

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SERIES TITLE: MARK 9:1-13 | SERMON TITLE: SELL ALL YOU HAVE

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Can you imagine being Adam or Eve before the Fall? What would it be like to approach God and the world as a whole person? As a person free from Lust, Greed and Pride? What would it be like to use the world and all it contains exactly the way we should?

You would have no fear, and so you wouldn't anxiously hoard possessions to protect yourself. Your soul wouldn't be a vacuous empty space because God would fill it, and so you wouldn't try to use possessions to fulfill yourself.

Your purpose would be clear, and you wouldn't shrink from difficult issues, and so you would never use money-making as a distraction and an escape. Adam wasn't required to toil for his bread so you wouldn't overwork.

In a word, you would never bow down and worship wealth as a substitute god, the way we have in the past, or perhaps still do in the present.

Well we aren't Adam and Eve. We live post-fall, and that means greed, anxiety, fear and insecurity are our constant companions. Therefore, the use of possessions and wealth is a constant problem for us.

Now the antidote to the Fall is Jesus Christ. In Adam we are fallen, and Jesus came to Un-Fall us. He came to Un-Fall us in every area of life. And that means he came to Un-Fall us in the area of possessions and wealth.

Jesus Un-Falls us in Wealth

So how does Jesus Un-Fall us in our wealth? By giving the following instruction, which I take to be the heart of today's text:

ESV **Mark 10:21** And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing; go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

So let's look at our text to figure out what's going on.

A man comes to Jesus and addresses him noticeably as "Good Teacher"; this man asks Jesus how he can get eternal life.

Now you need to know there was teaching floating around in Jesus' time which said that eternal life could be earned by various good works people might do. Apparently, this man thinks there is something he can do beyond God's law to earn eternal life. So I want you to picture this man as believing that he has fully kept God's law and that he is now asking for some other work to perform to get eternal life.

Jesus' answer reveals some of the problem with this man: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God." The man has a mistaken notion of goodness, which apparently is not as rooted in God as it should be.

So Jesus corrects the man's wrong notion by directing him to God's commandments.

And the man responds that he has kept all these commandments. Now strictly speaking, we have no reason to doubt he has. If he grew up in a pious Jewish home, it is very likely he has avoided formal, outward breach of these commands. In fact, Jesus doesn't refute the man. He lets his comment stand and moves on in the conversation.

Jesus says the man still lacks something. How can he get it? By selling his possessions, giving the proceeds to the poor and becoming a follower of Christ. What he lacks is discipleship to Jesus. And ridding himself of his wealth is the only way to get that discipleship.

Now this grieves the man and he leaves Jesus; why? Because he is rich, and obeying would mean parting with a lot of wealth. The man wasn't prepared for that. He came to get eternal life. He was happy to obey commandments and he would even go beyond commandments, but this is where he draws the line.

Jesus draws the lesson and tells his disciples that it is very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom. The disciples are amazed at this because they've always been taught that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. So if the rich are hardly saved, who else could be?

Jesus presses further: It's just plain hard to enter the kingdom, rich or poor! No, worse than that: It is humanly impossible! Getting a sinner into God's kingdom is as easy as stuffing a camel through a needle-eye; it's as easy as stuffing an elephant through a doggy door; it's as easy as fitting the Atlantic into a coffee cup.

Now look again at the context: What does he mean by saying it's so hard? Why so hard to save rich people? Well, you just witnessed it. Getting that rich guy to part with his wealth is like stuffing the elephant through the doggy-door! And unless he parts with his wealth, he will lose the kingdom! So how do you get this guy to give up his wealth?!!! How do I get this camel through the eye of the needle?!

Very simple: It will take a miracle. Got one of those in your pocket? No, but God does.

Is this instruction only for the rich man?

So that's the text. Let me hasten to clear up one mistaken interpretation of this story right from the get-go. We have often heard teachers say that Christ's instruction to this rich, young ruler was only for this rich, young ruler. That is plainly false:

Mark 10:28 ²⁸ ^aPeter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

Now why did Peter say that? Peter just witnessed the exchange between Jesus and the rich guy. He watched the rich guy refuse Jesus' call. But Peter didn't refuse that call. "We left everything to follow you," Peter says.

Peter is pointing out that what the rich guy wouldn't do, the 12 already did! But if the 12 did it, then it is not an instruction uniquely for the rich, young ruler.

If that isn't enough, look at this:

Luke 14:33 ³³ "So then, none of you can be My disciple who ^adoes not give up all his own possessions.

I hope that settles it for you. Whatever Jesus is telling the rich man to do, he is telling all his disciples to do, in some sense.

But what is he telling us to do?

But what is he telling us to do? It looks like he's saying we need to sell all we own, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Christ around as poor, itinerant preachers. Is that what we should do?

You will be relieved to hear the evidence won't allow that conclusion.

First, think of Peter. Peter had successfully done what Jesus commanded. Did Peter still own anything? Yes. A house, a boat, fishing gear. He still possessed his home and business.

Second, think of the female disciples in Luke 8 who followed the Lord and supported him out of their own finances. They apparently didn't give all their money to the poor.

Third, think of Zaccheus. Zaccheus gave, not all, but half his goods to the poor. And since he was very rich, that means he still probably had a fair amount. And Jesus said salvation had come to Zaccheus that day.

I could multiply evidences. It is a fact that the righteous in Scripture possessed things, and some of them were just plain rich. Anyone who takes this text and demands some sort of monk lifestyle from God's people rejects just about the entire Bible.

Then what is he telling us to do?

So it's plain that God's people serve God while possessing stuff. That's the norm.

But then, what is Jesus telling us to do? I think Luke puts it well:

Luke 14:33 ³³ "So then, none of you can be My disciple who ^adoes not give up all his own possessions.

Jesus is telling us to give up our possessions to follow him. It's just that our possessions will largely remain in our keeping. That need not make the giving up any less real, however.

Jesus wants you to renounce your private ownership over all you have. It will no longer belong to you; it will now belong to Jesus. And you will use it for his kingdom and purpose. Luckily, part of that purpose is our sustenance.

Christ wants us to shun greed in every form. He wants us to shun the anxiety which leads to hoarding. He wants us to refuse to trust in our wealth as if it were a god. He wants us to be generous and share, to be full of good works with our wealth.

He wants us to take our wealth to court and divorce it. Christians are to experience a decisive break with their possessions which leads to a new kind of life. Think of what the world does with wealth. Think of how they must seek after it, hoard it, trust in it, long for it. Think of how they can't help but bow before it. The Non-Christian has a spiritual vacuum inside and he must fill it. He has no Christ to deliver him; so he takes his wealth and makes it his Christ.

But the people of God didn't learn Jesus in this way. So Jesus demands that we divorce our wealth, renounce our wealth, give up our wealth, and use it only and always for his purpose and not our own. Anyone who won't do that is not permitted to be his disciple. And in fact, even if it were permitted, it wouldn't be possible. You can no more worship wealth and God than you can travel to California and New York at the same time. Worshiping wealth and God at once is like being a married bachelor; it's like a round triangle. It simply cannot be.

People think God is mean when he gives commands. But all his commands are to save us. The fusser says, "But can't God save us without giving us commands?" Folks, that's like saying "Can't God save us without saving us?" And the answer is No, No he can't. He can't save us without saving us, cause, you know, saving us is saving us. God's commands are essential to our salvation; they are not accidental.

So here we are again! What does it mean to be saved? I get online and order one ticket for salvation from Amazon and get it in the mail a few days later? Is that salvation? Salvation is a good deal larger than that. I need to be saved. Saved from what? For today's purposes, saved from greed. And being saved from greed means selling all I own, giving it to the poor, and following Jesus. Or short of that, renouncing all I own. The only way back to God is back; and there ain't no other way.

So it just comes down to the heart, right?

So I guess it all just comes down to the heart, right? Like, you can have whatever you want, the most expensive car and home, the most expensive clothing, the most expensive everything, but as long as your heart is right everything is okay, right?

Absolutely not. Christians are not people who lavish on themselves. And I refuse the idea that one can be as self-indulgent as he wishes while maintaining a pious heart. Nonsense. The soul that lavishes upon itself shall die.

^{NKJ} **1 Timothy 5:6** But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.

The Bible just said there are Zombies after all. We call them the Self-indulgent; we call them hedonists. They are the self-lavishers. They Are the Living Dead. God's will is that we shun such luxuriousness, lest we turn into Zombies.

The Christian ideal is wise use of possessions, whether one has much or little, full of generosity, enjoying God's good gifts, being content with food and covering, shunning luxury and delicacy, shunning self-indulgence and hedonism, divorcing our stuff and subjecting it to the control of Christ from now on.

Beware Riches

And another thing. We need to face the unpleasant fact that the Bible repeatedly warns against material prosperity. It's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. Good thing none of us are rich, right? Wrong.

"Even those who would consider themselves poor in modern western society live at a level which would have been unimaginable to most of Jesus' hearers, and remains so to many in other parts of the world today."

So basically we are all what Jesus would have called "rich." We can all expect difficulty in trying to enter the kingdom.

I thought recently that if there is one book in the Bible that could be said to speak positively about wealth, it is Proverbs. There we learn that if you work hard there's a good chance you'll end up rich. Admittedly, the point is not to try to get rich but to work hard.

However, even in Proverbs we get a verse like this:

Proverbs 30:7-9 ⁷ Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep deception and ¹lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the ²food that is my portion, ⁹ That I not be ³full and deny ⁴You and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or that I not be ⁵in want and steal, And ⁶profane the name of my God.

The Bible teaches that a number of God's people have been rich. It also says God mostly elected poor people for salvation. It also says wealth is a danger to the soul. Those are the facts.

Not only is it hard for the rich to enter the kingdom; it's impossible. This is because until they forsake worship of wealth they will never be saved. And they can't forsake their worship of wealth.

It's bigger than wealth

And there's more. It's hard for everyone, not just the rich, to enter the kingdom. Or impossible. Salvation actually takes a miracle, just as much as when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

Why? Because the poor are born idolaters, too. Every soul on this planet, apart from the intervention of God, is wrapped up in some idolatrous worship to such a degree that hell is the only fit place for them. They can't enter the kingdom anymore than a bachelor can go home to his wife; it's a contradiction in terms. What the sinner needs is a supernatural intervention that will break his idol worship and bring him into God's temple for true worship.

And that miracle is what we get when we call on Jesus. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We get a miracle which rescues us from false worship. It puts our wealth in its place. It effects a divorce between us and our stuff. It effects a divorce between us and the whole world. Listen:

Galatians 6:14 ¹⁴ But ^amay it never be that I would boast, ^bexcept in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, ^cthrough ¹which the world has been crucified to me, and ^dI to the world.

Until that miracle of crucifixion occurs, you will worship wealth, and sex, and likes on Facebook, and your career, and whatever else you can get your hands on. You will be a shameless worshiper. A promiscuous worshiper. You will be an undiscriminating worshiper. You won't care what it is you're worshiping so long as you are in fact worshiping, and not worshiping The Only Living God.

So I call on you to call on the Lord. I urge you to cry out to God to break your idol worship and transfer you to the true worship. Salvation is only found there.