

LESSON TEN

SALVATION THROUGH FAITH

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him,
“One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you
have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in
heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”*

MARK 10:21 NKJV

REFLECTION

Dreams of wealth are one thing. Having a huge bank account, vast estates, and impressive treasures are something else. We might be able to imagine having such a windfall, but it's a little harder to imagine what we would actually do with it. If you received an extraordinary amount of wealth, how would you spend it? How do you think it would affect your view of life, people, and eternity?

SITUATION

Three of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—include Jesus' encounter with one particular rich man. He seems to appear out of nowhere, anxious to pose his question to Jesus. He asks a universal question—how do I get into heaven? But it quickly becomes clear that he won't accept the answer Jesus gives him. His wealth has failed to give him eternal confidence, but walking away from the alternative leaves him even more miserable.

OBSERVATION

Read Mark 10:17–31 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

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?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder,

you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

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."

²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

²⁹ "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 ³⁰ 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. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹⁷ Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

²⁰ And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”

²¹ Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.”

²² But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.”

²⁹ So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, ³⁰ who shall 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. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

EXPLORATION

1. Why did the young man think he would inherit eternal life? On what did he base his beliefs?

2. What did Jesus say the man had to do to receive eternal life? What did Jesus say he lacked?

3. Why couldn’t the young man accept Jesus’ requirements for eternal life?

4. Why do you think it’s difficult for the rich and the self-righteous to enter the kingdom of God?

5. What was Jesus trying to teach his disciples about eternal life?

6. What does Peter’s response to Jesus reveal about his attitude toward eternal life?

INSPIRATION

Jesus gets to the point. "If you want to be perfect, then go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."

The statement leaves the young man distraught and the disciples bewildered.

Their question could be ours: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus' answer shellshocks the listeners, "With man this is impossible . . ."

Impossible.

He doesn't say improbable. He doesn't say unlikely. He doesn't even say it will be tough. He says it is "impossible." . . .

Does that strike you as cold? All your life you've been rewarded according to your performance. You get grades according to your study. You get commendations according to your success. You get money in response to your work.

That's why the rich young ruler thought heaven was just a payment away. It only made sense. You work hard, you pay your dues, and "zap"—your account is credited as paid in full. Jesus says, "No way." What you want costs far more than what you can pay. You don't need a system; you need a Savior. You don't need a resume; you need a Redeemer. For "what is impossible with men is possible with God." . . .

You see, it wasn't the money that hindered the rich man; it was the self-sufficiency. It wasn't the possessions; it was the pomp. It wasn't the big bucks; it was the big head . . .

Astounding. These people are standing before the throne of God and bragging about themselves. The great trumpet has sounded, and they are still tooting their own horns. Rather than sing his praises, they sing their own. Rather than worship God, they read their resumes. When they should be speechless, they speak. In the very aura of the King they boast of self. What is worse—their arrogance or their blindness?

God does not save us because of what we've done . . . and only a great God does for his children what they can't do for themselves.

That is the message of Paul: "For what the law was powerless to do . . .

God did." And that is the message of the first beatitude. "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ." The jewel of joy is given to the impoverished spirits, not the affluent. God's delight is received upon surrender, not awarded upon conquest. (From *The Applause of Heaven* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. In what ways are you measuring obedience to God by your internal attitudes rather than your external actions?

8. Why is it easy to fool ourselves into believing we somehow "deserve" God's mercy and salvation? What does this story tell us about what we must put first in our lives?

9. What does it mean that the "first will be last, and the last first" (verse 31)?

10. What should be the attitude of believers toward wealth?

11. What is Jesus' promise to those who give up the treasures of this world for his sake?

12. What, in addition to money, can distract people who want to follow God?

LIFE LESSONS

Like a skilled surgeon's knife, Jesus' words could have separated that man's heart from his riches. The operation would have been painful, but eternally effective. Jesus had already said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). His words exposed the man's inner struggle and challenge. When we're looking for what's really in our hearts, the best place to start is with our finances and "stuff." If we recognize that they belong to God and that we are only stewards, then it's likely that our hearts will be in God's hands as well.

DEVOTION

Father, reveal to us today what it is that we lack in our devotion to you. Help us to see the idols we have set up in our lives that we are serving instead of you. Keep us from being so blinded by the possessions of this world, which we cannot keep, that we fail to see the eternal treasure in you, which we can never lose. Help us to put you first in all that we do and say.

JOURNALING

How can you avoid the trap of putting your confidence in things rather than in God?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Mark during this twelve-part study, read Mark 10:1-52. For more Bible passages about the deceitfulness of riches, read Proverbs 28:11, 20; Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 8:36-37; Luke 12:15-21; 16:19-31.