

Mark 10:17-34 ~ Scripture Verses

The Rich Young Man

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: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do 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.

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is [b] to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

²⁸ Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

²⁹ “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Jesus Again Predicts His Death

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ³³ “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, ³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

Footnotes:

a. Mark 10:19 – Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20

b. Mark 10:24 – Some manuscripts add: “ for those who trust in riches”

Mark 10:17-34 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What was the attitude of the wealthy man when he approached Jesus? What did he want Jesus to explain to him?
2. Why did Jesus say to the man, “no one is good—except God alone?”
3. Which of God’s commandments given through Moses did Jesus mention in verse 10:19?
4. What does the man’s answer tell us about his spiritual state? (10:20)
5. What attitude did Jesus have toward the rich man? What instructions did he give him? Was this command to the rich man meant for all Christians? (10:21)
6. Why could the man not obey Christ’s instructions? (10:22)
7. What did Jesus mean when he said, “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.” (10:25)
8. When the disciples were astonished and dismayed at Jesus’ words, how did he encourage them? (Mark 10:26-27, Romans 2:11, Ephesians 2:8-9)
9. What does Jesus expect you to leave behind to follow him? (10:29)
10. In return for following him, what does Jesus say you will receive? When does Jesus say you will receive these things? (10:29-30)
11. What did Jesus mean when he said, “many who are first will be last, and the last first?” (10:31, 9:35)
12. Why would the disciples be both astonished and afraid to go to Jerusalem? (Mark 10:32, John 11:5-16)
13. This is the third time Jesus told his disciples of his coming death and resurrection (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). What’s different in this prediction?
14. Jesus has now made this prediction to his disciples three times. Do you think it has started to sink in? What did they do about it?

Mark 10:17-34 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What was the attitude of the wealthy man when he approached Jesus? What did he want Jesus to explain to him?

He was humble, kneeling before Jesus. It seems that he had good intentions. On the other hand, asking, "what must I do?" suggests that he was thinking in terms of earning righteousness to merit eternal life and did not realize that it was a gift to be received free.

2. Why did Jesus say to the man, "no one is good—except God alone?"

Jesus was not denying his own goodness but was forcing the man to recognize that his only hope was in total reliance on God, who alone can give eternal life. He may also have been encouraging the young man to consider the full identity and nature of the one he was addressing.

3. Which of God's commandments given through Moses did Jesus mention in verse 10:19?

He mentioned at least five (#5-#9) and if the prohibition of fraud represented the tenth commandment (against covetousness), then Jesus here mentions all six commandments that prohibit wrong actions and attitudes against others

4. What does the man's answer tell us about his spiritual state? (10:20)

The man spoke sincerely, because for him keeping the law was a matter of scrupulous external conformity. The fact that the law also required inner obedience, which no one can fully satisfy, apparently escaped him completely. Paul speaks of having had a similar outlook before his conversion. He says in Philippians 3:6, "... as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." *Legalistic righteousness* is righteousness produced by using the law as an attempt to merit God's approval and blessing—a use of the law which Paul came to strongly oppose as contrary to the gospel itself.

The rich man's phrase, "since I was a boy" was probably a reference to the age of 13, when at his bar mitzvah a Jewish boy assumed personal responsibility for obeying the commandments and thus became a "son of the commandment(s)."

5. What attitude did Jesus have toward the rich man? What instructions did he give him? Was this command to the rich man meant for all Christians? (10:21)

Jesus recognized the man's earnestness. Jesus' response was not intended to shame the man by exposing failure to understand the spiritual depth of the

commandments but was an expression of genuine love.

The young man's primary problem was his wealth, and therefore Jesus' prescription was to rid him of it. There is no indication that Jesus' command to him to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor was meant for all Christians. It applies only to those who have the same spiritual problem.

Jesus' reference to *treasure in heaven* referred to the gift of eternal life, or salvation. This treasure is not to be earned by self-denial or the giving away of one's material goods but is to be received by following Jesus. In giving away his wealth, the young man would have removed the obstacle that kept him from trusting in and following Jesus.

6. Why could the man not obey Christ's instructions? (10:22, 4:19)

He went away sad, because he had great wealth, a tragic decision that reflected his greater love for possessions than for eternal life. Jesus mentioned this earlier when he explained the parable of seeds falling on four types of soil. In Mark 4:18-19, he said, ¹⁸ Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹ but the worries of this life, *the deceitfulness of wealth* and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. The deceitfulness is that prosperity tends to give one a false sense of self-sufficiency, security, and well-being. This man clearly was being deceived by his wealth to rank it above having treasure in heaven and eternal life.

7. What did Jesus mean when he said, "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." (10:25)

This was a proverb in common use among the Jews (using either a camel or elephant), and is still common among the Arabians, to express something that was impossible.

The camel was the largest animal found in the Holy Land. The vivid contrast between the largest animal and the smallest opening represents what, humanly speaking, is impossible. The oft-repeated suggestion that one of Jerusalem's gates or a rock formation was called the Needle's Eye is unsubstantiated.

8. When the disciples were astonished and dismayed at Jesus' words, how did he encourage them? (10:26-27, Romans 2:11, Ephesians 2:8-9)

Jesus told them, "With man this is impossible, but not with God." Salvation is totally the work of God. Every attempt to enter the kingdom on the basis of human achievement or merit is futile. Apart from the grace of God, no one can be saved.

So what these verses say are that:

- The rich man had to be willing to put God before his possessions.
- Only God could save him.

Rich people can be saved like anyone else if they do what God wants. Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy. And Paul said in Romans 2:11 that “God does not show favoritism.” Anyone can be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

9. What does Jesus expect you to leave behind to follow him? (10:29)

Pretty much everything. He specifically mentions home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, and fields (employment).

10. In return for following him, what does Jesus say you will receive? When does Jesus say you will receive these things? (10:29-30)

Jesus here implies that there will be reward both in this life and in the age to come. The reference to the rewards in this life indicate that, even though Christians have given up family and possessions now, they will experience a new family and a place in a new social community, i.e. in the church.

However, two features of this new existence are notable. The list in vs. 30 of people/things which will be repaid to the disciple largely repeats the list in vs. 29 of things surrendered; but (a) no ‘father’ reappears in v. 30, presumably because God is Father and cannot be duplicated; (b) v. 30 adds a reference to persecutions. The life of discipleship is a combination of promise and persecution, blessing and suffering. God takes nothing from a Christian without making multiplied restoration in a new and glorious form. Paradoxically, fellowship with other believers develops most deeply in persecution.

The final promise of ‘eternal life’ provides closure with the start of this whole passage in v. 17 and the question of the young man about what he should do to obtain eternal life.

Jesus says you will receive these blessings and persecutions both in the present age and the age to come. These two terms take in all of time from the fall of Adam and Eve to the eternal state. The present age is evil (Gal 1:4), but the coming righteous age will begin with the second coming of Christ and continue forever.

11. What did Jesus mean when he said, “many who are first will be last, and the last first?” (10:31, 9:35)

In this instance, Jesus is not focusing on pride and humility as he did when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest (Mark 9:33-35). Also, he says “*many* who are first...” which implies a different meaning. Matthew Henry opines that “the heavenly inheritance is not given as earthly ones are, but according to

God's pleasure. Let us not trust in promising appearances or outward profession. Others may, for no reason we can see, become eminent in faith and holiness."

There is much more to this simple verse and it is well worth meditating on, reading what commentators say, and discussing with others what it means.

12. Why would the disciples be both astonished and afraid to go to Jerusalem? (Mark 10:32, John 11:5-16)

John gives us more details in his gospel. It is around this time that Lazarus dies, and Jesus decides to go into Judea to raise him from the dead, even though that means walking into danger. Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." So they are perhaps surprised that Jesus is plunging on ahead and fearful for themselves.

John 11:5-16 – ⁵ Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

⁸ "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"

⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. ¹⁰ It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

¹² His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

¹⁶ Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

13. This is the third time Jesus told his disciples of his coming death and resurrection (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34). What's different in this prediction?

There are three new elements in the third prophecy in 10:32-34:

1. "We are going to Jerusalem," implies that these events are imminent. The prediction in 8:31 probably took place about six months previously; now the time has come.

2. He will be delivered to the Gentiles. Previously he told the disciples that he would be rejected by the Jewish authorities, and killed, but had not said that the Gentiles would do the killing. Had the Jews killed Jesus, he would have died by stoning. But the Roman authorities would kill him by crucifixion. For us, the difference may not seem too great; both would involve terrible suffering, and the

end result is identical. But to a Jew, the shame of dying suspended from the cross was much worse than stoning. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:13, “cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree.”

3. Jesus tells the disciples for the first time that he will be mocked, spit upon, and flogged. Remember, they have declared their faith that Jesus is the Son of God, their Messiah, their king. Yet now their king tells them he will be rejected, mocked, tortured, and killed.

14. Jesus has now made this prediction to his disciples three times. Do you think it has started to sink in? What did they do about it?

After three separate predictions, one would imagine that some of it would begin to sink in. Perhaps they wouldn't understand how it could happen and perhaps they wouldn't actually believe that it would happen, but in no way could they claim not to have been told about it.

With all of these predictions of death and suffering that would occur at the hands of political and religious leaders in Jerusalem, it's interesting that no one makes much of an effort to get away—or even to convince Jesus to try and find another path. Instead, they all just keep following along as if everything would turn out alright.

What they did next is the same thing they did the previous time and that is start fighting over who is the greatest. In a different way this time—but we'll get to that next week.

Mark 10:17-34 ~ Additional Discussion Questions

1. In what way can having money stop us from doing what God wants?
2. What (if anything) have you ever sacrificed for the sake of following Christ?
3. How can we prevent ourselves from allowing wealth or the desire for wealth to interfere with our Christianity?
4. What makes it difficult for anyone—rich *or* poor—to enter the kingdom of God?
5. What prevented some followers of Jesus from understanding his prediction of his own death and resurrection?
6. What difference does it make to you (if any) that Jesus correctly predicted everything that would happen to him?
7. When has God led you down a road that you felt uncomfortable or frightened about?
8. Why does a loving God allow so much suffering and evil in the world?
9. What is the role of doubt in your Christian faith? Is doubt about your faith generally a good thing or a bad thing? Why? How can it be a good thing?
10. R.H. Evans said, “I believe that doubt is a part of a vibrant, growing faith. I believe that doubt is necessary as it helps us identify those parts of our faith which are dying or dead.” What do you think?
11. Is there a point at which doubt begins to NOT be a good thing anymore?
12. Have you continued to remain angry toward another person in the last week? Why?

End your small group discussion by PRAYING for each other.