

ICON: THE RICH YOUNG RULER

RESOURCE 1.4



Egg tempera on wood,, Edinburg, Scotland, August, 2015

Commissioned the summer of 2015 by Charles LaFond, this icon of Jesus' encounter with the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17–22) was developed and written by noted Scot iconographer Katherine Sanders. Wildflowers native to Colorado populate the ground at Jesus' feet, recalling our deliverance from bondage: "He brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock." (Deut. 8:11–20). The icon captures the moment Jesus ceases to look at the lavishly dressed young ruler and begins to see him ("Jesus, looking straight at him, warmed to him." Mark 10:17–22).

¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'[a]" ²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

In this icon, Jesus is dressed in the standard red undergarment signifying His pre-created divinity, the cloak of blue symbolizing the humanity he puts on as Jesus. As with many depictions of Mary and the Beloved Disciple, the Rich Young Ruler is here shown enrobed in the humanity of blue/green, his cloak lined in red—a nod to his desire to be more like Jesus ("what must I do to inherit eternal life?"—v. 17).

Shown in arrested movement, Jesus seems annoyed. For his part, the Ruler is bent, humbly seeking answers, attentive to the "good teacher" but trapped in his wealth. The blue-green of his tunic resembles the color of the ocean near Edinburg, Scotland, where the iconographer lives. The gold background scenery suggests the window to divine connection that this or any icon offers.

This passage from Mark 10 is usually mistranslated. Once Jesus recovers from his exasperation, he softens because he sees the Young Ruler's desire to be helped: "Then Jesus, looking straight at him, warmed to him." Some versions are stronger, saying, "Jesus . . . loved him."

Raising money in the church means raising it especially from those who are rich—from people who have three meals each day, and much more besides. Raising money in the church means being compassionate with ourselves first (for being annoyed by wealth) and then being compassionate toward the rich, too, who are trying to make meaning of their lives, but need help—from us and from Jesus.

Financial development in faith-based institutions is a ministry. It is not a chore. Funding Christ's mission through the church is our responsibility in gratitude for all God has given us. To ask requires humility—more humility than is required by giving. Jesus, in this passage, learns an earthbound and human humility toward those trapped by their riches but yearning for God.

