

Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15
 Psalm 90:12-17
 Hebrews 4:12-16
 Mark 10:17-31

The Rich Young Man
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WHAT MUST I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

Jesus was on his final journey. You can follow his progress in Mark 10:1, 32, 46, and on to Jerusalem. Our lesson in Mark 10 today describes an event that appears also in Matthew 19 and Luke 18.

Mark 10:17-22. *And as he 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?"* ¹⁸*And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: 'Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'*" ²⁰*And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth."* ²¹*And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* ²²*At that saying his countenance fell, and he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.*¹

• *As he was setting out in his journey ... (v.17)*. As Jesus left Galilee with his disciples and went down the Jordan valley toward Jerusalem, a man came running to catch up with them. He was evidently young and rich, and he was a "ruler" (Luke 18:18). This is a dangerous combination in a man, and you can see why death came to Adam and his descendants. A man might remain a ruler, and always be rich, but he will not always be young. This man knelt and asked, *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

Here is an arresting picture. The man was young and rich and apparently healthy – he lacked nothing in the world. Yet he threw himself at the feet of this penniless Teacher from Nazareth. He asked, *"What must I do?"* – *"What do I still lack?"* (Matt 19:20). He knew something was lacking.

• *"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."* (v.18) The reply seems abrupt. After all, the man was complimenting Jesus, and his words were probably sincere. Why did Jesus admonish him?

1. An advisor who does not respond to flattery is more trustworthy than one who does.
2. A faithful minister will bring glory to God, not himself
3. In Matthew 19:16 the man asked, *"What good deed must I do?"* There is no single act – no fast track to righteousness. You must give yourself completely to Jesus and follow him the rest of your life.
4. It is actually true that "no one is good but God alone." No one can make himself good. Paul wrote, *"I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it."* (Rom 7:18). We don't make ourselves good. We *receive* goodness in the person of Jesus Christ. That's the way things are. A horse can't grow wings, and you and I can't make our selves good.

• *"You know the commandments ..."* (v.19). The law is your standard of behavior. *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul* (Ps 19:7). Jesus recited commandments the young man had been able to keep, but he omitted the first commandment. Why? What part of the law had the man not yet obeyed?

• *"All these I have observed from my youth"* (v.20). Jesus loved this young man. A man who is young and rich and powerful tends to believe he has all the answers, but not this young man. He was different.

• *"You lack one thing"* (v.21). The "one thing" this man lacked (and many of us lack) was room in his life for Christ. The young man's wealth had actually *helped* him keep the commandments in v.19. But wealth,

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

when it becomes the focus of your life, will take you away from following Jesus. Nor is wealth the only problem. *Anything* that captures your mind and heart and leaves no room for God is a problem. Discuss 1 John 2:15-17, which begins, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him ...*” Peter’s first love was fishing; Matthew’s was collecting taxes; yours as well may be your career. If you find that something in the world is taking over your life, you must get it under control. The Bible says, “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Ex 20:3).

- *He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions* (v.22). Wealth and power are equated with success in America. And yet, we all know a wealthy life is not always a peaceful and happy life. We read about rich and famous people who die alone or even commit suicide. Let’s face it: money can’t buy everything.

Money will buy toys for our kids, but it will not buy back the precious hours we missed when we put money and success ahead of playtime. It will buy private schools and tutors, but it will not buy back the time when we ourselves were too busy to teach – when we could have corrected a small problem that later became big. It will not buy back the promised camping trip that was cancelled because Dad had work to do. Money can make us too busy to discipline, but it cannot pay for the consequences when our children grow up.

Money has no value in the kingdom of God. It won’t pay for the lost chance to visit a loved one in the hospital, or the phone call we didn’t have time to make, or the letter we had no time to write. It can’t bring back the lost opportunity to help a friend. In things like these, money is not the solution. It’s the problem.

Money will buy companionship, but it will not buy friendship. Money will buy comfort and attention, but it will not buy back the cutting remark that hurt a friend long ago and echoes now, back through the canyons of the past. Money will buy endless vacations, and take us to see wonderful sights around the world, but it has no power to kindle joy in a heart that has grown cold from pursuing wealth.

Nor does wealth alone determine a man’s character. A rich man may be kind or cruel, generous or stingy. Jesus said, “*A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*” (Luke 12:15). There are many things money can’t do that Christ can do. May God help us to keep from missing these things.

Mark 10:23-27. *And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”* ²⁴*And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them 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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* ²⁶*And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”* ²⁷*Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.”*

- “*How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!*” (v.23). In this context, a person with riches is someone with a full plate, spiritually speaking. He is someone who believes nothing is lacking – who says, as the rich fool said in Luke 12:19, “*I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.*” It is more difficult for such a person to see any reason to follow Christ. But a man with a lot of money may nevertheless be poor in spirit, and feel a great need for Christ. Anyone who is dissatisfied with life – who knows something is missing – who believes a better life may be possible – is much more likely to respond when he hears the words, “*Come, follow me!*”

- *The disciples were amazed at his words* (v.24). They had learned to equate prosperity with righteousness. Psalm 37:29 says, “*The righteous shall possess the land, and dwell upon it for ever.*” But it means righteousness is the *cause*, and prosperity and security are *results*, not the other way around.

- “*With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God*” (v.27). Soon the disciples would learn what this meant. Jesus would enter Jerusalem, where he would be tried and tortured and killed. Rich beyond measure, he would give his life to ransom the lost sinners in this world – people like you and me. Then he would rise again, and prove forever the truth of what he said here: “*All things are possible with God.*”

People still ask, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus Christ gave one universal answer to this question, which goes for the rich, the poor, and every one who asks: “*Come, follow me.*”