the writings of the rabbis for the greeting this man gives Jesus, "Good Teacher." Jesus's life had made a great impact on this young successful entrepreneur, this, possibly, real estate investor or one who had inherited wealth and managed it wisely, and he has a question for this teacher he respects so much. His question has to do with what he can do to make sure he gains eternal life. Look at it, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Matthew puts it slightly differently. Matthew says, “someone came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?’” That phrase “eternal life,” that expression, finds its basis in Daniel 12:2, something the rabbis talked about often. Daniel 12:2 says, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to everlasting life, others to disgrace and everlasting contempt,” talking about the final resurrection. The reference to everlasting life refers to taking part in the final resurrection and having assurance of that today. So, what this young man wants to know is what he can do to ensure that he will be part of the final resurrection unto life and be sure today that he has it.

There are several other phrases in the context that make it very clear that this is what the man was asking. Look down in verse 17 and you see the expression, “inheriting eternal life.” In verse 23, in the same context, Jesus talks about entering the kingdom of God and down in verse 26 He talks about being spiritually, the disciples respond, in talking about being spiritually saved or rescued. So this is what we’re talking about. We’re talking about gaining eternal life, entering the kingdom of God, both in its spiritual aspect now and eventually in its physical aspect, and being spiritually rescued or saved, that’s what we’re talking about. They’re all used synonymously.

It’s a remarkable question. The man came to the right person asking the right question. No one’s ever asked this question of Jesus, not even His own disciples have asked the question this directly. James Edwards says, “At last Jesus is asked the essential question capable of divulging the meaning of His ministry.”

It’s a truly remarkable young man. He appears, doesn’t he, to be a genuine seeker after God. I mean, think about his spiritual assets just in this passage that we’ve read. He has a commitment to the true God. He has an earnest desire to get Jesus’s answer on life’s most important question. He has a troubled conscience that’s led him here. He has an emotional response to Jesus, a deep respect for Jesus as a moral teacher, a genuine interest in Jesus’s teaching, a longing for eternal life, a thorough knowledge of God’s Law, an external conformity to God’s Law, a spiritual heritage in his family. He says, “I’ve kept these things from my youth,” that is, from my bar mitzvah. I was trained in these things as a child and once I became a son of the Law at 13 I’ve kept these things.

He had a spiritual heritage and there was an intensity in this young man, a sincerity about spiritual things that you can sense, and certainly a consistent display of self-discipline to even externally conform to the Law of God; really a remarkable, remarkable young man. He wants to obtain eternal life and he wants to enter the kingdom of God, but he has no clue, and here’s the key, he has no clue that he needs to be spiritually rescued. He wants eternal life. He wants to enter the kingdom and he thinks he’s almost there; he just lacks something yet. He has no clue that the only way to inherit eternal life, the only way to enter the kingdom, is to be rescued by God from the mess you’ve made of your life. It’s very important to understand that because

understanding that is what makes Jesus's shocking response understandable, because Jesus's shocking answer to this man is calculated to show him just that. That eternal life is going to mean receiving it as a gift.

So I want you to notice, secondly, Jesus's shocking answer. If you're honest with yourself there have been many times in your life, if not now, when you would love to run up to Jesus Christ personally and ask Him this question, but my guess is if you had done that, if you'd been there that day, if you had been the one asking the question, you would have been shocked at Jesus's answer. If someone asked you, for example, today, how do I obtain eternal life? Would you say what Jesus said? Look at His response, verse 18,

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 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.'" "

That's what you need to do, Jesus says. You want to obtain eternal life? You want to inherit eternal life? There you go.

Now, what is Jesus doing here? Jesus is correcting some very flawed ideas this young man has. Reminds me of what John writes in John 2:24,

Jesus was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.

He knew what was going on in this young man's heart and life. He knew what was really going on and He sets out to confront it.

First of all, Jesus confronts and corrects this man's flawed view of man and of man's sinfulness. Look again at verse 18, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." Now, that is a very surprising statement. I want to make sure that, first of all, you understand what Jesus is not saying when He says that. Jesus is not saying that He is not good. There are skeptics, those who attack our faith, who come to this very passage and say, see, Jesus and His followers never claimed that, in fact, He was morally good; He was the same as everyone else. That is not what Jesus is saying. How do I know that? Well, listen to Jesus's own testimony. In John 8:46, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe me?" Who is it that can convict Me of any sin? Who can point a single sin in My life? Jesus says.

Listen to the testimony of the Apostle John in 1 John 3:5, "You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin." This is one of the twelve who knew what He

taught, affirmed what He taught, and said, “there is no sin in Him.” Peter said the same thing in 1 Peter 2:22, “HE COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH.” Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Paul says, “He made,” that is, God made, “Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf.” Absolutely, unequivocally, Jesus is not saying here that He is not good.

Jesus is also not saying that He is not God. We’ve already seen this unfold in Mark’s Gospel. Mark begins his Gospel, look back at chapter 1 verse 1, “The beginning of the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” And then he quotes a passage from Isaiah in which John the Baptist is said to be preparing a way before the Lord, Yahweh, a reference to Jesus, and the story just continues to unfold from there. In chapter 2, Jesus openly claims a prerogative only valid for deity. He says, I have authority to forgive sins. And it continues to unfold in chapter 8 when Peter acknowledges Him in that great confession, “You are the Christ.” You are the Messiah, the anointed one. And Matthew adds, Peter said, “and the Son of the Living God.”

But, if you doubt that Jesus claimed that, keep your finger in Mark’s Gospel and turn over to John 8. You know, occasionally I’ll have Jehovah’s Witnesses come to the door and tell me Jesus never claimed to be God and I take them to this passage. John 8, look at verse 56,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.”  
[*Abraham anticipated My coming.*] The Jews said to Him, “You’re not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, [*ego eimi*] I am.”

He borrows, because He is God, He borrows the name of God from Exodus 3 and they got it. Verse 59 says, “Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.” Don’t let anyone tell you that Jesus didn’t claim to be God. And, by the way, if it was a mistake this would have been the perfect point for John and Jesus to say, wait a minute guys, you misunderstood, that isn’t what I meant. It happens again in John 10.

So, absolutely, Jesus is not saying that He’s not good and He’s not saying that He’s not God. So, why does Jesus say this? Look back in Mark 10:18, ““Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”” Because even though this young man thought of Jesus as nothing more than a famous rabbi, here was the confusion in this man’s mind, even though he thought Jesus was a very famous rabbi, he assumed that Jesus was good and that He could teach him to be good as well.

You see this man had a terribly flawed doctrine of man, anthropology as theologians call it. And he also had a terribly flawed doctrine of sin, what constitutes sin. Theologically that’s called hamartiology. He believed, and this is absolutely key and Jesus calls him on it, he believed that goodness was fully achievable. He believed Jesus had arrived there, and, as being just a man, which is what he thinks of Jesus at this point, and that Jesus can teach him how to get there.

He's almost there. "What yet do I lack?" The Rabbi Jesus had surely arrived at goodness, he thought, so He can get me there too.

In response to this man's flawed doctrine of sin and man, Jesus responds, you think I'm just a man and if so, why do you call me good? If you think I'm a man don't call me good. That shows there's a problem with your doctrine, with your thinking. No one is truly morally good except God alone. No man is good. You see, before Jesus explained salvation to this man He first explains the doctrine of sin, the doctrine of depravity and moral inability.

Jesus really makes two separate assertions in that one brief sentence. The first one is, that no human being is good. Look over in Matthew 19, the parallel passage, because Matthew fills this out a little bit for us. Matthew 19:16, "And someone came to Him and said, 'Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?'" Now, if you weave that together with Mark's account and Luke's account, you put the three accounts together, apparently the man said something like this, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life." He doesn't believe Jesus is God, he's not addressing Him as God, he's addressing Him as man, calling Him good; He's arrived, teach me how to arrive. And Jesus replied, what do you call me or "Why do you call Me good?" And "Why are you asking Me about what is good? No one is good but God alone."

This that Jesus is teaching him is in the category of what theologians call original sin. Every human being inherits from Adam ultimately, but through our parents, a package that theologians call original sin. What is it? Well, all we mean by that is you have imputed guilt. That is, you are guilty and I am guilty for Adam's choice. And, we have inherited pollution or corruption. And that really comes as a package in two pieces. Total depravity, that is, every part of our being has been affected. Doesn't mean you're as bad as you could be, no person is, because of God's restraint in the universe. It simply means, by total it means every part of you. Every part of you has been affected by sin. And, there's total inability. Jesus is talking about total inability here. What He means is the utter inability for any human being to do anything God considers good.

You realize that? There is not one thing one unregenerate human being can do that God considers good. It's not that we can't do good in some senses. I mean, we can still perform, as Louis Berkoff says, we can still perform natural good, civic good. We can be good citizens. We can do external religious good. We can do acts of kindness toward others. The problem with the good we do is that it's not motivated by a genuine love for God. It's not done for His glory. And so in God's judgment it's not good. It may look good here, but it doesn't look good to God. It doesn't meet the standard of goodness. Unregenerate man cannot do anything good.

John 8:34, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." In John 8:44 He talks about us being children of the devil and carrying out the nature of the devil. In John 15 He says, apart from Christ, "apart from Me you can do nothing" that's good. In Romans



3, “THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD. THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” That was the point Jesus was making.

So, I said He was making two points in the statement. No human being is good. The second point He was making is that God alone is good. Only God achieves the standard of moral goodness. Now, what does that do to this young man’s thoughts? It immediately brings this young ruler’s ideas of achieving goodness crashing in around him. Jesus essentially says to him, no one but God has ever met God’s standard. Let me say that again. He essentially says to this man no one but God has ever met God’s standard.

So, Jesus corrects his flawed view of sin. But that wasn’t the only problem with this young man and his views. Secondly, Jesus corrects his flawed view and confronts his flawed view of salvation. Look at verse 19, “You know the commandments,” and then He recites them. Again, Matthew fills out a little more of the conversation for us. We won’t turn there again, but when you put the pieces together, Jesus lists five of the last six of the Ten Commandments. Essentially, He lists the second table of the Law; the only one He leaves out is the tenth one, you shall not covet.

And some commentators, and I think they may be right, we can’t be sure, I think when Mark includes that expression, “do not defraud,” that is simply another way of saying don’t defraud your neighbor by wanting what he has and wanting to take it from him. It may be a reference to the commandment you shall not covet. It’s also possible that it’s a specific command pulled from a couple of Old Testament passages in the Law, not one of the Ten Commandments, but especially suited to this young man’s wealth and how he used it. It has to do, in context, with withholding wages, not paying wages in a timely manner. It may be that was an issue in this young man’s life, we just don’t know.

In response to the question, “what good thing shall I do to obtain eternal life?” Jesus says, keep the commandments. Don’t murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t bear false witness. Don’t defraud or covet. And make sure you honor your parents. And then, according to Matthew, Jesus summarizes the second half of the Law, “and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” He just, sort of, throws that out there, “and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Now, why does Jesus do this? Why? I mean, in answer to a straightforward question about obtaining eternal life, why does Jesus recite the Law, five of the Ten Commandments? Well, there are only two options. The first option is because a person truly can gain eternal life by keeping the commandments. As I’ll show you in a minute, that’s not possible. So that is not a legitimate option, but it’s an option. That isn’t what Jesus was doing.

The second option is this, He gives these commandments to this young man because a person can never do this in a way that meets the divine standard. It drives him to God as his only hope.

I mean, after all, the Old Testament does seem to say that keeping the commandments, keeping the Law, will provide eternal life. You can read Deuteronomy 30:15, “Do these things and live.” Ezekiel 33:15, “If a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he’s taken by robbery, walks in the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”

But we need to find out the purpose of the Law. Jesus uses the Law with this young man. What is the purpose of the Law? Obviously, the Ten Commandments, and I use those interchangeably because when we talk about the Mosaic Law there are three elements of that Law. There’s the Ceremonial Law, all of the sacrificial system and all the things involved with that. There was the Civic Law that governed the law of the nation and its standard operating procedure. And there was what theologians called the Moral Law.

I’ve done a study on this and at some point we’ll do it together. I can absolutely tell you there is justification for that breakdown. Paul does it. But for now you’ll have to take my word for it. There is those three aspects of the Mosaic Law. The Moral Law is that part of the Law of God that is a reflection of His eternal moral character and never changes. Never will change, never has changed. It is encapsulated, summarized by the Ten Commandments. Obviously, the Ten Commandments were very important at the time they were spoken. They were audibly spoken by God. They were written by God Himself with His own finger on two stone tablets.

But what about today? What is their significance and what was their significance with Jesus and this rich young ruler? Based on the teaching of Christ and His apostles, listen carefully, the Moral Law and its demands remain in effect today, serving the same purposes, both for believers and unbelievers, that it has always served.

So, what has been and still is the purpose of the Moral Law for unbelievers? The purpose of the moral law for unregenerate men and women is three fold, and stay with me because this will explain what Jesus is doing with the rich young ruler. First of all, it awakens their consciences. Romans 3:20, Paul says, “through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” If God hadn’t said, “Thou shalt not,” my conscience wouldn’t have anything to say, you’re wrong. It awakens their consciences. Romans 7:7, says, without the Law, Paul says, without the Law, before I really understood the Law, I did not know what sin was. I didn’t understand that I shouldn’t covet until I read, “THOU SHALT NOT COVET,” and then I saw coveting of all kinds in me. This is what the Law does. It awakens the conscience.

There’s a second purpose of the Moral Law for unbelieving people; it’s to drive them to Christ. It awakens their consciences. It says, sinner, sinner, you don’t meet God’s standard, and it drives them away from themselves to Christ. Galatians 3:22 says, “Scripture has shut all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to all who believe,” and then he, in two verses later, he says this, “The law has become our tutor to bring us to Christ.” You know why? Because when you really read and understand the Law of God, when you see what the

moral character of God requires if you're ever going to earn your own way to heaven, when you see that, you see it is completely hopeless; there's no way. And it drives you to throw yourself on Christ and on His mercy and on His work.

So the Law's whole purpose then in relation to our salvation or our justification is to become a tutor to lead us to Christ. That's what Jesus is doing with the rich young ruler. He is using the Law to awaken this young man's conscience as well as ultimately to drive him to his need for something other than his own goodness.

The third thing the Law does, not only does it awaken the conscience and drive him to Christ, but thirdly, it leaves unbelievers without excuse and under God's curse. Look at Romans 3. Romans 3:19, here's where Paul wraps it all up. He's talked about the Law, the failure to keep the law, verse 19,

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law [*that's everyone, some have it written, some have it written in their consciences*], so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

God gave the Law so someday when people stand before God they can't say, I didn't know. You say, well, what about the person who doesn't have the Bible? Well, Paul argues in Romans 2, they have the Law of God in its substance written on their hearts. They know they shouldn't be doing certain things and they do it anyway. That native in some dark jungle somewhere understands that he is sinning against his own sense of right and wrong implanted in his heart by God, and he does it anyway. So that no sinner will ever be able to stand before God and say, God you didn't tell me, I didn't know, Paul says, "every mouth will be closed." Not one sinner will ever stand before God and be able to accuse Him of not making His standard clear. It leaves them without excuse and under God's curse.

Now, every unbeliever is still under the Law, still responsible to keep it. He can do three things. He can keep it perfectly and earn eternal life, which is impossible. He can fail to keep it perfectly and be judged and punished for every violation, eternally, in Hell, or he can turn in faith and repentance to Christ, admitting his own inability, and clinging solely to Christ's perfect keeping of the Law. That's it; those are the options. Really there are only two.

Now, do you remember the context of the story of the rich young ruler? You remember back in Mark 10. Go back to Mark 10; look at verses 13 to 16. You remember the lesson from the children? Verse 15, "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." You remember, we talked about that, that means like a child, having nothing to offer, no accomplishments, no merit, no achievements; you have nothing to offer God. You come like a beggar; you come needing God to act on your behalf because you

have nothing to offer Him, just like a child has nothing to offer. That's the context. You "receive," verse 15 says, you "receive the kingdom of God like a child." It's a gift.

Entrance into the kingdom or salvation or inheriting eternal life, all of those expressions used synonymously, is received as a gift, as a child who has no merit, has done nothing to earn it, but simply gets it as a gift. It only belongs to those who, like children, acknowledge their own helplessness and their utter lack of merit and achievement. Jesus is graciously forcing this young man to see just how desperately he needs Jesus and the gospel and He brings in the Law to help this man see how impossible it would be for him to do anything to obtain a part in the final resurrection. It can't happen. Boy, the Law is so important.

Walter Chantry, in his book, *Today's Gospel*, writes this, "Hosts of Christians have a dreadful fear of God's law, as if it were the useless relic of a past age, the use of which in our day would keep sinners from the grace of God. Our Savior used the law as a primary tool in evangelism. He knew that preaching the Ten Commandments was the only way to teach a sinner his guilt and thereby stir within him a desire for God's grace." Listen, many well meaning Christians water down the gospel by skipping the bad news and getting right to the good news. But listen, the cross means nothing to a sinner who doesn't know the bad news. If he doesn't know that he has sinned against a holy God, his Creator, and that that sin earns him God's wrath and anger and that he will experience that wrath and anger forever, then the cross doesn't mean anything.

Let me encourage you to read Walt Chantry's book, *Today's Gospel*. I wish every person in our church would buy Greg Gilbert's book, *What is the Gospel*, and read it so you understand the gospel and you can share it with others. Read the Book of Romans. Paul begins in chapter 1 verse 18, goes all the way through chapter 3 verse 20, with the bad news. God has a Law that is a perfect reflection of His character and He has made that Law obvious. He has made it obvious in His Word. He's made it obvious in the human conscience. He's written the substance of the Law, Romans 2:14, on every single heart and violating that Law earns His eternal wrath and His punishment. That's the bad news, but it's the bad news that makes the good news, good news.

I've used the illustration before, but if you go into a jeweler's store, a nice jeweler's store, and you want to see a diamond, what do they do? They don't just lay it out there on the glass counter in front of you. They take a black book, either of leather or velvet, and they lay that across the counter, and then against that black, pitch black, background, they put that sparkling jewel and it just causes the facets to go everywhere, radiates its brilliance. That's what the bad news of the Law does for the gospel. When people understand that there's a holy God who is serious about His Law and His character, and He will defend it, and He will punish those who violate it, and that's what they have to anticipate, when they really understand that, it makes the good news wonderful.

I can tell you personally, in my own life, this is what the Lord used. I was sitting in a service on a Sunday night. I grew up in the church, my dad was a music director, he was saved before I was

born, and we were always at church. In fact, I felt like we were at church a little too much. You know, other people didn't have to go all the time; we always had to go. And I was sitting in a service, a little tiny church in Mobile, Alabama. My dad was temporarily helping them with their music, and they had a visiting pastor. I remember his name because there was another person who was famous for the wrong reason at the time. His name was Gary Gilmore. And Gary Gilmore that evening simply taught about heaven from Revelation, the last two chapters of Revelation. Doesn't sound like a highly evangelist message, right? It wasn't. It was all for Christians, there was just Christians there.

And I'm sitting there with my Bible and I'm reading with him passages I've read many times before, but he got to those verses at the end of the Revelation where it says what won't be in heaven. And he didn't spend a lot of time on them. He just read them. Here are the kind of people that won't be in heaven and he read the list. All liars. Uh, oh, this isn't good. We haven't gotten into the list yet. And he continued to read and the Holy Spirit, several times, just stabbed my heart and I realized that there was and is a holy God who is serious about sin, my sin, and that someday there would be justice done, and I realized I didn't want justice. I wanted grace.

That's exactly what Jesus is doing with this young man. As we'll see next week, He's taking him to the bad news because he needs desperately to understand that apart from grace, apart from Christ, he has no hope, and neither does anyone else. If you're here tonight and you're not a believer, let me tell you, everything may feel like it's going along fine right now. You know it's like the guy who jumped out of a 30-story building and someone heard him as he passed the 10<sup>th</sup> floor say, so far so good.

Listen, so far so good, but there is coming a day when Jesus said, you will stand before Him and He will be very serious about your violations of His Law. Your only hope is to turn in faith and repentance to Christ. Admit your own inability and cling solely to His righteousness. That's your only hope. If you'll do that tonight He'll hear you and respond. He would have responded to this rich young ruler if he had turned to Him in faith and repentance. Jesus loved this young man. He loves you, but He will not tolerate your rebellion and failure to turn in faith and repentance. I plead with you even tonight, before your head hits the pillow, acknowledge your sin, plead for His forgiveness, turn to Him.

If you're here tonight and you're a believer, listen, in your evangelism don't be afraid of the bad news. People have to understand there is a holy Creator who made them, who has every right to demand whatever He wants of them, and He has demanded it, in His Word and in their conscience, and they, like us, have consistently disobeyed that, and there's a day of reckoning coming. Jesus Himself will be the judge. Don't be afraid of the bad news because it's the velvet dark backdrop that makes the gospel of the good news shine so bright. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this account from the life of our Lord. Thank You for His wisdom. Lord, we are amazed at His wisdom, how He knew every heart, how He knew how to respond to every heart. And Father, I know that's true even now, that through His Holy Spirit He's putting His finger into each of our hearts in different ways, pointing out and touching and confronting issues in our lives. Father, thank You for His wisdom, but thank You as well for His gentleness and His grace as He works with this young man who thinks he's almost there.

Father, I pray for those here tonight who still are counting on their own goodness. Lord, strip that away and help them to see how hopeless that is, that there is no one good but You. That no one has ever met Your standard but You and they won't be the first.

Father, I pray for us who are in Christ, that You would magnify Your grace in our hearts as we look at what You have saved us from and may the bad news and the good news be on our lips this week as we share it with others. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.