

With Man it is impossible, but not with God.

Mark 10:17-31
Sermon 8/17/08

Mar 10:17 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?"

Mar 10:18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

Mar 10:19 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.'"

Mar 10:20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

Mar 10:21 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."

Mar 10:22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Mar 10:23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

Mar 10:24 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!

Mar 10:25 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."

Mar 10:26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"

Mar 10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Mar 10:28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

Mar 10:29 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,

Mar 10:30 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.

Mar 10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

[PRAYER]

This incident must have made a strong impression on the disciples as it is found in all three of the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. From our account in Mark we know that this was a man who was Rich, from Matthew 19:20 we can also glean the fact that he is "young" probably somewhere between his early 20s and late 30s, further from Luke 18:18 we learn that he is also described as a "ruler" someone who obviously had significance and authority. So from all three of these facts together we get the title that is commonly used to refer to this passage of scripture "The Rich Young Ruler".

Even if we are not rich, or young, or a ruler, or even a man I think that in this person we can clearly see parts of ourselves and learn from Christ's teaching. This passage has often been misunderstood. Some have read this and literally sold everything they had and given it all to the poor thinking that would be the key to heaven, but that is far from the point of this text. Ironically, in so doing they may have stumbled over this man's main problems, his belief that it was his works/actions that would save him.

At the beginning of vs. 17 we see that the setting is the last of Jesus major journeys before the crucifixion. Jesus is on his way south toward Jerusalem. He will soon be in Bethany and enter to the joyous cries of "Hosanna" and within the span of a week of that he will be crucified, buried, and rise again. By now news of his amazing miracles and teaching has spread throughout Israel and sparked a range of responses from curiosity to worship to sheer hatred. This young ruler has surely heard of at least part of Jesus' miracles and teaching. The passage opens on such a promising note. He enters upon our scene literally running up to Jesus. What eagerness and excitement he seems to have to see Christ. He doesn't even try to use his position to get a private audience he runs right up in public in front of all those around Jesus. Then he goes further and kneels before him... a very significant sign of respect that was reserved for some of the highest leaders like Kings. Then in the culmination of this introduction crescendo he raises it to an even higher level when he addresses him as "Good Teacher..."

We learn in other scriptures that only God is good. The implication of his statement if taken literally would mean that the young man views Jesus as God. From his actions and his words the man seems to be gushing in praise and respect for Jesus or perhaps just an outward attempt to ingratiate himself with Jesus.

After the initial praise of Jesus the young man moves to the core of his purpose. "what must I do to inherit eternal life" What must **I do** ... This statement and the young man's subsequent answers reveals a fundamental flaw in his logic. To him it is all about ...works and all about him... follow these rules give this much money... don't be around these people. His question was what more must I do. Religion ultimately boiled down to a list of does and don'ts.

Jesus' teaching has been one that is radically different from what the religious leaders at the time were expecting. He is proclaiming that entrance into the kingdom of God is not something you can earn via good works, your Jewish ethnic heritage, how much money you had, or your societal importance. These two views are now about to collide.

In verse 18 Jesus said to him....

vs 18

Mar 10:18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

Christ was not impressed by outward appearances or shallow flattery ... he can see into the heart and soul of everyone. There is nothing that we can hide from God! It doesn't matter how we appear to man or how society views us, our souls are laid bare before the all seeing eye of God every second of every day.

Christ immediately calls this man's bluff. The young man in his flowing speech has literally called Christ God. Jesus of course is not implying that he is not God, he never asks a question because he needs to know the answer. Jesus wants to make this young man think about the implication and weight of what he has said. Is Jesus just another teacher that this man can use his smooth people skills on or is he in fact God on earth. If the man does in fact recognize Jesus as God on earth than shouldn't he do whatever he says immediately. Shouldn't we for that matter!

This question of who Jesus is, is a significant one then and now. Many people seemed to respect him as a good teacher and for the miracles he did but could not come to understand the truth that he was in fact God and follow his teaching. However we see in Jesus' famous interaction with Peter the correct answer to the important question:

In Matthew 16 vs 15

Mat 16:15 Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Mat 16:16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

How did Peter know this? Jesus goes on to reveal the truth. That this knowledge comes from God who alone opens our eyes to see the truth.

Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Our Young Ruler was much different from Peter though. After focusing his attention first on God and his goodness at the end of vs 18. Jesus now goes on to apparently directly answer the man's question.

Vs 19...

Mar 10:19 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."

At initial glance it can appear to be a surprising answer. We readily know verses like:

Eph 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

And also

Gal 2:16 which says: we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

So what is going on here... Jesus seems to be saying if you obeyed all of the law that could give you eternal life. That of course is true. The problem is that no one can obey the whole law. The primary reason Jesus goes to the Law is that the purpose of the Law is to point us to our inability to fulfill it. When Jesus says that these are the things that the young ruler should do for eternal life He is essentially saying "This is part of what you are supposed to have done... can't you see you have sinned and fall short.... do you acknowledge this? "

If someone asked you "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" What would be your answer? Might you turn to a familiar set of verses like those in Romans, where we are told:

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Jesus answer is actually very similar to Romans 3:23. First, it points back to the holiness and goodness of God . This is something that we can take far too lightly. Our God is an infinitely glorious and good and righteous God. Second, we are reminded that all have sinned and fallen short. There is no one righteous no not one. Thus, in our natural sinful state we could not even be capable of standing in God's presence and having even just one tiny ray of His glory shining upon us.

So what is the young rulers answer?...has he been able to keep the law? Say even for a week? Of course his answer reveals much.

Vs 20.

Mar 10:20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

He boldly says that ever since he was a child he has obeyed all of these commandments. A 'sinless man' by his own judgment now appears before the only true sinless man to walk the earth. The self-righteousness is oozing out of him. He reminds us of the Pharisees of that day who were all about outward appearances.

The Rich Young Ruler was at least partially right in his answer he had not physically murdered anyone and he probably had not stolen anything. He had probably done a good job living a moral life in public and he eliminated the most obvious fruit of the sinful nature, but he had not and could not eliminate its root which still lived inside of him. Jesus described these people as white-washed tombs. On the outside they portrayed themselves to others as lily white while the heart was darkest dark.

What God is most interested in, is not the outward appearances that man values most, but what is on the inside that matters. For it is what flows out of a man's heart that matters and drives his actions. In references earlier in the Gospel Jesus underlined this point and raised the bar to the impossible height that people could never get over on their own strength. One example is in the beatitudes:

Mat 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

Mat 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Murder therefore was not just the letter of the law but the spirit of it. Even having angry thoughts made you guilty of this commandment. Just as adultery was not limited to having a physical relationship but even having a wrong lustful thought made you guilty. Jesus summed up the commandments in this way... "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." A clearly impossible task of our own strength.

This problem of self-righteousness is one that has run rampant throughout history and even in

our day. ~~Shortly before the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Luke we have the story of two very different people who go to pray:~~

~~Luk 18:9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:~~

~~Luk 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector:~~

~~Luk 18:11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.~~

~~Luk 18:12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'~~

~~Luk 18:13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'~~

~~Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."~~

What do you base your salvation and righteousness on? Is it on the work of Christ and him alone or is it on your own strength? There is an inner Pharisee in all of us wanting to rear its head and crying out look how righteous I am and what I have done.

Vs 21:

What was Jesus' response to the young ruler's answer. It was Love. "Jesus looked at him and Loved him" not a blind love to tell him that everything was alright but a love that told him what was wrong.

He calls out probably one of the many idols that he had in his life. Something that his love for was greater than that of God. The very first commandment is "*You shall have no other gods before Me*". The gods in our life that distract us from Christ need not be budda or mohammed they can just as easily be money or earthly pleasures.

Jesus tells the man what he must do and makes the choice clear.... Do you love me more or do you love money more. Jesus already knew the answer and that is why he asked the question. No longer could the young man bask in his self righteousness. He was forced to choose between Jesus Christ and one of the prime idols of his life. ... "Chose today whom you will serve.." The young ruler wanted to mix his idols up. Have a little Christ have a little \$ have this and that. For those of you who were in the Judges Bible Study class that is a familiar tone. Many times in the history of Israel they made this hybrid religion of a little bit of the true God and a little bit of Baal and a little bit of this. But our God is a jealous God and he demands everything or else to him it is nothing. Our response should be as we read in Matthew 13:44-46:

Mat 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Mat 13:45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,

Mat 13:46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

The Rich Young Man's heart is exposed by his reaction.

Vs 22....

Mar 10:22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

What did he value more Christ or his wealth? The answer is his wealth. Ultimately the rich man did not possess his wealth his wealth possessed him. He got closer to God than most, actually engaging Christ in a conversation but he was still infinitely far away. Do you value Christ above all things? The idol that replaces God in your life could be something as 'good' as your family, children, your job, sports, a hobby, etc. John Piper in his book God is the Gospel asks the following probing question:

"The critical question for our generation-and for every generation-is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?"

This man was in the very presence of Christ... and walked away. He valued the artificial heaven he had created on earth more than the infinite Joy from knowing Christ. This is a danger made all the greater in this age ... where immense plenty and ease of life is the standard. In fact just this last week while on vacation I noticed one of the beach houses was named "Heaven Can Wait". We should long for heaven to be in the presence of the Glory of God not think that it is here on earth.

Vs 23-vs24:

The Rich Man leaves and Jesus further explains what has happened....

Mar 10:23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "**How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!**"

Mar 10:24 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!**"

The disciples are stunned by Jesus word's that those who have wealth will have trouble entering the kingdom of God. The prevailing culture and religious teaching of that time was similar to the health and wealth teaching in many churches today. The teaching was that the rich are rich because they are clearly blessed by God. While those who are poor or crippled must be so because of their lack of faith or sins (remember the blind man and the question posed to Jesus who sinned this man or his parents?) Somehow Jesus did not get the memo from the Pharisees explaining how things worked and in his teaching he turned everything upside down or perhaps I should say right side up.

It is not just wealth though that keeps people from the kingdom. Ultimately a dark heart will find any idol to plug its hole. Sometimes the love of money burns brightest in those who have none, look at how 'successful' lotteries and casinos are. The people throwing their money away on such things are typically not the rich but the poor. If not money we can insert any number of idols that people's hearts might gravitate too.

Jesus goes on to provide a glaring illustration of the challenge facing those who seek to be saved.

Mar 10:25 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."

A camel going through the eye of a needle! An impossibility there is no way that any human no matter how smart could ever make that happen. It is physically impossible by the means that we have at our disposal. There are no amount of books you can read, no amount of things you can do to enable it. Just like the salvation of man.

The disciples and others around seem to recognize the consequences of what Jesus is saying.

Mar 10:26 Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

If one of the best examples of the Pharisee's proscribed way of do this and don't do that won't gain access to heaven then how can anyone get into heaven. How possibly can a human by themselves do enough good to be saved?

Jesus then gives the stunning answer in verse 27.

Vs 27

"What is impossible with men is possible with God." The reason we can be saved is not because of what we do it is because of what God does. Jesus was on his very way to pay the steep price for his sheep. To do what we never could do. To be the spotless lamb that bore the price of the sins of those God would call to him.

It is impossible for Man on his own to be saved. Is not the whole story of the Old Testament one painful lesson after another of how national Israel failed time and time again to uphold the law. However, with God this great uncrossable chasm between sinners and God's infinite holy Glory can be bridged. He is the one who is both Just and the Justifier. He graciously changes the desires of the hearts of those who don't deserve it so that instead of being opposed to him we now began to be sanctified and our ultimate desires are for him.

We understand this fundamental truth that our salvation is only accomplished by God's amazing grace. That he has accomplished the work and paid the price for us. After all this how many of us then go on to live a life of self-righteousness and one in which we view our salvation as our own doing. We are supposed to be a totally new creation. Christ has now shed the light of understanding on the shadows of the Old Testament. God did not buy us so he can have us for 1 day out of the week. He wants us to live and breathe every second for him not just on the Sabbath day. We can take no refuge in saying I give 10% of my money to the church (even if that is before taxes). Christ demands our full loyalty and from that should loving flow the desire to give to him since it is all his. 10% suddenly seems like a pittance in this light. But how much of us fall into the logic or comfort of saying oh I am pretty good... I give 10% to the church, I am here just about every Sunday, I am even on a setup or tear down team and help out in other ways. Christian living is more than a checklist. The rich young ruler had the longest and best checklist around it was probably stamped and blessed by all of the religious leaders of the time. He wanted Jesus' blessing too but Christ ripped up the list in order to show him the true way to heaven.

Finally Peter chimes in with his own observation.

Mar 10:28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

Mar 10:29 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,

Mar 10:30 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.

Christ's answer tells of the costs/rewards to those who are his Children. First he states the cost that is faced by new believers in vs 29. Biological families that are divided, loss of earthly possessions and status, travelling from your homeland, and others all for the sake of the gospel.

But rewards now and in the future make the cost pale in comparison. What are the rewards look at vs. 30:.... Now look around you ... I am not referring to the Chatham Center but to the people here do see your new sisters and brothers and mothers and children and the fellowship

that you can have with them and other fellow believers in Christ. We often lack this true sense of family which was so present in the early church let's take advantage of it even more. There is another thing that he promised them too. .. persecution. This world hates us just as it hated him but in the age to come we have our ultimate reward that of eternal life in the presence of God's radiant glory and that is truly the pearl of great value.

His closing words on this topic are to underline the difference between the values of this world and what God sees.

Vs 31 ...

Mar 10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

The values and judgment of the world are completely opposite those of God. The world says that this Rich Young Ruler has achieved the pinnacle of success he has done everything just right, he is well respected... and look what he has achieved... he is young, rich, and obtained power... what more could you want. In the world's eyes and in his own eyes the rich young ruler was perfect. In the eyes of God he wasn't fit for the kingdom of heaven.

There is so much that can be said on these verses. In addition to what I have already stated let me leave you with two closing thoughts. First, Do you see any of this man in your own life? There can be two relations that you might have with God. One is that you are like this man and even though you might be living a moral life you are not yet saved. If this is your case I would urge you to first consider God and focus on him. Think of his infinite glory and majesty and goodness and think of how far you are from that. Pray to God that he may change your heart and that you may then accept him as your Lord and Savior.

If you already know Christ as your Savior and Lord are you living a life that shows that? Are you acting in humbleness. Do you stand in awe of the amazing Glory and Goodness of your God and the unsurpassing grace that he has shown you through no work of yourself? Often once we are saved we slowly slide into an attitude of self-righteousness, one in which we began to take credit for little parts of our salvation and in little ways essentially steal some of God's glory. We should remember that we are a new creation bought and paid for by the work of Christ. Everything we have and are we owe to him.

Finally, there are many interesting applications of these verses to the way we do evangelism. Consider what the modern reaction would have been to the rich young ruler. He enthusiastically comes running right up front in public and expresses his desire to enter the kingdom, he is well connected/powerful, and he lives one of the most moral lives around. But would many churches really challenge him to make a heartfelt repentance – how many

churches even acknowledge the need for that? We are all in need of genuine repentance and turning from sin no matter how righteous one may appear on the outside. I think all too often this young man would have been eagerly welcomed into many churches, become a member, even a leader, and praised for his morals and his works. Yet, there would have been no genuine conversion, he would not have repented or even be brought to understand the need for his repentance. That is one reason why membership is something that we do not view lightly at this church. We need to be very clear that being a Christian and part of our body is not simply living a moral life but living a life transformed by God's power.

The verses tell us that Jesus loved this man... the most loving thing that Jesus could do was not to give him a false hope but to sear his conscience and shine the light of the law to point him to his need to turn. Ultimately, though the young man could no more change the desires of his heart on his own than a leopard could change its spots or a camel could go through the eye of needle. We do not see any more of this man in the scripture but I do hope that Christ did eventually change his heart.

END

*Bible Verses all from ESV

** Multiple Sources used as reference