


The Gospel of Mark
Part 35
The Rich Young Ruler

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Triangle Community Church aims to be a “transforming church”. We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Since “Talking Points, Walking Points” is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to “dive deep” too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled “Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time”, are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- Read Mark 10:17-31. Do you think Jesus was being **too coy in the way he probed** this young man's understanding of His identity (v. 18)? Jesus didn't even wait for a reply to this issue—what if the rich young ruler didn't understand Jesus' point? Why do you think Jesus doesn't speak more plainly, more literally?
- Was Jesus being **rude or unloving** in this interchange? Was he saying, in effect: “*Here's the standard. Don't like it? Too bad.*”? What light does the opening sentence of v. 21 shed on this question?
- Read Galatians 3:21-26. Why did God give the Mosaic Law?
How have you seen that purpose play out in your life?
- What did Jesus require of **this** young man in order to follow him (v. 21)?
What does Jesus require of **all** who would follow him (see Luke 14:26-27)?
Why doesn't Jesus negotiate with us (“*How about you just give away half of your possessions?*”)?
- What possession or position do you have that you **might be unwilling to give up** if God asked?

Sermon Summary Mark 10:17-31

We are going to look at a conversation Jesus had with a man known as the rich young ruler. Now some of you may be thinking, “I’m not rich, young, or a ruler!”—but the principles in this passage apply to all of humanity and I am quite certain that you will find some powerful takeaway truths in this conversation. This young man was religious, sincere, has a high regard for Jesus (he calls him a “good teacher”), and he was wealthy.

Back in Jesus’ day wealth was seen as a sign of God’s favor and blessing. So when people looked at the rich young ruler’s credentials, they would say, “Now here is a man who is on his way to heaven. He is moral, he is religious, he is sincere, he is blessed by God.” But despite the fact that he has all of this going for him, he has a deep concern in his heart; his concern is about eternal life...the deepest longing of the human heart. For all his credentials, he was also thoughtful. He looked beyond this life to the next life. He was concerned about his eternal destiny. I imagine it kept him up at night. He wondered, “If I don’t wake up in the morning, where will I find myself, heaven or hell? Will God really accept me?” I suspect that there were sins he had committed in his youth that his conscience wouldn’t let go of. And these are concerns that every single person in this room should wrestle with.

That rich young man asked Jesus: “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” Jesus knew that this man would never see heaven unless he perceived “goodness” rightly, for therein lay his problem. So Jesus pressed him. “Are you sure you know what you are saying when you call me good?” Because only God is truly good. Tragically, this man didn’t realize what he was saying. He thought that he himself was good.

Jesus knew that this man had an inadequate view of “goodness”—at least the kind of goodness necessary to merit heaven. God didn’t give us the Old Testament Law so that by keeping it we could earn our way into heaven. He gave us the law to show us what sinners we are, so that we would cast ourselves on his mercy (Romans 7:7). So Jesus recited from the Ten Commandments, hoping to help him see that he wasn’t nearly as good as he thought he was. And the man responded: “All these things I have kept from my youth.” This may be the most self-righteous response in all of the New Testament. Do you think that he had really kept all of these commandments? Of course he hadn’t! If he believed his own words, he had some serious blind spots in his life!

Because Jesus was omniscient he knew one area that this man really struggled with. Jesus said, “One thing you still lack...” The teaching of the New Testament (and the rest of this chapter) make it abundantly clear that he lacked humble, trusting, childlike faith. But he is not ready to hear that yet. He still sees himself as good enough to merit eternal life. Oh, maybe he has one or two little things to work on, but in his mind, he is close. He is almost there! What is Jesus doing? First, he challenged this young man to reconsider his definition of goodness. The very first commandment states, “Thou shall have no other gods besides me.” Well, he broke that one! Money was his God! By God’s standards—and it is His standards that matter—this man wasn’t truly good. He was selfish, and his response to Jesus proved it. If he truly loved his neighbor as himself (as he claimed) it wouldn’t have mattered whether he himself had that money or if his neighbor had it. But it did matter to him, so he wasn’t truly good. His problem was that he thought that he was!

Jesus’ challenge was designed to open this man’s eyes to his true spiritual condition—he had broken God’s Law. He was a sinner, and sinners need a Savior. If this man were to enter into eternal life he needed to see Jesus as more than just some popular Jewish teacher. He needed to embrace him as the great God-man. Jesus was truly good, because he is truly God. When Jesus said, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone,” he wanted this man to think carefully about his identity. Sadly, the text tells us that this man went away sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus knew that he would turn his back on this call to discipleship, but he hoped that his challenge would force him to think differently about the kind of goodness required to enter the Kingdom, and he would realize that he did not possess it. None of us do. Jesus shattered the myth of “self-righteousness.”

From this story we learn that religion and wealth cannot satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. The rich young ruler was fabulously rich and as religious as they come, and yet he was miserable. Some of us can identify with this man's experience. It is not more money or religion that we need. We need a relationship with the living God, made available through faith in Jesus Christ. Religion can blind us to our true spiritual need. Because of the low moral standards of our society it is easy for some of us to look around at others and feel smug and self-righteous. And so we pray, "God, thank you that I am not like other people". I go to church, I don't cheat on my husband, I volunteer to teach Sunday School. I am good!" But Jesus reminds us, "No one is good but God alone."

Wealth is deceptive too. When all of your major material needs are taken care of—when that ache in your heart can be temporarily relieved by going shopping—buying that new toy—we don't sense our need for God. We don't long for heaven. It's pretty good right here. Wealth can blind us to spiritual realities, tragically leading us to reason, "Who needs God? My hands have provided all that I need." When was the last time you prayed for your daily bread? It is so easy, living as we do here in the United States, for our trust to shift from God to our bank accounts. And we become blind to our spiritual need. You can be extremely religious and fabulously wealthy in this life and miss out on the kingdom of God. As far as we know, the rich young ruler never made it. He made three mistakes that we must avoid. First, he saw Jesus as a notable religious teacher, but failed to recognize him as Messiah—the God-man. Next, he had a false view of his own goodness; he thought he was good. In fact he was a sinner, as are we. And lastly, he had a false view of salvation; he thought eternal life could be merited. He was wrong. Tragically so.

Eternal life comes to those who see themselves as sinners and who, with humble childlike faith, place their trust in Jesus Christ as their sin bearer. Please, don't imitate the rich young ruler and walk away sad this morning. Place your trust in Christ—He is your only hope.



A writing area consisting of a rounded rectangle with a pencil icon in the top-left corner and ten horizontal lines for writing.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906 – 1945) was a German pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident who was a key founding member of “The Confessing Church”, a movement that opposed Hitler. He was arrested by the Gestapo in April 1943, imprisoned for two years in a concentration camp, and hanged as the Nazi regime was collapsing.



Bonhoeffer’s writings on Christianity’s role in the secular world have become widely influential. Following are some questions derived from his book, The Cost of Discipleship.

- 1** Bonhoeffer spoke of "cheap grace" and "costly grace." But, isn't grace free? What do you think he meant by those terms? What might be some examples of each from your own life or observation?
- 2** Bonhoeffer argued that following Christ requires a complete commitment in every aspect of our lives. What are some practical ways you live out discipleship principles in your daily life?
- 3** What do you consider the biggest challenges in truly following Jesus today? How do you confront or overcome these challenges?
- 4** Bonhoeffer placed significant emphasis on the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). What implications do the Beatitudes have to your life today?
- 5** Bonhoeffer talked about the importance of both community and solitude in the life of a disciple. How do you balance these in your own spiritual journey, and what benefits have you found in each?
- 6** Bonhoeffer held that Christian discipleship will be costly in secular society. How should your identity as a Christian shape the way you engage in societal and political issues? Does it?
- 7** Bonhoeffer insisted that faith must be expressed in action. What are some ways you have openly and actively expressed your faith?
- 8** Bonhoeffer suffered for his faith, and believed that all true disciples will suffer. What are perceptions of suffering in the Christian life common in America today? What are your thoughts in this area?
- 9** According to Bonhoeffer, the church plays a chief role in guiding believers toward true discipleship. How have you seen TCC fulfilling this role? How can we improve?
- 10** How does knowing that Bonhoeffer was martyred for his faith influence your thoughts on the applicability of his teachings to your own Christian experience today?