

Mark 10: 17-31

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[0 : 00] We read together from Mark chapter 10 and verses 17 to 31 on page 846 in our Bibles. Matthew and Luke as well as Mark all record the approach of this man to the Lord Jesus Christ that we read about in Mark chapter 10. In Matthew chapter 19 we are told that he was a young man and in Luke chapter 18 we're told that he was also a ruler. So he was a rich young ruler.

All three passages inform us that he was a man of great wealth. Mark and Matthew tell us that he had great possessions while Luke informs us that he was extremely extremely rich. Now the fact that there is a threefold telling of this story in the Gospels gives us a very strong indication that the lessons it has to teach us deserve particular attention and they are lessons that should not be forgotten.

They are of vital importance to the salvation of our souls. So what do we see in this history of the rich young ruler? Well we can see three things. First of all we see an anxious approach. Secondly we see a loving response. And thirdly we see an astonished reaction.

So let's look at this passage then under these three headings that will help fix it in our minds I hope. First of all we see an anxious approach. Look at Mark 10 and verse 17.

And as Jesus 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.

[2 : 17] As Jesus was setting out on his journey Jesus had recently been in the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan according to chapter 10 and verse 1.

But now according to chapter 10 and verse 32 he was on his way to Jerusalem. And as they were on their way a man ran up and knelt before him and asked good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now here was a troubled young man. There was something disturbing him. Troubling him. Eating away at his soul. Unsettling his conscience.

Outwardly on the surface of things he seemed to have it all. He was well respected. He had a high rank in his society.

He was a ruler. He must have lived a very comfortable life at the time because he was extremely rich with his great possessions.

[3 : 25] He clearly wanted for nothing as far as this world was concerned. And he had his whole life in front of him. He was a young man with an exciting future before him.

The world as we say was at his feet. And yet clearly he is not a happy young wealthy man.

He's not content. He has no peace of mind. And there's something else we should note carefully about him. He was clearly a good man as far as we can tell, as far as this world is concerned.

Because when presented with the commandments that form the second table of God's ten commandments, he could say without any contradiction that he was not guilty of murder.

He had never committed adultery. He had stolen nothing from anybody. He had never borne false witness against a neighbor. He had defrauded no one.

[4 : 41] He had always honored his father and mother. So in the eyes of man, as far as this world was concerned, this young, wealthy man was righteous as well as rich.

And that's a rare combination. It was rare then. It's equally just as rare today. He was upright. He was moral. He was sincere.

But more than that, see how he approaches Jesus. He runs up to him, and then he kneels down before him.

And then he addresses Jesus with the words, good teacher. Now what a contrast that was to the many rulers and leaders among the Jews at that time, who treated the Lord Jesus Christ with utter contempt and scorn, and who ultimately called for his blood, for his crucifixion in front of Pilate.

But this rich young ruler, he's different. He approaches Jesus with a certain amount of reverence and respect, and with the recognition that he was a good teacher.

[6 : 07] Good teacher. And he may have the answer that he is anxiously longing for with regard to his troubled heart, to his uneasy conscience.

What then is it that is causing him so much anxiety? So much anxiety that he runs up to Jesus, and that wouldn't have been a thing you would have seen often in those days, a ruler running in the streets.

But he comes running up to Jesus, he gets down on his knees before him, in public, remember, and he addresses Jesus openly before men as good teacher, good teacher.

Well, he's very troubled in mind and heart about what he calls here eternal life. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

That's his question. He's troubled and he's anxious about eternal life. And his morality, his wealth, his high position in the community and society of the day cannot quieten his troubled conscience with regard to this issue.

[7 : 47] Now, being a devout Jew, he had a certain knowledge of the Bible, the part of the Bible that we refer to as the Old Testament. The Old Testament was the Jewish Bible in those days, and in it there are references to eternal or everlasting life.

Now, perhaps, and this is conjecture, but perhaps he had been reading the words of the prophecy of Daniel. In chapter 12 and verses 2 and 3 of Daniel, we read these words.

And he knew that these verses speak, about the end time and the judgment and of a resurrection of the just and the unjust and the eternal destinies of the righteous and the wicked.

And as I say, despite all his wealth and morality and high social position, this thought troubled him. How shall I rise with those who shall enjoy everlasting life and not with those who shall endure shame and everlasting contempt?

Perhaps he has heard a report, if he wasn't there in person, but perhaps he heard a report of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus preached just a few years earlier.

[9 : 37] What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? And he thought to himself, what if I lose my soul? What if my soul is ultimately lost?

I find this most interesting. That here we have a young man who is anxious and concerned about a question such as this. And yet outwardly, as I say, he was the model citizen, so conscientious about how he lived in the privacy of his own home, in front of his mother and father, whom he honoured, as well as outside in public.

But he has no peace of mind. He has no peace of mind. There is a problem with him. There is this fly in his ointment of his otherwise perfect life.

He has no assurance regarding his safety and salvation on the day of judgment. And that's what I find interesting.

[10 : 59] Outwardly moral, a keeper of the commandments, a sincere man, but with no certainty, no assurance with regard to the day of judgment.

He's afraid. He's afraid. Deep down, he's fearful of what will happen to him when he dies and leaves the comforts of this life behind him.

I believe that this lay behind his anxious approach and his question to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So let us note in the second place a loving response.

And we'll read again verses 18 to 22 of the passage. Mark chapter 10, verse 18. And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good?

[12 : 13] No one is good except God alone. 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.

And he said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. 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. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

Now in these verses we see and we hear the loving response, the loving response of the Lord Jesus Christ to this anxious young man. And I base my point on the words of verse 21 where we

read, and this must have come from Peter who was an eyewitness of these events and who was the mentor of Mark, John Mark, who wrote the gospel.

There's lots of little eyewitness details in this gospel that we don't find in Matthew or Luke's account of the same events. But we read in verse 21, And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, so everything that Jesus says here springs from a heart that is overflowing with love for this young man.

[14 : 00] Now the love of Jesus Christ for this young man was full of pity and compassion. The Lord looked at him and what did he see?

he saw in this young man a strange mixture of seriousness on the one hand and yet utter ignorance of his true spiritual state on the other.

He saw a soul that was struggling with all the weakness of the fallen human condition, the troubled conscience that feels its need of relief, the darkened understanding that is blind to the very basic principles of the gospel of salvation, that thinks salvation can be earned and merited.

What can I do to inherit eternal life? That thinks it can work its way into God's good books rather than receive salvation on trust as a gift of a gracious and good God.

As we ponder over the way the Lord responded to this young man, let us always remember that Jesus feels love and compassion for the souls of the ungodly. Now there can be no doubt that the Lord Jesus has a special distinguishing love for those who, in John's gospel's words, hear his voice and follow him.

[15 : 34] They are his sheep given to him by his father and watched over with special care. They are his bride joined to him in an everlasting covenant and they are precious and they are dear to him.

But the heart of Jesus beats with pity and compassion and with tender concern even for those who, like this rich young man, love the world more than they love God.

We have got to remember how the Lord Jesus wept over sinful and rebellious Jerusalem. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He would still gather into his arms the ignorant and the self-righteous and the unbelieving and the impenitent and hard-hearted if they were only willing to be gathered.

We may confidently tell even the chief of sinners that Christ loves him and that salvation is ready for the worst, the very worst of men and women if they will only come to Christ to receive it as a free gift.

If people are lost, it is not because Jesus has no love for them or is not ready to save them. All day long I have held out my arms to an obstinate people, God says.

[17 : 04] Christ's own words supply the reason why men and women are not saved. You will not come to me but you might have life because men love darkness rather than light and will not, will not, that's the issue, will not come into the light.

and do we not see that uncovered in this passage? Our Lord directs this young man to the commandments and particularly you notice to the second table of the law which deals with our duties and responsibilities to our fellow men.

The first table deals with our duties to God, the second with our duties and responsibilities to our fellow men. Now why does the Lord Jesus do that? because he saw the superficiality of this serious young man's religion.

Yes, he was serious. Yes, he was sincere. But he was superficial. And his religion, if we can call it that, was skin deep.

Man looks upon the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart. And by drawing out the confession of verse 20, teacher, he says, all these I have kept from my youth, referring to all these commandments, the Lord Jesus was going to give the young man the opportunity to put that admission or confession to the test.

[18 : 45] And what a very practical test that would be. you lack one thing, Jesus says. Go. Sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

What a promise. What a promise. You will have treasure in heaven and come, follow me. Now we must understand this response from Jesus to be the litmus test of the young man's confession of obedience to the demands of the law.

Is the law the law of God not summed up in these two great commandments? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

Well, if it is, then for the love of God and for the benefit of the poor, you go and sell all that you have and give the proceeds to those who need it.

you will have treasure in heaven and be my disciple. You say, Jesus is in effect saying to this young man, that you've kept all the commandments since your youth and you say that I am a good teacher.

[19 : 59] Were those not your words? You came and you knelt down before me as a mark of respect for me and for my teaching and I told you that there is no one good but God.

God is the only good, the chief good, the unchangeable good. I also offer you treasures in heaven and a life of fellowship in following me.

Then, my friend, what is holding you back from doing something so perfectly good? could it be that this test will demonstrate that you're not perfect?

That you're far from perfect? That you do not love God in the way your outward life suggests? That you have a love in your heart that's greater than a love to God and that therefore you have broken the law innumerable times by not loving the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

Do you see the nature of the test Jesus has put before him? The Lord is revealing to him his real spiritual need of God's saving grace. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

[21 : 37] He had asked. Jesus' loving response has revealed that there is nothing he can do for he loves his wealth so much that he cannot part with it even for the winning of the eternal life for which he had hankered.

The saying was a hard saying. Jesus often utters hard sayings that people don't like not because he's loving it's because of love that he speaks thus and will not deny the truth and lead people into hell for the sake of niceness.

he went away sorrowful full of sorrow for he had great possessions. And that leads us to our third heading final heading an astonished reaction and we read about that in verses 23 to 31 and I refer to the section of the disciples who reaction of the disciples sorry who witnessed the whole scene and the words of Jesus that he taught following the departure of the rich young ruler.

Notice how the Lord's words broaden out in their application from those who have wealth to everyone in general in verse 23 he says how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God and in verse 24 he says how difficult generally how difficult for everyone how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God and then he shows just how difficult it is by using this well-known now famous expression 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 now you ask what is the degree of difficulty here it is difficult to what degree hard very hard no it's impossible it's impossible and from a feeling of amazement the disciples by the end of this passage are now according to

Mark exceedingly astonished at the words they have just heard Jesus speak and they ask the Lord Jesus who can be saved who then can be saved and Jesus is answered with man it is impossible but not with God for all things are possible with God what's he saying he's saying salvation is impossible as far as man is concerned you cannot save yourself you cannot contribute to your own salvation you cannot even do a little bit and cooperate with God who will fill in the gaps and do the rest as it were this is one of the roots of the apostles teaching where he says so clearly for by grace are you saved through faith and this not of yourselves it is the gift of God not by works so that no one may boast do we all understand this for you to be saved

[25 : 39] God must save you from first to last from beginning to end from top to bottom all the way through it is impossible for you but not impossible for God all things and that includes your salvation is possible with God and the lesson therefore of this passage is that we should not put any confidence whatsoever in ourselves in our own merits or in our own efforts to save ourselves we cannot keep God's law perfectly therefore we are guilty our guilt needs to be atoned for and the only thing that can atone for our guilt is the death of Jesus Christ as portrayed and set forth in the gospel you see the commandments if properly understood in the light of the Lord's teaching in Matthew chapter 5 that first great chapter of the Sermon on the Mount where he shows that the commandments are to be understood spiritually and not just applied to outward actions but to the inner thoughts and motivations of the heart when the law when the commandments are understood in that way then our world changes and we see that we're sinful and we see that we're guilty in the sight of

God the God who matters it's a little thing to be judged by the world but it's a great thing to be judged by God and as the apostle says it's by the law and that understanding of the law that the knowledge of sin comes and that knowledge of sin will teach us to despair of ever saving ourselves and it will drive us encourage us to seek salvation at the hands of a good and gracious and most merciful God this God sent his one and only son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him and whoever believes in him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the son of God and my friends as we finish let me say that there are two different types of people in this world just two and both are represented in this passage there are those who hear the voice of Jesus say come follow me and then like this young man they go away sorrowful sorrowful in this life and exceedingly sorrowful unspeakably sorrowful in the life to come but there are also those who hear the voice of Jesus say come follow me and who say as the disciples did at the end of this passage behold see we have left everything and followed you forsaking all I take trust him and I have to ask you this into which category do you fall this morning in another gospel passage after another hard saying of Jesus many of those who follow Jesus turned away Jesus turned to his disciples and said do you want to go away as well and Peter speaking on behalf of them all said Lord to whom shall we go you have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the holy one of God more than a good teacher you can turn away from a good teacher but you don't turn away from the holy one of God may God bless this word to us let us pray our father we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ and we thank you for his love and compassion and mercy which is the expression of your own love and compassion and mercy we thank you that in the gospel the Lord Jesus holds out his hands to us even the risen Lord Jesus and says come follow me we look to him and we would follow after him and we would pray for grace to keep us following after him and not ever rely on our own strength or wisdom or courage give us that we pray that we need with man it is impossible but not with God for with God all things are possible and we praise your name for that hear us we pray and receive our praise and prayers in Jesus name Amen our closing psalm is from psalm 23 in the Scottish Psalter it's on page 229 the Lord's my shepherd [32 : 04] I'll not want happen in the■■■■ Amen nd we we I and we we we we we we we