

59 Mark 10:17-31

Seeking Eternal Life

Text

The Word of the King 17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” 20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” 21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The Work of the King 23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” **The Worth of the Kingdom** 29 Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Introduction

It has been said that the greatest task of the church today is evangelizing her members. Why is that? Why all the warnings in scripture? Once a person has truly been justified, God is not going to give his sins back to him. So why all the warning passages? Are they for no reason?

This is the story of the rich young ruler. He has been so called because we see Mark that this man had great wealth. We learn from Matthew that he was a young man. And finally, doctor Luke informs us that he is a ruler. We have thus combined these three accounts together in the title, the rich, young, ruler.

There are three sections into which I have broken this morning's message. The Word of the King. The Work of the King. And the Worth of the Kingdom. In answer to the question, "Why are our

churches so weak and of such mixed company?" I answer along these lines: There is insufficient time spend in the Word of the King. There is therefore a misunderstanding of the necessity of the work of the King. These, taken together with an under-estimation of the worth of the kingdom, answer our question. I don't believe that this text was designed to answer this question as such, however, it does aim to explain to us where our thinking should dwell, and I submit to you that failure to live up to the example Christ set is the reason the body of Christ is in such an advanced state of atrophy.

The Word of the King

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Here is a young man that seems to have everything. He is young, he is still full of that youthful vigor. His life is yet before him. He is rich. Even at such a young age he has amassed great wealth for himself. He is obviously an industrious man. He is a ruler. Not only is he young and rich, he is a ruler! He has power to boot. And yet, this man feels that he is missing something. Even with all he has, it does not fill him. He senses his need and he runs to fall at the feet of Jesus, asking him for help.

This the question that every Christian hopes for is it not? This is not just a slow pitch, this man just walked up and set this ball on a tee. How eager we are for these kind of questions. "What must you do to inherit eternal life? Well..." we say as we crack our knuckles, "Just believe in Jesus and you will have eternal life." Case closed! We have just shared the gospel! We may congratulate ourselves and feel freedom for a while in case someone asks, "How many of you have shared the gospel in the last few months?" You can humbly raise your hand. You were able to share without getting out of your comfort zone. You could answer with authority. Everything about this is a perfect set-up isn't it?"

Let's see how Jesus responds. But now observe how our Master - the Divine Logos who took on flesh in order to seek and save that which is lost - observe how he answers this question.

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

What?! Why didn't he just say, "believe in me?" Look again at verse 17. "What must I do?" This man had a works-based view of eternal life. I don't want to press that too much because it is still a legitimate question to ask even if you do not have a work-based view, but in this case he did. John MacArthur states, "Jesus did not respond by immediately showing the way of salvation because the man was missing an essential quality. He lacked the sense of his own sinfulness, and Jesus had to point that out."

What is good? Jesus is not trying to deny any goodness in himself, rather he is challenging this man's flippant use of the word "good." To properly answer that question, the correct frame of reference needs to be established. God and his goodness is our starting point. This man addressed Christ in a very respectful way, but in order for this man to receive eternal life he must come to the end of himself. He must recognize that he is mortally bankrupt and then he must fall upon Christ as the way the truth and the life. But as long as this man's standard of goodness is on the horizontal level with man he will not come to the end of himself. The reference needs to be God himself.

19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

Jesus sets the standard. He takes the man back to the Ten Commandments. He takes him to the Word of God. He takes him to the Word of the King. God is the standard of goodness, and his word is the revelation of his goodness. Live up to the law. Why does Jesus give him the law? Because this man is still a child.

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. (Gal 3:21-23)

Jesus is teaching a works based salvation, nor is he dodging this man's question. He is answering it in the most direct way possible. Eternal life can only be had through the forgiveness of sins. If you want eternal life you must first know that you are a sinner in order to repent of your sins and rest in Christ. He was taking the man back to the law which should serve as a tutor to point us to Christ.

20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

It is obvious that this young man has not shifted his frame of reference. He is not yet contemplating goodness from God's perspective. He has not dwelt long on the word of the King.

21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

As a quick sidebar: Is this a command for us to sell everything and follow Jesus? No, not in so many words. Wealth was this man's vice and so Christ capitalized on it. But this does serve as a pattern for all who ask the same question. On this point, Gundry observes,

"That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command."¹

Jesus challenges this man's assessment. "You have kept all these commandments?" It seems that Jesus starts with the very first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." Go sell your god and come follow me. Repent of your sins and follow me. Repent of your idolatrous view of money and come follow me!"

22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Often it is the people who are poor who have a love of money. They fantasize about it.

The Work of the King

An Impossible Salvation: *23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God."*

1. Gundry, *Matthew*, 388

Here was the perfect candidate for a member of their group! This man was affluent, pious, humble, sincere, eager, everything that one could hope for in a church member. And Jesus more or less just turned the man away! The disciples jaws were probably on the floor when they saw the way Jesus spoke to this man. Jesus was not rude, but he sure wasn't inviting.

They no doubt would have said something when they had a chance to gather their wits, but Jesus gives them no opportunity. He responds to what they must be thinking, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples are amazed!

Jesus is just not content to let this go so he repeats in even stronger terms, "Children, how difficult it is 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 person to enter the kingdom of God." And at this they were exceedingly astonished!

26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

With man it is impossible. 1 Cor 2:14, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." Romans 8:7-8 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." With man it is impossible.

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5)

With man it is impossible "No one can come to me" But for God all things are possible with God, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."

The Worth of the Kingdom

28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

You have to love Peter. Jesus challenges this man to leave everything and to come follow him. When he fails to do so Jesus talks about how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom. The Peter pipes up, "We left everything!" Yes Peter, you did, and whose work was that, your own or God's?

29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Let's unpack a bit what Jesus is saying here. At a broad level Jesus is advocating blessings that result from kingdom membership. These blessings are found both in this age and in the age to come. The blessings of the age to come make sense and I need not expound too much on them at this time, but the blessings of this age are not quite as obvious.

First, observe the subjects of Jesus' claim. He starts out saying "there is no one" and finishes with "who will not receive a hundred fold in this time." Jesus restricts those who will receive one hundred fold to a certain group, namely, those who have "left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel." This is not something that a do-nothing, sacrifice-nothing Christian can claim. You cannot send in \$5 to your favorite T.V. evangelist and expect to get back \$500. As much as the health and wealth crowd would like to co-opt this verse, it cannot be twisted to support such uses.

Second, observe the blessings mentioned, "houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands." So if you leave your mom for the sake of the gospel you are going to receive 100 mothers? Obviously not. This is not to be taken literally. In Mark chapter three Jesus was teaching when his family came to take charge of him. It seems that they had a genuine concern for his well-being and they desired to take charge of him and bring him back home. But the door is blocked on account of all the people. Starting in vs 32, "And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.' 33 And he answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' 34 And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.'"

So when he says that whoever leaves sisters, brothers, mothers for his sake will receive in this time 100-fold mothers and brothers and sisters, he is referencing believers. Jesus has redefined family. The relationship you have with other believers, because of your unity in Christ, becomes a more significant relationship than that of family alone. Jesus was speaking more of the spiritual blessings that we have in him and through him.

In case someone were to try to twist this passage to be a health and wealth proclamation, look at the last item in that list: houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, lands, with persecutions! Jesus does not promise the good life now, if by that you mean a life without persecutions. He does not promise a trial free life. He does not promise a problem free life. He does not promise a life free of sorrow, free of pain, free of suffering, free of persecutions. It can be a life of joy and fullness, but not in a worldly sense.

Beyond the blessings of this life, there is eternal life in the age to come. Paul states, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:18-19). John in Revelation says, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'" 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

Dear friends, it is worth it! This kingdom is worth the sacrifice. It is worth the attending persecution. Here is a question for you, "Why didn't Jesus explain all of this to the man at the beginning?" When the man started to go away sad because of his great wealth, why didn't Jesus stop him in his tracks and say, "Wait! This is worth the sacrifice. It is unending bliss. Wait, you don't understand, if you give up your money, you will have untold riches!" This man sought eternal life, but he did not seek God. He yearned for the blessing, but he did not yearn for God.

The sad truth is, if God is not your magnificent obsession, neither will you have the blessings. Look at the life of David. "As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you!" God was his everything. David had all kinds of trials and stresses and persecution, but the Psalms are full of song that flowed from a heart raptured by God. If Christ is not your treasure, then when you are in prison you will say, "This sucks! This is terrible and cold and uncomfortable." And you will not sing to God as Paul and Silas. If Christ is not your everything, then you will not go away rejoicing that you were beaten for the sake of the gospel.
Make God everything!