

The Unhappy Rich Young Ruler

a four-step study on biblical happiness in **LUKE 18:18-27**

W	<i>Watching</i> in order to gather the measurable biblical data.
A	<i>Analyzing</i> the passage data to find the main theme and subthemes.
L	<i>Linking</i> the content themes to other Scripture and everyday life.
K	<i>Knowing</i> what to do and planning how to do it.



Commentary overheard in a Happiness Seminar at imaginary Quest Bible College

Dr. Quest (on the key linking (L) question)

The Lord told the rich young ruler that he would be truly wealthy if he gave up his riches and followed him (Lk. 18:22). Sadly, it seems that the young man's riches **had him** instead of it being the other way around. Who do you think the rich young ruler was like?

Red (on Thoreau's view of farmers and barns)

To me, he sounds a lot like the 19th century farmers that I've read about in Thoreau's works. According to Thoreau, the farmers in pre-Civil War Concord, Mass. did not possess their barns as much as the barns possessed them and held them in place like an anchor holds a ship.

Dr. Quest (on barns, idolatry, and salvation in old Concord)

Those are interesting analogies, but I suspect that at least a few of the farmers in old Concord were happier than the rich young ruler. The barns would not have been idols to those who knew the Lord. Sadly, Thoreau was probably right about many of his neighbors, however.

Red (on leaving houses to follow the Lord)

Yes, and reading on in Luke, the sadness of the rich young ruler contrasts with the happiness of the disciples, some of whom had left houses (18:29) *and probably barns* to follow the Lord.

THE UNHAPPY RICH YOUNG RULER	Luke 18:18-27 (Mat. 19:16-26, Mk. 10:17-27)
W.	A.
<i>who, what, when, etc. (especially measurable things)</i>	<i>Theme Analysis, putting it All together</i>
<p>Who? Good Teacher (18:18), Jesus (18:19,22,24), God (19:27) a certain ruler (18:18), young man (Mat. 19:20, 22) those who heard it (18:26), disciples (Mat. 19:23)</p> <p>Where & When? in Perea (on the east side of the Jordan) shortly before starting toward Jerusalem not long before meeting Zaacheus at Jericho (Compare Lk. 18:18-20 and 19:1-10.)</p> <p>What stands out?</p> <p>1.) Calling Jesus "Good Teacher" (18:18-19) - How common was this title? only this story (Mt. 19:16, Mk. 10:17, Lk. 18:18) but see 'Teacher come from God' in John 3:2</p> <p>2.) The rich young ruler's opening question - How common was this "eternal life" question? only this story and 10:25 lawyer and Philippian jailor similar in Acts 16:30. - It shows his wrong assumption (18:18). but asked what was still missing (Mat. 19:20)</p> <p>3.) The command to sell what he have. (18:22) - How common was this command? It is only in this story and in Lk. 12:33.</p> <p>4.) The rich young ruler's sorrow (18:23-24) - How common was this? People did not usually go away sorrowful. Jesus did not send people away hungry. But some disciples went away (Jn. 6:64-68).</p> <p>5.) the switch to the disciples in Lk. 18:24 - Did he hear what Jesus said in 18:24-27? No, the rich young ruler had left (Mat. 19:22).</p> <p>6.) the camel & the eye of a needle (18:25) - Is the large, unclean camel found elsewhere? only in this story and in Mat. 23:24</p> <p><i>Add or change points as needed.</i></p>	<p>What are the themes of the passage?</p> <p>MORAL SUCCESS & THE LAW (18:18-23) - Man's subject was NOT salvation from sin. The man did not ask about forgiveness. - The man had been successful. He was a ruler, though still young. This required basic morality. - but eternal life was a different matter.</p> <p>GOODNESS (18:18-23) - The man was morally upright (18:21). Jesus did not say the man was lying, but only God is good (18:19). - The man believed he was a good person. He was correct relatively speaking, but he was wrong before God. - Jesus loved him (Mk. 10:21). (Japanese Bibles use mercy, not love.) Did this involve the man's character? It involved understanding for sure. Did Jesus love unsaved people? All direct references are to the saved. (all the 'Jesus loved' verses) Yet, love is part of God's goodness to all. (See Mat. 5:43-48.)</p> <p>THE SALVATION OF THE RICH (18:24-27) - The passage does not end with the man leaving. - The last four verses are more general, about the salvation of the rich. - It is not just difficult; it is impossible, humanly speaking, but not with God (18:27). - But the ending in 18:27 is positive, and soon after Zacchaeus (19:1-10) was saved.</p>

L.

*Like: what is the passage like?***Like who else in the Gospels?**

- **Unlike the disciples who actually left all**
Compare them (18:28) and him (18:22-23)
- **Like & Unlike the Lawyer in Lk. 10:25-37**
The opening questions are the same, but the lawyer tried to excuse himself.
- **Unlike Disinterested Rich Individuals**
The rich young ruler was serious! unlike the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21) unlike rich man in Lk. 16:19-31
- **Like & Unlike Zaachaeus** (Lk. 19:1-10)
Both rich, but Zaachaeus was saved
Only Zaachaeus had joy (19:6).

Like who in other Scriptures?

- **(un)like the Philippian jailor in Acts. 16:30**
similar question: What to do to be saved?
but **Why the simple 'believe' answer?**
because the jailor didn't know the law
because the jailor didn't love money
The jailor rejoiced (16:34), was not sad.

Like what else?

- **Like various wrong assumptions.**
Some are serious, but seeking wrongly.
Jewish → via Moses, Japan → via Buddhism
- **Like looking for treasure in the wrong place**
looking one place, but it's elsewhere,
It was right in front of the man (Mat. 13:44).
- **Like good student failings college entrance**
student who had done well in high school.
Sad, because of a rule against... (idols)
But could be accepted later, if repent (18:27)
- **Like treating a Pimple, Splinter, or BULLET**
Just treating the outside is not enough.
Must remove the core (idol) problem, painful
- **Like the materialist farmers Thoreau wrote about.**
A farmer's barn can be his idol.

Add or change points as needed.
Choose your favorite likeness point(s).

K.

Key points for us, Knowing what to do

**IN ORDER TO
ENTER GOD'S KINGDOM
AND HAVE TRUE JOY,**

GIVE UP YOUR IDOL (18:22)

whatever it may be. For the rich, young ruler it was riches, and probably included his position.

AND FOLLOW JESUS (18:22).

Be willing as a principle of life to follow the Lord Jesus wherever he may lead.

**THANKFULLY, THESE THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
BECAUSE OF GOD'S ENABLING (18:27).**

CAUTION: FOLLOWING THE LORD JESUS PERFECTLY IS IMPOSSIBLE, AND SALVATION IS BY GRACE RATHER THAN BY WORKS. (ONLY GOD IS TRULY GOOD!) HOWEVER, ONE CAN NOT LOVE THINGS, POWER, PLEASURE, OR EVEN ONE'S OWN FAMILY (18:29) MORE THAN HE OR SHE LOVES THE LORD JESUS, BECAUSE TO DO SO IS IDOLATRY AND BREAKING THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER HAD ONE IDOL, WHICH THE LORD CHALLENGED HIM TO GIVE UP (18:22). SADLY, HE DID NOT DO SO.

How? *Make some specific applications.*

Dr. Quest (on the ending of the passages)

The story of the rich, young ruler, in all three passages (Mat. 19:16-26, Mk. 10:17-27, Lk. 18:18-27), seems to end sadly with the man's rejection of the Lord. Yet, that was not really the end, for the Lord went on to teach his disciples concerning the miraculous possibility of the rich being saved. (Nothing is impossible with God.) So this is a sad story (Lk. 18:23) with a potential happy ending (Lk. 18:27). Some believe that the rich, young ruler was saved later. What do you think?

Lukas (on Zaachaeus)

We don't know how the rich, young ruler ended up, but we do know that another rich man, Zaachaeus, was saved a short time later (Lk. 19:1-9). To me that is the real happy ending in the context. The rich, young ruler sadly refused to give up his idol (his riches), but Zaachaeus joyfully received the Lord, repented, and was saved (Lk. 19:6-10).

Frank (on three wealthy losers)

Why does there have to be a happy ending? Losers always end up badly. Frankly, I believe we should remember the rich, young ruler as the third of three wealthy losers in Luke. The other two are the rich fool in the Lk. 12:13-21 parable and the rich man in the rich man and Lazarus story (Lk. 16:19-31).

Joyce (on joy in Luke)

You are too negative, Frank! Good things also come in three's. The three lost things in Luke chapter 15, the coin, the sheep, and the prodigal son, were all found. So Luke 15 is one of the most joyful chapters in the entire Bible. Those who repent have joy.

Frank (on the need to understand sorrow)

Yes, but those who do not repent have sorrow or anger instead. The prodigal's older brother was angry (Lk 15:28), and the rich, young ruler was sad (Lk. 18:23). Frankly, we will never understand the joy of salvation unless we look at the sorrow of the lost.

Red (on Jesus' promise to his disciples)

Let's read what came next, in Mat. 19:27-29, Mk. 10:28-30, and Lk. 18:28-30. Peter asked a follow-up question and the Lord answered and promised his disciples that they would **not** be losers. This is the happy truth at the end of all three accounts.

Dr. Quest (on the positive ending for disciples)

Great observation, Red. It's natural to focus on Luke's account, since there is so much about riches and joy, or the lack thereof, in the third Gospel. You, however, pointed out that all three Gospels have this story contrasting the sadness of the rich, young ruler with the blessings that are to be experienced by the Lord's disciples including us!