

2/18/24

Good morning, Cornerstone! It is good to be with you this morning. Thank you for joining us. If this is your first time worshiping with us, I want to invite you to fill out our connection card. It just lets us get to know you a little more and be able to connect with you more. If Cornerstone is home for you, you can use our app to check in and let us know you are here. There you can also fill out a prayer request so we can be praying for you throughout the week.

We are going to be wrapping up our sermon series called 'counterfeits'. We have been studying all of the things that will take the place of God in our lives. Things that we will look to, to find our hope, our satisfaction, our joy, peace and security when all of those things are found in God and God alone. We have talked about the counterfeits of family, and careers and this week I want to talk about wealth and money.

Today our scripture is going to be found in Mark 10:17-31. If you have your bibles go ahead and turn there if you would like to follow along with us. If you do not have a paper bible and would like one we have some available for you in the back. You can also follow along with us today on the app with the scripture and our sermon notes available to you there.

But before we dive in the teaching today, lets read a part of our passage this morning together which comes from the book of Mark 10:24-26. So let us stand as you are able, out of reverence for God's word as we proclaim the truth in God's word.

SCRIPTURE Mark 10:24-26

"And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is^[b] to enter the kingdom of God! 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." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

INTRO

This morning we are going to be looking at the story called the rich young ruler. We are going to be focusing on the account in Mark but these events are also recorded in Matthew and in Luke. All of the accounts are very similar. Through this being a repeated event with similar account we can know that this was not a parable of Jesus so that he had an opportunity to teach about money, but in fact was an actual event. This was a real person that came to Jesus when he was with his disciples.

This story touches on a lot of things that apply to our lives. Human achievement, security, wealth, power and position. When we look deeper at the things that Jesus said we can see that at its core this story is about salvation. Jesus dispelled cultural myths about God's interaction with people but ultimately Jesus' purpose in this interaction uses money as the subject but it is a message of salvation in Christ.

This understanding will help us to see this message in the words and actions of Christ every step of the way. For someone that does not believe it is a message of hope that Christ came to save. For the believer it is a message in the security that we have in Christ that can and should alter our perceptions.

Mark's gospel that we are reading out of is probably the first gospel that was written. It was most likely written by John Mark who is famous for his falling out with the Apostle Paul. Now where John Mark was

not one of the disciples he was one that worked very closely with Peter. Chances are this is John Mark recording all of the things that Peter told him. Mark is the shortest of the gospels but it is unique in its sense of urgency often using words like 'immediately' or 'soon'. This gives a sense of need to act based upon the truth of Christ.

The first half of this gospel (1-8:26) focuses on Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The second half (9-16) of the book focuses on Jesus' journey to the cross. The book is split at Peter's profession of Jesus as the Messiah sort of as its climax. Where we find this story of the Rich young ruler is in the second half. So there will be tones and allusions to Jesus's death that was coming 'soon'. Mark is building to this event that brings about the kingdom of God with a focus on God's power.

Just before we see this encounter Mark often will give a teaching from Christ and then includes a story right after to show practical application. In this case we see Jesus' teaching about a child-like faith. That we should receive the kingdom of God like a small child. Jesus gives the word of warning that if we don't, we will not enter it. This story of the rich young ruler is included right after this teaching to establish a practical application of the principle Jesus discusses.

There are a lot of things that are important in the details of this story that help convey meaning so lets break it down as we open our Bibles to Mark 10 starting in verse 17.

BODY

Mark 10:17-18

"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."

The first thing that we notice is that there was this man that ran up to Jesus and knelt before him. Now if we remember when we talked about the story of the prodigal son, it was considered improper in the Jewish culture for a man of high position to run. It was borderline shameful for a man of nobility and power to run not to mention to kneel before someone. We know from Matthew and Luke's account this was a young man, that would have been influential and was extremely wealthy¹.

This action revealed that this man had an earnestness and respect to hear from Jesus what he had to say about his situation and eternal security. He would have seen Jesus as, at the very least a spiritual guide possessing wisdom that he found himself in need of. He comes to Jesus and calls him 'Good Teacher'.

This word that is used here for 'good' is the Greek word 'agathos'. It conveys this innate goodness. A goodness that is to the very core of a person or thing. Many Rabbi's, especially at the time, would have refused to use this term in reference to human beings. Now this could have been this man's acknowledgement of Jesus and being above human beings potentially a reference to Jesus as God, however we will see later that this use of 'good' by this rich young ruler is called into question.

This man's questions is telling about his motivation for the information that he seeks. He asks 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'. This man believes that eternal security in heaven is something to be attained. As we remember from last week this is a similar belief to the Pharisees, who believed that their entrance

¹ Matthew 19:20, 22; Luke 18:18

to heaven was secured through their good works. Jesus showed them that their belief is contrary to what God teaches.

This request of a task from this man is also contrary to what Jesus had just taught about approaching the kingdom of God like a child. There is not an approach with innocent abandon. This man approaches with deeds and achievement. At its core this man's desire was to have security in his entrance to heaven. He wanted something to be able to point back to and say I have achieved eternal security because I have done 'this'.

Jesus of course knows all of this and answers him with a question. He says 'why do you call me good (agathos), no one is good except for God.' This is Jesus' challenge to his belief about who he is. Jesus knows that this word of innate goodness can only apply to him, so this is not a denial of it but this man calls him good to the core, without acknowledging Jesus as God. This man more than likely saw him as good because of all that Jesus had done, not that he was good because he is God. If he would have seen him as such it would have indicated that he was actually more open to what Jesus had to say.

Mark 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.'"

Jesus continues to engage in this dialogue and he plays into this man desire for achievement. He tells him to follow the commandments. These commands are found in Exodus 20:12-16 and Deuteronomy 5:16-20. Jesus list 5 of these commands but he changes the order of them intentionally.

Obedience to the first 3 commands would have been easy to verify, they all deal with human relationships. They are external sins and their would have been witnesses should he have committed one of these things. However, the other 2 are sins of accountability. These are the internal sins that only he and God would know about. Do not lie and honoring father and mother.

This command of defraud is actually not found in the original passages. But this word would be pointing to stealing and lying. It would have been Jesus pointing to his wealth. This command would have said do not achieve what you have through dishonest or criminal means.

In this list of commands Jesus leave out coveting. This could have been Jesus testing the young man. Like he was trying to see if he noticed that he left one out. I think that Jesus left it out because he knew that was the command that this young man had not kept.

Mark 10:20

"And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.'"

Notice he calls him teacher again but now he has left out calling Jesus good. This could have been that he was convicted by Jesus' question of the use of his word 'agathos' and this second time drops it, by omission shows that he see Jesus as a teacher but not as God.

This reference to his youth is important. He would be referring to the right of passage into adulthood in the Jewish culture called *bar Mitzvah*. This was a rite of passage when boys became 12 years of age, they

became what was called 'son of the Law'². They came to an age where they were now to be held responsible for how they followed the law in the eyes of men and in the eyes of God.

This rich young man believed that he had kept the whole law perfectly since he was 12, when he became a man. He was coming to Jesus because he believed that he had missed something³. The thing that he missed was the teaching before. The loss of innocence in his approach to God, the child-like faith needed for entering the kingdom of heaven. This ruler focused on when he became a man. Jesus wants him to approach like a child.

Mark 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."

Now Jesus when he saw this man's desperate desire to find this eternal security, it says that Jesus loved him. The word that is used here is 'agapo' many of us know the root word 'agape'. In the New Testament this word nearly always is used to describe God's love to humanity. It is an unconditional sacrificial love. This love that is expressed is symbolic of Jesus journey to the cross. He went and died for the sins of the world because humanity could not atone for their sins without him. In a sense you can see a reflection from Jesus in this love that these are the people he died for. The one that are broken lost in sin and needing salvation. It was in this love that Jesus gives him these instructions.

These instructions were a sign of compassion for him. Jesus saw past this religious devotion and saw what he truly needed in order to find what he was looking for. He points out that there is one thing that he lacks. He needed to have devotion and allegiance to God. Currently his allegiance and devotion were to his wealth and achievements. His instruction was genuine and not figurative. He knew that this man needed to sell all that he had and follow him.

Jesus is instructing him to remove the barrier and follow him. In the theme of Mark's writing Jesus is saying follow me to the cross. Jesus was on his way to go back to Jerusalem where he knows that he would be crucified. Jesus knows that the way to eternal life is turning our hearts away from trust in achievement and earthly security and to trust in Jesus.

This teaching was not something that was new for Jesus, nor was it something that the disciples had never heard before. If we look at the early part of Jesus' ministry in his sermon on the mount in Matthew 6, Jesus said...

Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust² destroy and where thieves break in and steal,²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

This rich young ruler had built up for himself a great amount of earthly treasures. He would have been proud of his accomplishments as anyone would be in his situation. He acquired great wealth, was highly respected, held a position of influence in the culture and probably the synagogue, all while still being seen as a young man probably in his late 20's. Jesus in this teaching in his sermon on the mount, he is

² Luke 2:42-47

³ Matthew 19:20

pointing out that when we accumulate this great amount of possessions or money, that it is often telling of where our heart truly lies. Our desire is for this world not the one after.

Which is why he points out that all of the things of this world eventually will pass away but the things in heaven are eternal. We should be making the effort to store up treasure in the place that is eternal where the things of this world cannot destroy or steal. Have our hearts set on heaven. The heart was seen as the seat of intelligence and will. What a man desires is where he find his purpose. A person's choices and actions are a reflection of what they desire most.

Jesus continues in this sermon pointing out this dichotomy that exists in human beings. Like this rich young ruler he cannot find his value in his achievements on this earth and find his value in Christ. The 2 are in opposition of each other.

Matthew 6:22-24

"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

This symbolism of the eye being a lamp to the body is taking about the focus of a man. Light and darkness are the condition of man. Faithful and forgiven or lost and sinful. This dichotomy is that there can only be one master in your life, God or something else. Where our free will comes into play is that we chose that. We choose our master, one leads to eternal life and anything less than that leads to death.

God does not compete for your attention. Everything in this world does. It attempts to distract, disorient or disillusion but you chose to let it be your master or not. God desires allegiance to him, it is the only way to eternal life.

If nothing else Jesus is just being consistent in the principles that he teaches when he gives these instructions to this rich young ruler. Jesus is saying to him make me your master. Remove the distractions, and the thing that currently has your devotion and follow me to find the eternal life that you seek.

Mark 10:22

"Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

This man hears what Jesus says to him and he becomes depressed. This word sorrowful is 'lypeo' which is a pain you feel in grief. This man felt sad and gloomy because in order ot find what he was lacking he had to loose everything that he worked so hard to achieve and it was something that he was not willing to give up.

The possessions that he had were great. He achieved so much. He already possessed security in this world he wanted for nothing. What he lack was the security of when this world passes away. In order to achieve that last thing that he did not have, he was unwilling to do. He valued what he had right now over his ability to securely enter into the kingdom of God.

This act proved not only to the disciples that were with him but to this rich young ruler himself that his heart was not with Jesus, who to him was this great teacher and God himself, His heart was with his possessions. He like the master of money that he had and did not desire another one.

Now selling ones possession and being poor and destitute was not a requirement to be a disciple. Like we have looked at over the last few weeks in Luke 14. To be his disciple was to renounce the things of this world. God was to be your master. You can have relationships with father and mother but you are to love God exponentially more. You can have possession but your possession cannot have you.

Discipleship, the way to have eternal life, is a commitment to hold nothing in the same position as God. He rules in your life above all else.

His disciples having seen this were probably in shock. This would have been a big deal. Judas was probably already counting the coins that were going to enter the money bag. The other disciples where probably thinking about the resources that would be available to them if this man joined them but he walked away. Jesus then explains to them what just happened.

Mark 10:23-24

“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^[b] to enter the kingdom of God!”

Jesus poses this rhetorical question to them. He knew that they wouldn't know how to answer it. When it says that they were amazed at his words, it is not that Jesus is teaching something new to them about money. Being rich and wealth would have been viewed as having God's favor. If you were rich or had great possession the people would have seen you as being blessed by God, because why would God bless someone who was wicked. So for Jesus to say that it is difficult for people who are wealthy to enter heaven, was a shock. To them it would not have made sense. It was difficult for God's favorite people to get into heaven?

The second time he asks it thought he refers to the disciples as children. This would have been a sign of their spiritual immaturity. Jesus pointed to this and the disciples knew the answer. Entering the kingdom of God was about a relationship with God. For the rich young ruler his relationship was masked by his religion but his actions revealed that his relationship was non-existent. For the disciples they didn't have much before following Jesus so to have that relationship there was not much to hinder it. With those who are wealthy that process is much more difficult.

Jesus gives an illustration for this difficulty with a camel and a needle.

Mark 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.”

Now Jesus could have been talking about a literal camel and a literal sewing needle many people agree that this is what Jesus is talking about. Now it is plausible that the word that was actually used here was 'Kamilos' which is Greek for rope instead of 'kamelos' which is the animal of camel. A rope and a sewing needle is a little less absurd of a comparison. I have also hear it said that the 'eye of a needle' was a

reference to a small door in a gate to the city. That gate was big enough for a human to walk through but not big enough for a camel.

No matter what the interpretation of this illustration is, the situation that Jesus is painting is the preposterous and impossible circumstance. What Jesus is trying to teach his disciples is that following God requires great sacrifice. If it is wealth that stands between a person and God then it is wealth that needs to be sacrificed.

Mark 10:26

“And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”

For the disciples though who again see wealth as a sign of God’s favor they would have thought if it is impossible for the rich to enter heaven then who can? Jesus responds...

Mark 10:27

“Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

Jesus assures them and encourages them that even in this impossible situation, if God is involved nothing is impossible for him. With God it is still possible to change the heart of man. For this rich young ruler and what Jesus is pointing to, salvation through great deeds, accomplishments, successful business, model family, and wealth is impossible. Salvation can only come from God. It is through Christ and belief in him that salvation is possible. Through grace the heart of man is changed⁴.

Mark 10:28

“Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”

Peter takes this opportunity to be the spokesman for the group saying ‘hey Jesus we have left all that we have to follow you. What’s in it for us?’. Again there is this underlying understanding that material possessions is a sign of God’s favor. If these disciples have abandoned everything to follow Jesus what is the sign that God is with them.

Mark 10:29-30

“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.”

Jesus is saying that God sees and recognizes the sacrifices that are made for the sake of following God and sharing the gospel. Jesus knows that it is not just material possessions that will be lost for the sake of following Christ. Many of the things that will be lost will not be because they are given up but they are going to be taken out of rejection. This is Jesus saying you have to take the good with the bad, which is why Jesus says all of these reward come with persecution. This would remove any desire of someone following him just for the reward.

⁴ Ephesians 2:8-9

He talks about the loss of houses or permanent places to live and belong, relationships like brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and lands symbolic of provisions way of producing things to fulfill needs. This reward is pointing to the restorative and redemption of these things that are found in the church.

We will have redeemed relationships like brothers and sisters, children and parents. We will have permanent places where we live and belong, we will have provisions and ways of meeting our needs in and through the community that is the body of Christ. Through Christ we have these ties created between believers and is the fruition of this reward.

Which is why he says that we will have these rewards in this age, referring to here on earth experiencing the church. We will also experience them in the age to come, in eternal life, in the presence of God which is the ultimate reward.

This section ends with Jesus pointing to this distinction with people in this entrance to heaven.

Mark 10:31

“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

It is a final putting to rest that God's favor is not witnessed by human perception. Those that are seen as favored, as in tune with God like this rich young ruler are last in God's list. As proven by his actions, and unwillingness to renounce the things of this world in order to follow Jesus. But those that are humble and appear destitute are the ones that are truly favored by God and honored in heaven.

Disciples by nature have a servant role. Rewards are not based on earthly standards, but on the standards of commitment to Jesus and following him faithfully.

APPLICATION

Now when we study this story it is not a message of not providing for yourself and your family. We should work. We should set the example of what it means to love God while having thing or making money. What we have to understand is our hearts in it. Our world thrives on this idea of money. It's all over media. Advertisements, social media, even financial advice, anywhere. It all plagues on our desire for status. If you have this you will be viewed this way. If you act like this or live like this person you can have anything that your heart desires. If we aren't desiring the lifestyle of the rich and famous we are pursuing after financial stability. If we make enough money, to where we won't have to worry about paying the bills life will be so much better.

I know that I catch myself even praying that. God help my business to grow so that I don't have to constantly stress about paying bills. Or God grow this church so that I can feel more financially stable for my family. That even feels gross to say out loud. I've already been convicted about it all week.

Here's the thing, financially being wise with our money is something that is good and we should have those practices. However, our security cannot be found in things of this world. When we do we will find ourselves placing the things that God wants for us on hold to pursue after it. We sometimes will even defend it in the name of wisdom. God I know that you want me to serve in the kids ministry, but I work so hard during the week when I come to church I just want to be filled and rest before Monday comes around again. We cannot serve 2 masters.

Sid Roth is an evangelist who once worked as an account executive. Prior to coming to Christ, he, by his own admission, worshipped money. When he couldn't get rich, his life fell apart. It wasn't until he met Jesus that he found true peace that made his former love of money pale in comparison⁵.

If we are to find our security in God, finding it in anything else is just a counterfeit. If God currently does not hold that position, what is holding you back? If you were the rich young ruler earnestly and desperately running to Jesus to find that eternal security, What is it that Jesus would tell you to give up. What holds your allegiance? What is it you are devoted to?

Money is an easy thing to point to but it is a hard thing to recognize. It is like the commands Jesus pointed out, it is an internal battle. You have to know where your heart lies. Where are the treasures that you have accumulated.

This is why here at Cornerstone when we talk about tithing, it is not about generosity, it is not about a percentage, it is about worship. It is giving to God in an act of stewardship, out of what God has given I give back to him. It is also a sign of priorities. We give of the first fruits, we give because this thing is not where my treasure is. It is not my master, you are.

What is that thing for you? What is God calling you to give up in order to follow him. Where is your heart? In this life or in eternity?

⁵ <https://sidroth.org/about/sids-story/>