

Sermon outline and notes:

© Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor

[Swift Creek Baptist Church.com](http://SwiftCreekBaptistChurch.com), 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834

3/14/10

Mark 10:17-31 (read vv.17-22)      “The Rich Man Who Wasn’t Truly Rich”

Intro. In many ways the story that I have just read to you is a tragedy. It’s the story of a young man who came to Jesus seeking eternal life, but when he found out what he needed to do, he turned away, shocked and sorrowful at the words of Christ. He came to the right person, he asked the right question; but he made the wrong decision. Instead of becoming a part of the Bible’s Who’s Who, he remained part of the Who’s Not. As far as we know, he never obtained the eternal life that he sought.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give an account of this tragic story so that all who seek eternal life as this man did may know the answer. It is tragic that many people have many answers in life, and yet they don’t have the answer to the main question. But I’m afraid that most people, even in America, do not know how a person obtains eternal life. At the end of chapter 9, Jesus warned of “hell fire—where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Well, how can a person avoid hell and find a home in heaven? This morning, I want everyone present to know the answer to that question. And may this day be a day of victory in your life. I hope you will not be like this young man, and tragically walk away from this building lost without Christ.

So notice from our text that we first see:

## I. A SEEKER

Mark graphically pictures a young man running up to Jesus, dressed in fine clothes, and falling down on his knees before Him. We know from v.22 that he was wealthy. Matthew says that he was a young man. There is something amazing in the sight of this rich, young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth. Now consider with me:

A. The Object of His Quest - What is he seeking from Jesus? We know from his question in the last of v.17 what He was seeking. He asked, “Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit everlasting life?” He was seeking eternal life, and as a result, he asked the greatest question any person can ask. There is nothing wrong with seeking eternal life. After all, we were created by God, who is an eternal being. I believe He wants us to live with Him for all eternity. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So here was a man seeking eternal life.

What are you seeking today? Are you seeking friendship? Are you seeking pleasure? Are you seeking wealth? Are you seeking fame? I hope you are interested in eternal life, in living for all eternity in heaven with the Lord. If you have not sought & obtained eternal life, you are missing something really important. Jesus said in Mark 8:36, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?”

Next notice with me:

B. What Was Surprising about His Quest – Many Jews would have been surprised that this man was seeking eternal life. They would have thought that this man was surely on the road to heaven. I say that for two reasons:

1. He Was Religious – We see in the last of v.20 that he felt he had kept the 10 Commandments “from my youth.” From a child he had been taught the Bible in his home & the synagogue. By the time he was a youth he conscientiously sought to live by the Bible. And Jesus did not refute that. Furthermore, he showed concern for spiritual things, while most around him were careless and indifferent. There is something to be said for the young person who determines that he is going to live a morally pure and clean life. Furthermore, Luke tells us that he was a ruler. What kind of ruler? He was probably a synagogue ruler;<sup>1</sup> thus, he was religious, well trained in the Scriptures. He attended the synagogue services every Sabbath Day. This young man did not lack orthodoxy. He was not a doubter, skeptic, or professed infidel. He was not one of those liberal Sadducees. He believed in eternal life.

Many Jews would have thought that he already had eternal life because:

2. He Was Rich – As we have seen already, the last of v.22 says “he had great possessions.” Emphasis is placed on the man’s wealth in that all three gospels describe this man as being rich. As we have discussed before, the Jews believed that wealth was a sign of God’s favor upon the righteous. This explains the astonishment of the disciples in vv.24-26, for they had believed this Jewish teaching concerning wealth. They assumed that if anyone would make it to heaven, it would be a rich man.

Are you like this man? You may attend church. You may be morally upright most of the time? But is this enough for you to have eternal life? Well that leads to:

C. The Reason for His Quest - Why did he come to Jesus? In spite of his wealth and moral living, he still sensed that he was lacking something. He was inwardly restless. He probably thought he was well on his way to meriting eternal life, but he wanted to be sure. So Matthew’s account (19:20) reports that he said, “What do I still lack?” He was religious, obedient, & rich. But was that enough? Indeed, anyone who seeks salvation by works will always wonder if they have done enough. You never have assurance that you have obtained salvation.

So this man learned that there was something that money could not buy. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep. Money can buy a house, but not a home. Money can buy a diamond, but not love. Money can buy a church pew, but not salvation. And somehow his riches had not been able to buy what was missing in his life. Somehow the position this man had gained at such a young age had not satisfied the deep longing of his heart. He did not have the peace of God in his soul.

In spite of his accomplishments, he still wanted to know what else he needed to do to find assurance of eternal life. Well let’s find the answer from our text. Now the scene moves from the seeker to:

## II. THE SAVIOR

Notice that v.21 says that Jesus “loved him.” That love, beyond doubt, was a love of pity and compassion. Here was a man who thought that he was on the road to heaven. He assumed that salvation is by works, by something we do, for he said, “What must I do....” He thought salvation was by addition, adding something else to your list of accomplishments. For the moment at least, he seemed to be willing to do most anything that was necessary to attain eternal life. Yet Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> Same Gk. word used in Luke 8:41 (*archon*), which clearly refers to a synagogue ruler. The word was also used of member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, though that seems less likely in this man’s case. He showed a disposition to reverence our Lord, by kneeling to him, while teachers of the law and Pharisees despised him.

knew that he was on the wrong road to eternal life, & His heart went out to him. So in order to help this man, He wanted to help him see that his own ideas about salvation were wrong. So notice:

A. The Savior's Examination – Jesus is like a physician, who is examining & diagnosing the spiritual condition of this man, & his wrong assumptions. He could not show him the true way of salvation until He first convinced him that he was trusting in the wrong way of salvation. Jesus knew that this man needed to have his self-sufficiency shattered.

What about you today? Are you like many others who believe that you get to heaven on the basis of the kind of life that you live? Are you depending upon your goodness and ability to keep the 10 commandments to get to heaven? Well let's see how Jesus examines this man by in essence asking 3 questions. If you think eternal life is obtained by human works, I ask you these same questions:

1. Are You Truly Good? – After addressing Jesus as “Good Teacher,” Jesus replied in v.18, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.” In Jesus' response He is saying in effect, “You cannot call me good unless you call me God.” Jesus is not disclaiming goodness or deity. In fact, He affirmed His deity by His claim to sinlessness. He said, “Which of you convicts Me of sin” (John 8:46) and “I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29). Well the main point of Jesus' response was to call upon this man to contemplate the absolute goodness of God, and to measure himself by *that* supreme standard.

Yet this young man no doubt believed that good people go to heaven. Do you believe that? Jesus knew very well that if this inquirer was going to be saved, he had to realize that he fell far short of that standard. A person will not call on a doctor unless they believe they are sick. Likewise, a person will not turn to the Savior until they realize that they have a sin problem.

Now contemplate the next question:

2. Have You Truly Kept the Law? - This man had assumed that he could obtain eternal life by keeping the Law. He thought the law was given as a means of salvation, but he was about to find out the true purpose of the law. Rom. 3:20 says “through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (cf. Gal. 3:24). So Jesus starts out by referring him to the law of God in v.19. He said, “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.’”<sup>2</sup> The command “Do not defraud” is not in the 10 Commandments, but is a summation of the laws requiring us to give what is due to our fellow man. As a rich man, he probably had many servants or employees. Was he being fair to them? Had he paid them a fair wage, and paid them in a timely manner?

By the way, this is the “Way of the Master” in witnessing. At some point early in a witnessing conversation, we must share God's commandments in order to bring a person to the realization that they are a sinner in need of a Savior. Have you kept all of God's commandments?

Now here was his problem: He believed that he *had* kept the Law. The rich man responds to Jesus by saying in v.20, “All these things have I observed ever since I was a child.” He says this to Jesus without blinking an eye. He had been neither unchaste, nor dishonest, nor profane. Outwardly and superficially, he probably had done a good job of keeping these commandments. Paul was like this young man. In fact, Paul wrote in Phil. 3, “Concerning the righteousness of the law I was blameless.”

However, he misunderstood the true purpose of the Law. The law was given to be like a mirror, exposing our dirty sins. But here is an example of the problem with people who are brought

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew also has it that Jesus quoted “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

up to live good, moral lives. They casually glance at their outward goodness, and they determine that they are good, but Jesus carries us beneath the surface. The law was actually given to expose our sin and our inadequacy. Had it done its work in this man's life? No, so Jesus took him a step further,

3. Are You Truly Perfect? – Jesus perceived his casual concept of goodness and righteousness. So He replied in v.21, “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.” It is important that Matthew's account adds, “If you would be perfect.” Mark has it, “One thing you lack.” The point is, in order to be saved by keeping the law, you have to keep it perfectly. In Galatians 3:10 Paul quoted the Old Testament saying, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” Well, we're all in trouble, for Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” So Jesus smashed this man's self-righteousness by exposing his love of money & lack of positive goodness. When Jesus previously quoted the law, He left out the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, “You shall not covet.” Now, He is going to show him how he has been breaking that commandment. So His first demand was to sell all his possessions and give to the poor. He saw that he had made his riches his idol. He loved his riches more than God. If that was the case, he was breaking the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment as well, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3).

So you see, you cannot be good enough, or obedient enough, to earn your way to heaven. Jesus said in v.27 concerning obtaining eternal life, “With men it is impossible....” You have as much chance earning your way to heaven as an elephant on roller skates has of getting to the moon! So you might as well go ahead & give up the notion of getting to heaven by your good works, or anything else you might do.

Now once a person is brought to the place where they can no longer trust in their own goodness for salvation, then they should be ready to look unto Another for eternal life. For though it is impossible for us to save ourselves, Jesus say in the last of v.27 that it is “not with God; for with God all things are possible.” God has made a way to be saved. That way is Jesus Christ, and His death on the cross. So let us move from the Savior Examination to:

B. The Savior's Invitation – Jesus went on to say in the last of v.21, “come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” It is important to note that Jesus added these words. So based on these words & the context, this is what we must do to have eternal life:

1. Repent of our Sins – That's what this young man had to do. He had to turn from his love for riches, from his idol, from his greed. Peter said in Acts 3:19, “Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.” I hope you can see that Jesus is not commanding everyone to sell in order to have eternal life. This command was for a specific reason to a specific person. But the principle is this: you must surrender whatever it is that keeps you from receiving Jesus as your personal Savior. So in the young man's case he was saying, “Give up your idol.” His was wealth.

What about you? What is your idol? What would you have to give up to be a true Christian? I am sure that if you are not loving God, you are loving something else; and whatever it is that you love more than God is your idol. And you should give up whatever is hindering you from Christ. In this young man's case, it was his possessions. In your case, it might be certain friends that you have, or certain sinful pleasures.

You may hesitate. You may be tempted to refuse this call for repentance. But notice what Jesus said in vv.29-30, “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, 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.” Notice that what you give up for Jesus will be returned in another form and in another time many times over.

When I was 18 I made a commitment to forsake all & preach the Gospel. Following God's call meant leaving my family & going to Texas for 5 years to prepare in Bible College & Seminary. I went to Minnesota to do mission work. I spent about 6 years back in GA before moving to VA the past 23 years. Cheryl & the boys have had to give up those weekly visits to her parents. But God has His ways to compensate our losses. Over the years I've had some fine Christian older women fill the role of a mother to me. I've gained some fine brothers & sisters in Christ. I've got one who wants to be my cousin! One couple in the church did their best to fill the role of grandparents to my children.

Oh, what encouragement is given here to follow Christ with resolve & absolute commitment! You can't outgive God! He will be a debtor to no one. Next, you need to:

2. Trust in Christ - This man needed to know that eternal life is a gift (Rom. 6:23) which is received by faith (Eph. 2:8-9). The object of our trust must be Jesus and Him alone. For I John 5:11-12 says that eternal life is found in Jesus. And when Jesus gave the command to sell all, it would require complete confidence and trust in Jesus to obey such a command. I am afraid that he was not willing to trust Jesus.

3. Commit to Following Christ - The last command of Christ was “follow me.” This involved living in obedience to Christ, acknowledging His Lordship over your life. Paul said in Romans 10:9 that in order to be saved, we must confess “the Lord Jesus,” or confess that “Jesus is Lord.” And note present tense here. We should persevere in following Christ.

So we have seen the Seeker of eternal life. We have heard the Savior declare what this young man had to do. Now let us consider:

### III. THE RESPONSE

What would his response be? The angels may have stopped what they were doing, looking over the battlement of heaven with hushed anticipation. The angel at the book of life was poised with the pen, ready to write the man's name up there. We all must choose which road we will take: the road of human works, or the road of grace. One leads to death; the other leads to eternal life. But tragedy of tragedies, this young man made the wrong response. Notice what v.22 says, “But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” Now that he first of all responded with:

A. Sadness on His Face - When Jesus said what he did, it was like pouring ice-cold water into his face. The word translated “sad” (*stugnadzo*) means “to be shocked, appalled; become gloomy, dark.” The word was used of a dark sky in Mt. 16:3. What Jesus said was just the opposite of what he wanted to hear.

B. Sorrow in His Heart – In the middle of v.22 it says, “went away sorrowful.” His mistake was that he was remorseful instead of repentant. There would be no grief unless he believed Christ's answer was true. The tragedy is that in spite of what he knew to be the truth, he rejected it and clung to his riches. Some will hear a gospel sermon and leave with similar grief. They want to be saved but....

C. Refusal by His Will - V.22 also says, "He went away." He did not follow Jesus. Instead, he turned away from Jesus. The last of v.22 gives the reason. He chose gold over God. Having much wealth is not a sin as long as such wealth is obtained honestly. In fact, you can use wealth to honor God and bless the lives of many people. But if your money comes between you and God, then your covetousness is like the sin of idolatry.

Once the evangelist Gipsy Smith was greeting people after an evangelistic meeting. He shook the hand of a mother, and then tried to shake the hand of her son who was standing beside her. But he wouldn't do it. Gipsy Smith tried several times to get that boy to shake his hand with no success. Finally, he took the boy's hand and pried it open, and found that the boy was clutching 3 marbles. Many people won't take the hand of Jesus because they are clutching something else they are afraid they would lose.

Conclusion: If you were to die and stand before God at the gate into heaven, and He asked you, "Why should I let you into heaven?", what would you say? Do you have a good answer? Why should He give you eternal life? Would you say, "Lord, I've gone to church all my life"? Would that be enough? Or would you say, "Lord, I've kept the 10 Commandments better than most people"? Would that be enough to secure eternal life? Well we have seen today that you cannot earn eternal life. The only way you can have eternal life is to repent of your sins & trust in Jesus as your Savior. Will you do it today?

Sources: William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1965); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 7: Matthew 9-28 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming. H. Revell, 1927); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 219-225; Jerry Vines, *Interviews with Jesus* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 2/5/84); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Compare sources from Mt. 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30.

#### ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. Since Dr. Felker's sermons are generally preached without notes, the "live" recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author's own words. To obtain an audio recording of this message, you may send \$2 for each CD ordered, plus \$2 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each CD. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834. His email address is [S+Felker+2@aol.com](mailto:S+Felker+2@aol.com) (remove + signs).