

**The Memoirs of Peter  
The Rich, Young Ruler (Part 2)**

Mark 10:17-27

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Well, I invite you to take your Bibles and turn again to one of the most remarkable accounts from the life of Christ, the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10. We learn so much, about the gospel, about our Lord's heart for people, about the difficulty of salvation, in this passage. It really is a watershed passage in Mark's Gospel and I think it's specifically placed here to call Mark's readers to take a look at their own commitment to Jesus Christ. Are they willing to turn from everything else and embrace Christ alone?

As I look at this passage and I think about what's taught here, I find a clear antithesis between what Mark describes in this passage, what our Lord has to say, and so much of what's a part of American Christianity. In fact, when I think about what we read in Mark 10, my mind goes to the seeker sensitive movement that's so much a part of, still, of American Christianity and, of course, the undisputed voice in that community still, is Rick Warren. Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, largely remains the standard in American Christianity on how to reach the seekers or the unchurched.

Now, let me say that while I totally disagree with the book, it's very likely that Rick Warren is a brother in Christ and you have to keep both of those things separate. I've read the book a couple of times. I find it interesting that in a 400 page book primarily about helping churches reach seekers with the gospel there is no explanation of exactly what the gospel is. But Warren does mention his strategy of evangelism in the services that he holds. A couple of quotes stand out to me, I have a large collection of them on my computer, but these two stand out to me because they, specifically, are addressed by the passage that we're looking at tonight. Warren writes, "People crowded around Jesus because he met their needs, physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, and financial." He goes on, on that same page, to say, "It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart. The most likely place to start is with that person's felt needs."

That is completely antithetical to what we find in the passage we're examining together. In fact, based on the account we're examining here in Mark's Gospel, Jesus could not have been on staff at Saddleback Church. But in Saddleback's defense, He also would have flunked out most of evangelism 101 courses in most Christian colleges. Because Jesus was more concerned about genuine faith than the number of converts. He absolutely refused to lower the standards, the demands of discipleship, even when He was faced with the best candidate for salvation that He ever encountered in His entire ministry.

Jesus didn't fail because He didn't know the keys to this young man's heart. He didn't fail because He didn't understand his felt needs. Specifically, we'll see that Jesus didn't fail at all. He presented the clear demands of the gospel and it was this young man who failed to respond to those demands, the man we call the rich young ruler.

Let me remind you of, kind of, where we've been in this passage. Let me read for you Mark 10 beginning in verse 17,

As Jesus 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?" 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've 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."

The basic proposition that lies behind this passage is this, salvation is humanly impossible and can only be accomplished by a divine miracle of God's grace.

Now, as we've watched this remarkable account unfold we first met an apparent seeker. Jesus and His disciples are traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover, the last Passover, the Passover at which Jesus will be crucified. In just a few days will come the triumphal entry. They've arrived in the region of Perea, probably in the evening, after a full day's journey. Apparently they stayed there in the house of one of Jesus's followers and the next morning they get up and prepare to leave the house and continue their journey to Jerusalem. But as they're preparing to leave some parents brought their children to Jesus. And, over the disciples' protestations, Jesus blessed these children.

But before Jesus and His disciples can get out of town, they are approached by a man in, apparently, a desperate situation. Matthew tells us that he was a "young man." Luke calls him "a ruler." He was probably one of the rulers in the local synagogue, there in that town. So

here's a man somewhere between puberty and about 30 years of age in Jewish reckoning, who already at that young age has become very influential in his community. Only the leaders of the community were the rulers of the synagogue. It was more like a political position than anything else. And because of his financial wherewithal, because he was wealthy, because he had a genuine heart for spiritual things, to a certain extent, he quickly rose to authority and power. And he runs to find Jesus.

Look at verse 17, "As He was setting out 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?'" Matthew says he said, "'Teacher, what good things shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?'" This young man wants to know what he can do to ensure that he will be part of the final resurrection and everlasting life, an apparent seeker.

That brings us to Jesus's shocking answer. We looked at this last time. Jesus begins by confronting this man's flawed view of man and his sinfulness. Verse 18, "Jesus said, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.'" Jesus says, listen, no human being is good. You think I am a human being and you're calling Me good. No human being is good. God alone is good. Only God achieves the standard of moral goodness. No one but God, Jesus says, has ever met God's standard. There's no one else good by God's measure.

Then Jesus corrects his flawed view of salvation. Notice verse 19, "You know the commandments," and He lists five of the last six of the Ten Commandments. Essentially, the Second Law as it's called, the Second Table, I should say, of the Law, and then Jesus summarizes it all, according to Matthew, by saying, "'and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,'" quoting from Leviticus 19:18.

What is Jesus doing here? He is underscoring that the Moral Law of God still serves a purpose for unregenerate men and women. What do I mean by that? Well, by the Moral Law I mean the moral requirements that eternally reflect the character of God and are outlined in the Ten Commandments, those things that never change. It will never be acceptable to have a god in addition to or above the true God, it will never be acceptable to take God's name in vain, and so forth.

Now, according to the New Testament, the purposes of that Law are three. That Law awakens men's consciences to the knowledge of the truth. As Paul says in Romans 3, "by the Law comes the knowledge of sin." It drives them to Christ, Galatians 3, it becomes a tutor that tells them they need something other than their goodness, they don't measure up, and drives them to the need of Christ and grace, and it leaves those who refuse to repent without excuse and under the curse of the Law, that's Romans 3:19 and 20. Every mouth stopped when a person stands before God, because of the written Law, if they have the written Law, or the Law written on the conscience, Romans 2, they will be without excuse and under the curse of the Law. That's the purpose the Law serves.

In other words, every unbeliever is still under the Law. That unbeliever, the unbelievers in your world, in your family, in your life, they can either keep the Law perfectly and earn eternal life, which is an impossibility, they can fail to keep it perfectly and be judged and punished for every violation in Hell forever, or they can turn in faith and repentance to Christ, admitting their own inability and clinging solely to what Christ has accomplished. Those are the options. Jesus then is graciously forcing this young man to see just how desperately he needs the gospel.

Now, that brings us to the third part of the story. Let's call it the real barrier to salvation. We're going to get to what really is at the heart of the issue here. I want you to begin by noticing this man's response to Jesus quoting the Law. Jesus says, you need to keep the Law. He's holding up that standard, He's saying, let me tell you what you need to do if you're going to earn your own way to Heaven, here it is. Verse 20 is his response, "And he said to Him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.'" Matthew adds that he says, "what am I still lacking?"

Now, there's no indication that this rich young ruler wasn't sincere. In fact, there seems to be every indication that he is sincere. In a moment we're going to see that Jesus loves him, genuine and compassionately. Jesus never had that same tender reaction to the hypocritical Pharisees. I think this young man truly believed that he had kept them. But what's wrong with that response? Well, first of all, he doesn't have a true understanding of the spiritual nature of the Law. He doesn't understand that it's not enough just to keep the outside clean.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, you've been told *this*, and he interprets the Law externally. Let me tell you, it goes much deeper. You've been told that you shouldn't murder. Well, let me tell you, you shouldn't hate and you shouldn't use hateful words, and those can earn you Hell because it's a murderous heart that hates. Jesus said, you've heard that you shouldn't commit adultery. But it's not enough to stop with the external act, a man who looks upon a woman to lust after her in his heart has committed adultery with her already in his heart; he has the moral guilt of adultery before God.

The Law was very demanding and I can promise you, by God's standard of the Law this young man had not kept it. But he thinks he has because he doesn't have a true understanding of the Law. Nor does he have a true understanding of his own heart. I don't believe for a moment, I think he believes this, but I don't believe for a moment, for example, that this young man truly had never deceived or lied. In John 8 Jesus said, all unbelievers do the works of their father the Devil and that includes lying. So this young man is very confused. He's confused about what the Law is; he's confused about his own heart. He not only believed Jesus was good, even though he thought He was only a man, and he not only believed that other fallen men could be good by God's standard, he believed that he was already good, that he had almost arrived. "I've done all these things, what am I still lacking?"

By the way, his conscience is at work. Do you see this? Because he still feels, in spite of the fact that he believes he's kept the Law externally, he still doesn't sense that he has peace with

God. He still doesn't sense that he's actually going to participate in the final resurrection and enjoy eternal life. "What am I still lacking?" Something missing. For all of his confidence in his own performance, his conscience still told him that all was not right between him and God. I've done almost everything I need to do and I've done everything You just told me to do, Jesus, is there anything else?

Clearly, he's disappointed in Jesus's response. He had hoped for something more helpful than what Jesus says. He's already done all those things, he says, "from my youth." In other words, he's saying, from my bar mitzvah, from when I came to be a son of the Law, when I came to be a man in Jewish culture, I have done these things. You say, did he really believe that? Absolutely. First century Judaism believed you could actually keep the Law of God. Two authors, in a classic book on first century Judaism, write, "That a person possess the ability, without exception, to fulfill God's commandments, was so firmly rooted in the rabbis' teaching, that in all seriousness, they spoke of people who had kept the entire Torah from A to Z," or, actually more accurately in Hebrew, from Alef to Tav. They believed it. Think of another person who believed it. You remember Paul in Philippians 3:6, he says, when it came to external conformity to the Law, I was, what? Blameless.

This man's question assumes that his problem is a lack of knowledge. What must I do? What do I still lack? Tell me what it is I need to do so that I can do it. He was, in essence, saying, my real problem is a lack of knowledge of how to gain eternal life, because if I knew how, I would do it and I can do it. The real barrier keeping this man from eternal life is a much greater problem than knowledge and in Jesus's response Jesus diagnoses this man's real problem.

Look at verse 21, "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him." I love that. Again, as we saw this morning, the heart of Jesus in the Apostle Paul, we see it here, we see it exposed. The Greek word for look implies more than a quick glance. Jesus didn't just glance at the guy. It is rather a settled, piercing gaze of careful examination. Jesus, as it were, was peering into this young man's soul and He loved him. By the way, the word is *agape*. He loved him.

There are, just as an aside, there are some hyper-Calvinists who say that God doesn't love the non-elect, He loves only the elect. We believe that God loves all men, that He loves the elect with a special love, but He loves all men. They would say, no, God only loves the elect; He doesn't love the non-elect. By the way, Calvin himself didn't hold that position. Read what he has to say on John 3:16. And here, from the life of Christ, is a prime example of Jesus loving an unbeliever. And there's no indication this young man ever came to faith in Christ. And yet the Lord loved him.

Look at verse 21 again, "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, 'One thing you lack.'" Don't miss the irony of that statement. Here is a man who had never lacked anything his entire life, certainly not physically and financially, but even morally. From his perspective he had never lacked. Jesus says, there's something you lack. One thing you lack.

Matthew adds, “If you wish to be perfect.” Okay, you think you lack one thing, you want to be perfect, Jesus says, here it is, look at verse 21, “go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Now, folks, I can tell you right now, this man would have been shocked at that response, because the rabbis had never made such a harsh demand of this wealthy young man. He was taught that he ought to give alms, he ought to give to the poor out of his wealth, and he could do so sounding a trumpet before him like the Pharisees did. According to Alfred Edersheim, the great Jewish scholar, the rabbis taught that it was unlawful to give away all your possessions.

The maximum percentage, according to the Talmud, that a Jewish person was allowed to dedicate to the Lord was 20 percent, one fifth of their income. The reason for that was they didn't want them to be reduced to poverty and then not be able to help others was ostensibly the reason. But here Jesus demands that instead of 20 percent, this man sell everything and give all the profits to the poor. By the way, in another blow to the hyper-Calvinists, Jesus here extends a genuine gospel invitation to the non-elect, which is something the hyper-Calvinist denies.

Now, why does Jesus say this? Why does He say this to this young man? Well, let me tell you what He doesn't mean. Jesus's command does not mean that to become a Christian you and I must sell our possessions and give them to the poor. There are other wealthy followers of Jesus who are not reprimanded and who are not told to sell everything. A good example would be Joseph of Arimathea in whose tomb Jesus was buried. We're told he's very wealthy and there's no censure of him, there's no command to sell everything. There are other examples as well. I gave you several last time from the Old Testament, the patriarchs. So Jesus is not saying that.

Secondly, Jesus is not saying that poverty is spiritually superior to wealth. You know, today in American Christianity there is a growing part of what was called the emergent movement, or the emerging church, there are ascetics who take a vow of poverty, like monks used to do, and go live in the inner city with nothing but a few belongings, the shirt on their back, and they minister to the poor, and they think that that is more spiritual. Is that what the Scripture commands people to do? Look at 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy 6. This is important because, honestly, by the world's standards, I mean by the standard of everybody in the world, you look at the seven billion people on the planet, every person sitting in this room is wealthy by that standard. So what do we do? What should we do? Is Jesus saying we need to sell everything?

Notice what Paul tells Timothy to instruct the wealthy people in Ephesus, 1 Timothy 6:17, “Instruct those who are rich in this present world,” here it is, “not to be conceited,” don't think that they're the cause of their success. Tell them “not to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches.” Tell them not to trust their money and their portfolio, but instead put their trust in “God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” “Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,” that's what you should teach the rich, “storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that

which is life indeed.” That’s what you and I need to do with the wealth we have relative to the rest of the world, that’s Christ’s instruction to us. We need to examine our own lives against that passage. But Jesus is not saying that poverty is spiritually superior to wealth.

If it doesn’t mean that then what did Jesus’s command mean? It was, really this command was a call for two things and I want to look at both of these in detail. First of all, it was a call for true repentance and secondly, it was a call for faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Remember, this passage is about, back in verse 17, gaining eternal life. Verse 23, it’s about entering the kingdom spiritually. Verse 26, it’s about being saved. So we’re talking about salvation. We’re talking about coming into right relationship to God.

How does that happen? Well, you remember the very first sermon of Jesus that Mark recorded for us? Look back in Mark 1:14 it says, “after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of God.” And here’s what He said, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand,” the kingdom of God is here, the spiritual expression of the kingdom, you can be a part of my spiritual kingdom, and here’s how, “repent and believe in the gospel.” That message hasn’t changed. That is the very message Jesus is delivering to this rich young ruler, in different words.

Notice first, the call for true repentance. Verse 21, “go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Jesus here takes this man’s understanding of the Law much deeper, like He had already done in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells this man, and this is a real slap in this guy’s face, He says to him, you think you’ve kept the law, let me tell you something, you have broken both tables of the Law, the commands regarding God and the commands regarding man.

First of all, He says to him, essentially, you have failed to love your neighbor as yourself. He had not used his wealth for others in the same way he had used it for himself. Probably, in keeping with what the Pharisees taught, he had tithed his wealth. But apparently he hadn’t truly used his wealth, or tried to use it, for the good of the poor. So to evidence his repentance Jesus commands him to go, sell all of his real estate, liquidate all of his assets, and give the proceeds, the profits, to the poor. That will evidence that he is truly repentant and that will mean that he has treasure in heaven, where, Jesus says, moths and rust can’t destroy and thieves can’t steal. Jesus is, I think, by telling him to give to the poor, He is implying that this young man has not been generous in helping others with his wealth. He has done the bare minimum; he’s, sort of, just slipped by with just enough. So he certainly hasn’t loved his neighbor as himself, which is what Jesus told him in Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew’s account.

But, more than that, Jesus tells him, he has failed to keep the first part of the Ten Commandments, particularly the very first commandment. The First Commandment says, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” That is, instead of Me or in addition to Me. And wealth has become this man’s God. Our Lord already made this statement in the Sermon on the Mount,

Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters,” no slave can serve two different masters, “for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot be a slave to both God and wealth at the same time.” Jesus is telling this young man, not only have you not loved your neighbor as yourself, and I want you to go and sell everything and give it to the poor as a demonstration of your repentance, but you have allowed your wealth to become like God in your life.

By the way, Jesus doesn't always demand that we sell everything we have, but we must be willing. But I can tell you this, Jesus always demands that we give up whatever rivals there are for His affection, for our affection, I should say, for Him. You can't add Jesus to the shelf with your other gods. You can't have money and Jesus, wealth and Jesus, sex and Jesus, drugs and Jesus, a relationship that's more important to you than Jesus and Jesus. You can't have yourself as a god and Jesus, or whatever.

If you're not a Christian, ask yourself this question, what do I really worship? What's keeping me from truly following Jesus Christ? What has usurped the place of God in your life? If you want Jesus, He will demand that you repent, that you be willing to give up that thing, whatever it is, if you want to follow Him. When I was in India a number of years ago now, back in the 1990's, I had several discussions with Hindus who were very interested in talking about Jesus. In fact, they were very interested in adding Jesus to their shelf of idols.

Jesus doesn't come that way. If you want Him He will always demand that you tear down those idols. In fact, I can tell you this, in my experience, Jesus has a way of putting His finger on whatever the idol is and demanding that you be willing to give it up, just like He does with this young man. I've seen this time and time again and I've tried to practice this with people I'm talking with who are swaying back and forth on whether they're going to follow Jesus, is to make the cost clear. You want to follow Jesus? This has become an idol in your life and if you want Jesus, you've got to give up the idol. He's not going to let you have Him and something else too. This is a call for true repentance in this young man's life. Jesus doesn't demand we all sell everything we have. But He always demands that we give up whatever rivals there are for our affection.

There's a second part of this command, it is a call for faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Notice verse 21, “and come, follow Me.” You say, why doesn't Jesus tell this man to trust Him? That's exactly what He is telling him. He's saying, your trust right now is in wealth and riches; give it up “and come, follow Me.” Put your trust in Me. Jesus says to this young man, you've got to be willing to stake your eternity on Me and on My teaching. If you want Me to show you the way to eternal life, you must be willing to do whatever I tell you, follow Me, look to Me for eternal life, look to Me for your instruction. What He's really saying is, believe in Me as Savior and Lord.



I have to tell you, you know, I'm always amazed at our Lord. I'm amazed at His love and compassion, I'm amazed at so many things about Him, but I'm amazed in this context at His wisdom, because with a single practical command, think of everything Jesus showed this rich young ruler about himself. He showed him that he failed to love his neighbor as himself. He showed him that he'd fail to love God. He showed him that his wealth had become an idol that he served in the place of God, that he did not have a truly repentant heart even though he wanted eternal life. He showed him that he did not see the surpassing value of Christ like Paul eventually came to see; his wealth was more valuable than Christ. He showed him that he really did not have faith in Christ and He showed him that he was not willing to follow Jesus in love and obedience. One simple command stripped away this young man's spirituality and apparent desire to seek the truth, and showed him what he really was.

Look at this rich young ruler's tragic response, verse 22, "But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving." The Greek word for saddened is only used in one other place in the New Testament. It's used in Matthew 16:3 where it describes an approaching storm and the sky darkening. It's a really powerful picture. When this man heard what Jesus had to say, his face began to cloud over and to become like a storm, an approaching storm, "and he went away." Apparently there's no indication he said anything to Christ, he just walked off as suddenly as he came. "And he went away," we're told here, "grieving." Why? Verse 22 says, "for he was one who owned much property." The Greek word for property here is real estate, land. He had much real estate; he had much land. In the next verse Jesus uses another word that describes him as having a lot of money as well. Luke says, "he was extremely rich."

So here was a young man who had a lot of fixed assets, a lot of liquid assets, and he was extremely rich, "and he went away," because of that, "grieving." He didn't want to give up the idol in his life. It was more important to him than eternal life. It was more important to him than Jesus. You and I all know people who will not come to Christ and this is the issue. This is always the issue.

His response, by the way, showed Jesus had diagnosed his real spiritual problem. He wanted to serve two gods at the same time. The true God, he wanted eternal life, he wanted in, but he still wanted his other god as well. I love what James Edwards says, "A person who leads an exemplary life can still be an idolater." You know, people say to me, and I'm sure you've thought or seen people and thought, you know, he's such a good guy, he lives better than Christians live. Listen, if he's not coming to Christ in repentance and faith, he is an idolater, and it's that idolatry that keeps him from coming. There is something that is God in his life that he doesn't want to give up.

This is the only time in the gospels when an individual comes seeking Jesus and walks away grieving. Oh, they came often grieving and walked away joyful, but this is the only time that he comes seeking and leaves grieving. Why? Because of the real barrier to salvation, it's always

the real barrier, it's always the barrier, it is idolatry. Isn't that what Paul says in Romans 1 as he's laying out the problem with man? They've exchanged the true God for an idol of some kind.

As he walks away, Jesus turns to His disciples because there's a lesson for them in this encounter. And that brings us to the fourth part of this passage, Jesus's teaching on the impossibility of salvation. Look at verse 23, "Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples." So He's now, the young man's walking away, and apparently He turns and looks at His disciples and He's thinking about the application of this and how to drive this home to them, "And He said to His disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!'"

Wealth gets in the way of salvation, Jesus says. How? Well, look back at Mark 4 because Jesus has already covered this. Mark 4:19, look at verse 18. Remember, it's the parable of the soils and He's explaining the parable of the soils. In verse 18 He says,

others are the ones on whom the seed was sown among the thorns; [*so we're talking about the kind of heart that's like a thorny seed bed and the gospel is sown in that heart. He said,*] these are the ones who have heard the word, [*they've heard the message of the gospel,*] but the worries of the age, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Here's somebody who hears the Word, responds, looks like the real deal, but the deceitfulness of riches, the desire to have, to live at a certain level, to pursue a career path, chokes out that Word and before long they have their career and it's clear they don't have Jesus.

The disciples had just seen an illustration of this, in person. I mean, the rich young ruler had amazing credentials to gain eternal life. He was wealthy, and in that culture that meant that he was especially favored by God, which meant he was a righteous man. He was a ruler; he had both a religious and civic reputation and influence. He was moral, he believed he had kept and had externally kept the Second Law of the commandments. He was earnest. He sincerely desired eternal life. He was wise in that he acknowledged Jesus as the one who could give him the instruction he needed.

Think about it, he came in the right spirit, he came to the right person, and he came asking the right question. But giving up his wealth was too great a hurdle. Jesus said, it's hard for those who are wealthy to give it up, not to trust in that. Verse 24, "The disciples were amazed at His words." Literally, the disciples were shocked at what He said. Why? Because they lived in a culture where wealth was a sign of God's blessing and favor and so that meant a sign of a good person. So salvation for this guy should have been relatively easy. But Jesus is saying, no, it's hard for the wealthy.

Jesus sees their reaction, they're shocked, verse 24, "But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!'" He's talking about salvation again. Jesus sees their reaction and so He says it again, but this time He says it more generally. He uses that endearing term, "Children, how hard it is," for anyone, "to enter the kingdom of God!" Rich or poor. This was essentially what Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount. You remember, Matthew 7:13,

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, the way is broad that leads to destruction, there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

It's hard to enter the kingdom because you have to come in without any baggage and everybody wants to bring their baggage, everybody wants to bring something. In fact, it's not just hard, it's impossible. Look at verse 25, "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Now, perhaps you've heard the, sort of, sermon from, at some point, that the eye of the needle here is actually a small gate in Jerusalem and that to get through it a camel had to have its loads removed and then get on its knees and then it could crawl through and that's a picture of we need to repent and be on our knees. Listen, that may make a good sermon, but there's no evidence of such a gate and it wasn't even suggested until the ninth century after Christ. Jesus is simply using a familiar proverb, by the way, a proverb that's still popular among Arabs to this day.

The camel, you see, was the largest animal in Israel in the first century and the sewing needle was the smallest opening, so it was a very humorous picture to make a very powerful point. I mean after all, as I get older, you know, trying to get a piece of thread in a needle is a challenge. Have you tried that recently? That's hard, but it's not just hard to get a camel, humps and all, through the eye of a sewing needle, it's impossible. That's Jesus's point. But here's His real point, as impossible as it is to get a camel through the eye of a needle, it's easier to do that than it is to get a rich man into the kingdom of God. That's what He's saying. It's impossible to get a camel through the eye of a needle. It's even more impossible to get a wealthy man into the kingdom of God.

Verse 26, "They were even more astonished and said to Him, 'Then who can be saved?'" This time the Greek text says the disciples were "struck out of themselves exceedingly." They just can't handle this; this is blowing their mind. They're shocked beyond measure and they're left with the obvious question, "Then who can be saved?" If it's impossible for the wealthy, who enjoy God's favor, to be saved, "who can be saved?" Finally the disciples get it. Finally they're asking the right question, "who can be saved?"

Now, I hate to do this, I probably shouldn't, but I'm going to take a little detour, very briefly, Jesus versus C.I. Scofield. Matthew's version of this passage debunks the old dispensational

idea that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are two different things. You heard that taught? One, there's the kingdom of God, there's the kingdom of heaven. Matthew uses them synonymously. In fact, in verse 23, he calls it "the kingdom of heaven." In verse 24, "the kingdom of God," and in verse 25 he says all of that's equivalent to being saved. To enter the kingdom of God is to enter the kingdom of heaven is to be saved. So, file that away.

Now, Jesus's response to their question in verse 26 is absolutely key. They ask, "who can be saved?" "Who can be saved?" Look at verse 27, "Looking at them, Jesus said," and this is the heart of this passage, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." He says two things. With man, it's impossible. What's it? What's it referring to here? It's a response to the disciples' question in verse 26, "who can be saved?" It is salvation. "With man salvation is impossible," that's what Jesus says, "but not with God; for all things are possible with God." Only God can bring anyone, including the rich, to saving faith.

William Lane writes, "Salvation is completely beyond the sphere of human possibilities; every attempt to enter the Kingdom on the basis of achievement or merit is futile. The ability and the power to effect deliverance resides in God alone." Only God can produce salvation in the human heart. It's more impossible for someone to be saved than it is to get a camel, humps and all, through the eye of a needle, can't be done. This is the seed, by the way, of what will later become Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace alone we've studied in Ephesians 2 and other places. By the way, Jesus is going to begin to explain, in the coming weeks, how this salvation is accomplished. He talks about the fact that it's going to be accomplished by My laying down My life as a ransom for many.

Now, let's look at the application. What do we learn from this story? We really, on two levels, get application. The first level is on the personal level. Let me just say, perhaps you find yourself tonight in the same situation this young man was in. That is, you're religious, you've done a lot of things good. You want eternal life. You really want that. But you aren't sure. In fact, you don't think you have it yet. You think something is still lacking. You're not confident that you belong to Christ. Understand this, only God can accomplish your salvation. Get that into your head. There is nothing you can do. Go home and try to get a camel through the eye of a needle and then you can secure your own salvation. Only God can accomplish your salvation.

You say, well, how does that help me? Here's how it helps you. It reduces you to the place of a beggar, which is exactly where God wants you. Where you come to God and you say, there's no way I can ever be right with You on my own. There's no way I can ever be changed. There's no way I can have salvation unless You act. You come to God as a beggar. Isn't that the first beatitude? Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the beggars in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You come to God on your knees saying, God I bring nothing. I have nothing.

There's nothing I can do. Only You can change me. With you it's impossible, but with God it's possible. He can change you. He can give you a new heart.

But this is key, Jesus will demand the same thing of you He demanded from this man. He will not be just one of the gods in your pantheon of gods. He must be Lord alone. You cannot serve Jesus Christ and anything else. If you want Him you've got to be willing to give up whatever it is that you don't want to give up. He may not ask you to actually sell your possessions or whatever it is in your life. But He may. If it's sin He will.

Practically what this means is for you to come to Christ He may put His finger on your idol, whatever it is, and say, if you want eternal life, if you want to follow Me, you have to be willing to give that up. With this man it was his wealth, his property. Maybe for you it's something else altogether. What is it that's keeping you from really coming to Jesus Christ and acknowledging Him as your Lord and Savior? Whatever it is, it's to you what this man's wealth was to Him. And Jesus says, if you want Me you have to be willing to give that up.

There's a second lesson for us, for all of us, and it's on the level of evangelism, because this account has serious implications for our evangelism. Our Lord says, with man salvation is impossible. Think about that for a moment. That means neither the one sharing the gospel nor the one hearing the gospel can produce a change in the heart, can effect salvation. It is a divine act. We can plant, we can sow, we can water, but God causes the growth. Second Corinthians 4:6, God must command the light to shine where there was darkness, just as He did in the original creation. God has to, in an act of creation, speak light into the dark heart of the sinner. Understand that.

Secondly, in this area of evangelism, understand that like Christ we must appropriately use the Law to make sure the person we're talking to knows he's broken, not merely in some sense he's a sinner, but that he has broken the Laws of God specifically and deserves God's eternal wrath. That's what Jesus was helping this young man see. And we need to do the same. By the way, there's a helpful little book if you want to read more about that, Walt Chantry's book, *Today's Gospel*, which really addresses that issue, I think, very well.

Thirdly, we must stress in our evangelism both the conditions of eternal life, and that is repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, just as Jesus did with this young man. Isn't that what Paul said in Acts 20:21, when he was in Ephesus he "solemnly testified to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the gospel. Leave out either of those parts and you don't have the gospel.

Fourthly, like Christ we ought to manifest a genuine love for those individuals with whom we share the gospel. You see the heart of Christ for this young man. When we think about sharing the gospel we need to pray that God would give us that kind of heart for people. If we loved

people we would share the gospel. If we really loved them as Christ did we would want them to know the truth.

A fifth principle about our evangelism that grows out of this passage is don't be discouraged when a person refuses the gospel. It happened to Christ here. It happened to Paul. It probably has happened in your own experience. You've shared the gospel with someone and you've gotten discouraged because they've been antagonistic or they haven't responded. They don't want to hear it anymore. I'm tired of hearing that from you. Listen, don't be discouraged when a person refuses the gospel. Salvation is a divine miracle. You say, well, then why should I share the gospel? Very simply, because we're commanded to, it's not an option.

The elders and I have been talking and, you know, as our church there are so many wonderful strengths that are part of this church, but I think if I had to identify a single weakness that I pray about in my own life, I pray about in the life of our church, that I think is the greatest weakness, that is, as an individual and as a church, we don't share the gospel, we don't communicate the gospel with people in our lives like we ought to do that. We're commanded to do it. It's not like an option. You know, you can't go down this, sort of, list and say, yeah I'll do this, Bible reading yes, prayer, no evangelism, I'm going to leave that one off, that's uncomfortable. It's not like an option; we're commanded to do it.

But there's another reason we share the gospel and that's because the elect need to hear the gospel so they can be saved. That's what Paul says in Romans 10, isn't it? How shall they believe unless they hear and how should they hear without someone who communicates that truth to them? But I want you to see Acts, turn over to Acts 18. Here's why we share the gospel. Here's why Paul shared the gospel. Acts 18 and look at verse 9, Paul has faced real persecution, real trouble in his ministry,

And the Lord [*verse 9*] said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, [*watch this, here's why you ought to keep on sharing the gospel,*] for I have many people in this city."

Listen, this young man wasn't one of them but we don't know but what the next person we share the gospel with is. God says, "'I have many people,'" I have many elect, those I have chosen, who will respond to the truth of the gospel, so keep on speaking, keep on communicating the gospel. That's how you need to think. You're sowing the seed. You can't control the condition of the heart but inevitably the seed will fall into good soil prepared by God to hear it, so just keep on sowing. Don't be discouraged.

And finally, pray. We should commit ourselves to praying for the salvation of others. Think about it. If you believe, where we began tonight, that you have the power to reach inside a person and if you know the keys to their heart you can lead them to Christ, why do you need to

pray? Because you can do it! That person can do it! But if you believe what Jesus taught tonight and that is salvation is a human impossibility, only God can do it, then what does that cause us to do? Not only to share the gospel, but to pray that God would work in the heart of those with whom we share the gospel, to pray that He would prepare the soil, that they would be ready to hear it, that they would respond in faith and repentance. Pray.

Jesus makes it very clear in this passage that salvation must be a divine act of grace. It is utterly humanly impossible, can't be done. That's true of your salvation. And it's true of anybody else who comes to faith. May God help us to learn the lesson. Let's pray together.

Father, what an amazing account from our Lord's life. Thank You for His great wisdom. Thank You for His compassionate heart for this young man. And Lord, we see in that His heart for all the lost, for the people in our lives who don't know Him. Lord, help us to have a heart like that. Help us to have that kind of genuine concern and Father, give us the boldness and the courage to speak up with the truth as Jesus did. Father, make us like Him not only in His moral character but in His zeal to communicate the good news.

Father, I pray for myself, I pray for our church, that You would help us to take seriously the command to communicate the gospel constantly as a part of our life and experience. And Father, may it please You that it would find good soil and that we as individuals and as a church would see people come to the true knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Lord, I pray for anybody here tonight who doesn't know You, who still has an idol that's more important to them than Jesus Christ. Father, before they go to bed tonight, I pray that You would, by Your grace, speak light into their hearts. May they see the value of Christ more than that idol and may they be willing to tear it down, fall on their face before You, and beg for You to save them. We pray it in Jesus's name and for His sake, amen.