

## Let It Go! - Matthew 19:16-30

**Introduction:** Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 19. This morning, we're going to talk about a young man who was voted the most likely to succeed in his class; a young man who was on everybody's Who's Who List. This young man was his father's favorite son, and the apple of his mother's eye. He was the captain of the team and the leader of the pack. He had everything he wanted. We don't know his name. We just know him as the Rich Young Ruler. He had it all: a prominent position in society, riches, and he was young.

Some of us have a little trouble remembering our younger days, don't we? Do you know how to tell if you're old? You know you're old when...

- You try to straighten out the wrinkles in your socks and discover you aren't wearing any.
- The doctor tells you to slow down and the policeman tells you to speed up.
- Your idea of weight lifting is standing up.
- People call you at 10 am and say, "*Did I wake you?*"
- After you walk the dog, you go and take your medicine which is lying on the kitchen counter and discover that now you're going to be heartworm and tick free for the next 30 days!

Well, the man in our story wasn't old, he was young and he was rich and he had success written all over him, but something was missing. And that is where his story begins. Let's read his story in Matthew 19:16-22.

On the outside, this man appeared to be successful. He had achieved almost everything he wanted to at a very young age. He was following the path of success, and he thought he knew how to get there. But did he?

This morning, I want to point out some things you must have to be successful. First, if you want to be successful:

### 1. You Must Have the Right Goal

This young man came to Jesus. That's always a good thing to do. Maybe he had heard Jesus preach about being "*the bread of life*" and "*the living water*," and thought to himself, "*I need some of that.*" Well, for whatever reason, he came to Jesus with a sense of urgency. Mark tells us he came running to Jesus and knelt before him, which was a sign of respect.

This young man came to Jesus with a question. He asked Jesus, *“Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”* (16). In this very personal question, he stated his goal. On the outside, he appeared to be successful, but on the inside he knew something was missing. He hadn’t reached his ultimate goal. Maybe he was questioning why his rich life lacked worth; or substance; or purpose; or why he felt like he had a life, but not a quality of life. So, let’s give him credit - He had the right goal. And he came to Jesus – the only one who could give him what he was missing. Secondly, if you want to be successful:

## **2. You Must Take the Right Road**

This man’s question reveals what he thought about gaining eternal life - by doing traveling down the road of good works. It’s a common belief today. But it’s a common mistake a lot of people make. After all, we’ve have been taught by many religions to believe that if you do enough right things in the right way you can find the secret of life, or you can find nirvana, or enlightenment, or achieve karma. But it’s sort of like trying to find a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. It’s a fallacy. God says in **Proverbs 14:12 (NIV)**, *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”* And that is the truth about all these religions that have different rules and rituals, - they’re all founded on a false belief. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not about what we can do, but what God has done for us!

But Jesus knew this young man’s heart just like He knows ours. Jesus asked him a question that was intended to put him on the right road. He asked him, *“Why do you ask me about what is good... There is only One who is good.”* (17). Jesus wanted to put him on the road that would lead to God and eternal life.

You see, God is the ultimate standard of good. We try to make other people the standard. I’ve witness to folks and asked them if they are a Christian, and some say, *“Well, I live a pretty good life.”* What they’re saying is *“Compared to most people, I think I am OK.”* Or they say, *“Well, I’m just as good those hypocrites at church.”* That may be true, but the hypocrites at church or the guy down the street are not the standard. God is!

Jesus points this young man to God’s standards. He says, *“If you want to enter (eternal) life, obey the commandments”* (17), and then He proceeds to list commandments 5-9, (Ex. 20) and the second of the two great commandments—*“love your neighbor as yourself.”* I wonder why He left out the other commandments. We’ll get to that in a moment.

Well, the young man tells Jesus that he had kept those commandments, so he asked Him what was missing.

Now had the young man really kept all the commandments? Probably not! But whether he had or hadn't kept them, Jesus didn't debate with him. He didn't have to. The young man had asked a question that deserved an answer. *"What else must I do? I have everything else except eternal life. What do I have to do to get it? What am I still lacking?"* Obviously, he understood by now that although he had the right goal of eternal life, he was just headed down the wrong road. All his riches and religious accomplishments weren't enough.

Now here comes the hard part. We know it was hard because the young man *"heard this, and went away sad..."* (22). He was given the right answer but he couldn't bring himself to submit to Jesus. Finally, if you want to be successful:

### **3. You Must Take the Right Action**

Jesus' answer to this man's question was two-fold and straight to the point. He said *"If you want to be perfect..."* Now, we have to stop here for a minute and understand what Jesus meant by *"perfect."* Did He mean that this young man had to be morally spotless to gain eternal life? Well, if that was what He meant, then wouldn't that be going along with the young man's notion of doing good things and keeping the commandments to a "T?" No, when Jesus talks about perfection here, the word He uses is *"teleios"* which means completeness. In other words, He saying, *"You're life may look successful to you and to others, but it's not complete."* Then Jesus tells him what he has to do in order for his life to be complete. First, he must:

**A. Let Go.** Jesus tells him to let go of what is holding him back from gaining eternal life. He says, *"...go, sell your possessions, and give it to the poor..."*

Now, on the surface, it may appear that Jesus is telling this man that he must take a vow of poverty to gain eternal life. But I don't think so. You see, we know that many of Jesus' followers were people of means. For example, Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy, and Peter and James and John owned a fishing business. No, Jesus is not telling him that he has to be poor. He's telling him that he's depending on his goodness and all these other things he has that are temporary at best. First and foremost, he's dependent upon himself, and he's telling him what is missing in his life is his dependence upon God. He's missing is a relationship with God. And that is what the other the five commandments are all about. He may have kept all those other commandments that dealt

with what he should or shouldn't do, but he hadn't dealt with his relationship with God – especially having no other gods before him.

Jesus knew that as long as this young man filled his life with the everything-else-gods, there would never be room for the true God. And what was true for this guy is true for us. If I'm holding onto earthly treasures, I can't take hold of God's hand. If my heart is full of junk, there will be no room for the "*treasures of heaven.*" A life that is full of junk needs to be emptied before God can come in. Jesus knew that. That is why He told His disciples, "*It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,*"

Now, He could have just as easily said, "*It is hard for a prideful man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,*" Or "*It is hard for an angry man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,*"

You see, it's not just money Jesus is talking about. It's a matter of the heart. What are the other things you're filling your heart with that are keeping God out? Is it pride? Popularity? Anger? Bitterness? Is it fancy cars and fast women? Whatever they are, they are not worth missing out on eternal life. They are not worth missing out on peace and joy. They are just not worth it. There has to be room for God because He's a jealous God. He will not share your life with all those other things. He wants to be the only object of your affection and loyalty. Secondly, in his answer to the young man's question, Jesus says he has to:

**B. Let God.** Not only did Jesus tell this young man to sell his possessions, He also said, "*... follow me.*" You see, letting go of the junk in your life is only half the equation. When we let go of the bad, there must be something good put back in or else the bad will come right back. We have to let God in and let Him fill our lives with heaven's treasure and Jesus is the best treasure you can have. With Jesus, you have everything you need. **Matthew 6:33 (NIV)** says, "*...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" When you give Jesus all your heart, everything will fall into place. Without Him, little else matters.

Jesus also said in Matthew's gospel: "*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" (6:21) "*No man can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and money.*" (6:24) "*What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, but lose his own soul?*" (16:26)

You see, this story illustrates what Jesus had been saying for the last two chapters of Matthew. You can't think of eternal life in Kingdom of Heaven as you would earthly things. On earth, you strive to be #1, but in the Kingdom of Heaven, the first shall be last. Life on earth is an adult dominated society, but in the Kingdom of Heaven children make the best citizens. On earth, the movers and shakers have the reserve seats, but in the Kingdom of Heaven, the outcasts are the guests of honor.

So, if you have ever been broken down, mixed up, or felt left out, that's good news. You are who Jesus is looking for!

**Conclusion:** In the Indiana Jones movie, "The Last Crusade," Indiana and his dad are in search of the Holy Grail. Near the end, Indiana's Dad finds the Holy Grail only to end up in the clutches of the villain. Indiana rescues his father. Just as the two are about to escape with the Grail, there's an earthquake and Indiana tumbles over the edge of a crevice, and loses his grip on the Grail. His dad grabs Indiana's hand and tries to pull him to safety. But Indiana is still trying to reach for the Grail with his other hand. It is not going to work! Indiana is risking his own life to reach the Holy Grail. Finally, his father says to him, "*Indiana, let it go. Let it go.*" But Indiana keeps looking down at the Grail. His father says again. "*Indiana, let it go!*" Finally, he grabs his father's arm with both hands, and his dad pulls him up to safety.

Listen, if you're holding on to anything that is keeping you from having an eternal life with Christ; or it's keeping you from living a victorious Christian life; or if you're holding on to a grudge that's tearing you up on the inside, Jesus is offering you His hand, and He's telling you to, "*Let it go!*" "*Let it go!*" Whatever you're holding on to, it's not worth missing out on eternal life. It's not worth missing out on real joy and peace. Jesus is calling to you today, "*Let it go! Let it go! Let it go!*"