

From the Letter to the Hebrews:

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

“If I can just get a new car, I’ll be happy!” “All I need is that new house and things will get better.” One more rung up the social ladder, a raise in salary, a promotion, a beach shack - does it sound familiar? The Scriptures tell us time and time again when you get what you want, you curl up and sleep with it contentedly, then one day you will awaken and find it is all gone.

The rich young ruler was a man like this. He had reached the top of the ladder only to find that it was leaning against the wrong wall. He came to Jesus to make an urgent inquiry. Both Jesus and the young man in the story have much in common, for you see both were actually rich young rulers. Jesus according to Philippians 2:5-11 was God, heir of the very universe and its trove of honours and riches. But Christ “emptied” himself, was made incarnate, and now he stood before this young man in the Gospel.

He stood asking for a relationship of the first order. To be met on equal terms. “I give myself to you. Empty yourself and receive me.” In short, he was asking this worldly rich young ruler to give up his dependent clings and become like him. How will this juvenile respond? Let us closely study this young man’s encounter with Jesus, for there is much that is enviable about his character.

The Right Attitude: The Gospel says that the young and wealthy ruler had a good attitude. He “ran up and knelt” before the Lord! This fellow was not acting like he had all the time in the world. He knew that life was short, opportunity can pass you by unless you’re quick to seize upon it. He ran up to Jesus and there he knelt. He knew something in the man was divine. Though he was rich and he commanded authority, this Jesus was to be revered above all others. He knelt. And you? Your life? You’ve been in a hurry to catch a plane, get married, finish University, but have you been in haste to encounter God? Though you be rich and popular and bow to no man, have you broke into an undignified run and knelt sweating and panting before the Lord God?

The Right Man: He had the right attitude and according to the Gospel, he also had the right man. He did not go to Caesar or Peter. He did not visit the priest of Isis. He went to Jesus. You well know that it is vitally important to go to the right person with your needs. No one goes to a plumber for heart surgery. Nor do you take your car to the dentist to be serviced. You must go to the appropriate people who can fix the problem. This man went to Jesus with his spiritual needs.

When John the Baptist was imprisoned and death drew near, he began to doubt his cause. “Was Jesus really the Messiah?” We are told in scripture that John sent to Jesus saying, “Are you him who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Again, right man with the right question. When Pharaoh had his dream and he could not interpret its meaning, he sent to his occult artists and his priests but no one could help him. Only when he sent to God’s man, Joseph, did he find the answer. Where have you

been taking your questions? Millions today are rushing to kneel at the feet of gurus, Hollywood stars, Islam, Eastern mysticism, or Marxist professors. Where have you been going to get counsel? The rich young ruler had the right attitude. He also had the right man.

The Right Time: It is also clear from the Gospel that the young man had the right timing. Jesus was passing through his town. He'd be moving on, this itinerate preacher, and there was no time to spare if he was to have his appointment.

Now let's get something straight. One cannot come to God anytime they please. You can only come when the Holy Spirit calls you. It's just like the Premier of a state. You can't go to him or her anytime you please. You must have an appointment. And the Holy Spirit is the only one who makes appointments for God. When he calls for you, you must come at that time or not at all. Perhaps the young man knew this, however vaguely. Perhaps this accounts for his haste. It was the most important appointment of his life! And you? You too have an appointment with God. He will call for you and convict you, as well.

The Right Question: Right attitude, right man, right time, but notice also that he asked the right question. "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now that's cutting right to the heart of the matter! What about me? What about my sin, my will, my area of responsibility? What must I do to be saved? It's important to ask the proper question. Don't worry about others and what they have done or not done. Worry about yourself. "What must I do to be saved?"

The Right Conduct: Jesus answered the lad by pointing to the Ten Commandments. It was as if, he were saying, "You're a Jew. You believe in salvation by works of the Law. Then keep the Ten Commandments." The youngster replied saying, "All these I have observed from my youth." In the young man's answer, "All these things I have observed from my youth," there is to be found a glaring statement about legalism and the boy himself. Obviously the young man was a Jew. He'd obeyed the Law as a means of salvation but he still was not satisfied. Something was missing. Furthermore, the boy had a blind spot, as many of us do. He said that he'd kept the Law, all of it. But as we shall see, he had broken the first law. "You shall have no other gods before me." Here in the young Hebrew's life we see the inadequacy of Judaism. The Law cannot be satisfied and itself cannot satisfy. Priding our selves on our processes and following the rules is a massive blind spot. Because we are all sinners we must all have grace. Without that acceptance we are deluded sinners of the first and worst order.

The Right Answer: Yes, it seems the lad had it all — right attitude, right man, right time, right question, and the right conduct. There is at least one thing more that was right about this man: He had the right answer. Jesus said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Jesus looked into the heart of that young man. He saw beneath the veneer of outward finery. The clothes, the education, the poise, the golden rings did not mean a thing to Christ. The heart did. And there Jesus saw idolatry. He saw a heart worshiping creation and not the Creator. He saw a god held in higher esteem than Jehovah. He saw the idol of money. He still looks into the heart of man today and all too often sees the same gods: respectability, money, materialism, success, power and control. This is the god the rich man put before the Lord. And we are doing it too.

Isn't this just the way of God? He has those X-ray eyes. He sees beyond the sham to the inner self. He wastes no time in putting his finger on the problem. "Go! Sell all these idols. Give your money away. Follow me!" I tell you, for that young man and for you and me, that is the right answer. "I'm jealous," God is saying. "I'm not willing to share you with anyone or anything!"

The Wrong Decision: The right attitude, the right man, the right time — there is much that is enviable about this young visitor. Some translations of Mark say, "Jesus looked upon him and loved him." He had the right question, the right conduct, and God gave him the right answer. The Gospel warns that it is possible to be very right but totally wrong. With all he had going for him, our young friend still made the wrong decision! Hearing Jesus' answer "his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." He cared more for what his money could do for him than he cared about the kingdom of God.

So near, this young ruler! And yet so far! The irony of it is that if he'd just said to Jesus, "Give me five minutes to get rid of my wealth and I'll come follow you," the Lord would have certainly said, "No, no. Keep your money. You've shown where your God is. Go home and serve me with your belongings."

But he wouldn't let go of his marbles to shake hands with God. Jesus watched as the young fellow walked away. He did not call him back. He would not dilute it. I cannot dilute it either! Today will you drop everything and follow Christ? Will you let go of your marbles to shake hands with God? Really the question is: Will you put God first, very first in your life? So near. So near, this rich young ruler. And yet so far away!

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