

Rikko VOORBERG

When Asked to Do the Impossible:

Biblestudy and Reflection on the “Rich Young Man”

Rikko shared a shortened form of this reflection at the WSCF conference in Copenhagen as a part of the Reformed morning worship.

The Rich Young Man

⁶Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

¹⁸“Which ones?” the man inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹‘honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

²⁰“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

²¹Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²²When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 19:6-23 NIV

QUESTIONING

The rich young man comes to Jesus. He’s one of those guys that really try hard. He’s rich, has a lot of money, but isn’t satisfied. Something is wrong; his soul is not at peace. He comes to Jesus to find this peace. Then Jesus says things he already knows and does. Don’t

kill, don’t steal, etc. Do not do these things. But he already follows these commands. Is this all? He only must follow the basic rules? Jesus answers him, “you’re right, there’s more. Sell everything you have.” What? Auch... That hurts. It hurts a lot.

This always touched me. Look at the next sentence in this gospel. The young man walks away. He looks at Jesus and I imagine him thinking, “Let’s see, don’t kill, don’t steal. No problem. But this? I can’t sell everything—my car, my fridge, my Xbox.” He looks at Jesus and Jesus looks back. Jesus waits. Then the young man makes up his mind: “I can’t do this.” He turns around and walks away, shoulders hanging as if he’s been beaten. He’s tired and sad. He shouldn’t have asked. Uncertainty is better than this burning certainty inside. He’ll think twice before posing another question. Jesus asks impossible things.

Does Jesus ask impossible things? Yes, he does. Just read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter five and see what he asks: “Sell everything you have. Come and follow me.” Impossible.



Rikko VOORBERG in 26 years old, lives in the Netherlands, and studies at the Reformed University of Kampen. He loves to travel, to perform with his band and theater-group, and to host his local radio

show. His love of traveling (and meeting other cultures) and theology were combined in the recent WSCF conference in Copenhagen congress and he loved it!

FEARING

I am often afraid to ask anything because sometimes I know that the answer will be an impossible assignment. When I really dislike someone and I ask God what to do, I'm sure he'll tell me to love that person. And then? I don't want to love him, don't want to put my hate away. What if I talk to God about the fight I just had with my parents? If I discuss that with God, he might be so inconsiderate to say they are right. And then? It's impossible. And what about these things I don't want to do and still do? Sins—sexual sins, lying, bullying. How do I put these things in prayer?

The rich young man puts his question in prayer. Jesus answers and, too bad, the young man can't do it. Does this mean that the kingdom isn't for him? Is that what the story tells? No. There's another side to this story. This story poses a question. Namely, what to do if God asks the impossible. What should the young man have done?

WRESTLING

Well, he should have grabbed Jesus at his shoulders and shaken Him. He should have shouted, "Rabbi, you know I can't do that. Why do you ask? It's impossible. I even don't want to do that. Help! Please help!" That's where he should have put his questions. He shouldn't have considered his own possibilities in fulfilling this new assignment; he should have turned to Jesus. Then he would still have been in touch with God, with the one with unending possibilities.

But this young man wanted to clean up his own mess, as I often do myself. We often think by ourselves whether we can or cannot do what we are asked. If we can't, well, bad luck. I'm considering by myself whether I'm able

to stop bullying, or to admit that my parents were right, or to forgive my ex-girlfriend for cheating, and I conclude: No. I can't and I won't. Well then, no point in asking God. Sad and a bit demoralized, I walk away, my shoulders hanging, trying to hide what's really wrong.

SEEKING

This walking away and hiding is the source of the problem. Hiding has no purpose. God's close and knows you. He's so close. He knows how you wrestle with your own possibilities. Jesus knows why the

heart of the young men is restless. He gives on-the-spot advice and then He waits. Will he or she turn to Me for help? Will he or she surrender? God sees clearly that I have no intention to forgive, no intention to wrestle with sins. He knows I cannot do what He asks me to do.

But why give up as if I'm alone in this world? As if I have to fix everything myself? God is here. He sees my heart and wants to help. He asks me to surrender. That is scary and it even feels humiliating. But it's the only way, if I really want to deal with my own impossibilities. God not only sees right through me, but loves me unendingly. Well, that's amazing. The young man knew that. He called Jesus "Good." Jesus asks, "Are you serious? 'Cause if you really believe I'm good, then you will have to take my next advice too. The advice of giving up, the advice which comes close to forcing you to surrender."

"God, I really want to do it your way. I hate that guy, he's stupid and ignorant. But somehow I think that you like him. Not for what he does, but for who he is. And I want to do the impossible. To do what you ask me. I hate to be nice to him, so please, please help me"

God understands the impossibilities, and does not stop at the border of the possible. "With men things are impossible, with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).



Eva Marie ØSTERLIND

A Time Pocket

Living in the present,
in a time pocket,
now
combining past and future.

Tearing down all kinds
of walls and limits and borders
and so on.

Honesty.

Fighting for the action and case
instead of worldly and personal power.
Neutrality.

In reality,
it is good to work towards one united family
but also to be honest and realise
we are not always one happy family.

Personal testimony makes everything.

Europe must come together.

Time flies.
We will leave tomorrow.
Lost in time, lost in space.
Tearing.

Who am I to judge—still I have an opinion.

Eva ØSTERLIND, a Lutheran, was born in Copenhagen, Denmark on July 18, 1978. She graduated from the University of Copenhagen's Faculty of Theology in January 2007 with a Master's degree in Theology.

Currently she is in a seminar for pastoral training, and afterwards she may apply for a position in the Danish Folk Church. Furthermore, she is the newly elected chairperson for the Danish SCM, 'Ecumenical Youth.'

