

**Just the Facts, Ma'am!**

**TEN**

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

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*We need to make good  
choices, for the choices  
we make turn around  
and make us.*

Unknown

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## Just the Facts, Ma'am!

In an investigation of a crime scene detectives must sort out the facts. The scene itself provides evidence. Statements from loved ones, friends, relatives, and coworkers also give perspective and clarity to the evidence. The activities of the victim, as well as those of the supposed perpetrator, leading up to the incident are investigated. In each case the specifics are of upmost importance in order to solve the mystery.

The 1987 movie, *Dragnet*, was a remake of the old television series of the same title. Dan Aykroyd played the straight-laced, lead detective, Joe Friday. During an investigation of a crime, Friday needs information from a witness. The lady's response included unrelated and extraneous information. In his typical reaction, Friday exclaims, "The facts, just the facts, Ma'am!"

### The Whole Story

When studying a passage of Scripture, understanding and addressing the facts are critical. The complexity of the major issues in the rich-young-ruler passages presents an unusually perplexing interpretive problem. The Bible student must choose the one correct explanation of each major issue. A summary of the major concerns in the rich-young-ruler texts explored in previous chapters is presented in the following chart, *Summary of Major Issues*.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR ISSUES RICH YOUNG RULER PASSAGES			
Item	Issue	Options	
1	Who Was Asking?	Unbeliever	or Believer
2	What Was Asked?	Works (for eternal life)	or Works (for rewards)
3	What Was Expected?	Entering the Kingdom	or Inheriting Rewards
4	Kingdom Entrance	Entering Eternal Life (salvation)	or Inheriting the Kingdom (rewards)
5	Spiritual Perception	Man's Goodness	or God's Goodness
6	Life	Eternal	or Abundant
7	Jesus' Instructions	One-directional (for salvation)	or One-directional (for discipleship)
8	Treasure in Heaven	Eternal Life (merit-of-life)	or Eternal Life (proof-of-life)
9	Ability to Save	God (through faith)	or Men (by works)
10	What's in It for Me?	Heaven (eternal destiny)	or Compensation (for obedience)

## JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM!

### What Does It Mean?

Varying explanations from the ten major issues addressed in the previous chapters lead typically to four major interpretive views for the rich-young-ruler passages. Conclusions including strengths and weaknesses are presented in summary manner for each view. The major views are as follows:

1. Believer pursuing rewards, resulting from discipleship,  
page 136
2. Unbeliever pursuing eternal life, requiring commitment,  
page 137
3. Unbeliever pursuing eternal life, involving simple trust,  
page 138
4. Unbeliever pursuing eternal life, redirected to pursue  
an enriched life, page 139

Like the plot in a movie, you must understand the interrelationship and dialogue of all the characters. When interpretive tensions arise, decisions must be made as to the best solution in order to arrive at the clearest meaning of a passage, remembering that there is *only* one correct interpretation.

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

### **View One Believer Pursuing Rewards, Resulting from Discipleship**

This view holds that the rich ruler was a believer. He approaches Jesus to find out the requirements of discipleship and heavenly rewards or his inheritance in the kingdom that will come from following Christ in obedience. Jesus answers the what-must-I-do question.

#### ***Strengths of Position***

- Jesus answered the rich ruler's initial question as asked. He answered a discipleship question with a discipleship answer.
- No gospel, as in John 3:16, is presented to either the rich ruler (Luke 18) or the lawyer (Luke 10).
- Jesus' instructions parallel those for *believers* who are following Christ in discipleship (e.g., Matt. 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26; 14:25-33).
- Accounts begin and end with an emphasis on "inherit eternal life" (Matt. and Mark).
- Addresses the two aspects of "eternal life": received "at this time" and in the future "in age to come."

#### ***Weaknesses of Position***

- "Inherit" is *always* used as a *code word* for discipleship.
- It is unlikely that the lawyer in the parallel account with the identical question was a believer since he came to "test" Jesus.
- The discussion concerning God's goodness and trust in God versus riches should have been basic knowledge for a believer.
- Why did Peter have a question about rewards if even those outside the Twelve (e.g., rich ruler and lawyer) were aware of rewards?
- Why did Christ indicate that the rich ruler would not enter the kingdom if he was already a believer?<sup>1</sup>
- The "go, sell, give; come, follow" instructions are one-directional in a linear fashion.
- Entering the kingdom is equivalent to inheriting the kingdom (obtaining rewards).

## JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM!

### View Two Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life, Requiring Commitment

In this view the rich ruler is an unbeliever inquiring as to which works and how many are necessary for salvation. So the rich ruler asks the what-must-I-do question.

#### ***Strengths of Position***

- Jesus answered the rich ruler's salvation question as asked—a salvation question, with a requirements-for-salvation answer.
- Jesus' instructions parallel those for *unbelievers* to follow Christ in commitment and obedience for salvation (Matt. 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26; 14:25-33).
- Jesus addresses a complex, faith-works concept (knowledge, assent or belief, and trust or commitment) by knowledge of God's goodness, "go, sell, give" in belief, and "come, follow" in commitment.
- Christ indicated that the wealthy young ruler lacked salvation.
- Accounts begin and end with "eternal life" emphasis (Matt., Mark, and Luke).

#### ***Weaknesses of Position***

- "Follow Christ" is *always* used as *code words* for salvation or eternal life, referring to the demands of discipleship being imposed on saving faith.
- Childlike trust is simpler than complex faith-works that is required to explain the remainder of the passage.
- Complex faith-works derived primarily from James 2:14-24 must be substantiated and then imposed on the rich ruler text.
- Consistency requires that the word "believer" is *always* equivalent to a "committed, obedient follower of Christ."
- The "go, sell, give; come, follow" instructions are one-directional in a linear fashion.
- Rewards are not an issue since all committed, obedient believers will be rewarded, referring to heaven as the reward for perseverance in good works.

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### **View Three Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life, Involving Simple Trust**

In this position the rich ruler is an unbeliever seeking eternal life. Jesus did not answer the ruler's what-must-I-do question. Rather, Jesus explained first that eternal life is by simple faith alone, not merit. Then He proceeded to lay out the demands of discipleship.

#### ***Strengths of Position***

- Christ did not answer the rich ruler's initial question as asked; rather He corrected the ruler's erroneous view of works as a means of gaining eternal life to "trusting" God by faith alone.
- Christ pointed out that the wealthy young ruler lacked salvation.
- Entering the kingdom is equivalent to entering eternal life.
- Continued the childlike trust theme into the rich-ruler context.
- Accounts begin and end with "eternal life" emphasis (Matt., Mark, and Luke).

#### ***Weaknesses of Position***

- No gospel, as in John 3:16, is presented to either the rich ruler or the lawyer
- Emphasizes salvation through childlike faith for eternal life.
- Deemphasizes the requirements in texts regarding discipleship.
- The "go, sell, give; come, follow" instructions are one-directional in a linear fashion.
- Does not address why Jesus answered a salvation question with a discipleship answer.



**View Four**  
**Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life,  
Redirected to Pursue an Enriched Life**

In this view the rich ruler is an unbeliever pursuing eternal life, but is redirected to experience a full life now. Jesus does not answer the rich ruler's what-must-I-do question to obtain eternal life. Rather, Christ's response addressed an enriched life in the present that comes from obedience by those who are already believers. Jesus answered both the rich ruler and the lawyer in the same manner.

***Strengths of Position***

- Christ does not answer the rich ruler's initial question as asked, but instead corrects his faulty belief that eternal life is gained by works, pointing out that keeping the Law brings a richer life in the present. In the process, both the rich ruler and the lawyer face their own self-righteousness and necessity to trust God.
- Distinguishes the progression of the passage from "go, sell, give" salvation issue to "come, follow" discipleship issue.
- Christ indicated that the wealthy young ruler lacked salvation.
- Enriched or abundant living in Old and New Testaments is based first on saving faith and then on obeying God's commands.
- Consistency in the lawyer and rich-ruler texts, since both asked identical questions.
- Continues the childlike trust theme into the rich-ruler context.
- Entering the kingdom is equivalent to entering eternal life.
- Account begins with "obtain eternal life" emphasis and ends with "inherit eternal life" emphasis (Matt.).

***Weaknesses of Position***

- Christ answered a salvation question with both a salvation and a discipleship answer.
- No gospel, as in John 3:16, is presented to either the rich ruler or the lawyer.
- Assumes both the rich ruler and lawyer would understand Christ's line of reason in guiding them to the truth.

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### Choosing Wisely

These four major views present the facts relative to the four different interpretations. A summary of these interpretations by issue is shown in the following chart, *Major Interpretations*. One or none is correct. We can say with certainty that at least three of the views are inaccurate and unbiblical. The present author believes the fourth view is the correct interpretation—an unbeliever is pursuing eternal life, but is redirected by Christ to look to an enriched life now. This belief is based on a careful study of all four. You too must study and decide.

Nevertheless your choice regarding the rich-young-ruler text will not be without a ripple effect on other passages of Scripture. The following chapters will address the exchanged-life paradox from Matthew 16; Mark 8; and Luke 9. We will consider how these four rich-young-ruler views deal with the exchanged-life paradox. Remember, we are searching for the right wall to lean our ladders. You will begin to see why a particular theological mindset will affect the viewpoint you hold regarding a specific text, which in turn will impact all other interpretations.

MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS RICH YOUNG RULER PASSAGES				
Issue	Believer Pursuing Rewards by Works	Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life by Works	Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life by Trust	Unbeliever Pursuing Eternal Life Redirected
1	Believer	Unbeliever	Unbeliever	Unbeliever
2	Works (for rewards)	Works (for eternal life)	Works (for eternal life)	Works (for rewards)
3	Inheriting Rewards	Entering the Kingdom	Entering the Kingdom	Entering the Kingdom
4	Inheriting the Kingdom (rewards)	Entering Eternal Life (salvation)	Entering Eternal Life (salvation)	Entering Eternal Life (salvation)
5	God's Goodness	God's Goodness	God's Goodness	God's Goodness
6	Abundant	Eternal	Eternal	Eternal & Abundant
7	One-directional (for discipleship)	One-directional (for salvation)	One-directional (for salvation)	Two-directional (for salvation and discipleship)
8	Rewards (evidence-of-maturity)	Eternal Life (proof-of-life)	Eternal Life (proof-of-life)	Rewards (evidence-of-maturity)
9	Men (by works)	God (through faith)	God (through faith)	God (through faith)
10	Compensation (for obedience)	Heaven (eternal destiny)	Heaven (eternal destiny)	Compensation (for obedience)

## CHOOSE TO LIVE

### *Chapter 10, NOTES*

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1. Gary T. Whipple, *Shock and Surprise Beyond the Rapture* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle, 2003), 150-52.

Whipple counters with a distinction between “seeing” and “entering” the kingdom from John 3:3-5.