

Separation Anxiety

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 12

Mark 10:17-27 (Mt.19:16-30, Lk.18:18-30) 2/29/2020

Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler the way to eternal life is to keep the law? And why was he the one guy who had to sell everything in order to be saved? And why does Jesus go from saying it's hard for the rich to be saved, to it's impossible? And what does all that have to do with your daily life?

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Mark 10:17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" **18** "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' " **20** "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." **21** Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." **22** At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. **23** Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" **24** The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard 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 man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Introduction: Baby Faith

Grace

How would you feel if you had a chance to meet Jesus personally, in the flesh? In today's passage, we're going to see a man who had that awesome privilege. And look how excited he is to meet Jesus:

Mark 10:17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

Talk about a rare opportunity. I'm sure we would all be that excited to have that opportunity. But after a very brief exchange with Jesus, look how the meeting ends.

22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad.

If you met Jesus, and he did to you what he did to this guy—he peeled back the layers of your faith, how do you think you would feel when it was over? Happy? Or would you be like this guy and go away crushed? There are two tests you can take to answer that question, and we're going to see what they are today. Now, to understand the meaning of this encounter with the rich young ruler,¹ it's essential to remember the context. Jesus is hammering away at a topic he's been on since that day the disciples got into an argument about who was the greatest. Up to that point, Jesus was content to just teach as he walked, but when that happened, Jesus sat down, took the formal posture of a rabbi teaching something especially important, and really went after them. Basically he said, "This searching for earthly greatness thing stops now. Greatness in the kingdom is the opposite of greatness on earth, so you guys need to do a full 180." Twice since then he has used little children to try to teach them that point. The second one was the passage we studied last time. We come today to the passage about the rich young ruler, and Jesus is still teaching on that same point. All three accounts of the rich young ruler—Matthew, Mark, and Luke, each time it's connected with this the passage we studied last time about the babies, because that's the whole point of it. The point of this passage is to explain what Jesus said in the previous passage when he uttered these words:

Mark 10:15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

You can't enter the kingdom of God unless you receive it like a baby lifting its little arms to mom and dad. You enter with baby faith, or you don't enter. If you are resting on earthly greatness, you're out.

A Living Example

Today we're going to see a man approach Jesus and ask about eternal life, and Jesus' response is going to teach us how to know for sure whether you have baby faith or earthly greatness. So I hope you can think back all those months ago when we studied the passage in ch.9 about greatness, so you know which kind of human greatness you're tempted with. It's different for everyone. The way you can discover yours is by how you usually finish the sentence, "Well, at least I..." When you feel inadequate, you feel like a loser or a failure, and you want to boost your self-worth a little, so you say, "Yeah, I may be a failure in that area, but at least I..." How do you finish that? At least I'm good at ____? At least I'm

¹ Mark mentions neither his youth (Mt. 19:22) nor his political status (Lk. 18:18). Putting the passages together, this man has become popularly known as the rich young ruler.

a good mom? At least I don't do what those people do? At least I have this skill, this education, this expertise, this success..." We all tend to cling to something to justify our existence, so we don't get totally discouraged when other people outshine us or when we fall way short in some area. That's your earthly greatness; that's your claim to fame, that's your wealth in this world, and that is the greatest threat to baby faith. Either you trust in God like a baby counting on mom and dad, or you trust in your little area of human greatness. And this passage teaches us exactly how to test yourself to discover which it is.

Salvation by Grace

Sometimes people imagine that salvation by grace alone comes mainly from Paul, not so much from Jesus. But there isn't a stronger verse about salvation by grace alone anywhere in the Bible than Mark 10:15.

Mark 10:15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it..

Little babies can't keep the law, they can't earn anything, they can't do anything except trust mom and dad. You remember the beautiful ending to that scene in v.16.

Mark 10:16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Imagine a conversation between a 10-year-old and his father around 40 AD. "Dad, we come to church every week and worship Jesus Christ. Did we ever meet him before he died?" "Yes, son. In fact, he held you in his arms once when you were a baby." "Really? Why?" "He wanted to bless you. He picked you up and gave you a big hug and then prayed for you. It was an amazing prayer. He pronounced all kinds of wonderful blessings on your life. And a lot of them have already come to pass."xxxx"Why did he do that Daddy? Had I just done something really good?"xxxx"No. it wasn't because of anything you did. It was only because of how helpless you were." When a mother sees her little newborn crying, the drive within her to pick that baby up and give comfort is one of the most powerful drives in the human experience. God designed mothers like that to teach us about him. When you reach your arms out to him like an infant reaching up for mom and dad, it evokes that same kind of driving desire in God's heart to gather you up in his arms.xxxxSo that's where we left off. And you kind of wish Mark would give a little more explanation and make it little clearer what it looks like to welcome the kingdom like a child. And that's exactly what he does when this guy runs up to him. Jesus is going to confront this guy with two tests that will expose whether or not he has baby faith. And as we walk through these tests, we can apply them to ourselves to examine our walk with the Lord, because the requirements for walking with the Lord are exactly the same as the requirements for coming to know the Lord in the first place. You can summarize the two tests with two simple questions:

- 1) Have you seen yourself?
- 2) Have you seen the treasure?
I'll explain those as we go.

Setting

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher²," he asked, "what must I do to inherit³ eternal life?"

² Usually when someone calls Jesus "Teacher" in Mark, that person is coming from an inadequate understanding of who Jesus is.

³ The English word inherit means to obtain something as an heir when someone dies, but the biblical term can simply mean to take possession of something. But the use of this word does call to mind the Old Testament promises of inheriting the promised land or inheriting the Lord himself.

Great question. Not many people in our culture are asking that question. Walk through a Starbucks and you won't see anyone Googling "eternal life." This guy asks the right question, he brings it to the right person—Jesus, and he comes with the right posture—on his knees. He seems like the ideal seeker, but what about his heart—does he have baby faith? Jesus will uncover that with two questions.

Baby Faith Repents

The Mirror of the Law

The first one is "Have you seen yourself?" What I mean by that is, "Have you looked into the mirror of God's law and really seen what your heart is like?" James 1:23 says God's Word is like a mirror. So Jesus takes the mirror of the law and holds it in front of this man's face.

Mark 10:19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' "

Why is Jesus giving him the Ten Commandments? He starts with the law because you can always spot baby faith by how it responds to God's law. Child-like trust responds to God's law in the opposite way as normal people.

Placing Yourself Above God's Law (Self-Justification)

Normal people elevate themselves above God's law. "God says I should do X, but I think Y is a better way to go—and I win. I'm doing Y." That's one way to elevate yourself above God's law—just disregard it. But a more common way is to adjust it. People try to obey, they fall short, but then instead of repenting in humility, they redefine the terms, grade on a curve, dumb the law down, adjust it, massage it, and work it until it's manageable so they can snap their suspenders and say, "I'm a good person."⁴ "Nobody's perfect, therefore God can expect this, and most people do that, and ..." by the time their done, they have themselves convinced they followed it just fine. That's how most people elevate themselves above God's law. Instead of submitting to God's law, they are making God's law submit to them. And their purpose in doing so is always to justify themselves—to make themselves good people in God's sight.

Placing Yourself Beneath God's Law (Trustful, Loving Submission)

Baby faith does the opposite. It responds out of faith and love. If you're a child and he says to do something, you say, "You're my Father; you say this is the way to go; I trust you." "You say 'Don't touch that,' you're my Father, I don't want to be at odds with you because I love you, so I'll obey." And when it fails, it never tries to use the law to justify itself. Baby faith says, "I'm a baby. I can't make myself a good person any more than I can jump over the moon." So when baby faith fails, instead of trying to justify itself, all it wants is to be close to God again, so it repents and cries out for mercy and forgiveness. When you use the law that way—as a way of expressing faith and love for God—that kind of lawkeeping is the pavement on the highway to eternal life.

⁴ There was another man who asked Jesus the same question the rich young ruler asked. **Luke 10:25 ... "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** Jesus gave that same answer—pointed him to the law. The man responded by asking for a definition of "neighbor," and Luke tells us why. **Luke 10:29 He wanted to justify himself ...** This is the use of God's law that is repeatedly condemned in Romans and Galatians. **Galatians 3:11 No-one is justified before God by the law.**

Repentance

Remember the gospel Jesus has been preaching through his whole ministry. We saw it way back in ch.1. Repent and believe, for the kingdom of God is near (Mk.1:15). John the Baptist preached repentance, Jesus took over that same message, and then Jesus trained the 12 to preach it too.

Mark 6:12 They went out and preached that people should repent.

That's Jesus' gospel in a nutshell—repent and believe. Repent of what? Breaking God's law. That's the only thing that needs repentance.

Jesus Gives a Hint

So this guy comes, he wants eternal life, so step 1 is repentance. So Jesus hits him with the law. It's a test. Is he going to try to use the law to justify himself as a good person? Or will he see himself in the mirror and collapse on the ground in contrition and repentance? That's how you know if someone has baby faith.xxxxThat's the test, but before giving him the test, Jesus gives hint a hint to help him pass the test. And he does it by picking up on something the guy said. One thing about Jesus—he really listened to people, and he picked up on all kinds of subtle things that most of us would miss. And then, when he went to teach what he wanted to teach, he would very often begin with something that person said, and work from there. That's what he does with this guy.

Mark 10:17 ... a man ran up to him ... "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

And Jesus says, "Good teacher?"

Why do you call *me*⁵ good?

On what basis do you make that assessment of me? It's a crucial question, because whatever criterion this guy had to measure Jesus' goodness would be the same criterion he would use to measure his own goodness. Jesus wants to bring this man to repentance, but that can't happen as long as the guy has some dumbed down, watered down idea of what goodness really means. So before giving the law test, Jesus first gives the guy a big hint.

18 ... No one is good-- except God alone.

Sometimes we use the word "good" in a loose, relative sense ("You're a good man" or "He's a good guy").⁶ It's fine to speak that way, but Jesus is letting this guy know right up front that that's not what he's talking about here. By saying, "**Only God is good,**" Jesus is letting him know that he's talking about pure goodness—goodness that's good enough to justify you in the eyes of God. The point is, if you want to be good enough to receive eternal life based on your goodness, that would require being as good as God himself. xxxxThis is like a teacher saying, "The answer is 4. Okay, so tell me, what's 2+2? And

⁵ The emphasis in the Greek is on the word *me*.

⁶ The word *agathos* was used much like our word good. It had a very broad semantic range. Below are all the instances when it modifies a person. The meaning can range from the way we use "good" in the phrase "good guys and bad guys" or someone good at what he does ("good servant") to a synonym for righteous.

Matthew 5:45 ... He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart = Matthew 12:35

Luke 23:50 Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man

Matthew 20:15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am good?'

Matthew 22:10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad

Matthew 25:21 His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!

John 7:12 Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."

Acts 11:24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith

Romans 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

keep in mind, the answer is 4.” That’s Jesus with this guy. He says, “Okay, if you want eternal life, you have to keep God’s law—and when you’re assessing yourself to see how well you’ve done, remember, *only God is good*. So with that in mind, how are you doing?”

Response: Prideful Self-Justification

So how does the man respond? Does he see his sin in the mirror of God’s law and repent?

20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy⁸."

Piece of cake—I’ve kept the law from A to Z—what else do you got? No hint of repentance. He’s just coming to Jesus, one good man to another, asking how he can be sure he’s saved. He figures the way to obtain eternal life is to find a good man doing good things and ask him what good things you need to do to be as good as him so you can also go to heaven based on how good you are.⁹

Jesus Didn’t Come for the Good People

And by doing that, he completely disqualifies himself from Jesus’ kingdom. Remember what Jesus said back in ch.2?

Mark 2:17 ... It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

If you’re not a sinner, Jesus has nothing for you.

Jesus Loved Him

So he gets a zero on the first test. Does he see his heart in the mirror? No. Does he put himself below God’s law, or above it? Above. Is he a helpless baby before God? No, he’s self-sufficient, self-justifying, and good in his own eyes. He flunks test #1. But Jesus doesn’t give up on him.

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him.¹⁰

That’s an interesting detail, isn’t it? You could tell just by looking at Jesus how much he loved this man. This is the love of sympathy—the guy’s on the highway to hell, and that moves Jesus’ great heart.¹¹

Baby Faith Prefers

So Jesus moves on to test #2. Mark wants us to know—this is love. It’s tough love to be sure, but it’s love.

21 ... One thing you lack

One Thing

I can’t read that without thinking of Columbo. Columbo was a detective who would interview a suspect by asking a bunch of routine questions. Then he’d thank him, tell him to have a nice day, and

⁷ At least this time he drops the “good” and just says, “Teacher.”

⁸ This is a reference to his bar mitzvah. At age 12, a boy committed to becoming a *bar* (son) *mitzvah* (of the law).

⁹ This is implied here and stated explicitly in Matthew’s account (Mt.19:16).

¹⁰ I was amazed at how many commentators wax eloquent in vv.17-20 about how it is impossible to earn favor with God by being a good person, then when they come to v.21, they say things like, “Evidently, Jesus was impressed with this man.” They point to his honesty or genuineness or some other virtue, and assume Jesus admired this man because of something virtuous in the man.

¹¹ People make much of how Jesus loved the poor, but unlike most people who love the poor, Jesus also loved the rich.

walk away. The criminal would be all smug and happy. Then Columbo would stop, turn around, and say, “Oh, one more thing ...” Then he’d go on to ask the most poignant question of all that would totally expose the person as being guilty and unravel the whole mystery. That’s kind of what Jesus does here. “Oh, just one more thing ...”

21 ... "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Coveting

What’s that about? This guy said he kept the whole law: so Jesus hits him with the tenth commandment (Thou shalt not covet). What is coveting (or greed—same thing)? Very simple: Coveting (or greed) is when some created thing holds a higher place in your heart than God.xxxxAnd it can be tricky to detect. Is your stuff more important to you than Jesus? Hard to say for sure, isn’t it? But Jesus loves this man so much, he’s going to make it really easy. He forces him to choose: Your money, or me. Pick one.

Ocean’s Eleven

Does that sound unreasonable? Is it unreasonable to keep someone out of heaven because he loves his money more than Jesus? The movie Ocean’s Eleven is about a guy who’s trying to get Julia Roberts to leave her evil boyfriend. So Danny Ocean steals millions of dollars from the boyfriend, then he says, “I can get that money back for you on one condition. If you give up your girlfriend, I’ll get you your money.” They guy says, “Done. Where’s my money?” He has no idea that this whole exchange is caught on camera, and the girlfriend is watching. So, of course she immediately leaves that guy. xxxxI don’t know anyone who watches that scene and says, “She’s being kind of extreme. She’s leaving him just because of that?” No. Even though it was millions of dollars, everyone watches that movie and says, “Yeah, walk away from that crumb. A guy who cares more about his money than his girlfriend is a slimeball.” That’s nothing compared to loving your money than you love God.¹² God is far more worthy of our love than any woman or man.

Is Jesus Asking a Lot?

So that’s one reason this is perfectly reasonable. But there’s a much more important reason. Look at what Jesus says:

21 ... "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and ... (what does Jesus promise?) you will have treasure in heaven."

Is Jesus asking a lot of this man when he tells him to give everything away in exchange for eternal riches? What’s worth more: money on earth or treasure in heaven? Is it asking a lot to say, “If you give up something worthless, I’ll give you something priceless”? If you’re drowning and God offers to replace the water in your lungs with air, is that a sacrifice—giving up all that water?xxxxWas Jesus asking a lot of this man? No, he wasn’t, and we could take it a step further and say Jesus never asks a lot of anyone. He does require everything. We saw that back in ch.8 when he said to follow him you must deny yourself

¹² Loving money more than God is a violation of the 10th Commandment and the 1st and 2nd Commandments (no other gods before me and no idols). The first and last Commandments are really the same commandment. What is covetousness? It’s placing money or possessions ahead of God. That’s the definition of coveting (greed). That’s why Colossians 3:5 says, **Put to death ... greed, which is idolatry.** If you love possessions more than you love Jesus, you have shattered the most fundamental law in the whole Word of God.

and take up your cross. He requires your whole life—everything you have, all your money, all your stuff, your family, your time, your skills, your energy, your hopes and dreams—everything.

Luke 14:33 ... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

So he requires everything. But does he require a lot? No. He never asks a lot of you because he never, ever asks you to give up anything that's worth more than what he'll give you in return—not even close. You might have to give up pennies on earth for millions in heaven, but never will you ever come out behind.xxxxAnd that applies to more than just money. There are plenty of things he requires that feel like they cost us, right? Like giving up a grudge—forgiving someone. That feels like it costs you something, and it does, until you receive the reward. What about the 20 minutes it might cost you to get up in the morning and spend some extra time in prayer? Whatever it costs you is zero compared to the reward.

What is the One Thing?

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said.

What's the one thing? What does he lack? Well, what does Jesus offer him?

21 ... "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

The one thing this guy lacked was treasure in heaven.

Child-like Faith and Money

If you lack treasure in heaven, how do you get it? Very simple: prefer it. That's all. Prefer heavenly treasure over earthly treasure. That's all you have to do, and you can have it. Jesus says, "Get rid of your earthly treasure and I'll give you heavenly treasure." Jesus wants to know—"Which do you prefer?"xxxxBefore, Jesus was saying the only people who enter the kingdom are people with baby faith. Here's it's preferring heavenly treasure. Which is it? They're the same thing. The only way you'll ever prefer treasure in heaven above treasure on earth is if you trust Jesus. No one has ever seen this heavenly treasure, so the only way you can value it is if you trust Jesus when he says it's valuable.xxxxSo by choosing treasure in heaven, you're really choosing Jesus himself. That's the point. Jesus didn't tell this guy, "You'll have treasure in heaven if you sell everything and give to the poor." He said, "You'll have treasure in heaven if you sell everything and give to the poor and then *come follow me.*" If you don't get that last part, the rest of it is worthless. If you give all your money to the poor for any other reason, it's not only worthless—it's evil. You're right back to doing good works to make yourself a good person.

He Went Away Sad

How will this guy do on test #2? Does he get excited about the possibility of gaining treasure in heaven?

21 ... "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 At this the man's face fell.

This Greek word here is used to describe a cloudy day. You could see this man's face cloud over. That statement is the center of the whole passage¹³ (That's where Mark puts the climactic, central point—in the middle).¹⁴ I thought the emphasis might fall on, "Follow me" or "treasure in heaven." It turns out

¹³ Verses 17-27.

¹⁴ Mark placed the climax of his book in the center, and the climax of the Transfiguration account at the exact center. I suspected that was happening here because of how Mark seems to be adding extra verbiage at the end (repeating the disciples astonishment,

the center is “**His face fell.**” The emphasis is on his emotions. Then he emphasized it even more by repeating it.

22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad

The guy’s double sad. There’s one other place in the Bible that talks about someone selling everything. In that case, the guy actually does it. And that’s another passage that points out the emotions.

Matthew 13:44 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Just like our passage here—in order to get the treasure, he had to sell everything. And the guy who did it is full of joy. This rich young ruler didn’t do it, and he’s crushed with sorrow. And the emotions are crucial because your emotions show what you value and what you believe and what you love.

Separation Anxiety

It’s like we saw last time with the separation anxiety. A baby with separation anxiety can be playing with his favorite toy, and if mom leaves the room, he’ll toss that toy aside so fast it looks like he hates the thing. If you have baby faith, you’ll have separation anxiety at the slightest separation from Jesus. If you love money, you’ll have separation anxiety with your money and possessions, because that stuff takes the place of your father.xxxxThe first question for this guy was, “Have you seen yourself? Answer: no. Second question: “Have you seen the treasure in the field?” When this guy looked at Jesus, eternal life, treasure in heaven—when he looked at all that did he see that treasure in the field that is worth a million times more than all his earthly wealth? No.

22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Baby Faith is Hard

Hard for the Rich

So this man came sprinting up to Jesus looking like the hottest prospect imaginable. As this conversation goes back and forth, Jesus is standing, and this guy is on his knees in front of Jesus. His look of eager expectation became even more eager when he thought he had a good answer to Jesus’ first comment about the law. Then Jesus hits him with the “one more thing.” If you want eternal life, you have to let go of your idol. And everyone there could see the air go out of his balloon. His face clouded over. His head dropped. He looks at the ground in silence. Jesus is quiet. Finally the man rises to his feet. Then he turns, and slowly walks away. Maybe he pauses, looks over his shoulder, then keeps going.xxxxThe only sound is the man’s footfalls on the dirt road as he walks off. No one speaks. They just watch this tragic figure until he disappears over the rise. Then Jesus is the first one to move. 23 Jesus looked around He’s looking at each face. He’s reading their hearts.¹⁵ He knows exactly what they’re thinking. And then he blows their minds.

etc.) That reminded me of when he did the same thing at the Transfiguration, as if trying to make the word count work out. So I counted, and “his face fell” lies at the center.

¹⁵ There are three references in this paragraph about Jesus “looking.”

Verse 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Verse 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples ...

Verse 27 Jesus looked at them and said ...

I assume Jesus generally looked at people when he spoke with them, so there has to be a reason why Mark keeps mentioning this. And it’s not hard to think of a reason if you think about everything Mark has been teaching about perception. Remember when Jesus healed the blind man in two stages? First he fixed the man’s eyes, but not his understanding. Then he restored his

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard 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 man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 The disciples were even more amazed.

That's typical. Jesus says something, the disciples say, "Jesus, that sounds way too strong." And he says, "Oh, here, let me say it again even stronger."xxxxMost people believed wealth a sign of God's blessing. This guy has God's blessing, and every spiritual advantage, and *he* can't go to heaven? He was the guy everyone wants to be. He's young, he's successful, he's rich, he's powerful and influential, he's well thought of. Most likely he was a synagogue ruler, which is remarkable for a young man. He must have been winsome, good looking, likable, a people person. Everyone likes him, God obviously likes him if he's that blessed—if that guy can't make it in to heaven ... **26 ... they said to themselves, "Who then can be saved?"** xxxxAnd Jesus is probably thinking, *Finally, they're getting it.* When Jesus said no one can enter the kingdom unless they receive it like a baby, they weren't confused then. But when Jesus shows them a real live example of what he means by that, it was a shock. So often we think we get a biblical principle, but until you know what it looks like in practice, you don't have it.xxxxNotice the irony of this passage and the previous passage. In the previous passage you end up saying, "Wow, if babies are accepted, ANYONE can be accepted." And here you say, "If the rich can't make it, NO ONE can make it." It's astonishingly easy and astonishingly hard.xxxxSo, what's the answer to their question?

26 ... they said to themselves, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

So now we just went from difficult to impossible. It's impossible for rich people to enter the kingdom of God—without God. But with God, all things are possible. Isn't that also true for poor people? Poor people can't enter the kingdom without God either. Whether you're poor or rich, it's impossible for you to enter without God and possible with God, so what's the difference between the situation for the poor and the rich? The difference is this: No one can be saved without access to God's saving grace, but it's much harder for rich people to gain access to that grace than it is for poor people.xxxxIt's not that poor people, lowly people, humble people, helpless people, spiritual babies *deserve* to enter the kingdom. No, it requires just as great an act of God for those people to enter as for rich people. But the lowly are much more likely to gain access to that grace, because grace comes only through baby faith. And the #1 cause of death for baby faith is money.

A Hard Master

In our world, verse 22 is a strange sounding statement, isn't it?

22 He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

"He was so sad."xxxx"Why?xxxx"Because he was rich."xxxxWho gets sad because he's rich? If you're rich, you're in control, right? You have the power. This guy has a choice. If he would rather have

understanding. And after that, it says the man saw everything clearly (8:25), using this same word. That's the only time the word is used in Mark prior to this. And the point was to illustrate the difference between the Pharisees' blindness and the disciples' blindness. And before that, there was the parable of the sower, which was all about listening to God's Word. Listening, hearing, understanding, seeing, perceiving—that's been a major theme in the book. And mostly, everyone is blind or deaf to one degree or another.

So I think when Mark talks about Jesus looking, looking, seeing—three times in one incident, I think we're meant to understand Jesus is looking at them with perfect perception and insight. Everyone else looks at this rich man and sees a remarkable, godly, law-keeping model of the kind of person who will receive eternal life. Jesus looks at him and sees a tragic figure who is going to allow his money to drag him right into hell.

And when the disciples respond, he looks at them with the same supernatural perception, and answers according to their spiritual needs rather than just spouting facts.

riches in heaven than all his earthly money, he has that option. If he would prefer the earthly money over the riches in heaven, he can choose that. It's all up to him. This guy has the power to select whichever option he sees as more valuable, so what's the problem? If you want to be rich, keep your money. If you don't want to be rich, give it away. You can do whatever you want—right?xxxxEvidently not. Clearly, this guy wanted eternal life, and he wanted riches in heaven. He didn't walk away laughing, "Jesus, you're full of baloney. I don't buy what you're saying." No. You can tell from his emotions, he really did want what Jesus was offering. But he couldn't have it because he was enslaved to a cruel earthly slave owner who wouldn't let him go, namely, money. He couldn't follow Jesus, not because he had money, but because money had him. He might as well have been locked in iron chains. He couldn't let go of that money any more than a zebra can let go of its stripes. And so he stands on the outside looking in, with his nose pressed up against the glass of heaven, looking at the treasure that was just out of his reach. And his heart broke and his face fell and he went away miserable. xxxxWhen it says Jesus looked at him and loved him, it's not because Jesus admired the guy. It's the love of compassion. Jesus saw those chains and it broke his heart.xxxxIf you want a summary of this whole passage, here it is: A man came with the right question to the right man and received the right answer, but he made the wrong choice because he loved the wrong thing. Be careful what you let your heart fall in love with, because you can't just change your love on a dime.

The Deceitfulness of Wealth

Beware of money and possessions. Back in chapter 4, in the parable of the sower, Jesus warned us about becoming weedy soil, where the deceitfulness of wealth and desire for other things come in and choke out the work of God's Word in our heart. Our tendency is to read that and say, "The deceitfulness of wealth? I won't be deceived. I won't fall for its lies." But if you allow earthly possessions anywhere near your heart, look out. Once something touches your heart, it's amazing how deceivable you become.

Conclusion

Now remember, in this passage, this man's wealth illustrates all forms of human greatness. At the beginning I asked you to remember what form you're tempted to run after. Maybe it's not money. The thing that's touched your heart is acceptance or proficiency in something or knowledge or whatever. Whatever it is, let's apply these two tests to ourselves.

- 1) How do you use God's law?

When you strive to do the right thing, is it to make yourself a good person? To bolster your greatness? Or is it to express your love for God and trust in him? When you fall short, do you rationalize and adjust God's law to grade on a curve?

- 2) Or do you repent with contrition and deep desire to return to closeness with God? xxxxlIs there anything in this world threatening to touch your heart, so that if you had to choose between that and following Christ, you might walk away sad?

Do you have more separation anxiety toward anything in your life more than you do toward Christ? If so, loosen your grip on that thing. Let it go, follow Jesus, and you will have treasure in heaven, eternal life, and the kingdom of God.

Jesus is the Rich Young Ruler

And that's possible because of the fact that Jesus is the true rich young ruler. Jesus was rich, right?

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Jesus was the rich man who really did give up everything. And why did he do it? Because he preferred treasure in heaven.

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross.

He was rich, he was young (died in the prime of life), he gave up everything for eternal riches, and he gave to the poor, us, that we might become eternally rich. He perfectly kept the entire law of God, so that we could be justified through faith in him—if we have baby faith.

Summary

This passage is a real-life illustration of what Jesus meant about no one entering the kingdom of God without baby faith. This man seemed like an ideal candidate for the kingdom from a human point of view, but Jesus gave him two tests to see if he had baby faith. #1: “Have you seen yourself? Jesus holds up the mirror of the law, gives him a hint (no one is good except God alone), but the guy doesn’t repent. #2 Have you seen the treasure in the field? Jesus makes him choose between money and treasure in heaven, and they guy’s love for money won’t let him choose heaven. Money destroys baby faith.