

“Unfinished Stories: Rich Young Ruler”

Matthew 19:16-22

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Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Goldilocks. She went for a walk in the forest. Pretty soon, she came upon a house. She knocked and, when no one answered, she walked right in. At the table in the kitchen, there were three bowls of porridge. Goldilocks was hungry. She tasted the porridge from the first bowl. "This porridge is too hot!" she exclaimed. So, she tasted the porridge from the second bowl. "This porridge is too cold," she said. So, she tasted the last bowl of porridge. "Ahhh, this porridge is just right," she said happily and she ate it all up.

The End. ----- Hold it you may say xxxx The story is not finished, tell the rest of the story.

After she'd eaten the three bears' breakfasts she decided she was feeling a little tired. So, she walked into the living room where she saw three chairs. Goldilocks sat in the first chair to rest her feet. "This chair is too big!" she exclaimed. So she sat in the second chair. "This chair is too big, too!" she whined. So she tried the last and smallest chair. "Ahhh, this chair is just right," she sighed. But just as she settled down into the chair to rest, it broke into pieces!

The End. ----- No, the story is still not finished.

Goldilocks was very tired by this time, so she went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay down in the first bed, but it was too hard. Then she lay in the second bed, but it was too soft. Then she lay down in the third bed and it was just right. Goldilocks fell asleep.

As she was sleeping, the three bears came home. "Someone's been eating my porridge," growled the Papa bear. "Someone's been eating my porridge," said the Mama bear. "Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up!" cried the Baby bear.

"Someone's been sitting in my chair," growled the Papa bear. "Someone's been sitting in my chair," said the Mama bear. "Someone's been sitting in my chair and they've broken it all to pieces," cried the Baby bear.

They decided to look around some more and when they got upstairs to the bedroom, Papa bear growled, "Someone's been sleeping in my bed," "Someone's been sleeping in my bed, too" said the Mama bear "Someone's been sleeping in my bed and she's still there!" exclaimed Baby bear.

-----Oh, the story is still unfinished, but you probably know the story...so I'll let you finish it.

In scripture we have what I call Unfinished Stories. Today we begin a sermon series looking at stories in the New Testament and the Old Testament that tells a story, but as I look and examine the story and although it seems like the story is over....I wonder what is the rest of the unfinished story.

So in this series we are going to look at these Biblical stories and notice that they end somewhat unfinished. We will then look at some possibilities of what might have happened next. We will do that certainly not to add to scripture...but to think about what we might have done, or what we would have done in that situation. So we will propose several “endings” to the Unfinished Stories to see how that might make an impact and difference in how we would react in the same type of story.

Today we have the story of the Rich Young Ruler. I certainly encourage you to follow along in your Bibles, smart phones, and electronic devices as we look at this scripture.

Verse 16: And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

As we look at this verse a couple of comments. I need to make it clear that good deeds is not what gives you eternal life. There are going to be good people that do not make it to heaven and eternal life. It takes more than a good life? What? More than a good life???? You see you can be good and not be a Christian.

I have been often asked to officiate at funerals where I really do not know the person. The funeral home will call and say that they need a pastor. I believe everyone should have a decent burial. I meet with the family to gather information about their loved one who has died. I often try to go to the visitation the night before. It just about never fails when I approach the family and the casket to hear someone say, “They were such a good man.” There is a small shiver that goes up my spine....being good doesn’t make you a Christian.

Now here is the sad thing there are those that say they are Christians but are not good. To me that’s an oxymoron. You can be good and not be a Christian, but if you are a Christian you must be good.

Now let me pause and reemphasize the portion of our church Vision Statement that says, “Loving God! Loving All!” I want a church atmosphere where none are too bad to stay out and none are too good to feel like they don’t need church. You see, it’s not just about good deeds.

This Rich Young Ruler has a perception that the more righteous works he does the better possibility he will have for eternal life. Friends salvation and eternal life come by the gift of God’s grace. “By grace are we saved through faith, not of works...” (Ephesians 2:8-9) We can simply do good deeds and get to heaven. It’s more than just good church attendance, good giving, good deeds, and good living. It is about a relationship with Jesus Christ. Now I strongly believe there is a cause and effect. If you have a relationship with Jesus Christ then you will want to do good deeds. Faith and works go hand in hand.

Jesus mentions to this man to keep the commandments. Now this man must have been earnest in his seeking. I can picture him with a pen and paper out when Jesus says keep the commandments and he is ready to write them down....he wants to do it right. He says “Which ones?”

And Jesus says, **Verse 18: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness.**

Verse 19: Honor your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Now 2 observations about this list. One----they all deal with treatment of others and do not say anything about Loving God. I wonder why. Not going to answer that...just throwing that out.

Oh and by the way it's not Ten Suggestions, but Ten Commandments. And also The Ten Commandments are not multiple choice....we can't pick and choose.

The young man says he has kept all of these commandments. But did you notice of these commandments that Jesus listed he omitted one that deals with how you treat others. Can you identify it? xxxxx Do not covet. The Rich Young Ruler says he has kept all of these....goody good gumdrop....but Jesus does list the commandment about coveting, because where this is where there is an issue.

In verse 20 this man is called young. In verse 22 it says he has great possessions, but what about being a ruler. The parallel passages to this Matthew passage are found in Mark 10 and Luke 18. It is found in the Luke passage---thus with the stories together we can accurately say Rich Young Ruler.

Yes the young man's primary problem is his wealth. Now let me pause and say....If wealth is y our primary problem....come see me and between the Finance Committee, Board of Trustees and the Permanent Endowment Fund we will help you take care of that little problem. Just sayin'.

So this Rich Young Ruler is a good man, but.....Jesus wants complete obedience and tells the man: **Verse 21:sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will treasure in heaven; and come follow me.**

So that there will not be a misunderstanding Jesus is not telling all of us to do that. He knows that for this particular man wealth is an obstacle of complete obedience. He must get rid of the obstacle that is keeping him from complete obedience.

So...I ask you. It may not be possessions....but what is keeping you from complete obedience.

So **JESUS TELLS US:**

1. Get rid of obstacles that interfere with your relationship with me.

For the Rich Young Ruler it was his great possessions. But for us a way of looking at is: The obstacle is not what we own, but what owns us.

The man had come to Jesus, but then he asks Jesus a question of what he should do and then he went away. Ever have someone ask you for advice, you give it and they walk away and do the exact opposite. Jesus says, “Come learn of me. Learn from me.”

3. Follow me.

Note there are no conditions about the “Follow Me part.” Follow me, but you can keep all your possessions. Follow me, but you can keep doing your own thing. Follow me, but you don’t really have to obey me.

Sometimes it is hard to follow directions. We are stubborn. We think we are right. We know better. But when Jesus says follow we should follow and trust. The following video clip is based on a story that was supposedly true...however upon further checking through truth source snopes.com the story if a bit of an urban legend. However the truth is the same.

<https://youtu.be/fscydKvocrw> (Divert your course)

It’s your choice. Follow or not...who are you going to listen too?

Get rid of obstacles that interfere with your relationship with Jesus. Come, follow.

We then have this very sad verse. **Verse 22: When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

And so I ask, “What are you holding on to that can’t let go of?”

And now some scenarios of the Unfinished Story of the Rich Young Ruler. We have no further mention of this man....but what if:

Scenario 1: He went away sorrowful, lost all of his money....and then realized that the most valuable possession was a relationship with Jesus. That was the true treasure for eternal life.

Scenario 2: He kept his possessions. Followed his own path, would not divert his course and kept living his life like he had been.

Scenario 3: He went away sad, processed and thought about it and returned to Jesus saying, “I have removed the obstacle, I am coming to you, I am going to follow you.”

Scenario 4: He kept his possessions. Even gained more money. Continued to do good deeds, but believed the misconception that he was “good enough.”

Scenario 5: Left sad but encountered another person who shared with him the joy of truly following Jesus and because of Jesus words and the witness of others, he began to follow Jesus.

5 scenarios. 5 fingers....that make a fist. A fist to be stubborn....or to release and give it all to God.

Let me tell you another unfinished story. There was One born in a manger by the name of Jesus. He was Jesus Messiah, name above all names, Blessed Redeemer, Emmanuel The rescue for sinners, The ransom from Heaven. He was Jesus Messiah, Lord of all. At age 30 he began proclaiming Good News of salvation. He died for the sins of the world. He was resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven and is coming back again.

Now like Goldilocks and the Three Bears we can say the story is finished....but it is not. Here is the unfinished story....What will you do with Jesus Messiah? I'll let you finish the story.

As we celebrate the Sacrament of God's love, grace and forgiveness....the story is not finished.

As you are given the bread and dip it into the chalice of juice and return to your seat know that it is up to you as to how the story is finished.