

September 27, 2020

"Who do you say that I am?"

"Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8:27-29

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is the one question that ultimately defines who we really consider Jesus to be in our own lives. Believers over the centuries have been prone to ask this question and many have been willing, maybe too many, to provide their answers to it.

When the rich man came to Jesus with this question the Lord's first response was simply, "Keep the commandments" and when the rich man claims, **"...all these I have kept since I was a boy..."** Jesus does not argue which that claim. This rich man has been a careful 'rules keeper' for his whole life.

But when our Lord challenged this rich man **"One thing you lack. Go, sell everything that you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me..."** the rich man went away sad. While it would be easy to limit the lesson in this account only to those who are 'rich', I am convinced that Jesus has a much broader application.



Our Lord will tell us, **"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."** Worldly riches certainly can be a major stumbling block to completely surrendering to Jesus. The tendency to rely on our own wealth makes it especially hard to put our faith in Jesus and in him alone.

The truth is however, that there are many things that we consider our own that may be creating a major obstacle to our absolute surrender to our Lord. Our 'riches' may not be money-related. The real challenge of this story is, I think, that while we can keep most of Jesus' commands very well, especially those that require little of us, there are for all of us, things that are hard to surrender.

Our 'riches' might be our time, or our comforts, or our professions, or our... The simple truth is all of us have those things in our lives that we are not prepared to give up in order to follow the good Shepherd. For this rich man giving up his wealth was more than he was prepared to do even to inherit eternal life.

Our lives are reflected in this rich man's life. He had been a devoted 'rules-keeper'. He had carefully followed the ten-commandment laws and regulations for most of his life. I suspect that like a lot of us, he actually found keeping those rules pretty easy, because they really didn't cost him anything.

But, when it came time for him to give up his wealth his face fell and **"He went away sad, because he had great wealth."** If you or I had approached the Master with this question, **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"**, what would he command us to give up, to surrender? For this rich man keeping the commandments was easy, but surrendering his whole life to Jesus was more than he was prepared to do. So, where is our sticking point; what are we struggling to surrender to our Lord?

Most often lessons from this account focus on the problems that the 'rich' have in truly following Jesus, but I am convinced there is a much broader application of the basic truths shared here. This man chose not to give up his riches even to inherit eternal life. I might choose not to give up my dignity, or my control, or my faulty beliefs, or my guilt, or my family ties, or my... to secure eternal life.

