

## Lesson 2: Law and Gospel

“Consequently, in order to show that God will not have this commandment taken lightly but will strictly watch over it, he has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise.”

—Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: Preface

Thesis:  
The Bible’s two main ideas are those of Law and Gospel.

Key question:  
How can I know I have eternal life?

Catechism:  
Sverdrup’s Questions 10-17, 103-117

Accompanying Bible Story:  
Matthew 19:16-26 – The Young Rich Man

My questions:

The young man who came to Jesus with the question “What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” was rich. People in Jesus’ time thought being rich meant you were being rewarded for being a good person. We don’t know, then, if the man was trying to trick Jesus with his question or if he really was worried about his salvation.

Jesus told the young man to obey the commandments. The man probably knew what Jesus meant, but he asked which ones anyway. So Jesus listed off some of the commandments ending with a summary, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” The young man told Jesus he had kept all the commandments, so Jesus tested him. Jesus told the young man that his obedience would be complete if he sold all his possessions and gave the money to the poor. The young man went away grieved, very sad, because he was very wealthy. It seems he was not willing to give up all that he had to be saved.

To explain the situation to His disciples, Jesus told them it was very hard for rich people to be saved, harder even than it was for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The disciples, surprised by this teaching, wondered how anyone could be saved.

Jesus’ answer is one of the most beautiful and important truths of Scripture: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

We commonly divide the Bible into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. A more important way to divide the Bible, though, is into two parts called Law and Gospel. Both the Law and the Gospel can be found everywhere in the Bible.

The story of the rich young man has both Law and Gospel.

The Law part is the commandments and Jesus’ command to sell all he had and give the money to the poor. These are the requirements necessary to have eternal life, to be saved. The rich young man said he had done all the things in the law; but when he was asked to give up his most prized possessions, the possessions that had become his god, he was not willing to do it. He could not even keep the first commandment to have no other gods. In fact, none of us is able to do what God requires for our salvation, which is why Jesus said it is impossible for us.

The Gospel, or good news, is found in Jesus’ last words in our story. The good news is that God has done everything necessary for us. With us it is impossible; but for God, all things, especially our salvation, are possible.

\* Read Romans 3:23.

What is true about every human?

Was it possible for the rich young man to keep all the commandments? Why or why not?

Is this Law or Gospel?

\* Read Romans 6:23.

What would happen to the rich young man because he could not be obedient to the commandments?

How could the rich young man be saved?

Which part of this verse is Law?

Which part of this verse is Gospel?

\* Read John 3:16.

What did God do to give the rich young man eternal life?

What could the rich young man have done to have eternal life?

Is this Law or Gospel?

\* Read John 3:3.

What had to happen to the rich young man for him to have eternal life?

Is this Law or Gospel?

\* Read 1 John 5:12

How could the rich young man have known that he had eternal life?

We don't know if the rich young man ever came back to Jesus or if he ever got a chance to hear the Gospel in a way that he understood it. It is nice to think that maybe he did. But as the story ends, and from what we do know, why did he not have eternal life?

Which part of this verse is Law?

Which part of this verse is Gospel?

The story of the rich young man is really our story. We may not be rich, but we are all human and all need to hear both the Law and the Gospel. Go back through the five verses we just read and answer the questions about yourself.

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What did I learn in this lesson (three or four sentences)?