

## THE RICH YOUNG RULER (Mt. 19:16-22; also Mk. 10:17-22 and Lk. 18:18-24)

It is good to ask questions. It is the only way to learn, regardless of what age you are. Indeed, the more you learn, the more you realise you don't know!

Sometimes questions are asked, and the person who is asking them has already decided what the answer should be. Sometimes questions are asked to undermine or ensnare someone, and sometimes questions are asked to waste time. Voltaire wrote, "Judge a man by his questions rather than his answers".

By the way, I'm not recommending Voltaire, the famous French philosopher from the Enlightenment period (1694-1778). Some people call him an atheist, but he wasn't really for he believed in a Creator ('of sorts'), and he defended some of God's attributes such as His omnipotence and eternity. However, he rejected most of the Bible's doctrines and all the miracles. He did not believe Jesus as divine, but he did believe Jesus was superior to the other religious leaders. He described the Christian faith as "infamous superstition", and summed up the Bible, "The Bible, that is what fools have written, what imbeciles commend". ... He predicted in 1764, "we are living in the twilight of Christianity. ... Christianity is the most ridiculous, the most absurd religion that has ever infected the world. ... A hundred years after my death, the Bible will be a museum piece". Ironically, *less* than a hundred years after his death, - fifty-eight years actually, - in August 1836, his former residence in Geneva was purchased by a Bible Society and used for printing, publishing, and distributing the Word of God and evangelical tracts!

I wonder how Voltaire would have judged this young man who came to Jesus with this searching question, <sup>Mt. 19:16</sup> Good Master /Teacher, διδάσκαλος/, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? ... Was this young man seeking? I believe he was because it is an instinctive question to ask ... what happens after I die, and how can I possess eternal life?

This young man asked a very relevant and valid question for he *knew* there was a life after this present life on earth. Many people do not believe there is. This present life is all they believe they have. ... However, even atheists and agnostics and such-like cannot comprehensibly convince themselves. And in every religion, there is the fundamental expectation of a life beyond this one.

Of course, this young Jew had been taught in the synagogue and he had seriously examined the subject of the after-life. And now, as the opportunity had presented itself, he wanted to know the opinion of this teacher, Jesus.

What exactly *is* eternal life? The Bible teaches eternal life is a gift which comes through knowing the Lord Jesus Christ Who said, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me (Jn. 14:6) ... **Jn. 3:15** whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Eternal life is a gift from God in contrast to eternal death and eternal judgment. ... Everyone who enters this life, before they leave it, have a decision to personally make. That decision is either to receive the gift of God and eternal life with Him ... or else to ignore and ultimately reject His gift of salvation and be cast into eternity without Him and suffer His wrath. Therefore, *it is a choice with the most profound consequences.*

What *is* the gift? The gift offered is to believe in and to receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. We are not born with that gift. On the contrary, we are born with our backs towards God, by nature believing we do not need Him, and we can do without Him. What He would want for us is fundamentally inconsistent with what we want for ourselves. We want to do what we like, but the end of such a lifestyle leaves Him absent from our lives ... and if we do not live with Him in this life, we shall not live with Him in the next, **Prov. 14:12** There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. ... To be without God in eternity, you do not need to do anything, you simply continue as you have always done, ... going your own way, and ‘doing your own thing’.

On the other hand, to know you will be with Him forever, you must believe He died for you on the cross of Calvary to take away your sins and, from the day you put your trust in Him, you seek to live in obedience to His Word, the Bible. Jesus said, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3).

Now, this young man would have explored religious issues on the basis of his Jewish upbringing. It was no accident he met Jesus that day, for that was an appointment made in eternity. ... And this young man came with a seeking heart, searching how he could obtain eternal life.

It was indeed a life-changing choice. This was the time when he had to decide, with Jesus being there. Would he choose to continue with his version of religion which suited his lifestyle of wealth and popularity, or would the answer he would receive from Jesus be acceptable to him?

We know what he ultimately decided ... and it wasn't a good decision. He had come *running* to the Saviour (Mk. 10:17), he fell on his knees before Him, and spoke with Him sincerely, seeking answers earnestly, and listening intently ...

and yet he went away sorrowful. What went wrong? ... Does everyone who come to Jesus be saved? No. Does everyone who makes a prayer be saved? No, obviously not, for this young man illustrates how prayer must come not merely as words from the lips, but real prayer begins in and speaks out of the heart, **Rom. 10:10** For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ... From the depths of our soul we confess our need of God and our desire to receive His gift of salvation ... realising Jesus died for *me*, and washed away *my* sins, and now *I* belong to *Him*.

The young man wanted eternal life on his terms, at his convenience. In all likelihood, as a boy, his parents brought him up strictly according to the Jewish faith. However, by his own words and actions, he was displaying how he knew he was empty inside for he had not discovered the means by which he might gain eternal life ... and he came hoping Jesus would give him an answer which would comfortably suit his circumstances, without giving up or doing too much.

Each Sabbath he would attend the synagogue, and he knew every ceremony and every religious festival for he would have been at them all. He was involved, but he knew his present religion was not giving him a *living* and *meaningful* and *real* relationship with God. ... It had no heart and soul, for it was all about laws and rituals. ... So, he knew what he wanted, and he came to the right place searching. At the feet of Jesus, he was 'almost there'.

But he was only willing to go 'so far, and no further' ... and that is not how salvation works. Salvation is not on our terms ... Here's a young man who knew his need ... and he knew what he didn't have ... and Jesus told him what he needed, - a personal living relationship with God. He understood, but even though he had come running to Jesus, falling on his knees, and saying the right words, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? (v.16) ... regardless of how it looked and sounded, when he heard what Jesus told him to do, *he would not do it*. ... He rejected and walked away from the Saviour.

It is one of the saddest stories in the Bible, and yet, it is what happens every time someone who is not saved, - who does not know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, - walks away, knowing the answer, but not willing to believe.

There is *nothing* we can do to save ourselves for it is by God's grace alone we are saved, through believing faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is *His* gift of salvation to give, and *ours* to receive. We neither work for it nor contribute towards it, - it is a gift to be accepted. **Rom. 6:23** the wages of sin is death;

but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. ... God's requirement is, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved (Acts 16:31)

While accepting the Gospel is simple, and open to all, it requires handing the controls of your life over to the Lord ... and that is what this young man was not prepared to do, and that is why he went away sorrowful. ... The cost was greater than he was willing to pay ... and unless he returned on a later occasion, he kept on walking further away from the gift Jesus was offering him ... and his destination would have been eternal destruction and damnation.

As Jesus was speaking with him, He could see into his mixed-up life, and Luke describes the tenderness of the Saviour, <sup>21</sup> Then Jesus beholding him *loved him*. ... Jesus came to where that young man would be, - to meet him, - because He loved him, and wanted him to be saved ... "O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see? ... Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will go strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace".

To treat lightly the issue of your salvation is a dangerous thing for it affects where you will spend eternity. Our destiny in eternity hinges upon whether we accept Jesus as our Saviour and be saved, or we they refuse to believe in Him and are lost forever. ... The young man claimed to have kept all the commandments from his youth up (v.20). ... How misguided! How confused! How mistaken this gifted young man was. ... Even before he knelt at the feet of the Saviour, Jesus already knew all about him starting from his birth, and Jesus knew he was sinner ... maybe a 'righteous' sinner, but a sinner nonetheless for '*all have sinned*', Ps. 14:3 there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Rom. 3:10 There is none righteous, no, not one ... That was the young man's problem ... his unwillingness to accept he was a sinner. He was convinced he was good enough without God's grace. Jesus, I'll give You *this* part of my life, and *that* part ... but I'm holding on to those other things I love too much!

When a sinner comes to the Saviour, there has to be repentance for the offence caused against God, and there has to be a sense of sorrow for their sin. There has to be the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. ... But you don't see any of that here with this young man, no matter how sincere! ... "No, thanks, Jesus, not on Your terms!" ... and he got up off his knees and walked away from Jesus. ... Here is the sad news ... He had wasted his opportunity! He had squandered it! Jesus told him what to do, but he would not do it. ... He was

unwilling to leave behind his futile religion. And Jesus would not receive him since he was unprepared to receive salvation by committing to God's terms.

How sad it is when people come so close but won't take the last few steps. ... I'll come to you Jesus on my terms, - that was what he wanted, but ... it is either God's way, or no way. ... There *is* a price for salvation, and it *costs* belonging to Jesus, and that is what this young man was not prepared to accept,<sup>22</sup> But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

He went back to his work, as if he had never met the Saviour. There are many who come to Jesus, and when they learn it is Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us (Titus 3:5) ... rather than follow Jesus and His plan for their salvation, they depart without Him. There is another hymn, "I had a debt I could not pay, He paid the debt He did not owe". My salvation is all about how Jesus died for me, and for you, that you and I would believe and receive and belong to Him. ... "He died that we might be forgiven ... that we might from our sins be freed, saved by His precious blood".

What an opportunity lost! ... I mentioned the French philosopher Voltaire at the beginning, and how he spent his life attacking God. On his deathbed, priest asked him, "Sir, do you acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ?" ... One of the last statements to come out of his mouth was this, "For the love of God, do not mention that Man's name!" ... A few hours later he died, 30<sup>th</sup> May 1778, a life wasted. ... The rich young ruler did not treat Jesus with such contempt, - quite the opposite, with respect ... and yet that young man walking away from the Saviour, was rejecting the same opportunity for salvation. ... The Bible warns, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart (Ps. 95:7,8).

Come to the Saviour, make no delay;  
Here in His Word He has shown us the way;  
Here in our midst He is standing today,  
Tenderly saying, "Come!"