

August 29, 2004 by Steve Brandon



What Am I Still Lacking?

Matthew 19:16-22

1. He asked the right question (verse 16).
2. He asked the right person (verse 17a).
3. He received the right answer (verses 17b-19).
4. He was a righteous man (verse 20a).
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This country in which we live in is often called "the land of opportunity." If you have a dream and a desire to see that dream realized, you have the opportunity to see the dream happen. This morning in our study of Matthew, we are going to see a man who had a great opportunity to follow Jesus Christ. This man had a dream of obtaining eternal life. And he had a desire to get it. Every opportunity to obtain eternal life was placed in his lap. But, he didn't obtain it. It's really a sad and tragic story of a man who had it all, but couldn't obtain the one thing he wanted: eternal life.

This man is commonly known as the "rich young ruler." Indeed, this man was rich. Matthew 19:22 says that he "owned much property." Indeed, this man was young. Verse 20 identifies him as a "young man." Indeed, this man was a ruler. In the parallel account of this story in the book of Luke, this man was called, "a ruler." We don't know exactly what he was ruler over. Some suppose that he ruled over a synagogue. Some suppose that he ruled over some governmental affairs. We don't know for certain. But at any rate, he was a man of influence in his city.

In many respects, this man is me. I have been crushed in my study this week. I have come face to face with my own sin more clearly this week than I have in a long time. I have had many battles in my heart this week with the same battles that this man faced. I saw my worldliness very clearly this past week. I can only say that I stand here this morning, not because of my own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ, which is mine by faith. My only hope is in His shed blood. It's the only hope for you as well. For us to stand before God justified in His sight, there is no other way, than to trust in the good news of the gospel of Christ. Believe the good news that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3)!

Let's take a look at the account that is before us this morning:

Matthew 19:16-22

And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property.

This man had many things going for him. According to the standards of the world, he had it all. He was successful in this world. He probably had a large house, a nice job, money in the bank, and a bright future ahead of him. He was successful in the synagogue. He had the world by its tail. Everything was going this man's way. When he approached Jesus, it was no different. If anybody had an opportunity to follow in Jesus, it was this man.

1. He asked the right question (verse 16).

There are many questions in this life to be asked. If any of you have small children, like I do, you know that their minds are filled with questions. Some of the more familiar questions include these: "Are we there yet?" "What's for dinner?" "When is dinner?" And perhaps the most famous of all, "Why? Why? Why?" But, its not only children that ask questions. We adults are also filled with many questions. What sort of work should I do? Who should I marry? Where should I live? How should I spend my money? Will my job be around in five years. These are good questions. But, the most important question that any of us can ask is the question that the young man posed to Jesus. He asked in verse 16, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

Our life here on earth will soon be over. I don't care if you live to be 103, you will soon breathe your last. As the Psalmist says, "my lifetime as nothing in Thy sight, Surely every man at his best is a mere breath" (Psalm 39:5). And when the time comes for you to die, many things won't matter to you anymore. It won't matter to you who won the 2004 presidential election. It won't matter whether or not your job was stable throughout your life. It won't matter where you lived. There will only be one thing on your mind: "Did I so live so as to obtain eternal life?" See,

you will stand before the Almighty God of the universe to give account of your life. He will then direct you where you will spend your eternity. You will either spend your eternity in everlasting torment, or you will spend your eternity in everlasting bliss and happiness. All of it depends upon what you do here on earth. And so, this man asked Jesus the best question that He could ever ask Jesus. This man didn't die without hearing the truth, because Jesus answered him immediately.

2. He asked the right person (verse 17a).

When you ask someone a question, it is important that the person you ask knows something of what you are asking about. You can ask me about soccer, computers, or the Bible, and I can help you out a bit. But, if you begin asking me about financial investments, kitchen cabinets, car seat design, airplanes, or enzymes, you will probably find me in the dark. I simply don't know. Now, there are others in our church who know a great deal about these things. If you would ask a financial advisor about financial investments, he could help you out. If you would ask a kitchen designer about kitchen cabinets, he could help you out. If you would talk to a pilot about airplanes, he could help you out. If you would ask a chemist about enzymes, he could help you out. Now, when it comes to eternal things, there is no one who has ever lived who is more qualified to answer this question than Jesus. If anyone knows about eternal things, it is Jesus. He existed before the world began. He created the world, for Himself. He came into the world, to redeem His people from their sin. He will be worshiped forever in the life to come.

I don't think that it was an accident that this man came to Jesus. I believe that this man had come to recognize that Jesus would be capable of answering the question. In verse 16, he addressed Jesus as "teacher." In Mark and Luke's account of this same story, this man addressed Jesus as "Good teacher" (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). Perhaps this man didn't quite understand how true his words were. Indeed, Jesus is the ultimate good. We don't know how much or how little this man knew about Jesus, but there was some sort of acknowledgement of Jesus' greatness.

In verse 17, Jesus appears to stimulate the young man's thoughts about God and about goodness. He says, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good". There are some who have used this verse to say that Jesus was here denying His divinity. I don't believe that this is the case. Notice that Jesus in no way refuses the label of "good." He doesn't say to this man, "I'm not good." Rather, He simply says that nobody is good, except for God. In this way, Jesus is indirectly making a claim to His deity. He's saying, "Yes, I am a good teacher. And the only one who is good is God." And we are left to draw the appropriate conclusion: Jesus is God.

This man asked the right question of the right person and ...

3. He received the right answer (verses 17b-19).

Look at the last half of verse 17, "but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." There might be many who would argue that this is the wrong answer. I want for you to imagine yourself taking an exam at any Bible college across our land. You come across this question: "What must you do to obtain eternal life?" And you write down, "keep the commandments." What type of grade do you think that you will receive on your exam? My guess is that you might very well flunk. You'd receive a grade of "F". We typically don't answer this question in that way today. We prefer to answer the way that Paul did. The Philippian jailer asked Paul the almost exact same question. He said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul didn't say, "keep the commandments." Rather, Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). That's the answer that most Bible colleges are looking for when they quiz you. And yet, Jesus gave a different answer. Was Jesus right? If you're not sure, then let me put it this way: was Jesus wrong? No, of course he was not wrong. He never said or spoke anything that wasn't right. It is very true that if you keep the commandments of God, you will have eternal life. If you keep the commandments and never disobey, God will reward you with eternal life. Our problem is that this is incredibly difficult to do. It's not just difficult, it's impossible. Certainly, the law instructs us on how to live. But the law has another purpose. When we look at the law, it ought to show us our sin. Romans 3:20 says that "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." The law shows us our sin, because it shows us how much we are lacking in the keeping of God's standards.

Since the fall of Adam, there has only been one man who "kept the commandments," the Lord, Jesus Christ. That's why we often want to tell others to "believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31), because that is what a law-breaking sinner needs to do to be saved. Peter said it well in his statements to the religious elite in Jerusalem, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And yet, to this inquiring man, Jesus didn't say, "Believe on Me, and you will be saved." Rather, Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." I believe that Jesus was seeking to help this man see he could not keep the commandments. But the man doesn't reach that conclusion. Rather, this man asks for a clarification, "which ones?" (verse 18). He was asking Jesus, "Which commands are the ones that I need to keep to have eternal life?" Jesus gave him an assortment of various commands. "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (verses 18b-19).

Jesus gave this man six simple commands. Five of them come from what we call today, "The Ten Commandments," straight from the book of Exodus. One of them comes from Leviticus. Four of them are prohibitions: things not to do. Two of them are positive commands: things to do. I believe that Jesus could have easily chosen other commandments. It's not like Jesus was placing any particular priority upon these. He wasn't saying that the others didn't matter as long as you fulfilled these particular commandments. These commands are by no means exhaustive of the ones that you need to keep to inherit eternal life. But, they are certainly sufficient for this man to have seen how he failed to keep them. This man didn't seem troubled by the list of commandments that Jesus put forth, because ...

4. He was a righteous man (verse 20a).

Look at verse 20, "The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept.'" This statement probably sounds absolutely ridiculous to most of us. How in the world can this man profess to have kept all of these commandments? With what we know of Jesus' teaching, it seems quite absurd for him to make such a bold statement, "All these things I have kept." (verse 20).

Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder". I don't believe that any of us in this room have killed anybody. Yet, Jesus demonstrated in His famous Sermon on the Mount how we ought to take these words. He said that hatred in the heart is murder. "Everyone who is angry with his

brother shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (Matt. 5:22). I've been angry with other people this week. We have spent a few of our evenings watching the Olympics as a family. There are times that the kids have been a bit loud and reckless with me. I've been angry with them, saying things like, "Quiet down! Let me hear! Get out of the way! Let me see!"

Jesus also said, "You shall not commit adultery". I don't know if anybody in this room is guilty of this; it is certainly possible. But, again, Jesus said that adultery is more than the physical act. We need to get to the heart. Jesus said that lust in the heart is adultery. "Everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). I'm guilty of this as well.

"You shall not steal". You shall take nothing that isn't yours. That includes everything that you have ever borrowed. That includes everything that is copyrighted. That includes even the smallest paperclip. I've quoted before the Proverb, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD." (Prov. 11:1). I've stolen recently. I coach a children's soccer team in Winnebago, as an outreach to the community. Last fall, as we were leaving practice one evening, I happened to see this ball on the field. So, I took it. It has the letters, "WHS" on it. I know what those letters stand for. They stand for Winnebago High School. This is one of their balls. Have I given it back? No. I've had many opportunities to do so. But, I haven't. I'm a thief. I have even thought about scratching off the letters, "WHS" from the ball so that no one would know that I stole it.

"You shall not bear false witness". In other words, you shall not lie. Every word from your mouth should be true. You have never spoken about somebody else in a wrong way. I can't profess to be sinless here either.

"Honor your father and mother". Speak well of your parents. Never do anything that would bring shame to them. Obey them in every instance. Serve them always with gladness. I have failed in this many times.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself". Your words and actions toward your neighbor should be just like you want them to do to you. If they ever request that you do something for them, you are to be willing to do it quickly and with a cheerful heart. If they are in need, you gladly give to them what was yours. I've hardly done this one either.

I see these things, and I'm broken. Romans 3:20 has demonstrated itself to be true, once again, in my life this week, "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin." And this is where I have parted ways with this rich, young ruler because this young man said, "All these things I have kept." To our Christian ears, this man's assertion seems so bold and so false, especially as I have expanded upon each of these commandments as Jesus did. But, within the Jewish circles of his day, I don't think that it was too much out of line for this man to claim that he was blameless. Think about the apostle Paul. When it came to religion, Paul was as righteous as they came. Remember in Philippians 3, when Paul said that "as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Phil. 3:6). All of the ceremonies. All of the rituals. All of the commands. Paul said that he kept them perfectly. This man was very similar. He had a good upbringing. This man grew up in the synagogue. In fact, he probably never knew a time in which he was apart from the synagogue. Mark records that this man had said, "I have kept all these things from my youth up" (Mark 10:20). He learned the torah as a little boy, memorizing much of it. He constantly attended Sabbath services. He celebrated his Bar Mitzweh at age 13. Now, as a young man, the Lord had blessed him. In the Jewish world at the time of Jesus, a man's material blessing was often a visible demonstration of a man's righteousness. He had obtained much property (verse 22). Perhaps he was a real-estate developer in the community and had done quite well for himself. He was a successful business man. He was recognized as a ruler, which implies that he had some amount of influence in the civil affairs of life. He could have pointed to the Lord's material blessing in his life as visible proof of his righteousness.

The reason Paul and this rich young ruler could say such things is because the Jews focused their attention completely on the external righteousness of the law. Jesus blasted the Pharisees for making themselves appear beautiful on the outside, while being corrupt on the inside. Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provision of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23). Their focus was on the externals. And according to external standards, they could profess to keep the law, as this man did.

Please understand, it's not a bad thing to be externally righteous. It's not bad to obey the commandments of the Lord. Remember that Jesus commended the Pharisees in tithing even their littlest of items. He said that "you should have done" them. But, you should do these things without neglecting the other, more weighty portions of the law, which address the heart.

This man had unbelievable opportunities to follow Jesus. This man had asked the right question to the right person. He received the right answer, and he was a "righteous" man. Yet, something was missing in his life. He felt that something was wrong. ...

5. He felt the right conviction (verse 20b).

Look at the last half of verse 20. He said, "What am I still lacking?" Though this man could say, in all honesty, "All these things I have kept." Yet, he felt like there was something missing. And the very thing that was missing was also an opportunity for him to follow Jesus. Why else would he approach Jesus and ask about obtaining eternal life? Why else would he come to Jesus like he did? Mark tells us that this man "ran up to [Jesus] and knelt before Him, and began asking Him [these questions]" (Mark 10:17). He came in desperation. He came looking for something else. He knew that something was missing from his life. Why else would he say, "What am I still lacking?" This will always happen with those who focus upon their own righteousness. This will always happen when people are focused upon the externals of all of the commandments that they are trying to keep. They are always looking to enough. They will never be satisfied that they are doing enough.

When you see someone focus upon all of the external things that they do to be acceptable before God, you can always convict them by asking them, "Are you sure that's enough?" You go to church every Sunday. That's good. You read through the entire Bible every year. That's good. You don't ever get drunk. That's good. You give 10% of your income to the church. That's good. Are you sure that's enough?" Maybe you should go to a midweek Bible Study also. Maybe you should read through the Bible twice very year. Maybe you shouldn't even have any alcohol. Maybe you should give 20% of your income to the church. If they continue in their profession of

righteousness, you can continue on. You might say something like this, "Are you sure that this is enough? Perhaps you should spend an hour a day praying on top of all of your church attendance. Perhaps you should read through the Bible three times each year. Perhaps you shouldn't merely focus on your abstinence from alcohol, but also from your abstinence from food. Perhaps you should give 30% (or 40% or 70%) of your income to the church." You can keep going and going, until they feel that they haven't done enough. Those focused on their external obedience will always be discontent like this man was.

It was a good thing for this man to feel discontent, because it drove him to Jesus. He felt the right conviction.

6. Jesus exposed the right sin (verses 21-22).

Jesus discerned this man's external focus. Jesus saw that this man was trusting in the righteous things that he had done. In fact, I believe that this is why Jesus directed his attention upon the commandments. His list of these few commands should have exposed his sin. As they didn't, Jesus was very straightforward about the man's sin, which he does in verse 21. Jesus said, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (verse 21).

With these simple words, Jesus puts His finger on this man's heart. He was a good man. I'm sure that he did many good things, and perhaps Jesus would not object to that claim. Perhaps the man even gave quite a bit of his income to help out his local synagogue. But he was a man with a weakness. And, Jesus pointed out this man's weakness. He loved this world. He loved the things of this world. In verse 22, we read that this man "heard this statement, and went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property."

I recently went to the store with my son, who had set his heart upon a particular item that he wanted to purchase at a store. We agreed that it would be a good thing for him to purchase. So, we went to the store, but couldn't find quite what he was looking for. My son was very disappointed. He left the store grieving, because he didn't get what he was expecting to purchase. So also this man. Why did this man leave grieved? Because he came to Jesus seeking eternal life. But, he left without it, because of his desire for this world.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus made it clear, "No one can serve two masters; ... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). And this man was unwilling to give up his mammon god. So, he left without Jesus. He left grieved. He didn't get what he wanted, because he wasn't willing to let go of what we really wanted. For him, his money was more important than Christ. He was unwilling to submit Himself to the sovereign Lord of the universe. But, Jesus won't accept partial submission. Jesus demands your all. When you have opportunities to speak with others about the gospel, don't minimize the demands of Jesus. Jesus demands your whole life to be laid at His feet. This is what repentance means: turn away from yourself. Turn to God. Turn 180 degrees, not just a little bit. Jesus says, "Forsake it all!"

I have been reflecting upon this passage this week. I have been amazed at how much this young man is like the apostle Paul. Before Paul found Christ, he thought himself to be completely righteous. He said in Philippians 3 that he was "blameless." He didn't see his sin. But, in Romans 7, Paul described how the law convicted him of sin. He said, "I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind" (Romans 7:7-8). Here was Paul, perhaps not as wealthy as this rich young ruler, being convicted at his immense love for things. He was convicted of his sin of coveting things which means to want things you do not have.

But Paul was unlike this rich young ruler as well. Paul didn't cling to his possessions. Instead, he willingly let them go. In Philippians 3:7-8, we hear Paul's own testimony: "Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8).

This is Christianity: counting everything to be loss for the sake of Christ. There is nothing that ought to hold you back from embracing Christ. When Jesus called people to follow Him, He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). This is a life of complete self-abandonment. Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it" (Matt. 16:25). This is letting go of everything that you have.

When you follow Christ, you will lose much. When you follow Christ, you very well may lose your reputation. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). When you follow Christ, you very well may lose your family. Jesus said, "I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the member of his household" (Matt. 10:35-36). When you follow Christ, you very well may lose your comfort. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). When you follow Christ, you very well may lose your possessions. The writer to the Hebrews wrote about how the early Christians lost their property. This man wasn't willing to depart with his possessions. This man wasn't willing to forsake all and follow Christ. Jesus wasn't willing to accept a half-hearted convert.

Perhaps one of the most penetrating statements that Jesus ever made concerning these things is found in Luke 14:33, "No one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." It's a pretty definitive, all-encompassing statement: **no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.**

Now, I don't believe that everyone needs to go around and sell everything that they own, to follow Jesus. In a way this idea is absurd because the money you'd obtain from the sale would be given to other Christians for the sake of the kingdom. But these Christians would then need to give it to others Christians, as they need to give up their possessions. It's like a game of hot-potato: you don't want to be the one who ends up with the money in hand when Christ returns. Rather, these words mean that you need to hold these things with such a loose grip, that you are willing to depart with your possessions. Football players will hold tightly onto the football, to keep others from taking it away from them. But, a referee will hold a football with an open hand, allowing players to take the ball from them to play. We need to hold onto our possessions like this.

When the Hebrew Christians had their property taken from them by force, they "accepted [it] joyfully ... knowing that [they] had for

[themselves] a better possession and an abiding one" (Heb. 10:34). That is how Christians need to view their money and their things. Can you imagine a day in which the Rockford police show up at your door and forcefully take possession of your house, leaving you homeless, with only the clothes on your back? If this took place, would you "accept it joyfully" as these Hebrew Christians did? They were able to do so because they knew that their life didn't consist of things. Rather, they had a better inheritance awaiting them in the future. Jesus said, "Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). So, when you think of your house, your car (or cars), your furniture, your television, your silverware, your clothes, or your lawn mower, you need to think about who it really belongs to. Is it yours? Or is it God's?

In the past few months after our potlucks, we have been learning about money management. At one point, our teacher held up a piece of paper that was a deed to all of your possessions. He encouraged us to take this sheet of paper and sign over all of our possessions to God. When you come to Christ, that's what it costs. It costs you everything. This is not a new idea for Jesus. This is what Jesus taught when He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid, and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44). "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:45-46). These parables teach that those who find the riches of the kingdom willingly give up all that they have to obtain the kingdom. And this rich young ruler wasn't willing to do this. So, he went away grieved.

Let me ask you, Have you grasped your possessions so tightly, that you haven't let go of them? Or, are you ready and willing to use all of your possessions for the sake of the kingdom? My daughter is a little more than a year old now. She is just starting to understand that there are times that we take things from her, particularly, if they are dangerous, or if she could break it. There are times when we take things from her and she lets out a cry of complaint. Because she thinks that whatever is in her hand is her possession, and nobody has a right to take it away from her. It's like the ten property laws of a toddler:

1. If I like it, it's mine.
2. If it's in my hand, it's mine.
3. If I can take it from you, it's mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine.
5. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm building something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it just looks like mine, it's mine.
8. If I saw it first, it's mine.
9. If you are playing with something and put it down, it automatically becomes mine.
10. If it's broken, it's yours!

Do you know who really owns your possessions? It's not you. It is the LORD, "The earth is the LORD's and all it contains" (Psalm 24:1). Do you believe this? The Psalmist says, "For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; For the world is Mine, and all it contains" (Psalm 50:10-12). Do you believe this? Is it yours? Or is it God's? This rich young ruler was unwilling to give up his sin to follow Christ. He wasn't willing to give up his possessions.

There is a hymn in our hymnal that we have sung on several occasions. It is called, "I Surrender All."

All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.

All to Jesus I surrender, Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken, Take me, Jesus, take me now

It's a good song. Have you surrendered all? As I close my message this morning, I would like for you to imagine yourself coming to Jesus, seeking to obtain eternal life. After a bit of discussion, you ask Jesus, "**what am I still lacking?**" What would Jesus tell you? Would He counsel you to give up your possessions, as He did for this man? Or, is there some other issue in your life that Jesus would address? Would Jesus address you with some sin that you simply haven't been willing to forsake? Would Jesus say to you, "If you wish to be complete, speak up about the unethical things taking place at your work, and be willing to be fired for it" (1 Pet. 4:12-19). Would he ask you to demonstrate your love to your wife with specific acts of self-sacrifice (Eph. 5:25-32)? Would he ask you to be subject to your husband in all things (Eph. 5:22-24)? Would he tell you to stop being anxious about your financial pressures (Matt. 6:33)? Would he instruct you to sever your relationship with your worldly friend, who is causing you to stumble (1 Cor. 15:33)? Would he point you to the verse that says "do all things without grumbling or disputing" (Phil. 2:14)? Would he demand that you leave your family because they love you and hate Him? Would he tell you to be baptized?

Are there things in your life that you simply haven't surrendered to Christ? Don't be like the rich young ruler and cling to your sin rather than to Christ. I know that it is hard to forsake sin. But, I believe that this story would have ended differently if the rich young ruler would have responded differently. He could easily have said, "Lord, what you are demanding of me is hard. Lord, it's really hard for me to imagine selling all of my possessions and giving to the poor. I do want eternal life, but I don't know if I can sell everything. Can you help me? Can you give me the strength to do it? Can you give me the eternal perspective that I need? Could you come by and help me with my garage sale?" Such a prayer is biblical. The Psalmist prayed, "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies" (Psalm 119:35-36a). He was praying for God to cause him to walk obediently to his commands. He was praying for God to give him a willing heart to joyfully obey His commandments.

Several of us men have been reading a book by R. C. Sproul, entitled, "Willing to Believe." In the chapter that we read this past week, we

read about Augustine's famous prayer to the Lord. He said, "Grant what thou commandest, and command what thou dost desire" (p. 34). This is exactly right. "God, give me the ability to do what you tell me to do." If this rich young ruler had sincerely prayed this sort of prayer, I'm sure that the Lord would have helped him. May He help us to see our sin. May He help us to repent from our sin. May He empower us to live in victory over our sin.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 29, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
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