

## **“The Two Most Important Questions” The Gospel According to Mark 10:17-31**

July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018

It is human nature to ask what has to be done to succeed at something, get along with others, or even just get by. In today’s passage of sacred Scripture, a rich, young ruler ran to Jesus, knelt down at his feet, and pleaded with Him, asking “*What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*”

*How would you answer that question if it was asked of you?* For sure, it’s a very important question, and we’ll see how Jesus answered the young man in today’s message.

We’ve spent the past 3 Sunday mornings working through the first 16 verses of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s gospel account in the Bible’s New Testament. The sequence of events in those verses has been **marriage**, then **children**, and then **material possessions**; God’s’ sequence of how family develops. Today, we’ll look at a bigger chunk of that chapter, tracing out the answers to two key questions I’ve called “the two most important questions.” They’re important because they concern the salvation of our souls; we all have a soul, and it will exist forever, both in this present life and the one to come. Unless Jesus comes back to earth first, each of us will experience the death of our bodies. According to the Bible, when Jesus does return to earth in power and glory, our bodies and souls will be reunited with each other, and we will go, body and soul, through eternity – either heaven or hell.

Dear ones, we have the incredible privilege today of having God Almighty in our midst! When His people gather together to worship Him, He is here with us! Not only that, but so also are those in the Church Triumphant (Christian souls who’ve fallen asleep in Jesus). What is taking place right here, right now is a literal slice of heaven on earth!

### **The Gospel According to Mark 10:17-31:**

<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.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

<sup>28</sup> Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

<sup>29</sup> So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, <sup>30</sup> who shall 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. <sup>31</sup> But many *who are* first will be last, and the last first.”

These verses can be divided into two sections. The first section, verses 17-22, concerns the request of a young rich man of Jesus to answer what had to be done to gain heaven in the next life. (What to Do to be saved). The second section, verses 23-31, details the difference in understanding the impact of riches according to Jesus and His disciples. (Who will be saved).

We cannot properly understand what’s going on between this man introduced in verse 17 with the little children of verses 13-16, which we studied last Sunday morning. We learned that those who would receive the kingdom of God (salvation from sin) had to become as little children; no presumptions, no qualifications with eager, child-like faith. Jesus’ point with the children was to show us that we had to come to Him fully dependent upon Him for life and salvation. We can do nothing at all to earn God’s salvation for our sin.

And, with today’s opening verse, we have the very opposite kind of man – independent and self-assured in his abilities and resources. He was sincere; He knew that Jesus was the One Who would help Him with that question. The man saw salvation from his sin as something he could achieve by doing something worthy. Jesus lists for him several of the 10 Commandments – if the man were perfect (good) he’d have no trouble achieving salvation – steering clear of adultery, murder, stealing, lying, defrauding while also ‘Honoring father and mother.’” Jesus was diagnosing that the young man was not “good” because he had a bad heart condition. Inwardly, the man was a great sinner, though he tried to project goodness outwardly.

The man said that he kept God’s commandments back to the time he was a child. Out of His heart of compassion, Jesus pinpointed the man’s sin by commanding him to sell all his stuff and give the proceeds to the poor. Do that, Jesus said, and he’d qualify for eternal life in heaven.

But, the man was not willing to do that. He walked away sad because he had many possessions. This is the only time in Mark’s gospel account that someone walked away from Jesus sad. Yet, the man had his sin pegged; his stuff was his god. He wasn’t willing to part with it. “He had it; it had him, holding him tightly in its grasp.” (Hendriksen, 397) This man had broken the first commandment and made money his god. He was not willing to pick up his cross and follow Jesus. We don’t know if the man came back to Jesus any time after this. I hope he did for his eternal sake.

The first live nationwide television broadcast was a big deal. A number of prominent people were asked to address the nation. Conrad Hilton was among them. Everyone waited to see what this great man would say to such a tremendous audience. He said, “A number of you have stayed at Hilton hotels. Let me ask you to do something for me. When you take a shower, make sure the shower curtain is on the inside of the tub.” *Really? Shower curtains? The housekeeping staff must’ve been ecstatic!*

The Christian life is not a Hilton hotel. Yet, God truly owns the hotel and He makes the rules. Just make sure that they are His rules you are following. He only has one rule. He wants you to die. Do that, and He will live through you. Once He begins to live through you, you own the hotel, too.

“Let us watch against the love of money. It is a snare to the poor as well as the rich. It is not so much the having money, as the trusting in it, which ruins the soul. Let us pray for contentment with such things as we have.” (Ryle, 219-220)

Friends, this rich young ruler stands as a perpetual monument to the fact that if we have everything, but do not have Jesus, we ultimately have nothing. *What about you? Do you serve God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Is Jesus your Lord?* It may be that you love someone or something more than God. If that’s true, you’re in the same place this young man was. Put your trust in Jesus to lead you through this life and the one to come after it. And, you will inherit eternal life in the kingdom of God. The worthy things that you do, then, serve as proof of your being in Christ; they are not the basis of salvation. Jesus is.

After the man walked away from Him, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” We can imagine the shock on their faces, and perhaps a few gaping jaws at those words of Jesus. If anyone could inherit eternity, those with the financial means could buy it!

In verse 24, Jesus reiterates His statement of verse 23 - “Children (the first time Jesus called them that), how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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.” *But who are the rich?*

According to *US News & World Report*, people living in North America, Europe, and high-income Asia-Pacific countries hold 90% of the world's wealth. You're in the top 1% of global wealth if your annual income averages \$32,400. So, for instance, a registered nurse or an elementary school teacher’s average wage falls well within the top 1% worldwide. The percentage of global wealth owned by the top 1% earners is 54%! (Investopedia website)

We are the rich, at least in terms of money and possessions. And, the temptation is great for us to trust in them to see us through. It’s been said of Christians, “Show me your checkbook, and I’ll tell you how much you love God.” That’s probably true.

John Wesley once preached a sermon with three points. “The first,” he said, “is make all the money you can...” and an old saint in the front pew said, “Amen!”

Then Wesley said, “Not only should you make all the money you can, you ought to save all the money you can,” and the saintly old man in the front row said, “Amen!”

Then Wesley added, “Not only should you make all the money you can and save all the money you can, you should give all you can.” And, the saint in the front row said, “Why spoil a good sermon?”

*Can you imagine an elephant passing through a buttonhole?* It is just as ludicrous for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle. Humanly speaking, it’s absurd...impossible. Similarly, a person does not enter the kingdom of God with anything except the grace of Jesus Christ.

And, that answers the disciples’ question of verse 26, the second important question of the passage before us this morning, “Who then can be saved?” *How would you answer that question?*

Hopefully, you'd answer it like *The Catechism for Young Children* answers it in question 55 – “repenting of sin, believing in Christ, and leading holy lives.”

Jesus said in response to the disciples, “With men *it is* impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Salvation is completely beyond the sphere of human possibilities; we can no more save ourselves than we can save anyone else. God alone must save, or we are not saved at all!

A group of people were hanging out near a river when one of them fell into the water. It was obvious the guy couldn't swim, as he thrashed about wildly. One of the men in the group was a strong swimmer and was called upon to jump in and save the man before he drowned. But, he watched the man struggle until he began to stop thrashing. Only then, did the man jump into the water and save his friend.

When the rescue was over, the rescuer explained his slowness to act. “If I had jumped in immediately, he would have been strong enough to drown us both. Only by waiting until he was too exhausted to try to save himself, could I save him.

Perhaps your life is full of activity, by which you are striving to show yourself worthy of God's good grace. Your efforts can actually prevent you from being saved! Unfortunately, some people must reach the point of being too exhausted to continue trying to save themselves (from their sin) before they become willing to trust in the Savior and receive His gift of salvation.

The late missionary Jim Elliot said, “It's true that he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to keep what he cannot lose.”

In verse 31, those who are first are those who are regarded highly by the culture because of their wealth. But there are other things that come into consideration, such as advanced education, position, prestige, and talents, all of which are highly regarded by men in general. Sometimes, the accolades come from God's people. But, since God sees and knows the heart many of these very people are assigned by God to a position behind the others. That would be because they are smug in their wealth, not dependent on God for daily living. Some of them are merely coasting through this life. That doesn't mean we shouldn't pursue advanced education or positions of influence. God surely saves some with many degrees and initials, not to mention those with much wealth and influential positions. The issue is whether those blessed as such are trusting in those things as opposed to God in Christ.

We looked at two very important questions – what we must do to inherit salvation, and who can be saved. *Have you surrendered to Jesus Christ?* Only He can qualify you for eternal life in glory after this life comes to an end. You were born disqualified, and you can do nothing to qualify yourself to God. It is all a work of Jesus Christ, who came to earth to actually save the people that God the Father had given Him. His sacrifice ensured eternal life for all Who proclaim Him as Savior and Lord.

A mother living in a tenement house went shopping for groceries. While she was in the store, a fire engine raced by. She wondered, “Is the fire engine going to my home?” She had left her baby asleep at home. Forgetting about the groceries, she ran toward home. Her building had fire hoses aimed at it. It was burning like a matchbox. Rushing to the chief, she cried out, “My baby is up there.” He shouted back to her, “It would be suicide for anyone to go up there now; it's too late.”

A young fireman standing by volunteered, "Chief, I have a little baby at home, and if my house were on fire, I'd want someone to go up to save my baby. I'll go." The young fireman climbed the stairs; he got the baby, threw her into the rescue net, and just as he did, the house collapsed and he was burned to death.

The scene is two decades later at a graveside. A 20-year-old woman is sobbing softly. Before her, at the head of this grave, is the statue of a fireman. A man stopping by asks respectfully, "Was that your father?" She replies, "No." "Was that your brother?" "No," she says. "That's the man who died for me."