

THE POOR, YOUNG RULER

Mark 10:17-31

Many of you have probably heard in the news by now that Elon Musk (the Tesla and space engineer guy) just surpassed Jeff Bezos (the Amazon guy) as the richest person in the world. And just imagine being one of them, having the ability to buy whatever you want in this world. If you want it, you can have it. Multiple homes, multiple cars... the nicest everything. But now imagine being one of them and not having Jesus. It really changes things doesn't it? Because the reality is you can have everything in this world but if you don't have Jesus, what's the point? As a pastoral acquaintance of mine said recently, "Who cares? What difference does it make in light of eternity?"

One of the realities of life in this world is that you can look filthy rich and be dirt poor and you can look dirt poor but if you have Jesus, you're really filthy rich both here and now, and in the age to come. That's really what we're going to talk about today. The text that we are in is traditionally known as "*The Rich, Young Ruler*" but as we're going to see, he is anything but rich according to God's definition. A better title would be "*The Poor, Young Ruler*" because if he doesn't follow Jesus and that's what this gospel of Mark is all about: follow, disciple, surrender, and serve.

Mark 10:17-31

"As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 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.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Peter began to say to Him, "Behold we have left everything and followed You." 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 farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

Let's remember where Jesus is at. He is on his final journey to Jerusalem and on the east side of the Jordan River in Perea. He is getting ready to take up His cross and teaching us that we should do the same.

I. THE YOUNG RULER ASK JESUS A QUESTION. (V. 17)

As Jesus is walking along this man actually runs up to Jesus and kneels before Him. That tells us a couple of things about him. Let's note several things about this man. For one,

- **This man is young:** “a man ran up to Him.” Old people don't run! He did. In all seriousness, though Matthew 19, a parallel account, specifically calls him “young” (Matt. 19:20, 22).
- **This man is earnest:** he “knelt before” Jesus. The kneeling expresses earnestness.
- **This man is a ruler:** of some kind according to Luke 18:18, another parallel account. Many think this man may have been a member of the Sanhedrin or a synagogue rulerⁱ, which would have been like the pastor. In any case, he had oversight of some kind.
- **This man is responsible and zealous:** You might even say **meticulous**. Jesus says keep these commands and he says, “I have kept all these things from my youth up.” This is the kind of man who wouldn't miss a beat. He's sharp. He's diligent. Like one man said, he returned every phone call and nothing was overlooked. Responsible. Moral. Active in the community. He's a good person in anyone's estimation, going above and beyond the rest. He's of leadership quality.
- **This man is rich & prestigious:** “he was one who owned much property.” And according to the contemporary views of his day, wealth was seen as a sign of God's blessing. Many have that same idea today. That's why the disciples are amazed that Jesus says it's hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. They thought, like prosperity gospel preachers today, that if you're healthy and wealthy, you've got God's favor! This reveals that's not always the case.
- **This man is loved:** “Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him” You have to remember that as we go through this exchange between him and Jesus. Whatever Jesus says, it is because He loves the man. He wants what is best for the man and though His words cut painfully like a knife, revealing his sin, it's the cut of scalpel that's doing a life-saving heart surgery.
- **Lastly, notice this man is genuinely concerned,** and about the most important question one can ask in life: “*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*”

Even though this man had it all – he had risen to the top by being responsible and making wise decisions and working hard and living a moral life, get this: ***he still doesn't have rest in his soul.*** He knew something still wasn't right between him and God but he didn't know what. Matthew reveals, that he said, “What am I still lacking?” It's like saying, “What am I missing? Why is there still this empty void in my heart and life?” And maybe that describes you too. You were born and raised in the church. Been a faithful attendee since 9 months before you were born. You've been baptized. You've tithed. You've volunteered. You've never cheated on your taxes. You've been faithful to those around you. You do your “good deed for the day” every day. You keep commands. In comparison to some others, you're a good person.

And when you ask this question, you're really being honest and open about your life like this man is. Compared to others, you are a pretty good person. You've never done anything worthy of prison time. Most of the people on the street would say the same thing. If you asked them, “Are you going to heaven?” They would likely respond, “I don't really know but I think so. I mean, I'm a pretty good person.” That's what this man is saying and Jesus doesn't condemn or dog him for it. He really wants to know, “What is it that I'm missing?” Well, Jesus starts to show him that he's using the wrong comparison chart if he's comparing himself to other people, for one.

II. **JESUS' RESPONDS TO THE YOUNG MAN. (V.18)**

When the man greets Him with, “Good Teacher,” Jesus asks Him, “Why do you call Me good?” And it seems that this man would’ve understood what Jesus meant by this because one of the names for God that rabbis used was “The Good One”. So Jesus is trying to direct the man’s focus back to God. In stead of comparing yourself to others, you’ve got to compare yourself to God. The Greek word for good used there is *agathos*, which refers to **intrinsic goodness**. God is good in His very being – it’s who He is. “*Why do call Me good if only God is agathos?*”

And the man’s response is going to tell Jesus and us a few things about where he’s at spiritually.

1. Does this man really understand who Jesus is?

That Jesus is God? If He did, he would’ve answered his own question. He’s smart. He’s waiting on the Messiah and should’ve known that if Jesus is the One, then he should follow Him. When Jesus asks this question, by the way, He is not denying that He is God or that He is good because He is both – He is challenging this man’s view of who He is and His superficial idea of goodness.ⁱⁱ

Jesus understand that this man’s standard of goodness is far too low and He’s going to lift it! It’s just what He did on the sermon on the mount – whoever lusts is an adulterer (Matt. 5:31-32). Whoever hates is a murderer. Like many, he has a superficial view of the Law and sin. He was missing the depth of the Law and of sin. First, we look at the depth of sin.

2. Does this man understand his own sin nature and lack of goodness?

This young man doesn’t understand **absolute goodness and his lack of it**. He’s still trying to be good, but what he needs to understand is that he isn’t good! That his goodness is actually getting in the way of his receiving the kingdom of God. He needs to see that all of his greatest goodness falls short of the glory of God by infinitude. Why? Because only God is Truly and Wholly Good. He is the fixed definition of good. The Absolute that everyone else must be compared too.

❖ **God is the Absolute Good and the standard for goodness.**

Our goodness can’t qualify us for heaven because God is perfectly good and being in His presence requires us to be perfect as well. That’s why Jesus says to him to keep these commands in verse 19 which make up the second half, or what they call the second table, of the ten commandments. These are all commands that deal with our relationship to others – do not murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, defraud, honor your father and mother. Jesus says, “If you wish to enter life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17).

What was Jesus saying? That if you keep the commandments of God, you’ll have eternal life? Yes... *but in theory*.ⁱⁱⁱ If you keep the commands of God perfectly, *you can*. There’s only one little problem – *you can’t* keep the commands of God perfectly! No one ever has or can or ever will!... other than Jesus Christ of course. But Jesus is God and never sinned. He didn’t have a sin nature. But us, because we’re all descendants of Adam, we’re born with a sin nature.

If we could ever be good enough to enter heaven, and dwell in God’s perfect holiness and righteousness and goodness, Christ didn’t need to die for us. Perfect goodness is a pre-requisite for heaven and **since we’re all born with a sin nature, our chances of entering on our own merits and good behavior is impossible – like a camel being threaded through a needle!** What we’re really talking about here is biblical anthropology.

❖ **Biblical anthropology: Man is born with an inherent sin nature and as a result, it’s impossible for us to save ourselves.**

A literal camel can't be threaded through a literal needle any more than you can save yourself. It just can't happen because man can never be good enough. And a rich man won't give his riches in exchange to follow Jesus except by the gracious working of the Spirit of God. But many "Bible teachers" today, dating all the way back to **Pelagius** in the 3rd century have taught that we're all born basically good (**Pelagianism**). It's the same position as modern psychology. And it's one of the greatest lies people believe today and why so many people suffer. They think they're basically good but they're actually sinners and if you don't diagnose the problem right, you can't solve the problem. But if we'll let the Bible give us our anthropology, we must openly admit, "*I really am not good. I do things and think things all the time that are not good. I have a sin nature that I admit I cannot control on my own.*"

Isaiah goes so far as to say that all of our righteousness, our best "goodnesses" are like filthy rags to God and in comparison to Him.

Isaiah 64:6

"For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our wrongdoings, like the wind, take us away."

If that's true, that means every good work done to try and earn salvation, is actually working against us.

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

By chapter 3 in Romans, Paul has made the point that the worst sinner, the upright moralist, and the religious zealot all fall short. If this is the reality, we have to ask, "*Is there hope?*" And the answer is a definite YES.

Romans 3:23 extended,

"For all fall short of the glory of God,
being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins, our sin debt has been paid and extended to us, but we must repent of our sin and trust in Him. If you're here or listening to this today and you sense like this young man that something just isn't right between you and God, that is the answer.

What this man's problem was and what are many peoples' problem today is that they don't understand their utter hopelessness to save themselves and so they keep trying to be good enough, and then the "goodness" is what actually gets in the way of them entering the kingdom of God. You've got to learn to see yourself as a helpless sinner who can only be saved by grace. Do you see how this is such a dramatic contrast to the children we discussed last week? Children have nothing to offer and adults have so much to offer that it gets in the way.

The third reality Jesus wants this man to understand is the purpose of the Law.

3. Does this man understand the purpose of the Law?

The purpose of the Law is **to reveal God's character and reveal our sin**. To prove God holy and us not.

Romans 7:12

"The Law is holy, and the commandment holy and righteous and good."

And you'll have to read Romans 7 later if this is somewhat foreign to you, but this is the reason Paul said the Law killed him because it is good and he is not. But that's okay he said, because he was meant to die to it and be married to Christ and bear fruit for God through Christ (7:1-6). The Law, in Galatians he said, was a tutor that leads us to Christ. It's like an x-ray machine that can reveal our faults but can't fix us.

Romans 7:13-14

"Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold into bondage to sin."

Romans 7:24-25

"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

It's a funny reality for us but the only way to be set free and experience life, real eternal life, is through grace. To stop trying to be righteous enough and accept the gift of righteousness offered in Christ. Why did God do it that way? Well, for one, grace removes the pride of sin that says I'll do it on my own without God. That was the problem from the beginning. Adam and Eve tried to do things their way. The Gospel forces us to rely on God and understand life only comes from Him. It also keep us from being like this young ruler who is only keeping the commandments on an external basis for himself rather than out of love for God! And if it's true that in Christ, you have God and eternal life, you don't have to live the me-mindset all the time where all you think about your performance. People who are stuck in a works-based salvation mindset are naval officers.

Because that's what this young man's problem was. In everything he did, it was really about him. He's keeping. He's doing. He's earning. And Jesus eventually puts His finger on this young man's problem by saying "Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor." Jesus wanted him to realize, *"Friend I know you've been very zealous and tried hard, but you've broken commandment number one and all the rest if you've broken that one."*

He'd broken the 1st commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." His unwillingness to give up his wealth and follow Jesus may have just saved this man's life as he contemplated it further. He may not have literally followed Jesus but he now realized he wasn't perfect. And Jesus gave him this bad news in love because He knows this man is bound for heartache in this life and the next life because when you live for possessions, you tend to end up lonely, depressed, and empty. You will experience grief and loss for placing anything ahead of Jesus.^{iv}

And this is what it's going to be like in the last days. On Paul's list of what the last days are going to be like before Jesus returns to get us, the first two things he says to describe the people of that

generation is that they'll be **lovers of self** and **lovers of money** (2 Tim. 3:1-2). And that's exactly what Satan would have us love! He wants us to live for ourselves and to live for anything that's not Jesus, making us fruitless, barren, Christians. Anything to steal, kill and destroy us.

John 10:9-10

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

As long as we live for ourselves and our things, we won't know that life, at least experientially. You have to let go of whatever it is you're putting ahead of Him. You have to die to your agenda and your own story and start living for His great, overarching redemptive story. Just before He went to the cross, He said this:

John 12:24

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."

Jesus was obviously speaking of His death burial and resurrection here. But for us as well, if we insist on having life our way and refusing to die to us and live for Him, we won't bear fruit. If you insist on being first, you'll be last.

❖ **In God's kingdom, servants rule. (Mk. 10:42-45)**

And servants are honored. That's where the longing for our souls is going to be satisfied. Not in getting and gaining more for me, but when we die and let Him live through us. When we stop asking, "What do I want to do?" and ask, "What does He want me to do?". And there's great reward for that.

III. JESUS' REASSURES THE DISCIPLES OF GREAT REWARD FOR FOLLOWING HIM. (VV. 28-31)

In response to Peter's statement "Behold we've left everything and followed You," Jesus says,

Verses 28-31

"Truly I say to you, there is *there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, **for My sake and for the gospel's sake**, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.*
But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

From this I want to make a point right off the bat. Jesus doesn't always call each one of us to leave our homes and sell everything. He might call you to follow Him as a doctor or farmer or rancher or businessman or whatever. Whatever He calls you to, just do it for the Lord. But for some of us, He may really call us away from these things. But it doesn't mean those things are always bad because He replaces them in His way in His timing according to His will if you do. But think about this: *to see what He has in store for you, you have to let go of what you were previously holding onto*. Does that make sense? *This is something that people often miss out on – seeing God provide!* They love their stuff and

their money so much that they won't give and when they don't give, they don't see Him provide. It really is more blessed to give than receive.

Also notice as well from this, in light of recent sermons, **what is omitted**: What is missing in that list? Spouses. You've got brothers and sister and fathers and mothers and children but not spouses because **marriage is an indissoluble covenant in God's eyes**. You don't have to leave your spouse to follow God, except maybe for a time on occasion. Even Peter and the apostles had wives that they took along with them, and if they had wives, they probably had children too.

When it says you might have to leave children, these are not small children but grown, adult children. For years during the American missionary explosion in the 19th century, many children of missionaries were put in boarding schools for months and years while their parents served and many of the children were exasperated because of it.

Other than that, let's take away **two main points**:

1. There is reward for following Christ now, in this life.

In one way or another, the Lord Jesus Christ will compensate you. And I can speak for that one personally. If you leave a house, He'll bless you with another house. If you leave some family, He'll bless you with new family – just like you guys are to me! Family! Jesus is not kidding. If you'll trust Him enough to follow Him, you'll get to see Him provide and He'll bless your socks off. I've seen God provide in incredible ways.

But I like how He is also so realistic – “...along with persecutions” in verse 30. Just because there are rewards here, that doesn't mean there won't be times when the going gets tough. There are times when we will encounter persecution to various degrees. In fact, 2 Timothy says, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” That's part of living where Satan lives. We are soldiers behind enemy lines. It's to be expected. Mark tells us that Jesus added, “along with persecutions” but neither Matthew nor Luke did. So why did Mark? Because **he's writing to Christians in Rome undergoing Neronian persecution (Emperor Nero)** – some of the worst persecution Christians have ever seen.

But you know what's awesome? In Revelation when Jesus is writing to the 7 churches, when He writes to the heavily persecuted church of Smyrna, who had been through the wringer and literally robbed, Jesus says, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)!’” (Rev. 2:9). They looked dirt poor to the world, but in Christ they had infinite spiritual riches. And riches to come in heaven for their faithfulness.

2. There is rewards to come in eternal life.

We get to live forever with God on a New Heaven and New Earth. You can read about that in Revelation 21-22. And it's going to be awesome!

Just this week, my daughter was asking me about what's it's like in heaven. Is there grass? Is there trees? Water? Lakes? Candy? She had quite an extensive list of things she was concerned about! So I finally just said, “*Jaycee, whatever is good in this life, heaven will probably have it and it will be so much better. The grass really will be greener and the fruit of the tree of life juicier and tastier. It'll be the best fruit you've ever tasted. The water in the river of life will*”

have the perfect, crisp temperature and totally pure – it'll put even that expensive Fiji water to shame! Resurrected bodies will shine like the sun! I mean, there will be good things there that we don't even know about yet!" Not only that, we'll get to behold our God and dwell in His glorious presence forever and that my friends is worth living for. It's worth being dirt poor in this life to because we're filthy rich already in Christ and in the life to come. Who cares if you have everything this has to offer but you don't have the riches that are in Christ!

You know I can't help but finish today's sermon but by sharing what a friend of mine shared this week – missionary Josh Kuhn who visited us recently and who is right now in training at Ethnos 360 to take the gospel to unreached people groups in the jungles of the Brazil. He reminded me of a quote from the missionary Jim Elliot who gave his life trying to reach the Auca Indians in Ecuador with the gospel.

Jim Elliot said this – *"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*

Think about that and ask yourself, *"Am I really living for Christ? Or am I living for myself? If I am living for myself, am I really pleased with that? And will I be pleased with that in eternity?"* If not, I'd encourage you, do whatever you do for Christ. Live for Him and not the things of this world. And you young people like this young ruler in our text, consider giving your life for the sake of Christ of the sake of the gospel because it doesn't matter what you have in this life or how you live it if it's not lived for Jesus. If you feel like you just need to go out and try some of the things of this world first, I'm telling you you're bound for heartbreak. Trust Jesus and live for Him instead. Remain open to what He would call you to do.

ⁱ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 190.

ⁱⁱ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 2* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 270.

ⁱⁱⁱ Swindoll.

^{iv} Robert H. Stein, *Baker-Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 475.