

The Journey to the Cross, Part 6

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] So Mark chapter 10, beginning at verse 13. People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good? Jesus answered, no one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

[1 : 07] Teacher, he declared, all these I have kept since I was a boy. Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, he said, go, sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come, follow me. At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus said again, children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, who then can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, with man, this is impossible, but not with God.

All things are possible with God. Peter said to him, we have left everything to follow you. I tell you the truth, Jesus replied. No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, and with them persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

[2 : 28] But many who are first will be last and the last first. Amen. Questions are important, aren't they?

Well, some questions at least are important. Let me give you a number as we begin this morning. The number is 288. That is the number that people doing some data research calculated a curious four to six year old girl will ask her mom on a standard day.

23 questions per hour. On average, one question more than Theresa May faces at Prime Minister's questions.

Moms get asked some really tricky questions as well. The data researchers analyze the five toughest. Here's a couple real testers. I don't know if you've had them. Why is water wet?

What are shadows made of? I like that question. That research also then began to look into who in our society typically gets asked the most questions.

[3 : 33] So for a child, mom comes first, always. Primary teachers were not too far behind. And then across society as a whole, we tend to ask a lot of questions from nurses and GPs. And when you start to think about that, perhaps it's no surprise. Here are people who are authorities on their subject. Mom, who is an authority on everything. And everybody else has a slightly narrower field.

But these kind of figures, teachers, nurses, doctors, they help us understand our world. And they explain realities for us that we might find difficult to comprehend by ourselves.

Perhaps then, it's no surprise to find that Jesus faced so many questions. People understood Jesus was an authority figure, someone who could help them to understand reality.

And so we come to a couple of really important questions today. You know, of all the questions that we ask, some are mundane, some have profound significance for our lives. And of all the questions that Jesus faced, the ones that we have in verse 17 from the rich young man, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[4 : 51] And the question of the disciples in verse 26, who then can be saved? They become questions of massive significance and importance. So we're going to think about three questions today as we look at these texts.

The first question is this, can anyone be good enough for God? It's a really important question. For many people today, if you were to talk about goodness in relation to God, you might find them saying something like this, well, I know I'm not perfect, but I'm basically a good person.

So if there is a God, I'm pretty sure that he'll accept me in the end. Perhaps that's your understanding. Perhaps you know people who have that kind of understanding.

We meet a man here, a rich young man, who has a slightly different understanding, it seems. It seems like he has been living a good life, but he's still feeling dissatisfied.

He still is not sure if he's going to receive eternal life in the end. And so he comes to Jesus. He comes to Jesus with real desire. Look with me at verse 17.

[6 : 05] We find as Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him. So in that day, adults didn't really run, but he comes and he runs. And he shows great respect to Jesus. He fell on his knees and he calls him a good teacher.

And then he asks this crucial question, what must I do to inherit eternal life? But at the heart of this man's question, as Jesus begins to probe, is another question.

How good do I need to be to be good enough for God? And we see that as Jesus begins to talk to him. Jesus says, you called me a good teacher.

Why do you call me good? Since no one is good except God alone. What's he doing here? He's going to invite the man to see if his idea of his own personal goodness matches up to God's perfect standard of absolute goodness.

So he gives him a list of commands. You know the commandments. Verse 19, he gives him a list there of commands drawn from the Ten Commandments. And in verse 20, we discover a man who is confident in his law-keeping ability.

[7 : 17] I've kept these since I was a boy. All those commands about loving others, I've kept those since I was a boy. So Jesus is going to probe further and challenge further.

But notice why Jesus does it. I think it's really important. In verse 21, Jesus looked at him and loved him. We need to see that about Jesus.

He challenges because he loves. And his challenge effectively is this in verse 21. Do you love God more than you love money?

If you want treasure in heaven, sell everything, give to the poor, and you'll have it. Do you love God more than money? And connected to that, can you truly love others by using your money?

Rather than keeping it to yourself, can you show that you really love by giving? So the man comes with this deep desire. He's challenged by Jesus.

[8 : 25] And he goes away in despair. Verse 22, at this, the man's face fell. Well, he went away sad because he had great wealth. The cost was one he was not willing to pay.

The standard that Jesus set was too high for him. And he went away sad. Perhaps we like to compare ourselves with others when we think about goodness.

I feel like I'm at least as good as that person, or at least I'm not as bad as that person. And sometimes we forget that there is an absolute standard.

We think in relative terms, in comparison, with each other, when all the while God is inviting us to compare with his perfect, absolute standard.

Every two or three years, it seems like, in Scotland anyway, a really hard higher maths paper is set. You read about it in the news.

[9 : 28] That it was far too difficult. They were asking questions that pupils hadn't been prepared for. And so the examination board then has to respond. And they respond by lowering the pass mark.

So there's no harm in the end. Now, here's the question. When we read the Bible and we read God's commands and we discover that these are difficult things to do, is God someone who lowers the pass mark?

Here's my standard, but I know you're finding it hard. Therefore, I'll lower the bar so your idea of goodness can be good enough. No. God does not grade on a curve like our exam boards do.

One thing we need to understand about Christianity is it's really honest about our God. That God is perfect.

That he is perfectly holy and good. That he hates sin. He hates everything that is wrong or unjust or impure. And so if we want to earn God's favor, if we want to do something to know God, then the standard is 100% perfection in all of our lives.

[10 : 42] That we must love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength in our words, our actions, our thoughts and motives all the time from childhood until death.

And we must love others with the same kind of energy and care to the details that we apply to ourselves as we love and look after ourselves.

And if we can do that, then we can inherit eternal life. But of course, as we all know, when we look at our lives, and we don't need to look very deep, none of us can do that.

As the Bible says, no one is righteous, not even one. And so there's honesty about God, and there's honesty about our human condition.

By ourselves, we are unable. But there's also good news. There's a hint of the good news. In verse 18, Jesus says, Why do you call me good?

[11 : 47] No one is good except God alone. And here's a glorious thing that we discover about Jesus. He is God, and he is truly good as someone who becomes truly man.

When we look at Jesus in the Gospels, we discover the only one who has ever lived a life of perfect love, both towards God and towards other people.

We discover the only one who has lived in complete obedience to his Father's commands, and he's done it with joy all the way through. And that's good news for us, because the Bible says Jesus came to do that as a substitute for us.

We fail, we break the law, we stand condemned, but Jesus comes to stand in our claim, to be perfectly righteous where we fail, and that's a gift we receive by faith.

One of the things this passage, I think, reminds us of is that there are two approaches to Jesus, one that is doomed to failure and one that meets with success and blessing. You've got the man. The man is a model of somebody who comes with, it's like he comes with this religious record of achievement.

[13 : 01] Look, Jesus, here's these commands that I've kept since I was young. Here's me, and I'm trusting in my goodness. He goes away sad.

But remember, Jesus met with another group. Verse 13, he met with little children. How do little children come to the people that they trust?

You think about little children. When they see their mom or their dad or somebody that they trust, they come with their arms open, don't they? There's absolute trust and faith there to be embraced by the one that they love.

And that's what we see from the little children. That's the way to blessing. Come with your hands empty. We have nothing to bring to the table.

We come to Jesus to receive his righteousness, his goodness and perfection as a gift. When you and I, when we stand before God, the judge, at the end of time, as we all will, one of the things that we need to think about is what will we point to as the basis for God to accept us?

[14 : 17] When God says to us, why should I let you into my perfection, into heaven? Let's learn from the rich man. Don't point to ourselves.

Don't say, here's the things that I've done. Because that's not good enough. Rather, trust in Jesus. Don't look at me. Look at your son.

He lived the perfect life for me that I never could, but I should have. And he died for me the death that I deserve. Count me righteous because I'm trusting in Jesus alone.

That's the only answer that God accepts. So we need to ask ourselves, is Jesus Christ today my righteousness?

Am I trusting in his goodness and his goodness alone? Next question to think about from this passage is this one.

[15 : 21] What is my treasure? So here is Jesus and he's speaking to a man that he loves. We're told that in verse 21. And he has made this man and he wants to help this man.

And similarly, Jesus has made us and he loves us and he wants us to see our heart problem and to see him as its cure.

In this way, Jesus is like a surgeon. Jesus will sometimes cut and cut deeply, but he does it always so that he might bring spiritual healing.

So when Jesus asks the question in verse 21 of the man to sell everything you have and give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven, Jesus is not saying if you have money, get rid of it.

That's not a universal truth to apply to anyone who wants to be a Christian. Rather, he is identifying that this man before him has a heart problem.

[16 : 24] He has the problem of idolatry. He has made his money into the thing that he lives for and values most of all.

In essence, Jesus is asking the question of him, is it your money or your life? And the man sadly, tragically, chooses to live for his money.

He wanted eternal life, but he valued money more than God. He wouldn't loosen that grip on his money so that he might follow Jesus and inherit eternal life.

Now, idols, of course, are not just an ancient problem. We recognize today, I guess, that money is one of those things that has a huge influence, a huge pull on us and on society.

This week, I read a couple of articles where the wording idolatry was used. So there was one article talking about children's celebrity idols.

[17 : 34] Those involved in education are becoming increasingly concerned that there are some children who are saying, I don't need hard work. I don't need education. What I need to do is get famous like those folks on the telly.

That's the way to achieve. Another article was talking about social media as society's modern-day idol. Here's the thing that we bow down to for approval and identity.

We recognize that there are things in our lives that we choose to value and choose to define us. And again, while we're thinking about questions, it's really important for us to be able to reflect on our own lives with honesty.

Whether we're Christians, whether we're not Christians, what do I value most in my life? Where do I plow my time and my energy and my money into?

What could I not imagine life without? We need to think about these things. We need to ask God to reveal the answers to us, even if they're hard for us to hear, to pray with honesty about those.

[18 : 45] Here's what we have in this story. We have a rich man standing before Jesus. He's looking to inherit eternal life. And in John's gospel, Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Here is Jesus, the one who is the life of God, who can give the gift of eternal life, who is the treasure in heaven. But compared to the money in his pocket, the money in his bank, Jesus didn't seem that glorious.

He weighed them up and he chose his money. The Bible tells us we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus. We look at Jesus, we see the character and nature and quality of God.

When you look at Jesus in the gospels, you think about how he was with his disciples. His love, his mercy, his patience, his willingness to forgive. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

But unless God opens our eyes by his spirit without God's help, we will not see Christ as treasure. He will seem mundane.

[19 : 55] He will seem just another figure in history. I was at the football yesterday watching Edinburgh City against Peterhead. And I was standing there in the cold and remembering as a student when I used to go and watch Aberdeen play in Petaudry.

And the first couple of matches I went to, I found myself asking the friend who I went with, why does anyone bother going to live football? Now, that wasn't an indictment on the way Aberdeen were playing.

That wasn't great. It was a reflection on the fact that all I could see were blurry figures running around. It's like, I think he's playing in red, so I know he's playing in red.

I have no idea who he is. Turns out I needed glasses. I couldn't see what the fuss was all about because I didn't have glasses and I really needed them.

John Calvin talks about the Bible as God's glasses. It's the way that he reveals Jesus to us. And we need the glasses of the gospel.

[21 : 02] We need God to do something in us so that we would see the glory of Jesus and his salvation, so that we would desire and treasure him above everything else.

That's true for us if we're not Christians or if we are Christians, because it's so easy for us to sort of plateau and think, I understand Jesus. And we can allow, even as Christians, Jesus to become somewhat mundane to us.

We need God constantly to be showing us how glorious our Savior and our salvation is. Notice at the end of verse 21, after saying, sell everything and you'll have treasure in heaven.

He says, then come, follow me. That is the goal. That's eternal life, to follow Jesus. Here's this quality of life that we're invited into, to know Jesus as our elder brother, as our Savior, as our Lord and King, and to be brought into God's family.

He is the one who brings us to God, his Father. So eternal life is something we look forward to, a perfect life that lasts forever, but it's a life we're invited into now, because it's an invitation into our relationship with the God who made us and loves us, now and forever.

[22 : 24] How does God correct our vision so that we would treasure Jesus, unlike this rich man who couldn't see Jesus, as treasure and walked away?

Well, we've said it in part already, that God uses the Bible to reveal his truth and his glory to us. He uses things like gathering together as God's people in church, worship, reminding one another in song and in word of the truth of the gospel.

As we pray, God works in us and confirms that relationship that we enjoy and speaks with us as we speak with him.

There are things that we can do, places that we can be to help us to delight in Jesus more. Therefore, quite simply, we should make use of those.

And we should ask God to change us when we come to church, when we read the Bible, as we pray, as we spend time with other Christians. Verse 28 is interesting.

[23 : 36] So after Jesus talking about how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God because of the power of that idol, now Peter says to Jesus, we have left everything to follow you.

So here's a great example of what does Jesus say? Jesus encourages Peter, he encourages us as a church, that giving up everything to follow Jesus is absolutely worth it.

That yes, there will be persecutions, but there are also rich promises attached and ultimately the treasure of eternal life, now and always.

I quoted Jim Elliott last Sunday evening. I'm going to quote him again. Jim Elliott, who was a missionary who went to a tribe who were headhunters who would kill and then do things with people's heads to preserve them.

Jim Elliott, before he went to the mission field and he was killed within weeks of being there, he said, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

[24 : 48] Let's ask ourselves the question, is Christ really my treasure? If not, do I want him to be? Do I see? Is God helping me to see how glorious he is?

In which case, pray. Confess your sin. Turn to him. Put your faith and trust in him. Here's the last question to think about and it takes us back to the man's question in verse 17.

How can I inherit eternal life? Let's scale back for a moment. As I was reading this week for this morning, I was sitting for a while in the museum.

It's a nice space to think, I find. When you start walking around the museum, you discover all kinds of strange artifacts. They've got some new exhibitions.

They've got some interesting things on show. Sometimes you might find yourself asking, what is this thing for, this ancient tool? Why was it made?

[25 : 53] And again, without an authority to answer that question, sometimes it's really hard to figure out what that thing really is. Here, I think, is one of the big questions for all of us.

Maybe the biggest. What am I here for? What is the purpose of my having been created? Sometimes we're so busy, we don't have time to think about these big questions.

But there is a question, surely, that everyone should think through. And again, thinking about Jesus as an authority, thinking about the Bible as an authority, it speaks to that question.

It says, you and I, we were made to enjoy, to know and enjoy friendship with God, to worship Him, to see His glory, to love Him. That's the storyline of the Bible.

You go back to the beginning when God created the world and God created the first people, Adam and Eve. He created them so that they might know God, they might enjoy friendship with God, that they might be worshipers of God, enjoying His love and care.

[27 : 03] That was a relationship between God and people established from the beginning. But then that relationship was broken because those first two people, they walked away from God and His commands.

They decided they would like to be in charge and determine the right way to live. And so they were cut off from God, from relationship with God, having rejected Him, having allowed sin to enter into the world.

But as we trace the storyline of the Bible, we see it's all building to this wonderful moment when God in His love sends Jesus. Jesus who comes as truly God, who becomes truly human in order to rescue us through living perfectly for us, through dying to pay the penalty, the punishment for our sin for us, and rising in victory to restore us to relationship with the God who made us, to give us hope that one day that paradise lost by Adam and Eve would become for us paradise restored, never to be lost again for all eternity.

The hope of the gospel is forgiveness and eternal life and reconciliation and adopted into the family of God. And one day to be with God in His glory, to be with Jesus, our Savior forever, to see Him face to face in a perfect world that will never end.

That's what we were made for. That's what we were made to enjoy. Now, in that process of God looking to restore us so that we might receive this wonderful eternal life, how does that happen?

[28 : 54] Is that eternal life something that we achieve by personal goodness and hard work, or is it something that we receive? Is it a wage that we are paid for services rendered, or is it a gift of grace?

Does it come to us as a present from a good and a generous God? Jesus' encounter with the children and the young man reveals the answer.

Negatively, the young man shows us that we don't inherit eternal life by doing certain things, by keeping certain laws. Christianity is not, and has never been, based on our good works or our rule keeping.

This is what makes Christianity unique. Every other religion says, work really hard, and if you are good enough, your God might accept you. Christianity says, God saves us by grace when we are not good, and then he calls us to work out of that grace, out of that new position, out of that new life that we've been given.

Christianity works on the basis of grace, which is so freeing. If you have ever had the experience of trying to earn your way into God's good books, you will know that that is an exhausting way to live.

[30 : 23] It's like you're constantly on a treadmill. You're trying to keep up. You're working so hard, but you're never getting anywhere.

Sometimes you feel really good with your progress. Sometimes you feel terrible about your progress, but all the while you're stuck on a treadmill. You're getting nowhere. Religion based on me and what I can do is a path going nowhere.

It's a path to despair. The disciples, they're struggling with Jesus' conversation with the rich man.

Jesus says to them in verse 24, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. So the disciples ask, who then can be saved?

Now they're asking that because they're thinking, hang on, if this good man, if he can't be saved by his goodness, and we always thought that rich people were blessed by God, so if this person who seems like he's being blessed by God can't be saved, if he can't get, is there any hope for anyone?

[31 : 34] Can anyone be saved? That's a great question to think about. And Jesus straight away gives them an answer. Verse 27, Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible, but not with God.

All things are possible with God. Eternal life, humanly impossible. It's a standard too high, but with God, with God's power, with God's love, with God's grace, it is possible.

And it's possible for us because it's not something we're invited to achieve. It's something we're invited to receive. as a gift of grace from a loving God.

We're invited to receive the finished work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf. Jesus has completed God's plan of salvation. He has lived the life of perfect obedience that you and I should but can't.

He has died on the cross, bearing our sin, going there as a substitute, as a sacrifice for us, so that our sins might be cleansed, we might be made new, we might be forgiven, we might be acceptable in God's sight because we are in the Lord Jesus.

[32 : 50] This is a gift. It's a costly gift to Jesus, paid for with his own blood, but it's a gift free for us to receive by faith, by trusting in him.

Let's go back to these little children. Peter and the disciples thought Jesus was too important to bother with these children, but Jesus uses the children to teach a really important lesson.

Verse 14, let the little children come to me. Don't hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, will never enter it.

Let's go back to children. Let's think about how children receive presents when they are offered. You don't typically find them hanging back, being quite casual about that present.

I can leave that for a week or two, don't need to open it. You don't find them trying to find their piggy bank so that they can pay you back for this gift that you're offering. Rather, what you see is eyes that light up and you see hands that open and you see a gladness to receive and enjoy the gift that they are offered.

[34 : 12] Wonderful thing that Jesus identifies in children is that they are humble. They're not trying to earn this present, they just receive it as a gift. Children are trusting and dependent.

And that's what Jesus is calling all of us to. Humble hearts, dependent hearts, trusting hearts that recognize if we want the life that we were made for, a life of perfect joy and love and peace and friendship with God, we need to receive it as a gift.

We need to give up our idols, make Christ our treasure, have Christ as our life.