

The Blind Young Ruler

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[0 : 00] Thank you very much, Phil. Tonight we are going to turn back to the passage that we read. We can read again the words of Mark 10 verse 17.

And as 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?

This is a very famous and fascinating passage and it's often known as the account of the rich young ruler. Mark only told us that he was rich. If you look at the parallel accounts in Matthew, you discover that he was young and in Luke you discover that he was a ruler, which probably means that he was a ruler in the synagogue. So we often call this the rich young ruler, but I'm not so sure that that's the best title because the fact that he was rich, the fact that he was young, the fact that he was a ruler these, they're important, but they're not what's most important. I think that it's far more important for us to see that in terms of the gospel, he was blind. And so tonight we are looking at the blind young ruler. And we're just going to stretch the surface as we always do, but I want us to look briefly at four crucial things that this passage reveals. It reveals to us who

Jesus is, what Jesus expects, what Jesus offers and what Jesus can do. Who Jesus is, what Jesus expects, what Jesus offers and what Jesus can do. Each of these are crucial because if we get any of them wrong, then our understanding of the gospel is going to be inaccurate and we're going to be at risk of our own relationship with Jesus being sent off course. And what that basically means is that if we don't understand this passage about the blind young ruler, then we're going to be in danger of being a bit blind ourselves. So first of all, this passage helps us to see more about who Jesus is. And that's really one of the key things that we're confronted with in the passage, the fact that the man was blind to Jesus' true identity. And that's revealed in the kind of slightly surprising words that we have in verse 18. And they're surprising because in verse 17, the first impressions of this man all look really good. Because you see that he runs up to Jesus, he kneels down before him, and then he asks him one of the most important questions that humanity can ever consider. And the whole thing is very much in public view. So if you were looking on and seeing this incident taking place, you'd be thinking, oh, at last, here's a guy who really gets it. He really understands what's going on. And he's come and he's asking the right kind of questions. But Jesus, as he so often does, he completely ignores all this outward stuff that's going on. And he goes straight for the man's heart. And he asks him this question, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. What's Jesus asking when he says that? Well, I think he is asking the man, what do you really think of me? Who do you really think that I am? Because when he says no one's good except God alone, I don't think that Jesus is being all polite and modest as we as Scottish people tend to be as if to say, you know, I'm not good, only God is good, you know, don't give me any glory that doesn't belong to me. I don't think Jesus is doing that. I think he's actually doing the opposite. I think Jesus is saying, only God is good. And that's exactly who I am. In other words, Jesus is not distancing himself from God. Jesus is identifying himself with God. And in doing so, he's blasting straight through all the kind of outward politeness of the man. And he's confronting him with one of the fundamental claims of the Christian gospel, the fact that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. That's who Jesus is. He is God, the Son, God in human flesh incarnate in human flesh, God living and walking and talking among us. And one of the key points that's been said before us here is that for the man and for us, Jesus can only be good if he is God. Jesus can only be good if he's God.

[5 : 15] In other words, the things that Jesus taught, the claims he made, the message that he preached, none of that is good unless he's God. Because if he's not God, then he's either a liar or he is off his head. And yet this man in the passage and thousands of people around us in Scotland today and millions of people in the post enlightenment West, they all want a Jesus who is good but not God. They want a Jesus who is decent and admirable but not one who's worshipable. And the

key thing that we and they have to realize is that there is no such Jesus. He is either good and God or he's neither. This is incredibly important because in terms of eternity, Jesus will do nothing for you if you think that he's just a good teacher. A decent, respectable Jesus is useless. Only a divine Jesus can save us.

Now when we see that said before us here in terms of Jesus identity, the obvious application is to ask you if you recognize who Jesus really is. But I'm not convinced that I need to ask that question because I don't think anybody here thinks that Jesus was just a good teacher.

And if anybody does think that Jesus is just a good teacher either here or online, please talk to me. Please talk to me because you're in desperate danger. But I don't think anybody thinks like that. I think we all know who Jesus is. We know that Jesus is God the Son.

We don't think that Jesus is just a good teacher. And that means that the key point for application for us is that we have to recognize that we are surrounded by people who do. We're surrounded by people this week who think that Jesus is just a good teacher. God's placed people around us who are going to have maybe a respect for Jesus, maybe an admiration, maybe a tiny interest in him, maybe a slight awareness for him, maybe an appreciation for him, but they don't think that he's God. And so that means we have to ask the question, how are they going to see who Jesus really is? And the answer is by looking at us. It's by looking at us as we live our lives as Christians. That's the only glimpse they're going to get of who Jesus is. That's why we want to worship on a Sunday, our words and our conduct in the week ahead, our reactions to things going wrong, and the way that we teach one another. We want all of these things, all of them, to point to the fact that Jesus is our God, that we worship him, we serve him, we love him because he is so, so good. And that's the incredible privilege and challenge of Christian discipleship, that we want people to be able to see that as we go through our lives this week. Maybe it's easier if we put it the other way around.

And if we put it the other way around, we can say it like this, it's all too easy for us to make Jesus look bad. We can make him look boring, restricting, oppressive, depressing.

[9 : 13] We can do all of that by the way that we live our lives this week as Christians. And God forbid that we do, God forbid that we ever give that kind of impression of Jesus to the people that we meet this week. We're surrounded by people who need to see who Jesus really is. We have the incredible privilege of showing them as we go into the week ahead.

Second thing that we see in this passage is what Jesus expects. We can see this revealed to us in 19 to 22. This again is where we see that the man was blind. In fact, everybody who was watching him was blind as well because to all of them, everything looks really good, doesn't it? The man is everything that you'd expect of a devout religious person. And it's clear that he's anxious to please God, he wants to obey the commandments, he wants to do all the right kind of stuff. And we read about that in the verses that are before you.

And yet none of this is what Jesus is looking for. And the truth is, this man is the epitome of what Jesus says in verse 31, that many who are first will be last and the last first.

In terms of trying to identify people who were suitable for God's kingdom, you would have put this guy first in the queue. You just said, oh, last. This is the right kind of guy who should be approaching Jesus and following him. He looked like he had everything.

And yet he didn't. And this is an example of a theme that's running right through this chapter because just before this, in verses 13 to 16, you've got people trying to bring their children to Jesus and you've got the disciples saying, whoa, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don't even think about taking your children to Jesus. He has got far more important people to deal with. And Jesus is furious because he says, that's exactly the kind of people I want near to me. This is exactly how people should come to me if they want to enter God's kingdom. And at the end of the chapter, we didn't read this, but if you were to carry on and read it, you'll see that you have this incident with a man called Bartimaeus who's blind and he's sitting outside Jericho and Jesus goes past and he's crying out to Jesus for help and mercy and everybody's saying shush, shush, shush, stop bothering him, keep quiet. And yet Jesus calls him over and Bartimaeus comes to him with nothing except a plea for mercy and he's healed. In other words, Bartimaeus could see who Jesus was and what Jesus could do. And so you've got those three examples of the children and Bartimaeus in between.

[12 : 04] You've got the rich young ruler who looks really impressive. And then if you read on verses 32 to 45, James and John come to Jesus and they say to him, see, see when you come in your kingdom, can we have the best seats in that kingdom? One of us on your right, one of us on your left. And Jesus says, that's not the way it works with me. If you want greatness in my kingdom,

you've got to become servant of all. All of this is teaching us what Jesus expects of you. And that, that has got to be one of the most important things that any of us can think about. What does Jesus expect of you? The answer is nothing.

Now, when I say nothing, I don't mean nothing in the sense of never bothering with Jesus, never thinking about Jesus and thinking that you can just go through your life with no thought for him and he'll still save you and all will be fine. I don't mean that because that's not nothing. That's flippancy. And that's just another example of our sinful rebellion against God. When I say nothing, when we say Jesus expects nothing from you, what we mean is that he expects us to come to him and say, Lord Jesus, I've got nothing.

I've got nothing with which to impress you. I've got nothing to offer you. I've got nothing that is going to make me worthy of your kingdom. Please have mercy on me. That is what Jesus expects and that makes perfect sense because that is the only way that salvation can be by grace alone. If salvation is by grace, that's the only way it can work because the minute you start thinking you've got to take something to Jesus, then it stops being about grace and it starts being about the thing that you're bringing to impress him. Jesus expects us to come to him with empty hands. That's what makes Christianity so amazing.

That's what makes Christianity so unique because Christianity doesn't join that long line of world religions that are saying that the way to get to God is too impressive by doing this, that or the next thing. And anything that claims to be Christianity but actually says you've got to come to God and do this, this, this and that is a distortion and it's a false gospel because Christianity is grounded on the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Salvation freely given to anyone, absolutely anyone who comes to Jesus and says to him, I've got nothing. Please have mercy on me. And I just want that to be an encouragement to anyone here who's just, who just feels like they're just not quite good enough or not quite able or not quite what they should be in terms of becoming a Christian who thinks that for whatever reason God is going to overlook them or look past them and think that they're not good enough. Jesus wants nothing from you except your empty hands. Please just hold them out to him. The man was blind to all of this. And this is where we see that the whole conversation starts with the wrong question because he comes saying, what must I do? What can I do? And that really sums up his blindness because he thinks that he can do everything.

He thinks that he can fulfill the requirements himself and Jesus, as he very often does, Jesus takes him a little bit further down his own path. Now this is very important and very fascinating and it's just one of the examples of where we just see how incredibly good Jesus is at speaking to him. When we interact with somebody and it becomes clear that they think in a way that's incompatible with the Gospel or when we think that they're going down a path in their thinking or in their lives that's harmful, our instinctive reaction can be, we need to call them back off that path. So you meet somebody who has a different morality, a different sexual ethic, a different understanding of eternity, a different idea of faith or whatever it may be. We think, oh, the minute you realise that they think differently, we need to call them back, we need to tell them that that is not the right way to go and usually it involves some manifestation of us saying to them, you're wrong. Jesus doesn't do that. When Jesus meets this man and when it's clear that this man is going down the wrong path, Jesus doesn't shout him off that path. He doesn't say, you're wrong.

[17 : 30] He doesn't say, you need to stop thinking about that. He doesn't call him off the wrong path. He does the opposite. He takes him further down that path. Why does he do that? He does it to show them that that path is a dead end. So he doesn't say to the man, you've got it all wrong. You need to stop placing your confidence in your own obedience. You need to stop thinking that salvation is by works and you need to trust in me. Jesus would have been completely accurate to have said that. He could have said that, but he doesn't say that. He says to them, okay, you've done all these things. Let's carry on down that path.

There's one more thing you've got to do. And he asks him to sell what he has and give to the poor and the man can't do it. And the reason he can't do it is because there's an idol in his heart that his wealth and possessions has a place in his life that nothing else does. And Jesus just magnificently takes him further down that path to show him that any idea that he can earn his way to heaven by all the stuff he's doing is a dead end. Jesus is just so utterly brilliant at talking to people. He's so wise. And it's just such a wonderful example for us to follow. That's our prayer. Lord Jesus, please help us to speak to people the way you spoke to people. Help us to recognize how we should interact with people when we come across those who disagree with us. We're going to face that

when we talk about the gospel with people, especially today because we're surrounded by unbelievers. We're surrounded by people who are moving further and further away from a biblical worldview. And so we want to be able to talk to people in the way that Jesus spoke to people. And he's a wonderful example to us. Let me give you one example that you can think about a little bit more in the rest of the week. In terms of how our society has moved away from what we would consider a biblical view of marriage and of relationships and has embraced many, many different forms of acceptable relationship between people. One of the things that people will frequently say is love is love. And so you have just that argument, two people love each other, love is love. That's fine. And that's the great justification for it is something that you'll see all the time. When we come across somebody who said love is love, should we say, no it isn't, you're wrong. Stop thinking like that. Well, I don't think Jesus would have done that. If we were to follow Jesus as example, we wouldn't call people off that path. We would take people further down that path. And we would say to them, okay, okay, I get, you know, when you say love is love with two people. And I get why you say that. But what if you have a father who walks out on his wife and his four children because he's found a younger better woman, a younger better looking woman that he can be with. Is that okay? Love is love. Or even more if you have a 40 year old man and a 14 year old girl. And they really like each other. And you say love is love. And all of a sudden you realize, oh, actually, none of us will go down that road all the way. And there's a point on that road that it's a dead end.

And I think that Jesus is showing us here that actually rather than just shouting at people that they're wrong, taking them down their own road and getting them to think can be far more effective. If we just say you're wrong, then we're going to come across as bigoted and nobody's going to want to listen. But if we nudge people gently further down their own path, and if we bring them to a dead end of their own making, then at the very least they're going to stop and think. Jesus is an amazing example to us in terms of how he dealt with people. Third thing we see in this passage is what Jesus offers.

That takes us to verses 21 to 23. Jesus offers two things in this passage. One is very obvious. In verse 21 Jesus says that you will have treasure in heaven. We're going to come back to that in a wee moment. The other thing that Jesus offers is a little bit more hidden, but it's just as important. Jesus offers this man the truth. And for this man, that truth is hard. He'd come to Jesus with a long list of impressive achievements. And it may well have been the case that as he ran up to Jesus, as he knelt down before him, as he asked him that great question, and as everybody watched on, he was maybe expecting a pat on the back. And yet Jesus confronts him with a devastating truth, and he did it because this is exactly what the man needed. A friend of mine was talking about this passage about verse 21, and he described it in a way that I thought was fantastic. He said, Jesus looked at the man, loved him, and then told him that his life is built on completely the wrong things. That was the truth, and that was what the man needed to hear, even though it was hard. Maybe it's what you need to hear as well. Chances are we actually all need to hear this, whether we're believers or not. And the reason we need to hear it is because we live in a culture that is absolutely obsessed with possessions. We love our stuff. We love our quality of life, our comforts. And what once would have been considered luxuries, we now consider as basic needs, and we all hold tightly to our possessions. A good way of testing that is to read verse 21, and ask yourself, when you read verse 21, do you try to find a way to conclude that these words don't apply to you? We all do. You read those words, and you think, oh yeah, but this isn't like a man to me. It's just to this man. We all do that because possessions are so important to us. That's part of the reason why there's so much concern just now about the cost of living crisis, which is a huge concern for us all as a nation. But it's interesting to see how we're reacting to it. At the moment, half of our country is going on strike because everybody wants more pay because we want to make sure that we're going to be able to afford to maintain the standard of living that we have.

Because even though today we have more stuff than our grandparents would ever have dreamed of, for us to have any less is unthinkable.

[25 : 04] Now, our possessions are an extraordinary blessing from God, and viewed correctly, there are reasons for us to praise Him, and there are resources that we can use to serve Him. But viewed wrongly, our possessions can be a deadly snare, and they were for this man.

And so Jesus confronts him and us with an uncomfortable truth. And it is an uncomfortable truth, and it's a hard one for us all to consider. And sometimes you think, you know, I wish Jesus didn't make me feel uncomfortable like this. Why did He do it to this man?

He did it because He loved him. Why does Jesus do it to you? Because He loves you. He's confronting you tonight about the priorities in your life. He's doing that for the most incredible reason. So Jesus confronts the man with the truth. Alongside that, He offers this man treasure in heaven. And that's what the man's come looking for. And Jesus offers it to him. All the promises of God's kingdom, all the privileges of being a child of God, all the healing that God's great plan of salvation can bring, and all the joy and wonder of the gospel can be His. And Jesus is offering it all to him. And the blessings that Jesus offers, they aren't just for the future in heaven, they're for the here and now, verses 28 to 30, speak about that, that even losses that we have now for the sake of the gospel. There's going to be so many blessings and privileges that come in their place. But again, the man is blind.

He's blind to all of that because to him, wealth in the here and now is more important. In other words, the thing that he lacked was because of all the stuff he had. That's what captivated his heart. That's what he couldn't let go of. The man who had it all couldn't see how little he really had.

[27 : 27] And there's two big problems seen in this man here. One is that earthly possessions meant too much. And that's a snare that every single one of us can fall into at any point in our lives. Earthly possessions meant too much. But the other problem is even bigger. The other problem is that treasure in heaven meant too little. When the man weighed up, what Jesus offered for eternity against what it might cost him now, in this man's eyes, treasure in heaven wasn't worth it. And this is where we see how blind he was. It's unbelievable. You feel like saying to him, are you absolutely crazy?

He's come seeking eternal life. He's been shown the truth about an idol that's captivating his heart. He's been shown that he can't achieve salvation by his own doing. He's been offered treasure in heaven.

He's even been given by a personal invitation by the Messiah, by the Son of God himself. And he walks away.

And he walks away because the stuff he's got now is more important. And we think to ourselves, you are crazy.

And yet there's people in here. There's people online. And you're doing exactly the same thing.

[29 : 17] Now, it's probably not possessions that are stopping you. It's probably something more like not wanting your life to change. Or fear of what people might say. Or maybe just an unwillingness to admit that you can't actually make yourself good enough on your own. That it is only empty hands that you can bring to God. I don't know what you're holding on to. But anyone who's not yet a Christian here or online, anyone who's not yet a Christian, I don't know what you're holding on to.

But the one thing that I do know is that whatever it is, it is not as good as treasure in heaven. You've got to realize this.

People not talking about you because you haven't publicly admitted that you're a follower of Jesus. That is not better than eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

Being able to carry on getting drunk every weekend is not better than having treasure in heaven. Being able to come to Jesus for a service on a Sunday and then ignoring him for the rest of the week is not better than treasure in heaven. And getting all the money and stuff and car and holidays and whatever else we're chasing, that is not better than treasure in heaven with Jesus. Jesus is offering you eternal life, eternal joy, eternal peace, eternal security and eternity where everything that's good in this world is just a glimpse of all the wonder and beauty of the new creation and eternity where we will know the incredible joy of God's presence, where we will be able to be together as brothers and sisters forever, where there will be no more pain, no more tears, no more disease, no more death, no more sorrow. If that is not good enough for you, then you are blind.

There's one other way thing to note here. Looking at the man, we can see that he was driven by a love of wealth, but there's possibly an even bigger problem. He's not just driven by a love of possessions. I think he's actually also driven by a love of himself because he seems to have a confidence in himself and what he's done, what he's able to do, when he asks, you know, what must I do to inherit eternal life, it could very be that his motivation was to make sure that he was going to get the best possible eternal outcome for himself. In other words, he's coming here and he's looking for a ticket to heaven. Jesus, you know, I've done all the stuff, I want to make sure that I've got everything sorted in my life. What do I need to do to have eternal life? I want that ticket to heaven, I need to make sure it's all sorted. And this is important for us to think about because it's

incredibly easy to reduce Christianity to making sure that we've got a ticket to heaven. And that can happen easily when we recognize that eternity is real, when we recognize that hell is awful, and when we realize that we have to do something about an eternal outcome, we want to make sure that we don't go to hell, we want to make sure that our place in heaven is secure. And at one level that can seem wise, but it's so important that we think about this because if we think about [33 : 03] Christianity simply as a ticket to heaven, then you've got to ask yourself the question, do you love Jesus? Or do you just love yourself? In other words, do you want to be in heaven because you love Jesus and you love his people and you long to be with him and to know him?

Or do you just want to go to heaven because you don't want something really bad to happen to you? And it's crucial that we think about this because this is going to make or break how you live your life now. And this is emphasized and revealed to us so powerfully in Jesus's words that are so easy to miss in verse 21. He says, you will have treasure in heaven and then come, follow me. Do you want Jesus to give you a ticket to heaven? Or do you want to follow Jesus today and tomorrow for the rest of your life and for all eternity? Only one of them is the gospel.

Seven o'clock, this clock's slower, so I'm looking at that one, not that one. Final point. Watch this beefing have been oppressed from all angles here on the time. So last thing, what can Jesus do? What can Jesus do? This is actually a very brief point. The disciples are gobsmacked by what Jesus has said. They're like, this guy is perfect and you're saying that he's not good enough. This guy's for everything and yet he's walking away.

And Jesus says it's incredibly hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. And the disciples are stunned and the reason they're stunned is because they're just as superficial as we are because we jumped to the conclusion that if somebody's rich, if something's going really well in their lives, if someone's good looking, if everything seems to be perfect in someone's life, then we think, oh, well, God likes them. And they thought in exactly the same way.

[35 : 21] Jesus makes it clear that's not how it works. And so the disciples are left asking, well, who can be saved? And Jesus gives a magnificent reply. He says, all things are possible with God.

Now, that's a truth that lies at the very heart of the gospel. Without God, salvation is impossible. We have nothing on our own. Everything is dependent on his initiative, his mercy, his power, his grace. It also means that nobody is impossible for God to save no one, not even you. But what I want us to notice in particular is that when Jesus says, all things are possible with God, who is he saying that to? In other words, who is it who needs to hear that all things are possible with God? Is it the rich young ruler? Is it the unconverted people who are watching out in the crowd? No. It's the disciples. In other words, the people who need to be reminded that with God, all things are possible are not those who haven't come to faith. The people who need to know that with God, all things are possible are the people who are going to be sharing their faith. So as we go into this new week, as we live and work and serve, I'm a community of unbelievers, as we look at people around us and as we desperately long to see them come to faith, as we are lured towards the cliff edge of thinking, oh, it's never going to happen. They're never going to be saved. They're never going to listen. As we battle with all of that, we have got to write these words in our hearts that with God, all things are possible. And it makes perfect sense. We've got to realize that no conversion to Christianity has ever happened without going through those words. No conversion has ever happened without going through those words. None of us would be saved if it was not that God has made the impossible possible. So if you're having a coffee with somebody this week, who's not yet to believe it, as we get going with a new term of Sunday school and finders, as if you invite somebody to the ladies Bible study, as we plan outreach events for the autumn and the winter as a congregation, as we welcome people into our homes for dinner, as we invite people to church, as we stutter and stumble and try to get through a conversation where we tell people about Jesus, as we do all that, what is the one thing that you need to know with God, all things are possible.

That's what we need to know. That's what you need written on your heart as you go into another Monday morning tomorrow. So Jesus' interaction with the blind young ruler teaches us so much that's crucial. It teaches us who Jesus is, what Jesus expects, what Jesus offers, what Jesus can do. It's all teaching us that to follow Jesus, it does not matter if you are rich or not. It does not matter if you are young or not. It does not matter if you are a ruler or not, but it absolutely matters whether or not you're blind. May God give us that clarity of vision that we need to see all of these things more and more clearly today, tomorrow, this week and for the rest of our lives. Amen. Let's pray.

[38 : 57] Lord Jesus, we marvel at you in every way. We marvel at your words, at your message, at the way you interacted with people and at the incredible difference that you have made in our lives. Help us just to see and understand all of this passage is teaching us that we would see you clearly in all your glory as God the Son, that we recognize and what you expect, that we'd see the beauty of everything that you offer and that we would never ever forget just all the amazing things that you are able to do in your name we pray. Amen.