

General Topics :: Jesus and the Rich Man

Jesus and the Rich Man - posted by ArtB (), on: 2004/5/12 1:00

Some people imagine that the rich man of Matt 19:16-24 is indicative of rich people in general, and that this discourse between Jesus and the rich man somehow demonstrates that rich people are more sinful and evil than non-rich people, and/or their riches make it near impossible for them to get into Heaven. This is not at all the lesson Jesus is teaching.

Matt 19:16-22

And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He said to Him, "Which ones?"

And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property." NAS

In the category of living a life of decency and goodness, This rich man of Matthew 19 is in the top one percentile of all people who ever been born on earth. His riches afford him great opportunity to break the commandments that he did not break. For example, rich people usually have more leisure time and young promiscuous girls make themselves available to the rich, . Even more telling about this man's character is that he chooses to come to the light (Jesus). As it is written:

John 3:19-21

"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." NASU

But he did not keep ALL the commandments. Jesus drew out of him that he loved his material possessions more than God, a form of idolatry. No wonder is it that when Jesus told him he could enter life by simply keeping the commandments, the rich man responded by asking "which ones?". The rich man knew he was lacking something and was hoping Jesus would give him a way out by giving him another 'good thing' to do justify his failure to keep the whole Mosaic Law. This Jesus could not do, for the only way to eternal life under the Mosaic Law is to keep the entire law.

Many people stop here and thus draw the false conclusion I mention in the first paragraph above. But when we read on, we get a context that rather profound.

Matt 19:23-24

"And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, 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."" NAS

When the Disciples heard Jesus say this, they became worried about their own salvation as they focused on Jesus words on how this very exceptional decent rich man may never enter the Kingdom of God. I deduce this from the fact that they did not respond, "well that's really bad news for rich people, good thing we are not rich, isn't it.", rather, they responded :

Matt 19:25

"when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" NAS

Seeing that this highly esteemed rich man can not be saved by the works of the Mosaic Law, the apostles now worried how much less worthy are they of being saved. Jesus then assures them that they and this rich man can be saved and have eternal life:

Matt 19:26

Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." NAS

Jesus answered regarding the rich man's question that the rich man will never do enough good things to enter the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life. This is not the only time Jesus lets the Jewish people know that they will never be justified by their efforts to keep the Mosaic Law. He lets them know that if anyone has hatred in their heart that they are guilty of breaking the commandment prohibiting murder, and if anyone looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Thus no one will be justified by their ability to keep the Mosaic Law. God knew that when He gave Moses that Law.

Well, if no one is capable of keeping the Mosaic Law, who then can be saved?

In this exchange with the rich man and the ensuing conversation with His disciples, Jesus hints at the fact that there is another way to enter God's Kingdom and obtain eternal life. It will turn out to be the only REAL way to be saved. But the apostles do not know about that yet and, though semi-relieved by Jesus' last words, they are still concerned about their future. Peter speaks for their mutual worries on this issue of salvation:

Matt 19:27-30

"Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?"

And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life. NAS

Jesus would later reveal the good news as to how all people, rich or poor, may have eternal life, good life with joy and peace, life abundantly:

John 3:14-18

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John 6:37-40

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Matt 11:26-30

"Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for

r I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

ArtB

"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand?" Lady Macbeth W.S.

"But, there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul." Christian Hymn

Re: Jesus and the Rich Man - posted by rookie (), on: 2004/5/12 16:07

ArtB wrote:

"When the Disciples heard Jesus say this, they became worried about their own salvation as they focused on Jesus words on how this very exceptional decent rich man may never enter the Kingdom of God. I deduce this from the fact that they did not respond, "well that's really bad news for rich people, good thing we are not rich, isn't it.", rather, they responded:"

I have heard it explained another way. In that time, people who happened to be rich were thought to have been blessed by God. So with this thought, and I might say this thought has come back into vogue today, the disciples were confused by what Jesus said. Jesus, was always turning the Jewish culture of that day upside down. The disciples recognized this teaching of Jesus as turning the prevailing wisdom of the day upside down.

In Christ

Jeff

Re: - posted by ArtB (), on: 2004/5/13 1:59

Hello Jeff

Indeed, the rich were blessed by God, but in Jesus day, many, but not all, were known to be quite corrupt and sinful. Aside from what Jesus said in Matthew 23- They used their money to obtain high positions in the Synagogues, and the highest bidder would become the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. There was bribe-taking and bribe-giving, compromise with the Romans, and infighting among themselves.

The Talmud contains the following denunciation of the 'rich' priestly families of the time of Christ: "What a plague is the family of Simon Boethus; cursed be their lances! What a plague is the family of Ananos; cursed be their hissing of vipers! What a plague is the family of Cantharus; cursed be their pens! What a plague is the family of Ismael ben Phabi; cursed be their fists! They are high priests themselves, their sons are treasurers, their sons-in-law are commanders, and their servants strike the people with staves." "The porch of the sanctuary cried out four times. The first time, Depart from here, descendants of Eli; ye pollute the temple of the Eternal! The second time, Let Issachar ben Keifar Barchi depart from here, who polluted himself and profaned the victims consecrated to God! The third time, Widen yourselves, ye gates, and let Ananias ben Nebedeus the gourmand enter, that he may glut himself on the victims!"