

Well-Invested: Good Advice

Matthew 19:16-24

Building a Resume

Young people are all into resume building these days. And, I suppose, if we are honest with ourselves all of us are building resumes in one form or fashion, no matter our age.

Young people are quick to list their academic achievements, the honors they've received, their avenues of service, and the groups they have been a part of. A strong resume goes a long way toward a young person getting into college or finding a job.

This morning we encounter a young person who had a pretty strong resume. It is best summed up by three words—Rich Young Ruler.

The account of the Jesus' encounter with the Rich Young Ruler is found in three of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all with their own twist on things.

Matthew reports that he was young. Luke shares that he was a ruler. Mark states that Jesus loved him. From all three we can assume he was well off.

We aren't really privy to why he had the standing he did. You get the sense though that it came as a matter of privilege and not something he attained or earned.

What Must I do to Have Eternal Life?

The young man's request of Christ was pretty straight forward. "*What good must I do to get eternal life?*" Matthew 19:16

Giving him the benefit of the doubt, you have to hand it to the young man for approaching Jesus in the first place. He, at least, had some concern for doing what was right.

You get the sense though that his question about attaining eternal life was just another thing to check off the list, another thing to add to the resume. Since he had attained everything else, why not find out how to attain to eternal life.

Eternity is not something to check off a list. It has much more to do with the heart than anything else.

The young man would soon find that out.

Not a Matter of Performance, but a Matter of the Heart

Jesus responded to the young man's question by asserting the importance of keeping the law.

Jesus went on to cite some of the Ten Commandments. He even cited the Great Commandment of *“loving your neighbor as yourself.”*

The young man was pretty heartened by that since in his estimation he had done a pretty good job in keeping the commandments Jesus referenced.

The young man was in full-on performance mode. He wanted to measure up and because he had met the requirements stated he figured he was in good stead. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

He would soon learn that:

Relationship with God is not a matter of performance, but a matter of the heart.

Filling a God-Shaped Void

The young man still wasn't satisfied. There was still something gnawing at him. He knew things were not right.

“I've kept all these,” he said. *“What do I lack?”* Matthew 19:20

I have heard it said that every one of us is created with a *“God-shaped void”* that only God can fill. We can try to fill it all sorts of ways, but only God can fill.

The Rich Young Ruler tried to fill it with the wealth and position he enjoyed, but still found himself wanting.

There is within us a sort of *“divine discontent”* that's only satisfied when we once and for all sign on with Jesus. It is then that we give up all our striving and simply rest in the relationship God offers through his Son.

I encourage you to heed the discontent that swirls within you. It is God's way to get your attention and to lead you to the place of full surrender.

Even though the Rich Young Ruler had followed the law, he was well-aware that something just wasn't right.

J. D. Walt, the editor of Seedbed Publishing, puts it this way in speaking about the Rich Young Ruler and his keeping of the law, *“He got his A, yet he knew deep down he was failing the course. He had everything he wanted, yet still hadn't found what he was looking for.”*

Pointed in the Right Direction

Jesus was all about pointing him in the right direction.

What Jesus had to say though was not particularly what the young man wanted to hear.

Jesus had both the diagnosis and prescription in hand. He knew that the young man's wealth was blinding him to the joy that only relationship with him could offer.

Jesus knew that the young man's money was standing in the way of him really experiencing *"treasure in heaven."*

The young man's wealth had become a security blanket. He relied on it more than he relied on God.

Remember the two parables from last week—the first about a man who found a treasure so valuable that he sold everything in order to have it and the second about a man who in his pursuit of precious pearls found one and gave up everything in order to possess it.

In talking about those Kingdom Parables we quoted from Nick Butterworth and Mick Inkpen's book *The Precious Pearl*, *"The Kingdom of God is like this. Although it costs you all you have, it's worth even more."*

That's not the way the Rich Young Ruler saw it.

Jesus, in sensing that something stood in the way of the young man really following him, challenged him by saying,

"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Matthew 19:21

Doing so was the prescription for what ailed him. It was the very thing that would clear the way for the sort of relationship Christ knew was possible.

Jesus offered the Rich Young Ruler the very advice he needed.

Again, Jesus is the wisest investment counselor of all. He knew how this man needed to be investing his life and what was necessary to get there.

Jesus knew that the young man's riches held too much appeal, offered way too much opportunity, offered a coveted place in society, and pretty much defined his identity.

It was tough for the young man to let go of all of that, even if it meant following Christ.

It's not that Jesus is down on money, per se. The problem comes when money gets in the way of our relationship with him.

Truth be told, Jesus is anti-anything that stands in the way of us really following him. It's not just money that can stand in the way, but all sorts of things.

For some, money is the thing. For others, it's some position. For still others, what others might think is much more important. That varies from person to person.

The thing about possessions, or anything else for that matter that stands in the way between ourselves and Jesus, is that they have a way of possessing us.

The only way to shake them is to let go.

I like the story told of the monkey who put his hand down the narrow opening of a jar to get a banana. As long as he kept his fist clinched around the banana he couldn't get his hand out.

He wouldn't let go though, for fear he would lose the banana.

By his own decision, the monkey was doomed to carry around that jar. What he thought he possessed, in reality, possessed him.

Almost, but Not Quite

As the scripture records the Rich Young Ruler walked away "*sorrowfully.*" While he might have caught a glimpse of what Jesus offered, the price was too high.

He was "*almost*" there, but "*not quite.*"

The world is full of people who "*almost*" gave their lives to Christ. They were right there ready to get everything out of the way, all for the surpassing worth of following Jesus, when they just couldn't let go.

"*Almost*" is no different than not being there at all.

Christmas will be here before you know it.

Sometime during the Christmas Season we'll experience Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in one form or fashion.

The main character, Ebenezer Scrooge is a miserly old fellow, basically devoid of any sort of life. He'd rather hold on to what he had than really live.

He didn't start out that way, but time and circumstance took its toll.

Eventually, his self-seeking ways got the best of him, until three successive ghosts turned his thinking about such things.

They helped him recognize the folly of his ways. Scrooge turned from that and sought to live generously, instead of being the miserly fool he had become.

Money had taken a toll on his life. It had clearly gotten in the way. Released from its hold, Scrooge was free to truly live.

What Has a Hold on You?

You and I are left to consider what has a hold on us.

- What stands in the way of you really giving your life to Jesus?
- Will you let whatever it is continue to have its hold or will you release it so that you might know Christ all the more?
- Will you be counted among the number of those who “*almost*” gave their lives to Jesus or will you offer yourself completely to his way and will for your life?
- Will you walk away sorrowfully or will you “*come and follow him?*”

Gain All You Can, Save All You Can, Give All You Can

When it came to money John Wesley offered this bit of advice, “*Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.*”

Not only was Wesley a great evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement, but he had over time acquired quite a fortune, primarily from the sale of his books.

At one point Wesley made over 1400 pounds a year when at the time, a person could get by nicely with about 30 pounds a year.

While at Oxford, much earlier in his life, an incident changed his perspective on money. He had just finished paying for some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to the door.

It was a cold winter day, and Wesley noticed she had no coat. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy one when he found he had too little left. Immediately the thought struck him that the Lord was not pleased with the way he had spent his money.

The rest of his life John Wesley lived off about 30 pounds a year and gave the rest to the poor.

Missionary Jim Elliot is credited with saying, “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*”

This is what it means to be well-invested in the things of God’s Kingdom.

It’s good advice indeed, but clearly no better than the encouragement of our Lord to get whatever it is that hinders our relationship with him out of the way.