

HAVING IT ALL ISN

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Mark 10:17-27

"JESUS, MONEY, AND YOU" SERIES

#1, HAVING IT ALL ISN'T ENOUGH

MARK 10:17-27 (P.826)

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INTRODUCTION

-- A private investigator was hired to track down and retrieve stolen funds. The search led to Mexico. The investigator crossed the border and then, realizing he would need a Spanish interpreter, opened up the telephone book and hired the first interpreter listed in the Yellow Pages.

After many days, he finally captured the thief and, through the interpreter, asked him, "Where did you hide the money?" In Spanish, the thief replied, "What money? I have no idea what you're talking about."

With that, the investigator drew his pistol, pointed it at the suspect, and said to the interpreter, "Tell him that if he doesn't tell me where the money is, I will shoot him where he stands."

Upon receiving this message, the thief said to the interpreter, "Señor, I have hidden the money in a coffee can in the room across the hall."

"What did he say?" the investigator asked the interpreter.

The interpreter paused for a moment and replied, "He says he is prepared to die like a man!"

-- Money can motivate us to be clever - and to be crazy.

-- The New England Journal of Medicine reported a strange discovery made by French doctors in 2002. A 62 year-old man entered Cholet General Hospital suffering from stomach pain.

An X-ray revealed a huge mass of metal in his stomach. When doctors operated, they removed 12 pounds of coins and jewelry. The man had a strange psychiatric disorder. When he was invited to someone's home and found coins or jewelry, he would steal them by swallowing them. The man had 350 coins in his stomach.

Twelve days after having the coins and other objects were removed from his stomach, the man died from the damage they had done to his internal organs.

-- Well, a love for money can lead to death in more ways than one, as we see in a story about an encounter between Jesus and a man who comes to Him in Mark 10:17f.

I. THE ENCOUNTER (VV. 17-22)

A. A GOOD MAN WITH A GOOD QUESTION (V. 17)

-- What we have here is a story about a good man who comes to Jesus with a good question.

-- The importance of this story is underscored by the fact that it appears in three of the Gospels - Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Matthew tells us that the man is young - possibly in his 20s or 30s. Luke tells us that he was a "ruler," probably indicating that he came from a prominent family and had social status and power. All three Gospels note that he was a man of great wealth. In other words, here's a man who has it all - youth, prestige, power, and lots of money. But he knows that's not enough - he also wants eternal life. That's why he comes to Jesus.

-- At first reading, this looks like a heart-warming scene of a good man coming to a good teacher with a good question about how to obtain eternal life. But everything's not quite as good as it seems, and we find that out in the way Jesus replies to the young man's question.

B. AN UNEXPECTED REPLY (V. 18-19)

1. Unexpected Comment about "Goodness" (18)

a. You might expect Jesus to express His gratitude. After all, this is a man of money and influence, and he comes showing unusual respect for Jesus - kneeling before Jesus (an act that men of such stature didn't do often or lightly) and addressing Jesus with the highly respectable words "Good teacher."

b. But Jesus doesn't reply the way we might expect. Instead, Jesus seems to get picky over the

man's use of the simple adjective "good."

Cf., v. 18

c. So why does Jesus make such a big deal out of the man's use of the word "good?" It's because it reveals the man's flawed thinking. As the rich young man sees it, this is an encounter in which one good man is talking to another good man. Both assumptions are wrong:

(1) His assumption that Jesus is merely a good teacher is wrong. Some have taken Jesus words in this verse to mean that Jesus is denying that He is God. Actually, Jesus is doing just the opposite, as we see later on in the story when Jesus says that following Him leads to eternal life. Jesus is saying that the only one who is good in an absolute sense is God. That's the sense in which Jesus is a good teacher - not because He says nice things but because He is God.

(2) The young man is also mistaken in his assumption about himself - that he is a good man. In comparison with other people, he may be "good" - he may be good by their standards but not by God's.

For example, I've been watching the Olympics, and I've noticed you don't have to be perfect to get a medal - you have to be really good but not perfect. But if you used God's standards in the Olympics, the only way you could get a medal is by being perfect.

2. Unexpected Reference to the Commandments (19)

-- If Jesus' comment about goodness is unexpected, His reference to the Commandments as the answer to the man's question is even more surprising.

Cf., v. 19

-- Is Jesus really suggesting that the way to obtain eternal life is by obeying the commandments? Actually, yes, He is.

Remember the question the young man asked wasn't how can I inherit eternal life but "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's the question Jesus is answering - what the young man must do to obtain eternal life. The answer is to obey God's commandments. The man can receive eternal life by obeying the commandments - but it has to be all the commandments, all the time; obey them perfectly. That's what he has to do, but, of course, he can't - no one can.

C. A MISGUIDED SELF-ASSESSMENT (V. 20)

-- The man's response to the statement about obeying the Commandments reveals his seriously misguided self-assessment.

v. 20

-- The young man has lived his life since childhood according to God's commandments. As he sees himself, he's a good man - probably not perfect, but then no one is perfect. The problem is that he's thinking of goodness from a human perspective not from God's perspective. By human standards good means being good enough, but by God's standards good means being perfect. This young man has a serious misunderstanding about how sinful he really is in the eyes of God who is completely good and holy. The truth is that this young man can never obey God's commandments perfectly and, therefore, can never obtain salvation that way.

But Jesus is lovingly about to show him another way. Look at verse 21.

D. A LOVING CALL (V. 21)

-- The fact is that this man who thought he had kept all of God's commands hadn't even made it past the first of the Ten Commandments. What is that commandment?

"You shall have no other gods before me."

-- The instruction for the man to sell everything he has and give it away to the poor and then follow Jesus will demonstrate who or what is the young man's god.

E. A SORROWFUL CHOICE (V. 22)

-- For the young man this is a sorrowful choice. He goes away sad, but he goes away. He can part from Christ more easily than he can part with his wealth. He has put his possessions ahead of God; his possessions have become his god.

II. THE FOLLOW-UP TEACHING

-- Jesus uses this encounter as a teaching opportunity. In the discussion that takes place Jesus makes two important points - one about money and one about salvation.

A. THE POINT ABOUT MONEY (V. 23-24)

-- As the rich, young man walks away, Jesus turns to His disciples and makes the observation in verse 23, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples are shocked at this because they share the pop-theology of the day, a first-century version of the prosperity gospel, the belief that riches are a sign of God's blessings, but Jesus is indicating that riches may, instead, actually be an obstacle that keeps people from God.

-- How do riches make it so hard to find God? Jesus gives us a hint by the way He addresses the disciples in verse 24 - He calls them "children," which takes us back to the incident described immediately before the story of the rich young man.

Cf., vv. 13-16

-- Jesus says that in order to enter God's kingdom, to find salvation and eternal life, we have to become like children. In what way? By recognizing our helpless dependence on God. Just as babies and small children are totally dependent on their parents for the things of life, so we are totally dependent on God. It's that sense of our dependence that propels us to seek after and cling to God, but riches blind us to our helplessness and dependence. In Revelation 3 Jesus is talking to members of a well-to-do church and He says this in verse 17:

Revelation 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

-- Riches create an illusion of self-sufficiency and rob us of our sense of dependence on God.

-- Now, in case you're thinking well none of this applies to me because I'm sure not rich. Well, you don't have to be rich to make a god out of money or to believe that money can take care of all your problems. Lots of people are dirt poor but have made money and possessions their god and are pursuing them with more zeal than they are pursuing the true God.

-- One more observation about Jesus' command to give everything away. Jesus doesn't command everyone who follows Him to get rid of all their possessions, but He does require everyone who follows Him to surrender their possessions to His lordship, to look on our lives and our money and our possessions as stewardships that belong to Jesus, and we're managers, seeking to serve and please Him.

B. THE POINT ABOUT SALVATION (VV. 24-27)

-- Jesus goes on to make a vital point about salvation in verses 24-27.

Cf., vv. 24-27

-- In verse 24 repeats His statement about how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God - but with one difference - this time He extends it to include everyone, not just the rich. When it comes to obtaining salvation, everyone is on equal footing - it's equally difficult for everyone. In fact, it's not just difficult - it's impossible. Look at verses 25-26.

2. v. 25-26

-- To illustrate the impossibility of anyone earning salvation Jesus uses an exaggerated illustration of fitting a camel through the eye of a needle. I have enough trouble trying to get a thin piece of thread through the eye of a needle. Imagine trying to get a camel (hump and all) through that tiny hole. It's impossible. That's Jesus' point, and the disciples get the point but are totally confused by it and wonder out loud to one another how anyone can be saved. That's exactly what Jesus wants them to wonder; so He proceeds to give them the answer in verse 27.

3. v. 27

-- As far as we as human beings are concerned, obtaining salvation is an impossibility. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor or in-between; there's nothing you can do to be saved. That's the bad news. The good news is that what's impossible for you is possible with God. God can do what you can't. The salvation you could never do enough to earn for yourself, God offers to you as a gift of His grace. But only those who recognize their childlike helpless dependence will ever receive that gift.

CONCLUSION

The rich man came to Jesus asking "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer is, "There's nothing you can do." And so you must like a child stretch out empty, helpless hands to Jesus and say in the words of the hymn, "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling."