

## Mark 10:17-22

<sup>17</sup> Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup> So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: '*Do not commit adultery,*' '*Do not murder,*' '*Do not steal,*' '*Do not bear false witness,*' '*Do not defraud,*' '*Honor your father and your mother.*' " <sup>20</sup> And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." <sup>21</sup> Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." <sup>22</sup> But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Now remember where we are in our text in Mark.

First, it is important to realize that Mark has left out a lot of the story from the ending of Chapter 9 to the beginning of chapter 10. We pick the rest of the story up in Matthew, Luke and John.

Jesus was ridiculed by his half brothers/He journeys to Jerusalem/He teaches at the feast of the tabernacles/Jewish leaders try to arrest Him/He forgives the adulterous woman/Jesus teaches about being the light of the world/Jesus teaches about his relationship to Abraham/Jesus sends out the 70 disciples and they return/He teaches about the good Samaritan/Jesus visits Mary and Martha/He teaches about prayer/The Pharisees claim Jesus is guilty of blasphemy again/Jesus warns them and warns against Hypocrisy/He teaches about true wealth/He warns to be ready for the Master's return/He talks about a coming division/He teaches to repent or perish/He heals a woman on the Sabbath/He heals a man born blind/Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd/The jews attempt to stone Jesus/Jesus ministers in Judea and Perea/Jesus mourns over Jerusalem/He heals a man with dropsy/He lays out the cost of following Him/He gives the lost sheep and lost coin, the prodigal son, the unjust steward, and the rich man and Lazarus parables/Then Christ teaches on Forgiveness, Faith and Faithfulness, Lazarus becomes sick and dies and Jesus raises Him from the dead/ The jews plot to kill Christ/ Jesus heals the 10 lepers/ Jesus teaches about His second coming/ He teaches about the unjust judge and the justified tax collector. That brings us to the beginning of our chapter.

What we need to see is that our friends, the disciples, have experienced a lot more that Mark doesn't tell us about. They have even more reason to understand what Jesus is saying. They have more reason to have changed their expectations. But we continue to see much of the same attitude they had previously.

Now in Mark 10 we have gone from Jesus talking about **becoming like a little child**, becoming utterly dependent upon God's provision for us, to this text. And

then **the next thing** Jesus will talk about is his upcoming death. We are seeing Christ steer his disciples from the wrong way of thinking about life to the right way of thinking about life.

The Jewish mindset was that God will bless the faithful Jewish people with worldly goods. They actually see prosperity as a sign of spiritual approval and blessing. The Jewish mindset was that of a “righteousness by works”, something a child is not even capable of. It wasn’t until a child was 13 that they would be seen as fully accountable for their actions. What we will see in our story this morning is Jesus blasting the ideas of false righteousness.

Now when we put together the parallel texts from Luke 18:18 and Matt 19:20 we understand that this man was rich, he was young, and he was a ruler.

Wow, this is every evangelist’s dream.

When I was in youth ministry I was taught to seek out people like this. We were to target them with the gospel in the hopes that they would use their influence to expand the ministry. And look at this guy. Look at all the things he was doing correctly. What a wonderful human specimen he was.

<sup>17</sup> **Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"**

Look at this guy. Look what we know about him.

**First**, he has a lot of the world’s resources. He is wealthy. We have no idea how he became wealthy. We just know that he is. So he has a lot to offer the church coffers. Think about this from Christ’s perspective. Surely He had financial expenses. This guy could have really helped out.

**Second**, he was a ruler. That means he is responsible and influential. He can help the members with tough times they might have. He can influence a lot of people. He can reach the upper echelon of society. Again, from Christ’s perspective, wouldn’t it have been nice to have friends in high places. Maybe he could have provided some protection.

**Third**, he was young. So he is just chock full of potential. This is a person that you can build on. He isn’t like Brad and I who know we have already lived longer than we will continue to live. He is young. He has his energy and probably his health. And then keep looking. This young man **came running**. With all he had going for him, he threw caution to the wind. He threw anything anyone would say about him out the window. You see, dignified people did not run in that culture. They would have had to gather up their robes, display their legs, and run. Only the lowest class would do such a thing. So, **fourth**, we see this rich young ruler was also humble. He did not care what other people thought of him.

**Fifth**, we see that he knelt before Christ. He was clearly spiritually alert. He somehow knew that Christ was the real deal. Christ was the one to seek out. Christ was worth risking his whole reputation for. Keep in mind that this was

somewhat a religious suicide. He would be breaking ranks with the established religion of his day by doing this. This man, by kneeling in front of Christ and asking his question was displaying an endorsement of Christ that will be dealt with cruelly by the religious big shots.

And notice the man's question. **Sixthly** we can see that this man, to some degree, was aware of his need for salvation. He was unsure of his eternal destiny. He wanted to secure it. He clearly **wanted something spiritually** that he knew he did not have. And he figured he could get it from Christ.

If we skip ahead here, we can learn about more of this man's good traits. We see that from his childhood he obeyed the law. We will talk about this more later, but for our purposes here we can learn a couple of things.

**Seventhly** this was a man who **knew** the law of God. He had taken the time to know, at least to some degree, what God said. And he evidently knew it so he could obey it.

And **eighthly**, this was a moral man. It would have been hard to dig up dirt on this man. He lived a life of obedience to the outward requirements of the law of God. Wow. What a man. Again, what a wonderful beneficial person he would be in any group.

Look at what we can learn from this passage already. These are all traits in a person **who is lost**. This person stands, as he is, **under the condemnation of God**. With all of these positive traits, he is utterly and completely and eternally lost if there is no change in him.

We can never fool ourselves into thinking that any of these traits prove that we are saved. None of these traits show, by themselves, that we are right with God. Being rich, young, influential, responsible, humble, spiritually perceptive, aware of our need of salvation, knowledgeable about spiritual things, and obedient to rules does not make a person right with God.

What do you depend upon to make you right with God? If God were to ask you on judgement day, "why should I let you in?" what would you say? Do you realize if any of your answers are qualities of the rich young ruler, they won't suffice. They are the wrong answers.

In a different passage Christ answers a similar question. But he answers it much differently than he answers it here. And we will look at that. But look what the question asked in [John 6:28](#)

**"What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"**

To which Jesus responds:

**"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent"**

You see, that is the real answer. Salvation is only found by believing in Christ.

Now what does that mean? Does that mean just believing that Jesus existed and was a good teacher? Absolutely not. Our passage this morning shows us beyond

question that this kind of mental understanding is not enough. No. We must believe that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was a sacrifice given by Christ to pay the penalty for all of the sins we would ever commit. And His resurrection gives us the power to live new lives. A person who believes in the way that Christ explained belief is one who trusts his whole life into the hands of Christ. We trust his work on our behalf to save us from our sinful record. We trust His guidance of our lives to lead us into an exhibition of Christ's power over sin in our day to day lives. This belief is life changing. This belief is a trust in God that is demonstrable.

Have you trusted in Christ that way? No amount of good works will ever get you into heaven. Only trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ will ever save you. OK, now let's see how Jesus answers this rich young ruler's question.

**"Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"<sup>18</sup> So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.**

It is important to note here that Matthew says the question had an added element. In Matthew the man asked **Good** teacher, what **good** thing shall I do that I may have eternal life.

Now this word "good" is not some special word in Greek. It would not be all that unusual to call a man a good man. It would not have been understood as a violation of propriety. It would not have been equating that person with God. But Jesus uses that word as a springboard to the important topic at hand. He was using it to get to the man's real problem.

Jesus says **"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.**

Jesus is essentially challenging the man to consider **what he is saying**, and even more so, **what his statement implies** when considered in its **most absolute sense**. This man may likely have been using the word "good" to flatter Jesus. But Jesus brings that word front and center. And He does it to bring attention to what this man really believes about Jesus.

I found a quote I liked.

**"Jesus calls him to sober reflection. What does the epithet 'good' mean? It belongs to God who is good; and it should not be used unthinkingly or as a flippant gesture of praise" (Martin, *Mark*, p. 124). Or as Calvin (2:393) understands Jesus' reply, it is "as if he had said, 'Thou falsely calleth me a good Master, unless thou acknowledgest that I have come from God.'" In other words, Jesus is saying, "Before you address me with such a title, you had better think soberly about what the implications are, and especially what they are for you."**

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This man is treating Christ as a good teacher. But that is all he hopes to get from Christ. He hopes to get an intellectual answer to a spiritual question. But the problem is, this man does not know who he is speaking to.

Jesus essentially asks, by calling me good, are you proposing that I am equal with God? Or are you just ascribing me admiral qualities of a human being? Because that is the difference in **coming to Christ and leaving right with God, or coming to Christ and leaving lost.**

What you believe about Jesus Christ is the most important thing about you. The rich young ruler had no idea of that, but Jesus did.

Christ said at one point- **I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.** John 14:6

This, along with many other things that Christ taught, puts the human race in a bind. If Christ is true, we cannot come to Him like this rich young ruler did, as merely a fellow human who can give very good advice and teaching.

Christ claimed to be the only way to get right with God. He didn't claim to just teach it. He said that he **WAS IT**. He was clearly teaching that there is **only one way to God and He is it**. Every other way is a farce.

Logically this creates a dilemma. His statement removes the possibility of picking and choosing what you like to think about Christ. You might look at another person here in this church and think- that person is a good teacher. He or she knows a lot. You might even regard that person as a very spiritual person. But you could also adjust your thoughts of them based on their failures. You might conclude that the person is not even right with God. You can logically consider all kinds of alternatives.

But if that person says, **I am the only way to get right with God**, you are now very limited in your logical views of that person.

You have one of three choices.

**The first choice is that this person is a liar.** He says he is the only way to be right with God, but is lying and knows he is lying. He knows that he is not the only way to be right with God but lies about it.

**The second choice is that this person is a lunatic.** He says he is the only way to be right with God, and even believes it, but is hopelessly demented.

**Or the third choice is to believe that this person is truly the Lord.** He **says** he is the only way to be right with God. He **believes** he is the only way to be right with God. And he **IS** the only way to be right with God.

Obviously if it were a person at this church making the claim, they could only be a liar or a lunatic. Jesus was the real deal.

Jesus was truly good. He was absolutely good. He was perfectly good. Jesus was God. The young man didn't realize how accurate his address of "Good Teacher" was.

So Jesus's first question to the young man's question actually pierces to the heart of the problem. This man did not see Jesus **as he must be seen** in order to be saved. But Jesus doesn't linger on that.

The second thing the young man didn't understand is his utter lost-ness. He did not understand sin. We know this because of his question. He asked what good thing can I do to, essentially, save myself. When we really understand God and sin, that is a stupid question. It is absurd. God demands perfection. When a sin is committed, the death penalty for that sin cannot be undone by doing a good act, any more than a person who commits murder can be pardoned after giving a million dollars to a charity. God finds sin as a crime against Himself that demands a death of the sinner. To even think to bypass that by a good work shows no understanding of the character of God or the seriousness of sin.

Is this the kind of view you have? Do you really think you can be good enough to win salvation, to win entrance into heaven? Well, it cannot work and it will not work. You must believe in Christ.

Now Jesus moves on sort of answer the young man's question.

<sup>19</sup> **You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'** " <sup>20</sup> **And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."**

Jesus takes this young man to God's word to the 10 commandments. The first four commands have to do with how we regard God. Jesus quotes the last 6 commandments having to do with our treatment of others. There is a difference though in one of the commands. The 10<sup>th</sup> commandment is that we are not to covet. Coveting is a mental sin. You cannot see if a person is coveting or not. It will often lead to other sins, but it is a secret, mental sin. In Jesus' list it is replaced with "Do not defraud." Defrauding is often the external action that is a result of the internal attitude of coveting. You are getting something through an immoral means.

It is interesting that Jesus choices focused on the external obedience of the law. These are actually things that a person could appear to do perfectly.

Jesus didn't always focus on the law that way. In fact, the sermon on the mount is about applying the old testament law in a way that reaches into the heart.

Christ shows that **the attitudes** that lead to committing the external sins are just as sinful as **the actions** they produce. They are all of the same kind. Had this young man applied scripture in that way, he would not have been able to say that he had kept these laws since he was a young man, probably meaning since his bar mitzvah. But since he was allowed to focus on the actions, rather than the attitudes, he could fool himself.

But what Jesus is about to reveal is that coveting was actually this man's undoing. He loved stuff. In fact, He loved his stuff more than he loved God. When Jesus reduced the commandments down to two, we find that this young man broke the first one.

The first one is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is that we are to love our neighbor as our self.

Oddly enough, the young man asked the good teacher what good thing the young man should do. And Jesus took the young man to the good word of God. He took the man to the standard of good. He took the man to the perfect moral mirror. It is the only way for us to see ourselves exactly as we are before God. But the man failed to see himself as he truly is. He missed it.

<sup>21</sup> **Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him,**

We can assume by this, I think, that the young man was sincere. He probably believed what He was saying. Jesus was generally angry at duplicitous behavior. He was generally angry at hypocrisy. He usually called it out. But ignorance sometimes was overlooked.

Here we see Christ's response to this sincere man with a sincere question and a blindness toward himself and toward God. Jesus looked at him and loved him. He knew of the man's ignorance. He knew of the man's blindness. He knew of the man's lost-ness. And he knew how difficult the next thing He was going to say was going to be for this man. In fact, the only way the man would obey the next command is if the man really believed that Jesus truly was good. He would only do it if Jesus was his Lord. He would only do it if he were regarding Jesus as his sovereign ruler.

<sup>21</sup> **Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."**

Notice that Jesus loved him and at the same time told him to do the one thing he had to do in order to break free of his idolatry. This man loved his stuff more than he loved God. And there was only one path to freedom for him. He had to smash the idol he was worshipping.

Here is another good quote I found while studying:

As far as his actions were concerned, he was blameless (see [Phil. 3:6](#)); but his inward attitudes were not blameless, because he was covetous. He may have kept some of the commandments, but the last commandment caught him: "Thou shalt not covet!" Covetousness is a terrible sin; it is subtle and difficult to detect, and yet it can cause a person to break all the other commandments. "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" ([1 Tim. 6:10](#), nasb):

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Now, this is not a teaching passage. In other words Jesus does not command **everyone** to sell all their goods before taking up Christ's cross and following Him. Everyone certainly must **be willing to**. We cannot love our stuff. But not everyone is called to abandon their possessions. In the church at Jerusalem we saw that people maintained their assets and sold them at will. No one was excluded from the church because they still owned assets. But Ananias and Sapphira were dealt with harshly because they **lied** about their assets. The real question is, would you be willing to surrender everything you own to God if you knew that is what He wanted from you? Our answer better be "Yes". Notice again what Christ said.

**Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."**

All this guy needed to do was to sell out. This is not an act of merit that would save him. There is no such thing. But it would have been an act that displayed **utter trust in the person of Christ**. It would have displayed a saving trust in Christ that produced this fruit of repentance.

Christ told this man that he would not lose anything. It would be a trade. Treasure now for treasure in heaven. This would have required utter trust. I am not sure we really consider how much this is true for us today. We still have this choice. We can store up our treasure here. Or we can use our earthly goods to store up treasure in heaven. We are making those decisions every day. Given what our brother Steve has told us, how willing are we to forego some nice things for ourselves to meet our brother's needs in other areas?

What Jesus told this man to do was a one time thing. The verb tense for taking up the cross and following Christ is continual. Jesus was calling this man to follow Christ. He was offering this man he loved eternal life. He was offering him life in Christ.

If you are not in Christ, He is offering you the same thing. Surrender your life to Christ and come to Him on His terms. Display that you believe in Christ. That is what Christ calls you to.

<sup>22</sup> **But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**

Of all the people we have seen who have approached Christ for help, this is the only man who went away from Jesus worse than he came.

I found several good quotes about this verse. The first is this.

**Notice the intimate eyewitness details. When he heard the word of Jesus, the young man's "face fell." As Plummer (pp. 240-41) says, "He was gloomy and sullen with a double disappointment; no perilous exploit was required of him, but he was asked to part with what he valued most." To obey Jesus was too**



**great a risk for him to take. So the security of wealth kept him out of the kingdom of God. He went away "with a heavy heart, for he was a man of great wealth" (NEB). Obedience to God brings joy; disobedience, sorrow.**

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Here is another quote-

**The Greek word translated "grieved" gives the picture of storm clouds gathering. The man walked out of the sunshine and into a storm! He wanted to get salvation on his terms, and he was disappointed.**

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And here is a third.

**Money is a marvelous servant but a terrible master. If you possess money, be grateful and use it for God's glory; but if money possesses you, beware! It is good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don't lose the things that money cannot buy. The deceitful-ness of riches had so choked the soil of this young man's heart that he was unable to receive the good seed of the Word and be saved ([Matt. 13:22](#)). What a bitter harvest he would reap one day!**

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What a sad story this is this morning. Here was a young man with a choice. And for now, he has made the wrong one. He had the wonderful opportunity of joy. He was standing on the threshold. But he chose badly. He chose gloom and doom.

All of us who believe in Christ often face the same choice. We are so tempted to cling to things that make us feel secure or happy. And we end up trusting them to give us those things that only God can give us. And by trusting them, they take a place in our lives that they shouldn't. We can do it with our spouses, with money, with other relationships. But in the end we will find that it is a bad choice. Things can never deliver to us that which only God should be to us. What is it that would devastate us if God asked us to give it up? What would cause us to go away sad? This would be a good week to look at this issue. What idols have we made that we worship at? What things have we allowed to take a spot only God should have? God may not ask us to give up that thing or that relationship, but His word certainly demands that we reorient. We must hold everything in this life loosely but God Himself. Part of loving God is having no other competing idols. Do we?