

Deadly Seduction or Eternal Reward

Mark 10:23–31

Mark 10:17–31 — 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?” 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.

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!” 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.”

Today we join the follow-up meeting Jesus has with his disciples after the rich young ruler asked him what he could do to inherit eternal life. The young man is exemplary in every aspect of life. He honors his parents; he'll make a good family man — someone you might think would be a good candidate for your daughter to marry. He is a smart, hard worker who has not only acquired sizable wealth, but has been careful not to defraud others in the process. He is sincere. He is kind and polite. He's engaging. He's nice to his dog. He is a religious man who has studied his Bible and knows God's Law. And he is an idolater and is outside of God's kingdom. Because Jesus loved him, he told him the truth about his spiritual condition. If he is to inherit eternal life, it will be through following and worshiping the One who gives eternal life. But because of the man's love of things that are anchored in this world that's just a vapor world, he chose the allure of idolatry for a season and walked away from the author of life.

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Lest we think that there is no application for us because we do not enjoy his level of wealth, let's come to grips with two things. **First**, everyone in this room is wealthier than 95% of the rest of the world. Every one of us will have a meal following worship. We have homes to go to. Those homes will be climate-controlled so that we don't swelter. If we get thirsty, we will go to a tap that brings in pure drinking water from the city. We tend to look at the wealthiest among us, and think that because we are not gazillionaires, we are not wealthy. But all of us fall into the category of wealthy from a historical and global perspective. We need to be warned about the seduction of wealth.

Secondly, the fundamental problem is not his bank account, but his idolatry. His idol of choice was wealth — and wealth does have unique seductive dangers. But an idol is an idol. ***Anything in your life***, and anything in my life that keeps us from denying ourselves and following Christ — it is an idol. Christ will brook no idols, no pretenders, no competitors to his lordship. None. His teaching is for us.

So Jesus follows up with his disciples after this man's sad departure, and they are **astonished** by what the Lord says. Beginning in v 23, he says — "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the 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?**"

They were **astonished** because Jesus turned everything they thought they knew about wealth upside down. Wealth was understood to be a blessing, and indeed, God can bless with wealth. In Deuteronomy 8 God says he gives power to get wealth that he might confirm his covenant. That is not a universal promise to everyone as though it is some ***name it, and claim it*** doctrine. It is simply a principle that God chooses to bless some with wealth for his purposes. Abraham and Job were both famously rich individuals. Over time, the Jewish Rabbinic tradition evolved to **absolutely** associate wealth with God's special favor. The rich were understood to ***be approved*** by God, and thereby assured entry into heaven. So when Jesus says, it is near impossible for a rich man, to enter heaven, all the traditional teaching that the disciples had received through their lifetime was **undone** and they were **greatly astonished**.

His statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle does not have a literal tie to a gate in Jerusalem, as some legends have supposed. It is simply a hyperbolic statement to demonstrate the impossibility of salvation through human means. The disciples' response is, "If the rich, who we thought had God's special blessing and guarantee of entering, the kingdom, are not

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automatically in... who on earth can or will be saved?" They are actually closer to the belief system of the rich young ruler than they are to what Jesus is teaching. The rich young ruler wondered what he could do in the first person to have eternal life. What must I do... The disciples are look at a person's wealth and thinking, "If material blessing — earthly treasure — is not enough to get you in, what will do it?" They are asking the same question.

The rich young ruler, who had idolized all of his possessions, was confident that there was something that he could do to earn his way in, to gain some sort of favor with God. Likely, none of the disciples had the extreme wealth that this young man had — but they had the similar notion that **there must be something in this corrupt, passing earth that can be leveraged for entrance into God's Kingdom, which is holy, eternal, and spiritual.** When we put it like that, it sounds absurd even to our earthly minds. ***And we must put it like that***, because that is the false doctrine we are prone to embrace: there is something corrupt and earthy that can acquire what is holy and heavenly.

When Jesus corrects their understanding of wealth, they finally ask a good question: "**Who, then, can be saved if there's nothing that we can do to acquire it?**" The Lord's answer: There is nothing you can do. It is impossible for you to gain your own salvation. You cannot buy your way into the kingdom; you do not have the price in your hand. You will never have the price in your hand.

I'm confident there are a large number in this room, who at some time in the past have thought there was something that they could do to improve themselves, or gain some sort of favor with God that would cause him to sit up and approve of their entry into heaven. Because of the hardness and pridefulness of the human heart there are likely some in this room who still struggle with that at this very moment. You believe that you need to balance the moral scales in some way. You think that your past sinfulness can be erased by your present decency and good effort. Hear the words of Jesus: "**With man it is impossible.**" He can state it no more plainly or clearly than this. There is no nuance to tease out, no interpretive challenges. There is no entrance into God's kingdom through human effort. It is impossible. While this may astonish you, as it did, the disciples, Jesus did not stop there. Salvation cannot not be acquired by man. It is impossible. ***But with God, all things are possible.***

So they are astonished, and then they are assured.

They are **assured** that salvation and entrance into God's kingdom is a gift given by God himself.

What is impossible with man is possible with God. Salvation is of the Lord, as we sang earlier.

Entering eternal life happens in the same way that a small, helpless children must look away from themselves and trust their parents to provide. We must look away from ourselves and our efforts to God's provision for forgiveness and holiness in Christ.

Eternal life is received as a gift from God. This is why Jesus says it **is possible** for God. This is the assurance he gives not just the disciples, but all believers. It is our assurance. **Our salvation never has, does not now, and never will** rest on what we do or don't do. Our salvation rests on the finished work of Christ and the peace that he made with God by shedding his blood on the cross.

Disciples, **look away from yourselves to the Savior**, standing in front of you telling you this truth.

Redeemer's Grace, **look away from yourself to the Savior**, who is speaking this truth this morning. Be assured that when you come to him in faith, all who come to him he will never cast out.

Our enemy is called the Accuser of the Brethren. Demon dupes will whisper in your ear that, while it is theoretically possible for God to save you, at some point you passed the limit of sin and grace, and now you are either put out of God's kingdom, or at least you must do something to try and get back into God's good grace. **We must remind ourselves of truth: It was impossible for us to enter the kingdom at the beginning. And it is impossible for us to maintain ourselves in the kingdom through some good work.** As we looked away from ourselves at the beginning, we must every day look away from ourselves. We must preach the gospel to ourselves and be assured that God did what self-efforts at keeping the Law could not do. He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as an offering for sin. What was impossible with man is possible only by God.

They are **astonished** that they cannot do it, **assured** that God can do it, and told that **allegiance** to Christ will be rewarded.

Their whole notion of improving themselves, or acting better in order to gain entrance into God's Kingdom is now completely destroyed. Everything they thought they knew is undone. So Peter steps forward, perhaps as a spokesman for the group, or perhaps trying to justify himself, and makes a statement of fact: "See, we have left everything to follow you." There is a plaintiveness to it. It is almost as though he is saying, "Lord, won't this do it? We've laid it all on the line for you." It is true that they have left everything behind to follow Jesus — their families, their possessions... but it is also true that they did not **sell** all their possessions, nor **abandon** their families. There is ongoing,

progressive discipleship as they move toward “an ever-deepening walk with Jesus” as one commentator puts it. They are following Christ to the degree they are able at the moment. They will grow in faith after the resurrection and will follow in ways that they cannot imagine at this time.

Kids, have your parents never instructed you to clean your rooms and make them spotless? Perhaps company is coming and they say, “I don’t want to see anything out of place. Put everything up.” Off you are sent to bring order out of chaos. With much pain and difficulty and intensive back-breaking labor you go to your domicile and labor, and work, and sweat, and exhaust yourself, and three minutes later you emerge having cleaned to a level you hope will pass. And your taskmaster parent says, “What! You can’t possibly have cleaned your room!” They walk with you to inspect the work. When they open the door, some of your socks remain strategically placed around the room so that their odor is evenly distributed. Your bed is half made and the stacks of clothes washed two weeks ago remain at the foot of the bed. Your parent says, “I thought you cleaned! This room isn’t clean!” And you say, “You should’ve seen it just a few minutes ago. I put all of my trucks and balls in the closet. See! I have deprived myself of all joy to obey to you.” Well, if you are 17 and say that, you are likely and to be redirected to finish the job. But if you are five and say that, your parent likely has enough wisdom, to know that at that time in your life, that may be all that you can do, so there is pat on the back, knowing growth will produce more results in the future.

Though the disciples are not as mature as they imagine, Jesus responds in a very gracious way to Peter’s statement and gives them tremendous, encouraging, boldness-building truth, even though they have not yet arrived at full maturity. Their **allegiance** to Jesus, however, imperfect or robust, is not unnoticed by God, who rewards those who seek him and follow him.

If following Christ means that your earthly family rejects you, the body of Christ is your eternal family and there are 100 times more brothers and sisters in it. In the immediate context, this likely pointed to the home Churches gathering discreetly because of the persecution of Rome. It is a reminder that the family of God is enduring. Our earthly families, as precious and dear as they are, or not eternal outside of Christ. Even without persecution, we will one day, be separated from our earthly families unless those family members come to faith. But the body of Christ is forever, and it is infinitely larger.

If your houses and land are confiscated by the government, who told you to shut up about Jesus, you will receive 100 houses as the early church experienced in Acts 4 where they had all things in common. We currently have just a taste of that on occasion, but the day may be coming when we

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return to this first century reality. Good news! Jesus assures us that our **allegiance** is repaid by God. There is a paradox where he associates persecution with these rewards.

If this were the old-fashioned Sesame Street, we would read the list in vv 29 & 30 and say “One of these things is not like the other.” Persecution doesn’t seem to fit into blessing, does it? Yet Jesus puts it here. You will recall as we spent time in Revelation last year, those who are persecuted actually have their eternal reward ramped up. It is as though every persecution for Christ’s sake is a deposit in an eternal savings account. So when Jesus says, “Look whatever you’ve lost here in this passing world will be gain in eternity. You will be repaid 100-fold.

We need to be reminded that whatever the world takes away through persecution – whether that be money, freedom, friends and status, comfort, or even life itself — Jesus is a debtor to no man. He pays back in an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Rejoice in this! though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:4–7) What the world can take away is only what the world has to offer. We are to be jettisoning all of that stuff anyway. ***Don’t drop a single anchor; we’re almost home.*** There is a sense in which persecution helps rid us of what will not last. It is a bonus that it increases our blessing in eternity.

If we will see this, as Jesus promises, we will be equipped to see the removal of all things on this earth as gain. If we feel or fear the loss of earthly treasures, relationships, comfort, or freedom, it should be a dashboard warning light that we have yet to grasp the eternal glory and blessing of the kingdom of God. Wealth is seductive, and can seductively worm its way into our hearts until we believe that because we can have anything we want, we should have everything that we want, and that we must have it. It causes us to think that our preferences, our desires, our comfort and security should be had. That is a seductive notion that runs counter to Christ’s teaching, that if we are to follow him, we will have to deny ourselves. Earthly wealth can strike at the very heart of spiritual passion, love for Christ, and discipleship. Let our souls be warned by the Lord’s clear teaching.

We need to preach the gospel to ourselves of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, and we need to sing truth to ourselves of eternal life in his glorious eternal Kingdom:

Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.
The body they may kill; God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

PRAY

Children, keep yourselves from idols...

Honor the Lord with your wealth...

You shall have no other gods before me...

Wealth as a curse — Lot, the RYR

There is peculiar allure and peculiar accounting for the rich. — The book of James in chapter 2 and in chapter 5 notes that God will specifically hold the rich to account for the way they treat the poor. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man, who had trusted his wealth to provide all he needed, died and was then tormented in the fires of Hell. The picture is that he would've traded everything he had in life for a drop of cold water on his tongue. But Lazarus had received no material wealth in life, though as James 2 puts it, God made him to be rich in faith and an heir of God's kingdom forever.

Sproul noted that Lot, when dividing the land with Abraham chose the portion of land that would benefit his cattle business. But that choice landed him Sodom, which was not a bad place for raising cattle, but was a terrible place for raising children.

There is a godly use of wealth.

Proverbs 3:9 — Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce...

Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian Revival