



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for October 25, 2009  
Released on Wednesday, October 21, 2009**

**"True Treasure Costs"**

**Lesson Text:** Mark 10:17-31

**Background Scripture:** Mark 10:17-31

**Devotional Reading:** Proverbs 11:1-7

**Mark 10:17-31**

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

**18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.**

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother.

**20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.**

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

**22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.**

23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

**24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into 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 into the kingdom of God.

**26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?**

27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

**28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.**

29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

**30 But he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.**

31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

**Today's Aim**

**Facts:** to show that true treasure has its cost.

**Principle:** to demonstrate that what man sees as really important is not what God values.

**Application:** Make a plan to eliminate one material possession or attitude that most interferes with his or her relationship with Jesus.

## **Introduction**

Mankind is so prone to self-deception. We often tell ourselves we are serious about something or on the right track until an unexpected hardship or an enticing diversion proves that it is not so. When someone points out our self-contradiction, we are not inclined to feel kindly toward that person. In truth, however, the person is doing us a great favor.

The greatest self-deception that threatens man's ultimate happiness is the idea that somehow we can live a God-pleasing life and have a good heart through our own efforts. Such a delusion is what lies at the heart of every false religion, and it was this delusion that controlled the rich young ruler in this week's lesson text. It was a delusion that the Lord Jesus mercifully punctured.

The world offers no help in dispelling our illusions. On the contrary, the evil world system seeks to keep us bound in self-deception. One particular area in which this is true concerns what it is that will bring us true happiness. Unless we look to God's grace and wisdom for guidance in this matter, we will heed the siren's call to live for temporary pleasures that ultimately leave us empty. In truth, God Himself is the great treasure.

## **Lesson Background**

Today's story comes in the middle of a section where Jesus was traveling with His disciples toward Jerusalem. Along the way He told them that those who receive the blessing of God's kingdom must be like children (Mark 10:14, 15) and that those who would be great in God's kingdom must be the least, the "servant of all" (Mark 10:43, 44). Only those who recognize their great need for what only Jesus can give are ready to receive His gift, which comes through His death (Mark 10:45).

Jesus' conversation with the rich man demonstrated how hard it is to accept those truths when we believe that we can rely on ourselves. Parallels to today's account are in Matthew 19:16–30 and Luke 18:18–30.

## **The Snare of Earthly Treasure (Mark 10:17-23)**

### **1. What was the question that the young ruler asked Jesus? (Mark 10:17)**

Verse 17 tells us that as Jesus was traveling a man came up to him. We learn from Luke's account that this man is a young ruler (18:18). The earnestness and zeal of the young ruler are clear from the outset. He shows tremendous enthusiasm and submission, *running* to Jesus and kneeling before Him. That attitude is also reflected as he addresses Jesus literally as "good teacher" (when we see the word *Master* here, think of a "schoolmaster"). The man asks the most significant question a person can ask: *what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*

The fact that this man is rich will be evident in verse 22, below. Clearly this man has enormous respect for Jesus. He believes that Jesus can answer this most significant question. He trusted that such a teacher would have important truth to convey on how a man could obtain the most precious of gifts—eternal life.

### **2. Why did Jesus challenge his use of the word "good" (v. 18)**

Before responding directly to the man's question, Jesus had a question of His own. He challenged the young ruler on his use of the word "good." By noting that only God is good, Jesus was not saying that He was not worthy of the appellation; rather,

His point was that it should be used of Him only if the ruler believed He was God. In other words, it was Jesus' way of causing the man to reflect on whom he was dealing with. Jesus was a righteous teacher, but He was much more than that. He is the Son of God.

The phrase "there is none good but one, that is, God" has an implication for the young ruler. He wants to know what he can do to obtain eternal life. But because he, like all other sinful people, is not good in an absolute sense, there is nothing good that he can do to earn or deserve eternal life. By definition, the answer to his question is, "You can do nothing to obtain eternal life because you are not good."

Jesus does not let the point rest there, however. It is hard for us to admit that we are helpless sinners who have nothing to offer God. So Jesus will give the man a chance to realize his situation in upcoming verses.

### **3. Does Jesus' statement about God alone being *good* mean that we can never refer to any human being as *good*? Why, or why not?**

The Bible refers to "good" people in several places (see Proverbs 12:2; 13:22; 14:14; Ecclesiastes 9:2; Matthew 12:35; Luke 6:45; Acts 11:24; Romans 5:7). In most of those cases, however, there is an expressed comparison with someone who is wicked in some way. Thus it may be legitimate to refer to "good" people if we are using the word *good* in a relative sense. In so doing, we keep in mind that it is God alone who is good in an absolute sense.

### **4. How did Jesus begin to expose the fact that the young ruler had not kept the law? (vs. 19, 20)**

In response to the young ruler's question, Jesus responded by mentioning the Ten Commandments. Why did Jesus mention only the commandments dealing with relationships with others? It is probably because how we behave toward others demonstrates whether we love God. Love of God and love of others are closely interrelated (1 John 4:20).

Jesus' answer was firmly rooted in what the Old Testament taught: "that the man who kept the law would live (Deut 30:15-16)" (Wessel, in Gabelain, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan). Of course, no man is able to keep the law when its demands are understood properly. One crucial purpose of the law was to show us our need for a Saviour (Gal. 3:24). This was how Christ was using the law in this encounter.

The rich man's response was that He kept the law since his youth. Compared with many people, this man probably is indeed a shining example of obedience to the commandments of God. He is probably a highly respected religious figure in his community. (Again, Luke 18:18 tells us that he is a "ruler," probably a leader of the synagogue.) So from the perspective that compares people with other people, he can say in all honesty that he has kept the Ten Commandments ever since he was young.

Here lies the issue that this man must confront. Compared with other people, he is indeed good. By that standard, he can perhaps rely on what he can do to obtain eternal life. But compared with God, he is not good. By the standard of God's goodness, this man can do nothing to obtain eternal life. Jesus will now confront the man with his need.

### **5. What area in the young ruler's life did Jesus say was lacking? (v. 21)**

What Jesus says here is among His most difficult sayings. This is perhaps why in introducing the statement Mark stresses that Jesus loves the man. Jesus' words, though seemingly harsh, are spoken in love to bring the man to salvation.

Jesus said to the young man that he lacked but one thing. Jesus told him to first *sell* all his possessions and *give* the proceeds to *the poor*. From one vantage, this command might sound like a challenge to go beyond the basic requirement of the law and do something of outstanding goodness. However, what Jesus will say later will make clear that the issue is really something else.

The result of the man's giving all his possessions to the poor will be that he will have *treasure in heaven*. Here we should probably understand Jesus to be talking about more than God's blessing in eternity. To say that one has treasure in Heaven is to say that the person's real support and security, what "treasure" provides, will come from God himself, the one who is enthroned in Heaven. In other words, Jesus tells the man that when he gives up all his possessions, he will still have genuine, lasting treasure that will supply everything that his money supplies—and more.

But Jesus goes on, ending His statement by saying *follow me*. The final step of these instructions is the key to everything. This man cannot obtain eternal life on his own. Even with his money, he cannot manage to be good enough to merit God's salvation. But Jesus can give freely what the man cannot possibly earn on his own.

### **6. How would you explain to someone that Jesus' requirement that the man give up his wealth in order to be saved is not "works righteousness?"**

Verse 22 makes it clear that this man's money was the most important thing in the world to him. Thus the test for the man was whether he valued salvation more than his wealth. At some level, Jesus will test us in this way as well, concerning that which is closest to our hearts. That test may come as we ask ourselves, "What would I find hardest to give up for the Lord?" The answer to that bit of self-evaluation will reveal what needs to be passed from our control over to His control.

Although our works do not save us, we must make Jesus Lord. Jesus cannot be our partial Lord, ruling in some areas of our lives but not in others. He must be fully Lord to us. If the rich young ruler was not willing to give up all he had to Jesus, then he was not submitting to Jesus as Lord. The same is true today.

### **7. Why did the young ruler go away in sorrow? (v. 22)**

Jesus offered the man the same call to discipleship that He made to His disciples (cf. Luke 9:23-25). He said he should forsake everything and follow Him. Jesus' words here are a clear call to faith. The man would need to trust that what Jesus offered was greater than the world's rewards.

Instead of answering Jesus' call to discipleship, he went away in sorrow. The rich man now knew that his keeping of the commandments was not authentic. His riches had a tight grip on his heart; he did not love God or others enough to give up his riches. Greed had consumed him in a subtle way. He would not make such a commitment.

We must remember that God should not have to compete with our heart. The best this world can offer cannot even compare to what God offers. All we have to do is to have a relationship with Him, by living for Him.

### **8. What truth did Jesus declare after the rich man had departed? (v. 23)**

The Lord used the scene that had just unfolded as an opportunity to teach His disciples. As the man leaves, Jesus states boldly that wealth is a hindrance to entering God's *kingdom*. This surprises *his disciples* (see v. 24).

*The disciples* probably are used to thinking of wealth as an advantage. They may see wealth as a sign of God's blessing. Or they may think that the wealthy can devote more of their time and resources to keeping God's law and doing good works.

In response to their surprise, Jesus addresses the disciples as *children*. It seems that He is reminding them of what He taught in the previous story: that those who

enter God's *kingdom* need to be like children (Mark 10:14, 15). They cannot be like the rich man who sees himself as self-sufficient. They need to know that they are utterly dependent on God the Father, just as a little child depends utterly on a parent.

### **The Prospect of Lasting Treasure (Mark 10:24-31)**

#### **9. What was the reaction of the disciples to what had happened and to Jesus' words? (Mark 10:24)**

It is a mark of how important and surprising Jesus' point was that upon seeing His disciples' shocked reaction to His words, He repeated them. Again, the disciples' shock was related to the popular idea that earthly prosperity was a sign of God's blessing. The riches of an outwardly religious man would be taken as an indication that he was on the right path.

#### **10. What illustration did Jesus use to drive home His point? (v. 25)**

Jesus ensured that the disciples (and all who would read the Scriptures in coming years!) would remember His teaching by painting an unforgettable word picture. It is, of course, absolutely impossible for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle. From a human standpoint, this illustration shows how desperate a rich man's plight is. If it was all but impossible for a rich man to enter heaven, they reasoned, how could anyone hope to "be saved" (v. 26)?

#### **11. How did Jesus answer the disciples' concern about salvation? (v. 27)**

The amazement of the disciples grew even greater as they continued to listen. This was exactly the conclusion Jesus wanted them to reach. The fact is that salvation is impossible for any man in his own strength and attempts at goodness. The lesson that Christ was teaching is our absolute dependence on God for salvation. From beginning to end, salvation is God's work. Faith itself is God's gift, and it expresses itself in trust that He is able to do the impossible (cf. Luke 1:37).

#### **12. What did Jesus teach about the rewards of following Him? (vs. 28-30)**

Peter, acting as the spokesman for the apostles, noted that they had already taken up the invitation to follow after Him that Jesus had given the rich young ruler (cf. v. 21). They had seen what had happened to the rich young ruler and heard about how salvation was impossible for man; so words of affirmation would have been greatly appreciated at this time.

Jesus did not dispute Peter's statement that the disciples had indeed followed Jesus, and it seems clear that His wonderful description of the blessings that come through fellowship with Him were intended as comfort and reassurance. They also were an encouragement to remain on the right path.

Jesus began by saying "Verily," a familiar term of emphasis that lent great force and certainty to what He was about to say. He proceeded to give a full list of the things a person might have to leave to follow Him. Again this does not mean that every believer will have to leave his family or his property to serve the Lord, but it does mean that he needs to be willing to do so. The fullness of the list points to the fullness of claim that Christ has on us.

Every believer becomes part of a very large family indeed—the body of Christ—and inherits all that belongs to Christ's kingdom. One of the great consolations of life in this fallen world is the fellowship of our spiritual family.

Jesus did not sugarcoat the fact that His people will also experience hardships. He inserted the potential for persecution into His list. Even through these things, we come to know Christ better.

### **13. Why did Jesus make the statement about who would be first and last? (v. 31)**

Jesus here repeats a concept that He uses elsewhere (Mark 9:35; etc.). He reminds the disciples that their standing with God does not depend on the size of their sacrifice, any more than the rich man's standing with God depends on the size of his bank account. Jesus comes into the world as the Lord of all but also as the servant of all (Mark 10:45). He reverses our expectations. If we count ourselves *first*, we may be in danger of being put *last*. If we know that we are last and so depend completely on Him, He makes us first.

#### **Conclusion**

How much does it take to make someone rich? Any amount, large or small, can deceive us into thinking that we can depend on ourselves instead of depending on God.

At the end of this chapter of Mark, another man approached Jesus—a blind man. He knew that he had nothing to offer, that he could do nothing to change his situation. He cried out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:47). Jesus gave him his sight, and he then followed Jesus (v. 52).

Will we be more like the rich man or more like the blind man?

#### **Prayer**

Lord, help us to be honest with ourselves. Show us where we trust in ourselves. Help us to see through the fog of possessions to understand how desperately we need You to provide for us, now and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

#### **Thought to Remember**

Allow God to do what is impossible for you to do.

#### **Anticipating Next Week's Lesson**

Our lesson next week takes us into **1 Peter 1:13-25**, where we explore how to be "A Holy People."

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