

Series: *Jesus the Master Evangelist*

Title: " 'Good Teacher' or 'Christ the Lord' ?" (part 2)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/3/2009

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In our last message, we began considering the case of the rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18. And I said that we need to take note of four things in this account. First, we needed to notice how this young man addressed Jesus. He addressed Him as "God Master" but not as "Lord". From the way he addressed Jesus it is clear that he thought of Jesus only as another one of the Jewish rabbis, and not as the Son of God. So first of all, the young man addressed Jesus in the wrong way.

Second, we saw the rich young ruler's basis for approaching Jesus. It was the basis of works. This young man wanted to know what one thing he could do, what one thing he could add to his Jewish lineage and his keeping of the law, in order to have eternal life by right of inheritance. So he addresses Jesus in the wrong way, and he comes to Jesus on the wrong basis.

Third, in our last message we began to see how Jesus now deals with this young man. Jesus is showing the rich young ruler the impossibility of keeping God's law. He says to him, in Luke chapter 18, verse 20, "You know the commandments." And as a ruler of the Jews, this young man certainly knew the commandments.

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But now I want you to take note of something very interesting – and that is the list of commandments that Jesus gives to the rich young ruler in verse 20.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The Jews referred to these two parts as the two tables of the Law. The first table of the law, the first four commandments, deal with man's relationship with God – Have no other gods before Me; Do not make any graven images to bow down and serve; Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; and, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The fact is that this young man, by the way he has addressed Jesus, is already in trouble with the first table of the law. He has not recognized that he is standing before the Son of God. And he gives every indication that he has made the Law his idol.

But Jesus focuses this young man's attention on the second table of the law, the remaining six commandments, the ones that deal with man's relationships with his fellow man. And it is this second table of the Law that the Lord Jesus lists out for this young man. He first lists five of the six commandments – Do not commit adultery; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not lie; Honor your father and your mother.

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And what does the young man say? Verse 21: "All these have I kept from my youth up." I've done all that. No problem.

Now at this point, Jesus could have embarrassed this young man. He could have said, "Oh, really, you've kept all these commandments. All right, young man, let's go talk to your mother and father and see what they have to say about that. Do you mean to tell me that you never once disobeyed your parents, or wanted to disobey them in your heart? Do you mean to tell me that you never told a single lie in all your life? Do you mean to tell me that you got every penny of all your wealth in a totally honest way – you never got one penny of it dishonestly?" Do you really understand how high a standard the Law is? Do you understand that it is not just a matter of outward obedience but of obedience in the heart?

But Jesus doesn't approach this young man in that way. He doesn't embarrass him with those kinds of pointed questions. But He does give him a great deal to think about.

In this account and the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark, we see that, despite this young man's pride in his nationality and law-keeping, Jesus treats him with the utmost respect. In fact, we read in Mark's parallel account,

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chapter 10 and verse 21, that Jesus looked on this young man and loved him. He loved him.

Sometimes people ask the question, "Is it true that God loves the sinner but hates his sin?" There are varying opinions on that point. But I must tell you that the answer, according to Scripture, is "Yes." God does love the unsaved. If God did not love sinners, He would not have sent His Son to die for them. The word in the account in Mark is *agapao* – selfless love. "Jesus beholding" this young man "loved him." Loved him with *agape* love, selfless love.

This is exactly the same Greek word, in exactly the same grammatical form, as we find in John 3:16 – "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." *Agape* love. And God's *agape* love extends even to His enemies. And this young man, sincere as he is, stands before the Lord Jesus as an enemy. He is at odds with Christ and the Gospel. And that is the position of every one of us apart from Christ. Romans chapter 5 verse 10 tells us that it was when we were still enemies of God that we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, because "God so loved the world."

But then, in verse 22 of this account in Luke, Jesus really gets to the heart of the young man's problem. And that is his riches, his wealth. Jesus has

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mentioned the other commandments, but now He gets to the very last commandment – “Thou shalt not covet.” And that is where this young man’s problem really lies. Jesus says to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Now at this point in the conversation, this young man should have been under deep conviction. Like the disciples a few verses later, the young man should have responded, “Who then can be saved?” “Lord, help me!” And that is just the point. It is impossible to keep the law perfectly, and God will accept nothing less. A few seconds ago, this young man had confidently but mistakenly declared that on the Law’s terms, he was qualified for heaven. But then Jesus exposed the young man’s essential problem. And what was that problem? This young man was relying on something that could not save him, but could only condemn him. And that is what the Law does. It never saves. It only condemns.

There is another man in the Bible who said that he kept the law, and that was the Apostle Paul. In Philippians chapter 3, Paul says, “concerning the righteousness that is in the law, I was blameless.” I did it all. Zero defects. But, he says, “But – what things were gain to me, those I counted but loss – refuse –

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garbage – I counted all these things, all this law-keeping, but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ my Lord.” He tells Timothy in his first epistle, even though I kept the law, I was “a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man.” None of my law-keeping counted for anything, because I was still an enemy of Christ in my heart. I needed the “excellency of the knowledge of Christ my Lord.”

This young man also kept the law, and he was also an enemy. But in contrast to Paul, this young man knew Jesus only as “Good Master” – “Good Teacher” – Good rabbi” – he refused to know Him as “Christ my Lord.” He refused to come to Him as Savior.

Why did Jesus respond to the young man this way? Was He saying that selling all that he had and giving it to the poor, and coming and physically following Him, would result in eternal life? No. There were many along the way who followed Jesus for a time, but then they fell away, and they didn’t follow Jesus anymore. Here Jesus was pointing out the futility of law-keeping as the way of salvation. Yet the Word of God tells us that the law does have a place in the life of the believer, and that is the place of obedience after we are saved.

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This is the difference between saving faith and discipleship. This is the difference between justification and sanctification. Many times, these things are confused today. We need to be careful. We aren't justified before God by keeping the law. We're justified by our faith in Jesus Christ, and His perfect law-keeping, which God credits to our account when we put our faith in Him as Savior.

But it is once we are saved, as the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us, that God begins the work of sanctification within us. The work of discipleship. We aren't perfect people. But we have a new set of motivations. We don't obey the law to be saved. We obey the law out of humble love and gratitude for our salvation, out of recognition of the Lordship claim of Jesus Christ upon us – that He is Lord, we don't make Him Lord, He is Lord -- and we seek to obey Him out of a desire to please Him and be more like Him.

#### 4. The Young Man's Final Response

So now, we've seen how the young man addresses Jesus – as "good master" but not as "Christ the Lord." As a mere man, and not as the Son of God. And we've seen the basis on which the young man approaches Jesus. He approaches

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Jesus on the basis of good works. And we've seen how Jesus responds – by confronting the young man with who Jesus really is, and confronting the young man with the futility of trying to inherit eternal life by good works.

And finally, we see how the young man responds. Verse 23: "But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich." And the accounts in Matthew and Mark tell us that the young man went away sorrowful. He didn't listen to Jesus anymore. He went away. He still clung to the idea that he needed to do something in order to inherit eternal life. He remained lost in his sins.

Many people let many things stand between themselves and eternal life. In this man's case, it was his wealth. For someone else, it might be pride. For someone else, it might be some sin that they just can't let go of. All kinds of barriers, all kinds of burdens, keep people from coming to Christ.

I'd like to conclude this message by mentioning seven application points. These points have to do with our own presentation of the Gospel to others, our own witness for Christ. And we see all of these points in Jesus' dealings with the rich young ruler.

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First, Biblical evangelism presents the Gospel from Scripture. We should always do that, because Jesus Christ, God Himself, the Master Evangelist, always did that. Here we see Jesus referring to Scripture, and quoting Scripture, extensively. We should be prepared to do that, and we should never be ashamed to do that. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." God's Word is powerful. Don't be afraid to rely upon that power in your witnessing.

Second, Biblical evangelism presents good news in the light of bad news. Where did Jesus begin in His Scripture-based evangelism? He began with the holiness of God, and the Law of God. He began with the fact that being able to enter into the presence of the holy God demands absolute perfection. That is bad news for every human being apart from Christ.

Third, Biblical evangelism focuses man's attention on his sin problem. Using the Scriptures, Jesus focused this young man's attention on his own sin problem – a sin problem that began with his misapprehension of God Himself, and a sin problem that spilled over into the young man's thinking that he could earn his way to eternal life by his own merit.

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Fourth, Biblical evangelism then draws man's attention to Jesus Christ as the only answer to his sin problem. After Jesus had confronted this young man with the holiness of God and the law of God, after He had confronted this young man about his sin problem, He said, "Come, follow Me." This is the same Jesus who said, in another place at another time, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me." I Myself am the only answer to your sin problem. Jesus was not telling this young man that he could be saved by selling all of his goods and giving them to the poor. That was a test to show the true condition of his heart. The salvation that Jesus held out to this young man was to be found in His own person and His own work – "Come, follow Me."

The Gospel has to do with Jesus Christ, His person and work, as the only remedy for the problem of sin. We need to make a complete presentation of the Gospel, just as Jesus did.

The Gospel isn't merely inviting someone to take Jesus as your friend, although He will be your friend if you receive Him as Savior. The Gospel isn't merely about having a relationship with Jesus, although that is certainly part of it too.

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The meaning of the word "Gospel" is "good news." And there can only be "good news" if people understand the "bad news." People need to understand that they are sinners. People need to understand that because they are sinners they stand under the wrath and condemnation of a just and holy God. And people need to understand that they cannot save themselves.

It's when we understand these things that the Gospel really becomes "good news." Jesus bore my sins on the cross in my place. He paid the penalty that I deserve to pay. And Jesus was qualified to take my place before God the Father because He perfectly kept the law that I cannot keep. And it is only as I put my faith and trust in Him that I have eternal life, a sure home in eternity with Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to help me through the difficulties of this life now. So we need to present the Good News of salvation in Christ in its proper relationship to the bad news about all of mankind, and our sinful, lost, and hopeless condition apart from Christ.

Fifth, Biblical evangelism presents Christ to the lost with respect. We need to present the Gospel with respect, just as Jesus did. Jesus presented the truth in such a way that it got to the heart of the young man's problem. But Jesus did it with the utmost respect. And we need to do the same in our own witnessing.

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Sixth, Biblical evangelism presents Christ to the lost in love. We need to present the Gospel with love, just as Jesus did. If you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ today, it means that God reached out in love to you while you were still a sinner without hope. And we need to pray for the work of the Holy Spirit to reach out in love through us, to hopeless sinners, who are just as we once were, with the message of life in Christ.

And seventh, Biblical evangelism demands a response, in Christ's name. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5, verses 20 and 21: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The Gospel calls for a response, and there are only two kinds of responses. Two kinds of outcomes. There are two kinds of people. The rich young ruler came to Jesus as a lost sinner, and he went away from Jesus as a lost sinner.

But next time, the Lord willing, we'll look at the account of an encounter with Jesus Christ that produced an entirely different outcome, the account of Zacchaeus in the next chapter of the book of Luke. Zacchaeus comes to Jesus as a sinner, but He doesn't go away in the same condition. In fact, He remains

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with Jesus. And as He remains with Jesus, a great change takes place. We'll see that next time.