

THE SCROLLS

Meeting The Messiah | Mark 10:17-31

Life Lesson

Like the rich young ruler, many of us approach Jesus with sincerity and even reverence, but still cling to something that competes for His place in our hearts. Jesus' call to "sell all and follow" isn't just about money; it's about releasing anything that has become an idol, anything we trust more than Him.

Examine Scripture

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "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 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth."
21 Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."
22 But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.
23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were astonished at his words. Again Jesus said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the

The Poverty of Great Wealth

In our text, we see a contrasting image of the Pharisees, who were seeking to trap Jesus in an effort to invalidate His ministry. Here, we see a man who seeks the right person to ask the right question. The man is not trying to trap Jesus or seeking to abuse His grace and mercy. From all indications, Mark shows us that this man's intentions were good... but that was the root of the problem! This text illustrates the limitations of good intentions, morality, and the dangers of legalism. Jesus quickly turns the conversation and provides an answer to this man's, and all humanity's, deepest question: What must I do to inherit eternal life?" However, the answer was not what the man expected. Again, Jesus shows the radical requirements of true discipleship.

Vs. 17-18

Here, Mark gives us a glimpse of the sincerity of the man and his question. Again, he was not seeking to trap or manipulate Jesus; he was expressing a genuine desire to know how to receive eternal life. Though Mark does not reveal the man's wealth until v. 22, we see from Luke's account that he was a ruler or court official (Luke 18:18). In addition, Matthew reveals that he is a young man (Matt. 19:20). Therefore, this man is obviously a man of prominence, power, and possessions who rose to leadership quickly.

In addition, the man's actions reveal his heart and genuine desire to learn from Jesus. First, he "ran up" to Jesus. In Jewish culture, men of nobility and position did not run; it was considered improper and uncouth (as seen with the father in Luke 15:11-32). Secondly, when he approached Jesus, the man "knelt down before him." Lastly, he showed Jesus tremendous respect by calling Him "Good teacher." Therefore, there is no doubt that this man's intentions were good, and he was genuinely seeking assurance of eternal life.

However, Jesus' response may seem abrupt, but as usual, Jesus cuts to the heart of the issues: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." The Greek word used for "good" is not the usual "kalos," which refers to something that looks good or is

eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 They were even more astonished, saying to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Looking at them, Jesus said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God.” 28 Peter began to tell him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time —houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and eternal life in the age to come. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

- Underline “Good” in v. 17.
- Circle “eternal life” in v. 17. Draw an arrow to “inherit” and write “earn” above it.
- Bracket “all these I have kept” in v. 20. Write “morality/religion” above the bracket.
- Box “because” indicating reason in v. 22.
- Box “but” indicating contrast in vs. 27, 31.
- Bracket “how hard” in v. 24 and “easier” in v. 25.
- Circle “saved” in v. 26. Circle “all things are possible with God” in v. 27, and draw a line to connect the two circles.
- Underline “a hundred times more” in v. 30. Draw an arrow to “and the last first” in v. 31.

Personal Notes

aesthetically pleasing. Here, the Greek word is “agathos,” which means good to the core, virtuous without corruption. There seems to be two intentions in using this word. First, Jesus uses it to give a mini-sermon on His own deity. Jesus is quick to respond that no one is good except God. Jesus is taking this man’s subtle title and using it to show His own deity. In a sense, Jesus is saying, “If no man is good and only God is good, then are you calling Me God?” Subtle, yet powerful.

Secondly, the man is using it as a description of Jesus, comparing works with goodness. Jesus does good works; therefore, He must be good. In the same way, the man does good works, like keeping the Law, so he must be good as well. While his declaration unintentionally revealed Jesus’ deity, he intended to place himself on equal ground, saying, “You are good because of what you do. I am good because of what I do.” In fact, in Jewish culture, wealth was often seen as a sign of God’s blessings. Therefore, the man felt justified and good because of his position and wealth.

This is the flaw in the man’s religion (and of any religious person). In his eyes, goodness is found in what a person does: religious acts, good works, and legalistic adherence to rules. Yet, he has lost sight of the very Scriptures that say no one is good, no one who seeks righteousness apart from God (Psalm 14:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20). Despite his goodness, the man still lacked eternal life, and he knew it.

Do we rely on such goodness for our eternal life? Are we guilty of measuring our following of Jesus based on what we do, rather than what He has done?

Vs. 19-22

Now, we come to the difficult conversation and even more difficult realization. Jesus continues responding to the man by listing the second half of the Ten Commandments. These commandments are horizontal, referring to how we treat one another. So, are these more important than the first half of the Ten Commandments? Is this why Jesus refers to them only? Certainly not! Jesus is simply leading the man toward his greatest need and what is genuinely required for eternal life.

The man responded, “Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth” (v. 20). Again, the man shows great respect to Jesus and great morality in the keeping of the Law. There is no doubt about his devotion to the Law. He seems genuine, and Jesus did not respond to him as He did to the Pharisees. The man is not being prideful; he is simply providing evidence of his morality and goodness. However, that is the problem. The man has yet to see what he is neglecting in an attempt to maintain goodness through religion. No matter how good he may be, he is missing what he needs. In his goodness, he has seemed to forget that “all of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a polluted garment” (Is. 64:6).

Personal Notes

Therefore, moved by love, Jesus exposes the man's greatest sin and failure. Jesus responds, "You lack one thing: Go and sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." There it is! Jesus' call to radical discipleship. However, Jesus is not only calling this man to leave everything and follow Him; He is calling this man to fulfill the commandments he holds so dear. Masterfully, Jesus used the second half of the Ten Commandments to test the man's adherence to the Law. Now, Jesus reveals that, though the man was fulfilling some form of the Law, he forgot the most significant part of the Law: "Do not have other gods besides me. Do not make an idol for yourself" (Ex. 20:3-4).

At some point in his life, perhaps in his pursuit of power and prestige, the man became ruled by wealth. Wealth and possessions became his idol. It was the one thing that he could not let go of; in a sense, he did not have a hold on it; it had a hold on him. Therefore, Jesus cuts to the heart and demands that he sell everything, give it to the poor, and then follow Him. The man's response shows that wealth was his idol: "But he was dismayed by this demand, and went away grieving, because he had many possessions" (v. 22). Interestingly, Mark does not tell his readers that the man was rich until this moment. It emphasizes what Jesus meant when He said, "You lack one thing." He lacked complete devotion to God; money had become his idol.

The man started the conversation, genuinely seeking eternal life, but when Jesus revealed the cost, it was too much for the man to bear. He chose money over eternal life, idols over God. He left grieving because he was exposed, and he knew his love for money was greater than his love for God. That is the danger of idols; they will always keep you from truly following Christ. Sure, we may look good, religious, and even holy, but any idol keeps our hearts from Christ.

Vs. 23-25

Again, Jesus takes a public teaching and turns it into a private lesson for His Disciples. He turns to them and says, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 23). The Disciples were left astonished, perhaps due to their Jewish understanding of wealth and God's blessings, so Jesus repeats it. To solidify his point, Jesus uses hyperbole, one of His favorite literary forms in teaching: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 25).

There is much debate on the meaning of this hyperbolic expression. Some suggest that "camel" is mistranslated and should be "cable" or "rope." Others suggest that it refers to a special gate in Jerusalem called the "Eye of the Needle," where camels had to bend low to enter; however, there is no archaeological evidence to support this gate. However, the more accurate interpretation is that Jesus is using a

Personal Reflection

1. What am I relying on for my eternal life and security? God's grace or my own "goodness" and efforts?
2. Is there anything in my life (possessions, status, relationships, comfort) that I would struggle to give up if Jesus asked me to?
3. When confronted with the radical call of discipleship, do I respond with surrender or sadness?
4. Jesus promises that the reward outweighs the sacrifice. Do I believe this, or do I live as if this life offers more than He does?
5. Do I genuinely believe that what may be impossible by human effort is fully possible with God? In what ways have I seen this to be true?

Commentaries

Exalting Jesus in Mark by Daniel Akin

MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Mark 9-16 by John MacArthur

BECNT: Mark by Robert Stein

Mt. Zion's Mission

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MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY
disciples of Jesus Christ.*

hyperbolic form to express an impossibility. This interpretation aligns with a common rabbinical saying, which likens an elephant passing through the eye of a needle to convey the difficulty or impossibility of something. Either way, Jesus' point is clear. He is not saying wealthy people cannot enter the kingdom of God; He is referring to the dangers of wealth and possessions becoming an idol. Idols replace God as the center of your life. Idols keep you from following Christ, so they must be removed.

Vs. 26-27

The Disciples, even more astonished, responded much like you might ask: "Then who can be saved?" Now comes the crux of the Gospel: "with man it is impossible, but not with God, because all things are possible with God" (v. 27). In other words, man cannot enter the kingdom of God on his own. No manner of wealth, blessings, works, religion, or goodness is enough to earn eternal life. It is not what we can do, but what God has done through Christ. Paul is quick to remind us, "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast." (Eph. 2:8-9). It is nothing we do or anything that we have; it is all because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. God makes the impossible possible: the salvation of man. However, this is true for every aspect of our lives!

Vs. 28-31

The Disciples are now aware of the cost of discipleship, and Peter interrupts to plead their case. Jesus continues by describing the reward to those who express enough faith to surrender to Him completely. The reward is much greater than the sacrifice. Not only is there entrance into the kingdom of God and salvation, but Jesus also declares that everyone will receive more than they have sacrificed. For those who leave their homes, they are given a new home in Heaven. For those who leave their families, they are given a new family in the Church. For those who leave possession and wealth, they are given the riches in Christ. Those who are willing to give their lives in the midst of persecution will receive eternal life that no one can take away.

Jesus concludes with the upside-down way of the kingdom of God. Those who are first in this life: we have achieved power, position, and wealth, without Christ, will not be counted as "first" in the kingdom of God. Yet, those who had nothing or left everything to follow Christ, placing Him first in their lives, though considered the "last" now will be "first" in the kingdom of God. In other words, true discipleship is surrendering oneself completely to Christ in humility and love. Only those who forsake all idols or anything else that would replace Christ will be first in the kingdom of God.