

File No. 142

MARK 10:17–31

Matthew 19:16–30, Luke 18:18–30

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

(SBS Bk 5 Story No 28)

Story Notes

Those who come under the reign of God as children, seeking his blessing, will enter his kingdom. Rich people will find it difficult. The disciples have trouble with both of these points. They still wrestle with grace being undeserved. Little children, weak and dependent, have done nothing to deserve what they receive. Rich people appear already to have been rewarded by God. But these external facts are no guide to the strangeness of the grace that is present in Christ.

Jesus receives a young rich man who is eager to have eternal life, not as a gift (v. 15) but as a reward for his deeds. Even calling Jesus 'good' is ill advised because he also thinks himself to be good. He needs advising that only God is good.

Jesus directs him to something he already believes (Deut. 30:15-16), that life will come to him through keeping the law.

Perhaps he thinks he is eligible for the coming kingdom, that his riches are a sign of life. He has outwardly conformed to the law (as in Phil. 3:6) since his youth (age 13 when he became a 'son of the law' at his *bar mizvah*). This is a notable accomplishment, yet he knows he lacks something. Jesus loves this man and directs his steps to what he lacks: the forsaking of his false trust in riches.

To join the true members of the kingdom by having no recourse to money is too much for him. He still loves the power and significance which money provide. No wonder he feels he lacks something.

The disciples also stumble over the question of money, which they see as a sign of God's favour. Jesus adds to their amazement: getting a rich man into heaven is like threading a needle with a camel. However, Jesus assures them that rich people can be saved, but only by the miracle of grace which enables them to see that they have nothing in their wealth.

The apostles have come further than they thought. They have forsaken everything and will have riches where it really counts, that is, in the coming renewal of all things. But it is not in their having or not having anything that they have eternal life but in their reliance on Jesus as the Christ.

The disciples are comforted by Christ's word about their everyday life. God will make provisions for this life for those who forsake everything to follow Christ, a hundred times more than is lost, material, relational and eternal, albeit, with persecutions. Christ entrusts us to the generosity of his Father and to the richness of community life that comes to those who live for his kingdom.

The rule of God turns everything upside down as far as this world is concerned. People who seem to be first will then be shown to be last and visa versa.

The story continues with Jesus striding on to Jerusalem, amazing his disciples with his resolution to face what would meet him there. It continues also with the disciples wishing to have special places in the kingdom. It was going to take more than teaching to bring through to them, and to us all, the truth of childlikeness in the kingdom.