

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

The Rich Young Ruler
February 18th, 2018
Mark 10:17-31
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 10:17; that’s on page 846 in your pew Bibles. I mentioned last week that we are into a new section in Mark’s Gospel. Beginning at 10:1 Jesus begins to impress upon the disciples how radically DIFFERENT things are and MUST BE in the Kingdom of God. Salt that has lost its saltiness is WORTHLESS and cannot be made salty again – we need to maintain our distinctive beliefs and values over and against the pressure from the culture – that’s what he is talking about in this section. He began by talking about marriage. The world has its way of doing marriage and sexuality but we have our way. And its different – thanks be to God – its different. And we do kids different. We value them and prioritize them in a way that seems WEIRD to the watching world. And, he goes on to say in this story, we have a totally different take on MONEY. Marriage, kids and MONEY – Jesus is going right to the heart of the matter here isn’t he? This is where life happens. And life happens DIFFERENTLY in the Kingdom of God, that’s what he’s saying.

Now in terms of handling this passage, I think we’ll do it exactly the opposite of how we did it last week. Last week we were dealing with a short passage that was easy to understand but challenging to live out. So we were brief on explanation and long on application. This week we are dealing with a lengthy passage that is full of potential landmines and misunderstandings. Therefore we will take our time in walking through the passage and then if we’ve done our job

the implications of this teaching for us should be fairly obvious.

We'll read this passage in two stages. We'll deal first with the meeting that Jesus had with the Rich Young Man and then we'll read next how Jesus debriefed this encounter with his disciples. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" 20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." 21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22 ESV)

This teaching was disorienting and disturbing to its original hearers and it remains disorienting and disturbing to people in the present day therefore it is very important for us to take a few minutes to sort out what Jesus actually did and did not say in his meeting with this man.

Meeting The Man

The first thing we need to point out is that Jesus did not say that keeping the law was the way of salvation.

1. He did not say that keeping the law is the way of salvation

He did not say that. He said: "You know the commandments" and then he listed them or more specifically he listed the second table of the law – those commandments that have to do with our relationships with other people. Now it is interesting to note that in the place of the 10th commandment – thou shalt not covet – he says instead:

Do not defraud (Mark 10:19 ESV)

Most Jews understood that the 10 Commandments were really the heart and substance of the law and that all the laws that followed were really applications and explications of the original 10. So we can think of this commandment – do not defraud – as simply a more specific version of the 10th commandment that has been chosen by Jesus because it puts pressure on the reality and life

experience of this particular rich young man.

He is rich and in a fallen world it is really hard to get rich without defrauding the poor!

So Jesus gets specific with the brother. He asks – in becoming rich have you defrauded the poor? That is a really good question. Have you coveted wealth to such an extent that you did unkind and unloving and unjust things to the poor?

Oh boy! That's a really good question in a terribly fallen world. It's hard to make serious money in a sinful world without being unkind to the poor. Think about this, business owners. Are you forcing your employees to do anything that you wouldn't make your son or daughter do? Do you need to do that in order to make the kind of money you have come to enjoy?

That's a good question and Jesus uses it to challenge the self reflection of this brother.

That's what the law is for. The law is not a means of salvation. Jesus doesn't say: What are the commandments? If you do them you will get saved. No, he says, "what are the commandments? If you think about them you will realize that you need to be saved."

That's an important distinction.

That's the primary purpose of the law – it is supposed to shut every mouth before God – Paul says that in Romans 3. The whole point of reading the law and preaching the law is:

so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Romans 3:19 ESV)

You see if you actually understand what the Bible says and what God requires of human beings then shut your mouth and you fall on your face and you beg for mercy and that's when people get saved and that's what Jesus is doing here – but this brother is not having it.

He actually says: "I have kept the whole law. I'm actually hitting this whole righteousness thing out of the park Jesus. Thank you for asking."

I love what William Lane says here. He says:

“in the case of this man the Law has not yet fulfilled its function”¹

No kidding.

That is a classic example of scholarly understatement. Jesus has just laid out the law and this brother has said: “Thank you Jesus, I’ve nailed it.”

And so Jesus turns up the heat.

He says:

“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.” (Mark 10:21 ESV)

That’s a big statement. That is Jesus going from DEFCON 5 to DEFCON 1 in a single sentence and it has caused a fair bit of anxiety among Christians – particularly rich Christians – over the years, and that takes us to the second thing we need to clarify; Jesus did not say, exactly, that a person has to give away all of his or her possessions in order to be saved.

2. He did not say that you have to give away all your possessions in order to be saved

Let’s remember the flow of the conversation. This brother has just said to Jesus: “I have kept the law; I have nailed it” – and Jesus says, “actually son, there is one thing you lack. Go, sell all that you have, give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

So Jesus doesn’t say, exactly, that selling your stuff and giving it to the poor will cause you to be saved – he says that this guy needs to sell his stuff and give it to the poor and that if he does, he will be rewarded in heaven, assuming he comes back and follows Jesus.

So this statement is just a little more complicated than we might like. You have to think here

¹ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 368.

don't you? A careful reader will remember that Peter didn't give away all his possessions – in fact the last story took place in Peter's house. And some of the other stories took place in Peter's boat. And we know that Jesus was supported by some wealthy people – some wealthy women actually – and he never criticizes those women for failing to give away all of their possessions – so what exactly is going on here?

To answer that question you have to remember the wider context. Jesus has just said:

Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it. (Mark 10:15 ESV)

We talked about that last week. We said that child like faith has at its heart two essential qualities. It has a certain humility and it has a certain receptiveness. Those things are very easy to lose as you get older and accumulate possessions. The more you have the more secure you feel – the more proud you feel – the more wise you feel – the more sufficient you feel – and the less you feel like you need to receive anything from anybody.

That's what's wrong with this guy.

Look at his question:

what must I do to inherit eternal life? (Mark 10:17 ESV)

He says, “Jesus, I've been successful at everything I've ever done. Tell me what I need to do in order to enter the Kingdom of God and I'll do it.”

Is that child like faith?

Is that humility? Is that receptiveness?

No.

He's asking the wrong questions because he has too much stuff.

So what does he need to do? He needs to go, sell all his possessions, give it all to the poor and then he needs to come back like a little child – humble, poor, a little bit desperate and in need of receiving what only God can give.

That's what Jesus is saying – and its important to understand what he is saying and its important to understand what he is not saying – AND its important to understand how we feel about what he IS and IS NOT saying. I love what Robert Gundry says here, he says:

“That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he *would* issue that command.”²

So maybe it would be best to say this. Jesus says that this man, like probably many others, must give up whatever it is that makes him so proud, so self assured, so indifferent to the poor, so certain that he can do what is necessary because those things are keeping him from having a child-like faith. And those things are making it impossible for him to enter the Kingdom of God.

That's what Jesus says in his meeting with the Rich Young Man.

Debriefing The Disciples:

The Rich Young Man went away very sad – he was disheartened and sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

And here's the thing, in Judaism, having great possessions was supposed to be a sign that you were particularly favoured by God – but here is Jesus saying something TOTALLY different and totally DISTINCTIVE from everything the disciples had ever heard or been taught by their culture.

So Jesus spends some time debriefing; we read that story in verses 23-31. Hear again the Word of the Lord.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the

² R.H. Gundry as quoted by R.T. France in *The Gospel Of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 400.

kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:23–31 ESV)

So, we’ve talked about what Jesus said in his meeting with the rich young man and now we need to be clear about what he said while debriefing the disciples. The first thing he says is that:

1. Being successful in this world makes it harder to enter into the next

Now, granted he says, it’s hard for ANYONE to enter the Kingdom of God; he says:

“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! (V. 24)

Its hard for anyone! Its hard for poor! Its hard for children! Children are nearer, the poor are nearer, but its always a miracle when anyone gets saved. Its hard! But its really hard for a rich person – its really hard for people who have pulled themselves up by their boot straps and made something of themselves and won something for themselves by their efforts – for those people its pretty much impossible. In fact:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:25 ESV)

Camels are big, needles are small – that’s the sum of the metaphor. Its hard. Its impossible. Its almost inconceivable.

Jesus said stuff like this all the time. He said:

24 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

25 “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:24–26 ESV)

“Woe” means “how unfortunate”. How unfortunate it is to be born wealthy! How unfortunate it is to be well fed! How unfortunate it is to find yourself on the right side of history! You can be sure that you are close to the fires of hell if everyone in the culture thinks you are a person to be reckoned with.

You are far from the Kingdom of God.

You are proud. In step. Invested. And secure.

And those just aren't the type of people who find the doggy door of the Kingdom of Heaven. Those generally are not the type of people who despair of their righteousness, who confess their sins and who beat their breasts and who say along with the tax collector:

‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ (Luke 18:13 ESV)

And that's too bad, because those are the only people who are saved.

But the second thing he says in his debrief with the disciples is that:

2. No one is beyond the saving reach of God

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27 ESV)

Yes it would take a miracle for a rich person to get saved, but thankfully, miracles are kind of God's specialty. We serve a miracle working God – amen?

Amen!

And our miracle working God knows how to get the attention of cold, distant, self satisfied people. He knows how to open blind eyes. He knows how to unstop closed ears. He knows how to soften hard hearts.

He knows how to do all of that, so there is every reason to hope.

But if you are hoping, if you are praying – if you are coming to Jesus, looking, like the rich young man, to inherit the Kingdom of heaven, then, you better be willing to undergo a complete revolution – a complete catastrophe – a complete re-ordering of your life, values and affections. Because that is what is invariably involved.

3. Conversion involves a complete reordering of your life

Jesus said that to the Rich Young Man. He said:

go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”
(Mark 10:21 ESV)

By the way, that’s the same deal he offered to the disciples. Remember he saw James and John working with their dad and he called them to forsake it all and to follow him and the text says:

and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. (Mark 1:20 ESV)

He offered the same deal to Matthew the Tax Collector. He said:

“Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. (Mark 2:14 ESV)

The disciples left EVERYTHING to follow Jesus. They understood: following Jesus takes you down a whole other path.

Peter points that out. He says:

“See, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:28–31 ESV)

Yes Peter, I know that you left everything to follow me – I know that following me created a MASSIVE UPHEAVAL in your life and loyalties. I know that. I came for that. Jesus said:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have

come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ... Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ... Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34–39 ESV)

You can't come to me – you can't enter the Kingdom of God – without losing your life in this world. You can't come to me out of the world – out of a family – out of a culture – and expect to KEEP everything the way it was in your world, in your family and in your culture.

No my friend. There is going to be change. There is going to be CATASTROPHE. There is going to be a major shake up.

And that of course is great news for people on the bottom and less great news for people on the top in this world. Poor people have less to lose. Lonely people have less to lose. Broken people have less to lose.

That's why Jesus said:

20 "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. (Luke 6:20–21 ESV)

The worse things are going for you down here, the less reason you will have not to let it all go in order to enter the Kingdom of God – that's what Jesus is saying.

He is saying that becoming a Christian is an engineered catastrophe. It's a complete shake up. He will knock things out of your hand that you don't want to give up. But you've got to let it go! You have to let it all go. You have to put everything on the table and you have to let Jesus sort through it, reorder it and reassign it according to his will.

That's what Jesus asked the rich young man to do – but he wouldn't do it. Will you do it?

Now listen very carefully, it's not as though Jesus wants you to be poor, broken or lonely. No. He even says to Peter; I'm going to give you stuff back:

now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the

age to come eternal life.

But its going to be different; its going to be a gift; and its going to come from me.

That's the new deal friends!

Are you in?

Will you lay it all down at my feet, Jesus says, and follow me? Will you make yourself LAST in this world VOLUNTARILY in order to LIVE WITH ME ETERNALLY in the next? Will you become like a child? Will you humble yourself and come unto me with open hands and a ready heart to receive?

That is the question that every person hears on their way to Jesus Christ.

Responding To The Text:

So that's the text. It's disorienting and even disheartening to many people still today. It's a big ask. This is a big, hairy, audacious text of Scripture – now how should we respond? Let me quickly suggest three things.

1. Be careful what you wish for

So many of us growing up fantasizing about being rich and successful – about climbing the corporate ladder and accumulating earthly pleasures. But be careful what you wish for because those things, according to Jesus, can choke out spiritual life. Jesus said that earlier in Mark's Gospel. Remember the parable of the sower? Jesus said that some seed was growing up in the midst of thorns and he said:

They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mark 4:18–19 ESV)

So maybe, it would be better not to be rich. Maybe the more successful you are and wealthy you are the greater risk there is that you will be choked unconscious and rendered disinterested in the

saving Word of God.

That's a real thing. That's a real risk. So be careful what you wish for.

2. Be careful what you live for

This story tells me that Jesus will go after whatever occupies the highest place in your affections. The Rich Young Ruler was like a lot of men. He cared about his business – he cared about his money - and so Jesus went right after it.

Listen at the risk of sounding politically correct, let me just say that generally speaking men love their jobs and their money more than they should and women love their relationships and specifically their children more than they should. Now, listen, money is good and children good but no good thing should function as a God thing in your life and if it does I promise you this, Jesus will come after it.

He said that he would.

He said:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34. ESV)

Jesus said I have come to go right after whatever you love most in the world – because if you want to enter the Kingdom of God I need to be the one you love most in the world.

So be careful what you live for. If you live for your money expect Jesus to come for your money. If you live for your kids expect Jesus to come for your kids.

He will test you to see how you have ordered your affections. One scholar put it this way, he says:

The call to follow Jesus does not constitute an additional obligation in life, but rather judges, replaces, and

subordinates all obligations and allegiances to the one who says, “Follow me.”³

Do you hear that? It isn't as though giving up things or deprioritizing things EARNs us salvation – no – it is that coming to Jesus entails the judging, replacing and subordinating our previous affections and loyalties. Jesus takes it all out of our hands and puts it on the table and weighs it. Some he gives back – but in its proper place. Some he discards and some he returns in tact.

That's what it means to let Jesus be the Lord of your life. So be careful what you live for.

3. Be careful what you pray for

If you are praying for a friend or loved one who is proud or rich or stubborn or just disinterested in the Gospel, understand what you are praying for when you ask God to soften their hearts and give them faith like a child. You are asking God to knock them down, remove their barriers and press their nose NEARER the doggy door to the kingdom of Heaven. Understand what that will almost certainly entail.

You are asking God to RATTLE THEIR CAGE and UPEND THEIR WORLD – do you know what you are asking for? You are almost certainly asking for illness or the loss of a loved one or the collapse of a career.

Do you understand that?

But of course, if the Kingdom of God is a real thing, then you do what you've got to do. And you pray for God to do what he has to do to break down and to break through to your loved one. The Kingdom of God is on the line – ETERNITY is on the line. So don't you give up! Keep praying. Keep believing.

For all things are possible with God. (Mark 10:27 ESV)

And all God's people said: AMEN! Amen, let's pray together.

³James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 309.