

Having Everything yet Having Nothing

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[0 : 00] to Mark chapter 10. I want to consider with you that little passage from verse 17 to verse 22. For the benefit of the Bible class that have just come in, I want to read these verses again.

Not for the benefit of everyone, but obviously the youngsters have just come in. Verse 17 is, 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 life, eternal life?

And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? 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'll have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. In this crazy, mixed up world, seems a lot through the centuries even, through the millennia, there are three things that present the highest goal, the most sought after criteria for life.

[1 : 31] Three things that seem to epitomise success. Being rich, being young, whether young in age or young in appearance, and having an elevated status in society.

You know, the fascination with vast sums of money. You see whenever a couple, for example, win the National Lottery, front page news. This is what's considered to be one of the highest accolades, the highest achievements, to have this vast sum of money.

Or the fascination with youth, whether it's, as we said, numerical age, or again, the media-fuelled focus on eternal youth that's somehow supposed to present what's truly successful in a person's lifestyle.

And then there's status, the achievement of the famous. The celebrity culture that sees status in terms of fame and popularity and possessions, and again, so much of the media-obsessed mindset that promotes status of various kinds.

You know, somehow showing the apex of success. Rich, young, and having status. Having everything it seems that the world can offer.

[2 : 47] Having everything it seems that fully satisfies. Now, let's just pause for a moment before we see anything further. Of course, wealth or youth or status, of course, aren't wrong in themselves.

Of course not. God blesses some with wealth to use for God's glory, to further God's kingdom, to alleviate the needs of the poor, to help maintain the work of mission, for example.

Youth itself, we have to cherish our youth. We value young lives. We treasure our young, even those with us in this congregation. We delight in the achievements of you.

We rejoice, surely, when a young person comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. And then status. And of course, you know, we rejoice when gifts are exercised, when gifts are rewarded with positions of responsibility in all walks of life.

And pray for Christians, particularly in these positions of responsibility. Pray that they'll have that influence for good in a world that would seem to reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 56] And yet, and yet, when these gifts are ill-used, when they become gods of our own making, when they become gods that we worship, gods that we focus our life on, then that's where the problem lies.

That's where we see the sin of idolatry. The sin that will not have God rule in a person's life. And that person won't be released, and be willing to be released from the snares of these three supposed great things of life.

wealth, or youth, or status. And of course, things haven't much changed in 2,000 years. These three, same three aspects of success presented here, and of course, there's a very well-known story of the rich young man, or maybe it's more popularly known, the rich young ruler.

We'll come to these definitions in a minute. This young man, this man who obviously had a lot of wealth, this man who had young years on his side, this man, as Luke tells us in his account of the story here, Luke tells us he had status, he had status as a ruler.

In other words, he was a leader in the synagogue. He was a man who in the eyes of society had everything. And yet, when exposed to the piercing words of Jesus, the truth of Jesus' words, this man who seemed to have everything was found to have nothing.

[5 : 27] Having everything, yet having nothing. And you see, we're the church. We're Christians. We're you who know the Lord Jesus. We're you. If you profess to follow the Lord Jesus, then your life has to be so utterly counter to the values of the world around.

So it's important that each one of us knows what truly satisfies, what's of true value, what's of true eternal worth. And it's not material wealth.

It's spiritual wealth. Spiritual riches in Christ. And it's not the cravings of you. It's the promise of eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus.

And true value isn't, it's not in a world recognized and connected status. It's a standing of humility before the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

So, as we come to this important encounter, this young man and Jesus, this man who seemed to have everything but had nothing, then realize this is something for each one of us to consider.

[6 : 34] It's an encounter with Jesus. We know it's been preached many times. I'm sure many of you preachers here have preached on this passage. But it's an encounter that, you know, each one of us has to continually turn to in our reading, in our thoughts, in our worship.

Because what we have here is this message that God has given regarding the true nature of faith. What it means, what the true nature of grace is, what the true nature of salvation is.

And the very fact that three out of the four gospel writers actually include this episode in their gospels, surely tell something of the importance of this particular encounter.

Because what are we reading here? We're reading the need for true heart religion, as opposed to mere head religion. We're seeing here the need for true humble dependence on God for salvation, as opposed to any, even an inkling of somehow salvation being by one's own efforts.

We're seeing here the need to seek first the kingdom of God before any other kind of seeking. We're seeing here the need to know God, to know his love, and to worship him, and to worship him alone, to have no other gods before God.

[7 : 54] And all of that's included here in this passage. This passage that shows us what having a right relationship with the one true God, what it must mean.

And so this story alerts each one of us. Truly, who must be first in our life? It must be God first. It must be his word first.

It must be his truth first. And of course, that putting God first is only possible through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, let's look at this passage.

Let's look at this encounter with Jesus. And I think we said at the start, we have to look at the context, where it's placed, the setting of the story. And you have to see, obviously, what comes before the story, what comes after the story.

Well, what comes before the story? Well, notice what Jesus says, for example, in verse 15. Verse 15, when Jesus meets with these little children, he says, Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

[9 : 05] Just think on that for a moment. Jesus has just uttered these words before he meets with this rich young man. Jesus is saying, as we see there regarding the children, unless you become like a little child, unless you come to Jesus trusting him completely, fully, coming before him, helpless before the saviour who receives him, his saviour.

Jesus said, you can't have eternal life. Now, of course, when we come to see the account of the rich young man, the rich young ruler, that was his problem.

That was his problem. He wouldn't come to Jesus like a little child. He wouldn't come in his helplessness and his dependence before a loving saviour. Yes, he was young.

He rejected that attitude of the little child. That man, that young man, remained fixed in his own world of self-delivery belief. That man who thought that his work, something he did, would be sufficient for his salvation.

But then, when we come to what's after the story of this rich young man, particularly verses 32 and 34, when Jesus tells of his imminent death and resurrection.

[10 : 26] And again, you have to see that in the context of the rich young ruler. Because Jesus is saying there that all who would follow him, well, all who would follow Jesus must deny themselves, take up the cross, follow Jesus.

And again, that was something the rich young man wasn't prepared to do. So, here's the story of this rich young man. that's sandwiched between, on the one hand, the emphasis on coming to Jesus and all our helplessness and our dependence on Jesus alone.

On the other hand, the emphasis on our need to follow Jesus, to deny ourselves, take up our cross, follow Jesus, again, something that young man wasn't prepared to do.

Then, I think we see the story of this rich young man in that relief, as it were, when we see truly what it means to know Jesus and to follow Jesus, to come to Jesus and recognise that he and he alone has done for you and winning for you salvation.

So, let's now focus in on particularly that young man who had that self-deluded heart. As we said, Jesus has just been blessing the little children.

[11 : 36] He's placed, the parents have placed these children in Jesus' arms. And as Jesus has blessed the last of these little children, and as Jesus is about to set off on his mission work, and of course setting off not just that in particular, but of course setting off towards Jerusalem, towards the cross.

As he's on his journey there to Jerusalem, we're told that a young man comes to him. He comes running to him. And the young man falls on his knees. He addresses Jesus in a very respectful manner, a good teacher.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Matthew tells us in his account that this is a young man. As we said, Luke tells us he's a ruler, a ruler in the synagogue.

And all the accounts tell us that he's rich. In fact, very, very rich. In other words, here's this man who had everything the world could offer him. Wealth, power, the illusion, as we said, of eternal youth.

This man, even at an early age, had all the trappings of comfort and security that the world could give. And not for him the insecurity of old age or the insecurity of poverty or the insecurity of powerlessness.

[12 : 52] He was a man who had everything, it seemed. And the face of things, much to commend him. As we said, he's very respectful to Jesus. He kneels before Jesus, that posture that recognised authority.

And he addresses Jesus as good teacher. We'll come back to that in a moment. But there's something wrong, something missing in his life. And that's so clear the minute he opens his mouth.

And he addresses Jesus with a question that reveals his self-deluded heart. Good teacher, what must I do to be saved, to inherit eternal life. In other words, he's implying that he himself is so pious, so righteous, that he thinks that within himself he's got that ability to do something that's going to guarantee him eternal life.

That rich man had a trust in what he could do to earn salvation. But, you know, at this moment he needs some direction. He needs a word from the good Rabbi Jesus.

He's already achieved so much in his young life. He's rich, he's got riches, he's got status, and yet he knows there's something missing. He's got no assurance of eternal life even though, you know, his piety, I'm sure, was unmatched by so many.

[14 : 17] And it's that self-deluded heart in so many people. You know, that delusion that says that there's got to be some capacity for good within me.

That somehow I'm going to earn salvation. Somehow, you know, please a kindly God. God's going to be pleased with my efforts. But at the same time as that, these thoughts come into the mind, there's that nagging conviction.

How can I be sure that God's really going to look in favour in my efforts? That was the problem Martin Luther had. The German monk who became the great Reformation leader before Martin Luther's conversion, he thought that his efforts must satisfy God sufficiently for God to be pleased with him.

But yet, there was that nagging conviction in his heart that, how could he be sure? Listen to what he said. I wrote, I almost fasted myself today, for again and again I went for three days without taking a drop of water or a morsel of food.

I chose 21 saints and prayed to three every day when I celebrated Mass. Thus, I completed the number every week. I prayed especially to the Blessed Virgin who with her womanly heart would compassionately appease her son.

[15 : 41] Then Martin Luther goes on to write that instead of bringing that relief that he sought by his efforts, you know, extra devotion and prayer as this going without food and so on, he writes that it made my head split and he continued to descend into that spiritual and emotional darkness and try as he might the more and more efforts that he tried to put into somehow pleasing God.

He became the more uncertain of his salvation until by God's grace he saw that it wasn't his efforts. It wasn't his works that would save him but it was through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus.

He could be made right with God through Christ's righteousness and not anything of himself. And that's what saved that man and of course saves all who know the Lord Jesus as Savior.

It's by the grace the Lord Jesus by what he has done for you not what you do for him. But you see for that rich young man that young man who met with Jesus he didn't even see himself as a sinner who needed God's grace to save him.

He didn't see that his salvation was outside of himself and through God. Maybe there's someone like that who thinks like that even now.

[17 : 03] You know if only I could just say the right words if only I could just do the right things if only I could just think the right thoughts then God's going to be pleased with me.

You know this sort of idea I'm the master of my faith I'm the captain of my soul. You know some of it is down to me how I live and down to me therefore to please God and God's going to be happy with me.

That's so opposed so opposed to what scripture tells us that salvation is it's all of God it's all of his grace. you contribute nothing towards your salvation.

God contributes everything his love his grace and the faith that's gifted to you to believe. He's going to reveal to you as Jesus reveals to this rich young man whether your heart is right with him or not.

As we see here in Jesus probing that man's heart to the searching saviour. Jesus has true compassion in this man and Jesus points that man away from himself well away from Jesus as merely a good teacher.

[18 : 14] Verse 18 why did you call me good? No one is good except God alone. See what Jesus is saying here. He's saying to this young man there's Jesus standing before him and he's actually questioning this man's expression good teacher and Jesus is saying to him why are you calling me good?

good? Just you think young man what you're saying. This intelligent young man this man obviously has a lot of learning. He's learned scripture the Old Testament.

You know your scriptures and you know that only God is good. So why are you calling me good if you don't truly recognize me as God come in human flesh?

and you know Jesus saying to this man all you want is an opinion to add to your own. You haven't really come seeking God's answer to your deepest need.

Then Jesus says you must hear God's answer from one who truly is good the Lord Jesus. And so this young man has to hear what God says in his word.

[19 : 22] He's not going to listen to the beat of his own heart. He's got to listen to the word of the living saviour. And so Jesus gives him God's answer to the question what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus refers to God's word. You know it's like Jesus is saying okay you want an answer that speaks of goodness. You want to know what man has to do to truly truly inherit eternal life.

Well keep every single one of the commandments that show perfect obedience to God's law. Do that and you'll inherit eternal life. Obey the commandments.

And Jesus lists particular commandments that deal with man's relationship to man. If you like the second part of the Ten Commandments and well Jesus knows of course Jesus knows that that young man hasn't kept the commandments.

His relations with others haven't been perfect. because Jesus knows as you know as I know that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. This man was a sinner with a heart that wasn't right with God.

[20 : 36] But you see the young man couldn't see that. The young man's spiritual pride had blinded him so much that as he says to Jesus teacher all these things I've kept from my youth.

Now he's basically saying Lord a good teacher since I've become a man. Well these days when you're age 12 you became a man. I've been good.

I've done all that God's demanded of me. I haven't murdered anyone. I haven't committed adultery with another man's wife. I haven't stolen a penny from anyone. I've never told lies.

I've always been honest with everyone. I've honoured my parents. I've done everything that the law demands of me. But I'm still not sure if I'm fit for heaven.

See that man thought there was some way that he could work his way into heaven. That God would be pleased with his outward conformity to his law. A young man forgot the importance of the heart and the motive of the heart and of being God.

[21 : 42] Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount when he spoke of for example of murder. Even a person breaking that commandment they shall not kill when a person is angry with a brother or of the adultery they committed in the heart.

So it's obvious that man had no concept of the heart the necessity of the heart's relationship with God. So that man isn't satisfied.

He's outwardly conformed to the commandments but there's still a gap in his life. Jesus tells him what he can do to remedy that as it were. Jesus probing his heart.

Verse 21 You lack one thing go sell all that you have give to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven and come follow me. Look at Jesus' attitude to that young man.

Verse 21 Jesus looking at him loved him. Jesus had compassion in that man. That man who was lost in the darkness of his own choosing.

[22 : 52] So Jesus turns to him and with compassion tells him speaks to him and shows where his heart truly lies. So Jesus reveals to that man something that that man would not have expected in hearing from Jesus.

Sell all you have. And here's this rich man. He's been told get rid of all your possessions. Give the money you make from your possessions. Give it to the poor.

And then he'll know where true value lies. In heaven. Treasures in heaven. And when that man is told follow Jesus.

Put his faith in Jesus. We're not told he did that. What are we told? We're told the rich man was shocked. He was saddened.

He was disheartened. He was distraught. I mean this man I'm sure had expected some kind of, I don't know, theological discussion, learned opinion from this good teacher.

[24 : 01] Something that's going to make his life complete. Something he can actually do to satisfy God. But he's told to give up his way of life, to follow Jesus.

He can't do it because we're told he had great wealth. This whole world, this whole mindset was being challenged. And just as so many contemporaries at the time thought, they thought his possessions were a sign of God's favour.

But the good teacher is now telling him he's got to get rid of these things to prove his heart. And he can't let go. He can't let go.

And he goes away saddened. He goes away broken. See what Jesus has been doing. Jesus wanted this young man to see that his heart wasn't right with God, if his heart was seeking first himself and his riches.

And if he wasn't prepared to sacrifice for God, then that would reveal where his heart truly lay. In himself. If he wasn't prepared to follow Jesus in faith, then how could he expect to know eternal life in heaven?

[25 : 16] So he's given this choice. Christ the riches. And he chose riches. Couldn't let go of what he considered was most precious in his life, even though it meant forfeiting his freedom to enter eternity, to have the everlasting life.

in tropical countries, hunters used to capture monkeys with a very simple trick.

They'd put a banana up, they'd put something sweet inside a basket, and the basket was anchored solidly, with a little hole in the top, just big enough for the monkey to put its arm in, its hand in, to grab hold of what was inside the basket.

But then when that monkey tried to pull the hand out as it was holding, whatever it was holding, it wouldn't let go, it wouldn't let go. Its closed fist was too wide to get out of the hole at the top.

And of course that monkey could have at any time dropped where it was holding it and be released. But it wouldn't let go of what it considered so precious. And that monkey ended up being captured.

[26 : 26] as far as the rich young ruler was concerned, he wouldn't let go of the thing that was keeping him from being free to follow Jesus. He wouldn't let go of that thing that was trapping his life.

He wouldn't come to Jesus as a little child. He wouldn't come depending on Jesus alone for his salvation. He wasn't prepared to deny himself and take up his cross and follow Jesus.

He wouldn't know unless he came to Jesus. Faith unless he was prepared to deny himself. He wouldn't know eternal life.

Is there anything that you're holding on to? A trap to your soul's good? Be something that's taking the place of God in your heart? Something you cherish more than following the Lord Jesus?

Is there an idol in your life that you just won't let go of? If that's the case, well, where is your heart?

[27 : 37] Where is your heart? Well, come before God and be loose from these sins that are holding you back from following Jesus. And you come before him and cry out, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And be loose from those sins that are a barrier between you and God. I know that freedom then to love God and your neighbor as yourself.

And to be free, free from the oppression of thinking that there's something that you can do to earn salvation. No, you come to him. You come with the words of him in your heart.

Not the labors of my hands can fulfill the law's commands. Could my zeal no respite? No, could my tears forever flow? All for sin could not atone.

Thou must save and thou alone. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, forgive us for the many times when we have held on to those things that have become idols in our lives.

[28 : 41] Forgive us, Lord, when we put others first or other things first before you. Help us, Lord, to trust in you with all our heart and to lean not in our own understanding, to follow you all the days of our life.

Lord, help us then, we pray, to know you, to serve you, to follow you, to deny ourselves, to take up our crosses and follow you, our Savior.

Bless then, we pray, the proclamation of your word. Forgive for anything and forgive those things that have been said amiss. Lord, help us, we pray, to see no one else except Jesus only.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 130, Psalm 130 on page 173.

Lord, from the depths I call to you, Lord, hear me from on high and give attention to my voice when I for mercy cry. 1 to 8, Psalm 130.

[29 : 51] 1 to 8,