

Money Matters

- Mark 10:17-31
- Jesus has just explained to his disciples how someone can enter the kingdom, and now a man asks him how he can have eternal life! Matthew tells us he's young. Luke tells us he's a ruler. And all three tell us he's rich. Rich young ruler. Wow, what a golden opportunity for the Lord to welcome someone with status and wealth into his band of followers! But that's not what happens. Let's look at this passage today under these main points: The Wrong Question, The One Thing, and The Right Question.
- **The Wrong Question (verse 17)**
- Put the two together, and Mark and Luke record that the young man asks, "Good teacher, what good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?" The man will go on to tell Jesus that he has kept the commandments since he was young. He is pretty confident that he is already qualified, that he is already a lottery pick, because of how he has tried to live his life. But he is concerned that there may be one good deed that he has overlooked, just one! The question seems odd to me the way it is worded, "what must I **do** to *inherit* eternal life?" How many of you would go to your parents and ask, "What do I need to do in order to receive an inheritance from you?" The normal way of inheritance is that you do nothing to earn it, you receive it because you are a son or a daughter. I know it doesn't always work that way because we live in a fallen world, and some parents choose to ignore their children in their wills, and some children choose to reject and dishonor their parents! But this man seems to stand on his behavior as the ultimate requirement of religion. Jesus doesn't argue with him but asks, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Why does Jesus start there? I believe he is trying to move the young man away from confidence in his behavior and to the ultimate purpose for life, which is to know God. Later, on the night he would be betrayed, Jesus prays, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:1-3) Do you know God and Jesus Christ his Son? If you do, then you have already received eternal life, as a gift. As we said last week, it is not attained by merit but received by mercy.
- Jesus then takes the young man back to the law, asking if he has kept the second half of the Ten Commandments. He leaves out coveting, which speaks to evil intent, and only asks about deeds: murder, adultery, theft, lying, honoring parents. Notice he doesn't ask him anything about the first four commandments, which refer to a relationship with God. Jesus already knows there is a problem with that in this man's heart. He also adds a commandment, if you will, asking the young man if he has defrauded anyone. Some believe this was added by Jesus because of the man's great wealth, since wealth is sometimes gained by cheating the vulnerable and the poor.
- The young man says he has kept all of these commandments from his youth! Now we might see this as arrogance at worst, or self-deception at best, because we know that no one can keep the commandments because of our evil hearts. Didn't Jesus teach us that having evil intent is the same as doing the deed, as in hating your brother is the same as

murder? But most of the commandments have to do with deeds, and those could be kept even if one's intent was otherwise. In fact, the rabbis taught in the synagogues that one *could* keep the law perfectly, and they spoke of people who kept the whole Torah, from A to Z. That's how Paul could sincerely believe, before he met Christ, that he was blameless according to the law.

- What happens next? Jesus looked at him and loved him. This is so important. Jesus didn't see a hypocrite standing before him. He didn't see arrogance. He looked at him, and the word indicates a careful examination. And Jesus loved him. The word for love is from the root word agape, unconditional love. Jesus saw a sincere desire in this young man to know that he was ok, and that he would be in heaven. And because Jesus could see the man's heart and because he loved him, Jesus tells him the truth.
- **The One Thing (verse 21-22)**
- Matthew tells us the young man said, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus says, here in verse 21, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." What an irony that in the previous story, the little children had nothing, but Jesus said "to such as these belong the kingdom of God." In this story the young man has everything but is denied the kingdom because he lacks one thing. It is not because the man had wealth that he could not follow Jesus, it was because wealth had him. He didn't possess his possessions, they possessed him. He lacked one thing. To have everything, the man had to become like a vulnerable child who had nothing, and then come and follow Jesus. The young man had been obedient to the law, at least in his own estimation, but if obedience to the law does not lead to surrender to Jesus and becoming his disciple, then it is worthless.
- What was the one thing that was keeping this young man from inheriting the Kingdom of God and becoming a joint heir with Christ and having eternal life in a new heaven and new earth? His money. His stuff. His possessions. Not because money and stuff are evil. Jesus did not tell him to go and destroy everything he owned. He told him to sell everything he owned and give the money to the poor, and then he would have real treasure. When asked to choose between all that he had accumulated and following Jesus with nothing at all, he chose his stuff, and walked away disheartened and sorrowful. As long as the man lived by sight and stood on his own goodness, his own merits, he was confident and self-assured. But Jesus does not let any of us stand there. He calls us into faith, and for this man, faith would be represented by giving up the treasure that held his heart captive.
- James Edwards writes, "Jesus does not teach or uphold poverty as an ideal, but he does, as here, regard the awareness of need that results from poverty as a blessing. The greatest enemies to faith are self-satisfaction and pride, and nothing removes those bulwarks more effectively than poverty."
- Remember, Jesus never told anyone else to sell all that they had and give the money away. But he was the great physician who healed many, and he was the great deliverer who set many free from demons that controlled them. Here the Lord applies the scalpel to the one thing. He asks the young man, in essence, if he wanted to be delivered from the god he loved more than anything, the money that controlled his thoughts and held his heart captive. For some people, the one thing they lack is to sell their pride in their

own intellect. They are just too smart, they believe, to trust in Jesus to save them. They scoff at the idea of sin while their sin of pride blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts more and more. For some, the one thing they lack is to lay down their “goodness” and trust in the righteousness of Christ, the only One who is good. Anyone can find someone who is worse than they are and point to them and say, “Hey, compared to that guy, I am a saint!” I remember Ray Comfort’s illustration of a man looking at a flock of sheep on a green hillside and saying, “How white and clean those sheep are!” Then the snow falls, and he looks again at the sheep standing in the white snow and says, “Those sheep are filthy!” Our goodness looks filthy when it is held up to the spotless Savior. That leads us to...

- **The Right Question (verses 23-31)**

- After the young man walks sadly away, Jesus looks around perhaps to see if anyone else would walk away, and says to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” I wrote in my notes, “Powerful statement. Terrible warning. Sobering call to surrender.” Yes, and the disciples were amazed at this. Jesus doubles down by saying, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven.” I remember hearing someone saying years ago, “Oh, Jesus was using a metaphor here to make a point. He was thinking about a city gate where, before a loaded camel could enter, the owner had to have the camel kneel down, and it is a picture of a person humbling himself. Edwards writes that no, Jesus is talking about a literal camel going through the eye of a literal needle, and adds, “There is no evidence for this legendary (city) gate until the ninth century A.D.” And think about it! If it were just kneeling at a gate Jesus referred to, the disciples would not have reacted the way they did, with exceeding astonishment in verse 26! A camel cannot go through a needle. That’s why they ask the right question: “Then who can be saved?” Now, since I was inspired by Scott last week to ask again...
- **I need a teenager to come up to help me demonstrate something.** “Can you jump up as high you can?” Ok, good! “Now, do it again, and this time don’t be modest. Go ahead and show us your incredible leaping ability by touching the ceiling.” No, sure you can. Go ahead. I measured and from this spot on the stage, the ceiling is just 11.5 feet away. You can do it. After they try, ask, “OK, why can’t you or anyone else in here jump up and touch the ceiling?” “It is impossible.” In 2016, Evan Ungar from Canada set the highest standing jump, a Guinness World Record at **63.5 inches**, but he had to do it by jumping to a platform, not with his arms up. (PICTURE) He couldn’t touch the ceiling from here, either. **Thanks for helping demonstrate that!**
- **“Then who can be saved?”** This is the right question. What is the right answer, if it is up to man? No one. None. Not one. The gate is closed. The ceiling is out of reach. The sheep are just plain filthy. No hope! But wait, Jesus goes on. “But not with God. For all things are possible with God.” It is not you or I who will do something for God and cause him to sit back on his throne and say, *Wow, ok, I never saw that coming. This one might just be ok.* No. It’s like I have said before, the chances of you or I impressing God with our goodness are infinitesimally smaller than you or I impressing NASA with our best paper airplane. It is God who glorifies God by giving us his grace and accomplishing his Word in us. The disciples are being taught an unshakeable foundation for the church,

that it is sola gratia, “only grace” upon which we stand. Who can be saved? No one on his own merits, but anyone to whom God gives grace.

- Peter says, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Matthew adds that Peter said, “What then will we have?” I used to see that as Peter still trying to earn favor, standing on the good deed the disciples have done by leaving everything to follow Jesus. I don’t think that’s it. Sinclair Ferguson sees Peter’s question as great concern, and James Edwards sees it as a plea for affirmation. “Lord, we are not wealthy men, but what we had we left behind and followed you. Are we...ok?” Jesus might have said, “Peter, some are called to give up their riches, and others are called to give up their nets, or their tax booth, or their friends and families in order to follow me. But no one can follow me and hold onto the baggage of his old life.” Then he gives Peter, and us, affirmation.
- What comes next are some of the greatest words of encouragement in all the Bible. Their sacrifices for the Gospel, and ours, will be rewarded a hundred times over in this world, Jesus says, and in ways we cannot begin to imagine in the world to come. Those sacrifices may include great losses of houses and land and brothers and sisters and parents and children who do not believe. But we will be given a hundred times as much in this present age. How? **Look around you.** We have been given this great gift, the body of Christ, brothers and sisters and parents and houses and land. And we have been given this, Jesus says, along with persecution. We need each other even more because of persecution and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. Then Jesus says in the next age we will receive eternal life.
- The first question and most important for all of us: “Do you know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent?” Second question: “Are you trusting in his grace alone and becoming his disciple alongside your brothers and sisters who are growing with you, and are you pursuing Christ and your brothers and sisters, no matter the cost?” Third question, “Are you pursuing the lost, looking at them and loving them as Jesus loved this rich young ruler, and are you telling them the truth?”
- Prayer