

## Sermon on Mark 10:17-31

### The Rich Young Ruler

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost Oct. 10, 2021

Please pray with me: Lord make us conscious of your holiness and majesty: teach us to know and do your will: pour into our hearts such love towards you, that, loving you above all things, we may obtain thy gracious promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Our Gospel reading this morning is about a rich young ruler, who must have made a good impression on the apostles, because it shows up in all three of the synoptic gospels. And what are the synoptic gospels? They're Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Matthew refers to the man as a young man while Luke refers to him as a ruler and Mark calls him a man.

There are two dialogues in this morning's gospel reading. The first dialogue is between Jesus and the young man and then between Jesus and His disciples.

First, I want to give you all a little background on this morning's gospel reading. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem when the young man, who thought he was a righteous person, meets Him. A righteous person would normally seek his own teacher, usually, a person of wealth and who was popular. To kneel or bow before their teacher or rabbi would indicate great respect for them. And for the man to ask what he must do to inherit eternal life meant to enjoy life in the coming kingdom of

God or the Age to come. In John's gospel the term "Eternal Life" is mentioned frequently, but in the Synoptic Gospels "Eternal Life" is mentioned only three times in both Matthew and in Luke and in Mark only twice.

The way Jews and Gentiles thought of the times when Jesus spoke was the present age for them and they were looking for the age to come.

The present age for the rich young man saw the Pharisees and Sadducees enjoying the so-called good life while everyone else was being oppressed from many restrictions, and heavy taxes.

Let me try to explain what was happening here with the young man. Many first-century Jews divided their immediate future much like my parents and other people of their age did after WWII. Prior to WWII was the great depression and then came the war. After a great event such as WWII, came in a period of peace and prosperity. The same thing happened a number of times in the Old Testament such as when Solomon was King of Israel. Israel and Judah were united and peace between them and surrounding kingdoms was established. Jews and Gentiles both enjoyed the benefits of these peaceful times.

In the first dialogue in today's gospel the young man knelt at Jesus's feet and asked what must he do to inherit eternal life. The young man was being arrogant because he was an observer of the law. He knew the law like the back of his hand. He felt he was already justified because of his knowledge of the law and of his good works and the wealth he had accumulated. He had not understood the relationship between his works and God's grace that is **No one** can achieve eternal life by virtue of their own actions or works. This man had a spiritual deficit and needed to ask God for His grace. He did not realize he was kneeling at the feet of God. I think he may have been one of the lost sheep referred to in Matthew 10:5 where Jesus told His disciples "Do

not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” The young man did not realize that he could not be saved by the law, but only by Jesus. In Acts 13:38 Paul said when he was in the temple in Antioch “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.” Again, Paul says in Romans 3:20-26 “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes thorough faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. **There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.** God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus

The young man isn’t aware that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to die for him. In Mark 8:35 Jesus says “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses life for me and for the gospel will save it.” What Jesus is saying in this verse is that whoever lives a self-centered life with a focus on the present world would lose his life. They will not receive eternal life. Whoever gives up their self-centered life of rebellion to the Good News of Jesus Christ will find eternal life with Jesus. The man tells Jesus that he has kept all the laws referring to the Commandments Jesus just mentioned to him. The five Commandments Jesus mentioned, “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not

steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother”, these all have to do with the way we are to treat people. If you look these up in Exodus 20:13-17 you will not see “Do not defraud. Jesus substituted this for “You shall not covet”. The man was attempting to justify his living. Jesus knew how this man was living his life and is why He told him one thing he lacked, he needed to sell everything he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor and then follow Him. The man was sad when he heard those words and walked away disheartened because he had a lot of possessions. This man may have been doing everything in his life believing he was pleasing God and that God was rewarding him. He may have thought because of his status of wealth it would gain him entrance into heaven.

Now if the young man had asked a Pharisee or someone of another sect, such as the Essenes who were a mystic Jewish sect during the second Temple period and wrote some of the Dead Seas Scrolls, he would have been first told something completely different from what Jesus told him. The Pharisee most likely would have given the man two rather detailed interpretations of Jewish law. The law itself defined Israel and God’s people and as the prophet’s said Israel was full of sinners. Therefore, it was necessary to follow a more exact understanding of the commandments. Second a Pharisee or a person of another sect would have tried to persuade the man that he would need to join their sect. Doing so, the person would be able to enjoy the present age and then be assured of going to Heaven or inherit the Age to Come. So, hearing what Jesus told the young man may have been puzzling to him. We know in reading the Gospel the man was wealthy and his wealth was important to him. Possibly more important than eternal life, unless of course, he thought he could obtain eternal life without giving up his wealth and possessions. He was amazed at the price Jesus put on him for eternal life or an easy life. This man was

expecting a free pass. A free pass is for children who have nothing to give as we read in Mark 10 13-16 where it says: “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.” There is quite a contrast here between the rich man and the children. The children had no status while the rich man did because of his wealth. The children had no power while the rich man did because of all his wealth. The security afforded a person by having a lot of material possessions often tempts them to trust in their possessions and not in God. Some people back then and sadly even today think more of their possessions than of God.

The Jewish faith put a lot of emphasis on charity. Rabbis, when they taught their students, did not require them to get rid of all their possessions or funds as Jesus told the young man. However, there were some Greek teachers that did require their students to get rid of their wealth. These requirements were given to test the students of their sincerity. Now mind you, not every student did that though a few did.

Now we come to the second dialog in today’s lesson I mentioned earlier. Jesus turned to His disciples and told them that it was easier for a camel to go thru an eye of a needle than to enter the kingdom of God. Mathew and Luke in their gospels say the same thing.

When Jesus told the disciples that it was easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, he was telling them that the accumulation of wealth won’t

help you to get to Heaven. Having wealth was not a bad thing but rather it is what a person did with their money. That could be said for today as well. Wealth won't buy a person a place in Heaven or the Age to Come. Perhaps the disciples may have been surprised at what Jesus told them because people often regarded wealth as a sign of God's pleasure with them. This was a common thought among the Jews and gentiles.

Jesus told the disciples in the second half of Mark 10:27 "With man it is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." And in Mark 10:31 Jesus says "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." That it is those who had left family and friends along with their possessions to follow Jesus who would receive things back even in the Present Age—such as an ever-larger family of their fellow disciples, and with homes that are open to them where ever they go proclaiming the Good News. They would also meet persecution along the way and they would of course in the Age to Come, receive the God-given life of that new Age.

This young man was only asked to do two things. 1. Sell all of his goods and distribute the money to the poor. 2. Follow Jesus and become one of His disciples. We as Christians are disciples of Jesus and are asked to help the poor and proclaim the Good News to everyone. We do not have to dispose of all our possessions and give all our money to the poor. Volunteer work, prayer, contributing by money and or food to our local food bank are examples. If anyone needs more ideas how we can live our discipleship please see me.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit be ascribed, as is most justly due, all might, majesty, dominion, power and glory, world without end. AMEN.