Mark Lesson 34 (2023)

**THE WEALTHY AND GOD’S KINGDOM**

Mark 10:17-31

Key Verse: 10:21

“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.’”

In the previous passage, 10:13-16, Jesus addressed that one should become like a little child to enter God’s kingdom. How? It’s by changing themselves from the inside out. In today’s episode, Jesus shares a similar topic concerning securing eternal life in his dialogue with a wealthy young man and the twelve disciples. Do you think anyone can ensure their eternal life? Surprisingly enough, it’s yes. Yet, it’s tough, and not many people do so. Then how can anyone secure eternal life? Jesus told the secret in today’s passage. This morning let’s pay attention to what Jesus had to say about securing eternal life.

Look at verse 17. “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?’” We don’t know much about this man who came to Jesus except that he had great wealth, maybe a millionaire (22). He probably inherited wealth from his parents. The humble way he approached, Jesus revealed his deep respect for Jesus, calling him “A good teacher.” He also seemed to be a sincere man concerned with inheriting eternal life. He asked Jesus, “Good teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Some people think there is no life after death, believing that if one dies, that’s it. Yet statistics show that most people, including non-religious people, believe there is life after death. The question about life after death or eternal life is a common question not just among the Jews but also among sincere people throughout history, regardless of their religion and culture. This man seemed to have believed that there is life after death. He was wondering how he could secure eternal life for himself. What a good question he asked. He had probably asked the same question to other rabbis. But he wanted to hear from Jesus, whom he highly respected.

How did Jesus answer his question? Before answering the man’s question about how to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him a question, which turned out to be fundamental. Look at verse 18. “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good – except God alone.’” The man might have called Jesus a “Good teacher” to express his respect for him. We might call somebody we admire by saying, *“Oh, you are a good man,” “You are a good doctor,” “You are a good husband,” “You are a good musician,” or “You are a good driver.”* When someone compliments us that way, we say, “*Thank you!”* We don’t necessarily take it seriously by asking, “Why do you call me good?”

But Jesus did question the man for calling him good. We wonder why. Was Jesus trying to humble himself or denying his goodness? I don’t think so. It seems that Jesus wanted to make a point by saying, “No one is good – except God alone.” The point Jesus wanted to make in this statement, although not directly but indirectly, is that he is God who alone is good. In other words, Jesus was not just one of the good teachers or great prophets, but he was God who came to save men from their sins. Not long ago, his disciples confessed him as the Messiah (8:29), and Jesus showed three of his disciples his glorious image as the Son of God through his transfiguration on the mountain (9:2-7).

Throughout history, many great teachers offered their wisdom as the way of life, including Buddha, Laozi, Confucius, Socrates, Mohammed, Gandhi, etc. Yet, Jesus didn’t just teach great wisdom. He himself was the way, truth, and life, meaning he is God the Eternal. He proved himself to be the Son of God through his resurrection from the dead. Now, Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to become the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world. I’m sure Jesus was glad that this man came to him to ask about eternal life. Jesus could have said to this man, *“You call me good. In fact, I AM the eternal life. If you accept me in your heart, I will enter into your life, and I will live with you and you with me.”* (Rev. 3:20) But I don’t think that Jesus, at this time, expected this man would accept it.

How did Jesus help this man, then? Look at verse 19. “You know the commandment: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” We wonder why Jesus asked this young man if he kept God’s commandment. It’s because conservative Judaism in Jesus’ time, led by the Pharisees and the teachers of God, taught that one could inherit eternal life only by obeying God’s law. For example, Deuteronomy 30:15-16 states, “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.” Obtaining eternal life by keeping to the law of God is theoretically possible but practically impossible. However, the conservative Jews sincerely followed the instructions of Moses’ law, while the liberals ignored them, thinking they would be okay if they were Abraham’s descendants.

Look at verse 20. “‘Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’” This young man was a sincere and conservative Jewish man who went to synagogue faithfully and didn’t do anything terrible against the law of God, like murdering, stealing, lying, or committing adultery. He was confident in his religious observation, yet he wasn’t sure if he had secured his position in the kingdom of God. That’s why he came to ask Jesus, “Good teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Perhaps, he came to Jesus expecting a confirmation that he was doing good. He might have expected Jesus to say, “*You are a good man. Keep doing what you have been doing, son!”*

How did Jesus respond to his answer? Look at verse 21. “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.’” We notice that only Mark, among the gospel writers, recorded that Jesus loved him even though he didn’t say why. Was it because the young man was sincere that Jesus loved him, seeing great spiritual potential in him? We are not sure, but it is possible.

Jesus looked at the man and loved him, yet he pointed out something crucial if he wanted to inherit eternal life. He probably said this to this man, not rebukingly but lovingly. “‘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.’” (21b) Wow! This man must sell everything he had, all the property he might have inherited from his ancestors. That must be tough. We often focus on the fact that this man had to sell everything he had and give to people experiencing poverty. Yes, it’s essential that he had to give up everything he had. The real issue, however, is why he must give up what he had. In other words, if the man wanted to secure the best, he should be able to give up the good he had. It reminds us of the well-known phrase, *“****The best is the enemy of the good.”***

Jesus was telling the man, *“If you want heavenly treasure, which is eternal life and the kingdom of God, you cannot hold on to your material possession in your hand. Let it go, son. You cannot serve both God and money!”* (Pic#2) By the same token, if we want secure heavenly treasure or everlasting life, we should not hold on to anything or anyone that hinders us from following Jesus, who is the best and the treasure from heaven.

When Jesus said to the man, “Then come, follow me,” it was an open invitation for this young man to live as a disciple of Jesus for the rest of his life, which will secure eternal life for him. Life as a disciple of Jesus is the best life we could ever live, whether we are doctors, lawyers, diplomats, engineers, teachers, basketball players, bus drivers, or pastors. This is a calling from heaven. If we live up to this high calling, we will never regret it. It truly is a rewarding lifestyle that will last forever and ever. How to follow Jesus? He said it repeatedly in various ways, but the original is, “Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (8:34) That’s what Jesus was telling this young man.

How did the man respond to Jesus’ invitation? Look at verse 22. “At this, the man’s face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.” This man was disappointed at Jesus’ words and went away sad because he had great wealth. More accurately, he went away sad, not because he was rich but because he was obsessed with wealth. Obsession! This man was preoccupied with his wealth to the point that he became an enslaved person or idol worshiper. Being wealthy is not wrong. Yet, if we are obsessed with wealth, we cannot secure eternal life. When this rich and lovely young man went away sad, Jesus also became brokenhearted.

Read verses 23-25. “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 someone rich to enter the kingdom of God.’” In these verses, Jesus repeated how difficult it is for a rich man to enter God’s kingdom or secure eternal life. To emphasize his point, he used hyperbole: The camel was the largest mammal in Palestine. Can you imagine a big camel trying to go through the eye of a needle? (Pic#1)

We also must note that Jesus didn’t say that the rich cannot enter God’s kingdom. He only said it’s extremely difficult for the rich to enter God’s kingdom because of strong temptation. Money itself is not evil. Being rich is not a sin. Yet, the love of money is the root of all evil. 1 Timothy 6:10 states, “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” We live in a materialistic society in which we are evaluated by the amount of money we have. No one wants to be looked down on by others. So, people want to become rich. Who doesn’t? Some would say they don’t love money, but they like money. I think the disciples were shocked by what Jesus said about the rich being unable to enter God’s kingdom. So, they said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” (26)

Look at verse 27. “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man, this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’” Jesus’ point in this statement is that salvation is God’s work and not human achievement. It does not mean that our free will has no place in God’s salvation. God’s grace of forgiveness of sin is entirely a gift from Christ Jesus. We are justified by faith through the grace of Jesus Christ. Yet, sanctification is not free from our decision. We need to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus. Yet, God’s grace overrides all things.

Look at verse 28. “Then Peter spoke up, ‘We have left everything to follow you!’” Using the term **“we,”** Peter spoke on behalf of all disciples. He meant what their reward would be since they had left everything to follow him as his disciples. The fact of the matter is that they had left their job as fishermen in Galilee and a tax collector. They also left their family members behind, their wives, and children, at least temporarily, and sacrificed some golden opportunities to follow Jesus. At the moment, they were poor and didn’t have solid security for their immediate future and beyond. They surely expected they would not have to remain poor for the rest of their lives. After all, the Jews believed that God blesses the righteous with material wealth, just as he did to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David, etc.

How did Jesus respond to their expectation? Jesus didn’t rebuke Peter, saying, *“Are you following me only because of reward? That’s not pure.”* He didn’t do that. Instead, Jesus, understanding their fundamental needs as humans, promised great reward in this life and the age to come, though he included persecutions and challenges in life. Read verses 29-31. “‘Truly I tell you,’ 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 – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.’”

Reading these verses, do you think God cares about our life in this world? Yes, he does. I don’t know if *“a hundred times”* is literal. But Jesus did say to his disciples that God would bless their lives both spiritually and physically a hundred times more than they sacrificed. Of course, many Christians were martyred. Yet, it’s true that God takes nothing away from us without restoring it to us in a new and glorious form. Therefore, we should trust in his promises. Matthew 6:33 states, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Seeking his kingdom and righteousness first means not just doing God’s work but following Jesus as the priority in all circumstances. Jesus also said to his disciples, “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” (Jn. 6:27) and “the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” (Jn. 6:29)

Christ Jesus is the greatest reward for us. Nothing is better and more rewarding than Christ Jesus himself. Life in this world is troublesome; it includes even Christian disciples. But for those who choose to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, all things work for their best. No matter what circumstances we may be in, our life in Christ Jesus is safe and secure in God’s providence, and we will thrive day by day.

But Jesus concluded his teaching by saying, “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” What did he mean by this? It means eternal life is not a blank check. Spiritual complacency is the enemy of securing eternal life. We should have the right attitude like an Olympian, running the race of our faith. Otherwise, we will fall behind and gnash our teeth.

Let me close the sermon. In today’s passage, Jesus invited the rich young man to follow him even at the cost of giving up his material possession. If this young man followed Christ, it could be the best choice he could have made, and he would be greatly rewarded. But he went away sad. This morning, let’s examine ourselves to see if we are obsessed with anything or anyone that hinders us from following Jesus as his disciple. Are you discouraged because you aren’t blessed or rewarded enough for your sacrifice? It’s time to put our trust in the Lord again. Jesus, our Lord, deeply cares for us and will never leave us. No matter what stage of life we are in and what circumstance we may be in, it's time for us to follow Jesus and run the race of faith. (Pic#3) Eternal life is life in Jesus now and forever. (Pic#4)