

An Applicant for Heaven

Mark 10:17-27

Halifax: 10 May 2020 AM

Introduction

Today, we will continue our sermon series in Mark.

- Last time, we came to the passage in chapter 10 about Jesus blessing the little children that were brought to Him.
 - Jesus said that if we want to receive His kingdom, we must receive it like a little child does.
 - That means that we contribute nothing for our acceptance—because we *have* nothing to contribute.
 - This is very hard for us because we always want to think that we have something in ourselves that makes us worthy.
 - We cling tenaciously to whatever that is and it keeps us from coming to Jesus.
- It is no mistake that the passage about the rich young ruler follows the passage about children in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).
 - He was the kind of young man that made his parents proud—the kind of fellow that everyone admired. Everyone thought that he was a good man.
 - But this young man had a lesson to learn—and so did Jesus’ disciples, and so do all of you who read this passage.
 - It certainly made an impact on Matthew, Mark, and Luke.
 - All three of them include it, each adding details of their own.

Listen as I read this account to you from Mark’s gospel —Mark 10:17-27.

- Pay careful attention because this is the very word of God.

Mark 10:17-31: 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.”

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and to the exposition of His Word.

As we have seen in previous sermons, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem with His disciples for the last time because, as He has been telling them,

- this time He is going to be arrested and delivered up to be crucified.

When our passage opens, Jesus is just leaving the house where He has been receiving little children...

- And we are told that before He hardly gets on the road, He is approached by this eager young man.

I. Here is an earnest applicant for heaven!

A. Mark, in particular, highlights his zeal.

- Remember, of course, that Mark wrote his gospel based on Peter's observations...

1. Mark alone tells us that the man *ran* up to Jesus.

- He wanted to catch Jesus before He left town.
- This made an impression on Peter. While we learn from Luke that he was a ruler, and from Matthew that he was young, we learn from Mark how he ran.
- All of them tell us that he was rich.
 - It is a bit unusual to see a rich young ruler so eager to talk to Jesus.

2. Mark is also the only one who tells us that this man knelt down in front of Jesus.

- This was not ordinarily done to teachers among the Jews of Jesus' day—
- We have seen people who were desperate for healing come and kneel before Jesus—to plead with Him, but this man has not come for that reason.

3. All three gospels tell us that this man also displayed unusual respect for Jesus, addressing Him as “Good Teacher.”

- Very rarely did the people in this culture call anyone “good.”
 - Sometimes they did, but usually the word *good* was reserved for God.
 - And it was pretty much unheard of that a teacher should be called “Good Teacher.”
- This man was giving to Jesus a tremendous show of respect—something of which Jesus was fully worthy but rarely given.
 - This man's zeal greatly impressed Peter.

B. And this rich young ruler has a very important matter to ask Jesus about.

1. He did not ask Jesus for healing.

- He did not ask Him important questions that he might have as a ruler, about settling a controversy or establishing a policy.
- He asks Jesus about his soul.

2. He wants to know how he may inherit eternal life:

- You can see that in verse 17 where says: “**Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**”
- This was something that the Jews often talked about.
- They knew that their hope was not to be found in this world—

- Surely if the city whose builder and maker is God was only to be found in this world, their founding fathers—men like Abraham and Jacob and Moses—would have had something to complain about.
 - Think of Abraham and Jacob who got no inheritance, and of Moses who spent forty years in the wilderness leading Israel to the Promised Land and never got to set foot in it himself.
3. And I say, what could be more important than to know where you will spend eternity?
- You can have everything in this world—everything—but what does it profit you if you lose your own soul?
 - This man was right to be earnest about this!
 - It is a question that so many ignore in our day to their own hurt...
 - And what a hurt it is—not just for a year—not just for a few centuries, but forever!
 - Foolish is the man or the woman who lives out their days without ever stopping to consider where they will spend eternity.
 - But not this young man!
 - He stands out as one who is rightly concerned... one of the few who comes to Jesus about it.
- As we have seen all along in our study of Mark, most people came to Jesus for either healing or deliverance from demons, but this man came for the salvation of his soul.
- C. And what a candidate he was!—a fine applicant for an inheritance in Christ’s eternal kingdom.
1. How often do we have upstanding accomplished young rulers approach us to earnestly inquire about the way to heaven?
- How pleased we would be if such a man came to our church to ask about this.
 - Many modern evangelists today would ask this man a couple of questions, have him pray a prayer, and assure him of a place in heaven.
2. You can be quite sure that this young man was used to being quite well received.
- It was unusual for young men to be rulers, but Matthew tells us that he was young and Luke tells us that he was a ruler.
 - He is the kind of fellow that you’d be glad to have as an acquaintance, glad to be connected with—
 - the kind of young man that had impressed his teachers and that had always made his parents proud.
 - the kind who was the first to get promoted among his peers and who found success in everything he did.
 - I remember a pre-med student at my university who had a straight A average and was the captain of the basketball team too.
 - This man was accustomed to being warmly welcomed wherever he went.

TRANS> But now this young man comes to Jesus.

- He is meeting someone who is not like anyone else.

II. Jesus searches this young man out. Graciously, He searches him out.

- That is exactly what this young needed.

A. First, Jesus asks him, “What do you mean by calling me ‘good?’ ”

- His words are: **“Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.”**

1. Jesus is not just being pedantic here.

- You know how some overzealous believers will catch at what you say—
 - for example, if you say that you *just happened* to run into someone you were looking for—and they will interrupt you and in a correcting way will say, “Nothing happens by chance,” and then you have explain that you were speaking in relative terms...
- Jesus was not just picking at his words or trying to catch this man at his words.
 - He was truly searching him out—getting him to think.
 - In telling your story, you perfectly understood that God is sovereign, just as you perfectly understand that only God is good when you say that someone is such a good person... but Jesus knew that the way this man understood good *was* a problem.
 - Jesus wanted him to think about this.

2. How was he really using this word “good?” Was it in a meaningful way?

- Or was this just part of his smoothness as one who had learned how to get on well with his superiors?
- Or was he perhaps using the word “good” of Jesus in the same way that he would have thought of himself as “good?” We are the good people.
- It was very unlikely that at this juncture he intended to imply that Jesus was good like God is good.
 - Even Jesus’ own disciples had only recently come to see that Jesus was the Son of God—and the full meaning of that was yet to sink in.

TRANS> Jesus just raises the question to the young man—and moves on to search him out further.

B. Next, He searches him out with some of God’s commandments:

- **Verse 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.’ ”**

1. One of the reasons God gave us His commandments was to search us out.

- a. James speaks of God’s word as a mirror where we see our face and learn what kind of person we are.

- An adulterer can go along feeling he is a pretty good, well-meaning person—until he hears “you shall not commit adultery,”
 - I spoke to you last week about how the jeweler can misrepresent his wares—claiming his rings have more gold than they do—and feel quite good about it because he knows that other jewelers do it too—and because (after all) he has to provide for his family and to look after his employees and he can’t do that if he can’t sell his jewelry...
 - But then the commandment comes that you shall not defraud your neighbour... it stings him... and if he doesn’t shake it off, it will do him good.
- b. Know that God graciously gave us His law to show us our need of His salvation. It is good to be exposed by the word.
- We do well to search ourselves out (or rather to ask God to search us out) with God’s law... and we do well help others search themselves out when are helping them to learn about God and to understand their need of Christ.
 - It is designed, as Paul tells us, to be our schoolmaster that leads us to Christ.
 - As John said, the law came by Moses (Moses showed us what is required of us) but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (in Christ, God provides us with what is required of us).
- So how does this young man respond when Jesus points to these commandments?
2. He responds that he has done quite well in keeping all of these commandments.
- His answer would not have been shocking—it would have been expected.
 - He says (verse 20): **“Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.”**
 - His testimony is that from the time of his Bar Mitzvah at the age of twelve when he became a son of the law (taking responsibility for his own obedience) he has kept these commandments.
 - And this is probably true in the same way that it was true of the Apostle Paul.
 - As touching the law, he was blameless, a righteous man who kept the law of God.
 - He had not slept with another man’s wife, he had not stolen from anyone or borne false witness, and he had honoured his parents.
 - His parents would say that he had honoured them.
 - He had kept the law as to the letter of the law.
 - He really did lead an exemplary life.
3. So why did this young man come to Jesus to ask what he needed to inherit eternal life if he thought he was so good?
- a. Was he simply looking for Jesus to affirm him the way everybody else did?
- Perhaps.
 - Some see him as a very proud man—and of course he was a proud man else he would have been calling on Christ for mercy.
 - But it does not seem that he is an insincere man or a blatant hypocrite.

- It seems pretty clear that he was a moral man—much more moral than most people.
 - His problem was that he had not learned to look clearly at what he was *before God*.
 - He read God’s law in a superficial way... not thinking that though he did not commit adultery, he had lusted after women that were not his own wife.
- b. But perhaps there was something more going on within him—besides a mere wish for Jesus to affirm what a good boy he was...
- Perhaps there was an ache within him...
 - After all, he had come to ask Jesus what he was lacking—what he must do to inherit eternal life—and Jesus seems to take him quite seriously.
 - Perhaps he came to ask Jesus to ask this because he knew that what he had done was not enough.
 - Perhaps the Spirit was beginning to work in him.
 - Perhaps seeing Jesus had produced in him a gnawing growing awareness that he didn’t measure up.
- c. Whether that was the reason or not,
- He certainly got a response to his question that was calculated to expose what is true of every man...
 - That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
 - That there is none righteous, no not one.
 - That by the works of the law, no flesh shall be justified.
- C. He asked what he lacked and Jesus told him.
1. We are first told that Jesus looked at him and loved him.
 - The word ‘look’ is *eu-blep-o*, which refers to one of those long searching looks that Mark has mentioned before—it is a rare word...
 - And notice that it was not a look of disgust or a look of irritation.
 - He looked at him and loved him.
 - Even though he was this man who could not at this time see his desperate need, Jesus loved him and He told him what he lacked.
 2. Look at verse 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.”**
 - That was what this man needed to do.
 - He needed to come to Jesus if he wished to be saved.
 - He needed the righteousness that only Jesus could provide.
 - His riches and his good life were in his way because he trusted in them and they kept him from coming to Jesus.
 3. The young man refuses Jesus’ call.

- It is very pitiful to see.
 - Verse 22 tells us his response and the reason for it: **But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.**
- When it says that he was sad, the language indicates that his countenance fell.
 - He sunk in despair.
 - This shows that he was sincere—he didn’t get angry—he sort of believed Jesus—he knew that Jesus was telling him the truth.
 - But how could he do what Jesus was asking?
 - His whole life was in his achievement, in the respect he had gained, in his prosperity and honour.
 - How could he leave all that? He had so much! He had worked so hard.
 - He goes away in deep sorrow, clinging to what he cannot keep and rejecting the treasures that would last forever.

III. What is going on here with all of this? What was Jesus doing?

- Jesus’ disciples were like us—
 - They found this troubling—why did Jesus not do more to encourage this fine upstanding man who had come seeking eternal life? He put up a wall.
 - They were troubled just like we are when we read this passage.

A. Jesus turns to His bewildered disciples.

1. We are told that He turns that searching gaze of His upon them: v. 23: **Then Jesus looked around...**
 - The word here is with *blep-o* again.
 - When Jesus looked at the man, it was *eu-blep-o*, which means to look upon; but here it is *peri-blep-o* which means to look around, fixing His gaze on each one of them.
 - In both cases it is to scrutinise—to look deeply and searchingly at them—to penetrate them with His eyes.
 - He is ready to speak into their confusion.
 - Perhaps he is going to help them to understand what He was doing here.
2. But instead of relieving our perplexity, He makes it even worse.
 - He says (v. 23) **“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”**
 - What is Jesus saying here?
 - This was a fine upstanding young man—looking for God’s kingdom!
 - Are riches not a blessing from God?
 - Does everyone have to sell all that they have to be saved?
 - Surely if this man did not have what it takes to be saved, who does?
 - He was seeking eternal life.
 - But all Jesus can say is how hard it is for an excellent fellow like this to enter His kingdom!

- Verse 24 tells us that Jesus' disciples were astonished—the word *astonished* can even carry the idea of frightened or terrified... uneasy...
 - It is the same feeling you likely have when you read a passage like this.
 - It is disconcerting.
 - If this man that came to Jesus isn't good enough for His kingdom unless he sells everything—what does that say about you?
- But Jesus has more to say—in answer to their astonishment.
 - Perhaps He is going to help relieve the tension...
- 3. But no! He goes on only to emphasise His point even more!
 - He doubles down on the difficulty of such persons being saved.
 - Picking up in verse 24: **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.”**
 - Now His disciples are said to be *greatly astonished* (verse 26).
 - Did Jesus just say that it was *impossible* for a rich man to be saved!
 - They were *greatly astonished*.
 - The word *astonished* that is used here is a very strong word in the original—it means that they were struck out of themselves—completely blown away by what He said... and this strong word is modified by the adverb ‘greatly’ to make it even stronger—they were greatly blown away.
 - They ask the question among themselves that comes to the mind of all who hear this... **“Who then can be saved?”**
 - That is the real stinger!
 - Someone in the fifteenth century tried to soften what Jesus says here...
 - They said that there was a gate that was called the eye of the needle that was only big enough for *people* to get through, but not a loaded camel.
 - If a man wanted to get through with his camel, the camel would have to be unloaded and bow down low...it made a nice sermon illustration, but there is absolutely no evidence that there was ever any such gate.
 - And it completely destroys the point.
 - The point is not that if a rich man gets rid of his riches then he might be able to squeeze through the gates of salvation to eternal life...
 - The whole point is that it is impossible.
 - We are right to say, **“Who then can be saved?”**
 - Jesus wanted to drive His disciples to this question.
 - Jesus wants to drive us to this question... **Who then can be saved?**
 - If this fine young ruler can't be saved, who can be?
 - What hope is there for any of us?

- Jesus has us just where He wants us to be.
 - Now we are ready to hear what we need to hear.
- B. Now He tells us the good news:
 - verse 27: **But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”**
 - 1. Yes, it is impossible for any man to save himself.
 - Jesus reiterates the point to make it crystal clear to us that it is impossible for any man to save himself.
 - This should be obvious to us.
 - Why did Jesus even come anyway?
 - It was to save His people from their sins. It was to die on the cross to atone for them. It was to be their righteousness, to justify them.
 - It was to do what they could never ever do—no matter how good they might be, how upright, how skilled and sincere...
 - Not one could save themselves.
 - It is utterly impossible.
 - With men it is impossible...
 - 2. But the good news is that what is impossible with men is possible with God.
 - The whole point is that only God can save us.
 - We are right back to where we were in the previous passage... that we must receive the kingdom of God the way a child does or we will never enter.
 - We have to toss out the things that we are trusting in—even a good upright life—a successful life—riches—achievements—a knack for getting things done—we have to get rid of it all and come to Jesus.
 - Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.
 - Children don’t try to earn their keep.
 - They have nothing to give in exchange for their house and their food and their clothing.
 - They don’t pretend to pay for it—they simply look to their parents.
 - Now we can begin to see how to make sense of what Jesus said to this man.
- C. What are the lessons we can learn from Jesus dealing with this rich young man?
 - 1. First, we learn that this man’s problem is with his goodness and his riches.
 - The very things that would seem to qualify him disqualified him.
 - He trusted in what he could do to inherit eternal life.
 - That is the reason this man had to sell everything.
 - He could not let these things go—because these things actually kept him from coming to Jesus.
 - Those who read this passage and sell everything to earn eternal life *completely* miss the point.

- They end up even worse off because they end up trusting even more in what they have done.
 - Jesus is not giving this man a way to earn his salvation.
 - He is telling Him to get rid of what was keeping him from coming to Jesus.
2. Second, we learn that only God can save us. Salvation is *all* of grace.
- There are two ways that salvation is impossible for us.
 - Not only is impossible for us to earn our salvation.
 - It is also impossible for us (especially if we are successful) to come to Jesus.
 - That's right.
 - We want there to be something in us that we use to pay for our salvation—some kind of merit that we can present to God.
 - But the message is that we have nothing of the kind.
3. That good news is that what is impossible with us is possible with God.
- Let me close by reading to you the testimony of a another successful moral man who learned what Jesus was teaching this rich young ruler.
 - **Philippians 3:3-11: For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, ⁴ though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.**