

Mark 10:17-27 The Rich Young Ruler

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In Mark 10:13-16, people were bringing their little children to Jesus so that He might touch them and bless them, but His disciples rebuked them and told them to go away. When Jesus saw this He admonished His disciples and ordered them to bring the little children to Him, and Jesus reminded them that “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these”. I’m sure the disciples were initially confused by that statement, so Jesus explained Himself that, “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter at all”. If you believe that you are saved by your own good works, then you may not understand Jesus either. Yet knowing that we can only be saved by faith in the grace of God, we should understand His meaning—in order to be saved we must have childlike faith in Christ. A very young child cannot possibly have done good works or even obeyed the law in order to be saved, but their childlike faith in Jesus made for an excellent visual example of the type of complete trust and faith God expects us to have. Children have no clout, no rights, and no power to repay, yet Jesus blessed them, and acknowledged their salvation. Next, in the story of the rich young ruler, we will see that the well to-do man who claimed to obey the law will go away grieving because He proves that he has no faith other than faith in his “property”. As usual Jesus shocks His disciples by revealing that the rich man who they thought was saved is doomed while the little “rug rats” in the street were saved.

What Must I DO?

Before Jesus and His disciples could leave for their next journey, a man that we later learn is rich and respected ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him, indicating respect for Jesus as a man of God. The man asks Jesus an important question that reveals his wrong view of the means of salvation, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” I am certain that if Jesus said to give money, or feed the poor, or had given him a list of works to accomplish, he would have done it. I believe He was sincere, but sincerely wrong in his presumptions. The first thing Jesus did was to rebuke his idle flattery by saying “No one is good except God alone”. Jesus was rebuking the man’s inadequate view of the word “good”. In the theological realm, good must be defined in relation to God, so it is defined in an absolute sense, and not a relative sense. People may be relatively good or bad in relation to each other, but only God is absolutely perfectly good.

The Set-Up, Mark 10:19-21

Jesus knew this man’s problem. Being omniscient and knowing the man’s heart, Jesus knows the man’s idol is money (property). Therefore Jesus set him up to indict himself. Jesus quoted the commands that the man thinks he keeps in a religious sense, but which command did Jesus purposefully leave out? The first and most important command is Exodus 20:3 saying, “You shall have no other gods before Me”. Nevertheless, Jesus threw the softball commands out there that everyone thinks they can keep, “Don’t murder, don’t lie, don’t steal, and honor your parents”. This provokes the rich man to jump all over Jesus’ statement saying, “I have kept all these from my youth”. In excited triumph the man walks into the trap exclaiming, “High five, super, I’ve done all that, and I’m a good person”. I think the guy was suffering from self deception derived from his worldly success, but deep down he knew there was something lacking or else he never would have approached Jesus. Jesus looked at him and felt a love for him, which governs the interpretation of this story. Jesus surely loved Him and what Jesus said to him next was said out of love. Jesus then told the man just what he needed to hear—the truth. Love challenges him with the painful truth for his own good. This man needed radical surgery to save his life. In verse 21 Jesus told him what he lacked, and in doing so He was explaining the first commandment against idolatry. This man’s idol was his property and money, therefore he needed to give it up. Jesus said, “go and sell all your possessions and give away the money to the poor.” There is nothing wrong with possessions or money, but the love of money is idolatry (1 Timothy 6:10, Col.3:5).

Is Jesus’ command to the rich young ruler unreasonable? Is it for all rich people? No to both questions. It is not unreasonable to expect you to give up your idol—it is salvific. It is not necessary for those who don’t “love” money. The man’s reaction proved that Jesus was right. He was very sad because he had very much property and was not willing to give it up. The rich young ruler went away grieving, which revealed his true love. The man chose treasure on earth instead of treasure in heaven.

The Disciples Reaction, v.23-27

If I had of been there with the disciples, I admit that I might have said, “Hey wait a minute, wouldn’t it be pragmatic to ask the man to give some to their ministry and let him hang around?” I mean think of the good we could do with it, yet Jesus is interested only in the truth, and He knew that God doesn’t need any money, but the man needed to give it up. Then Jesus began teaching the disciples about idolatry and the love of stuff in verses 23-25. It is as if Jesus views wealth as an almost insurmountable obstacle that prevents people from following Jesus. It seems a lot of property can be toxic to the soul. Jesus said that it is very hard for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God, and then seeing their surprise, He repeated it for emphasis. In order to really blow their minds, Jesus made the famous statement, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God”. He could have just as easily said “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a sinner to enter the Kingdom of God”. One of the reasons the disciples were so shocked was that the prevalent religious teaching was that rich people were blessed by God with good fortune because they were righteous, but poor people were cursed because of sin. The metaphor Jesus used was excellent because the opening of a needle is the smallest opening imaginable, and the camel was the largest animal in Israel. The reaction of the disciples was shock at the hopelessness of it. Jesus’ statement corrected the false assumption in the rich man’s question, “What must I DO? He was wrong that a sinner could earn, deserve, or achieve eternal life—it is strictly the gift of God. The man had asked for something to do, but Jesus wisely revealed what he could not do—give up his true love. The disciples asked a great question, “Then who can be saved?” If this well respected wealthy healthy man could not merit salvation, then who can? Jesus then answered with the bottom line, the point of the whole story, “With man it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible”. How can we miss that salvation comes from a divine initiative, and not a human work. What man cannot do, God has done. The price man cannot pay, God has paid! Jesus came into the world to die on the cross to atone for our sins—this is the free gift of God, and we receive it only by faith.

I love Peter’s reaction, he takes it personal, and I can relate to it, “We left everything to follow you, so what will we get out of it?” (my paraphrase) Jesus gave the beautiful encouraging answer that whoever gives and sacrifices now for Christ will receive a hundred times as much now along with persecutions, but in the age to come eternal life in glory. I think the “hundred times as much now” refers to a rich fulfilling life in Christ and the gaining of the family of the body of Christ—the church. They might lose their earthly families, but gain a multitude of spiritual brothers and sisters. The eternal life they will receive has a value infinitely surpassing any loss on earth.

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