

Pentwater Bible Church

Gospel of Mark

Message 40

January 18, 2015



Hundred Guilder Print (Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler by Rembrandt Cir 1648)

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Mark

Message Forty

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD

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The Deceit of Riches by Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale Cir 1901

THE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION

Mark 10:23-31

²³ And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, [With what Difficulty] 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 an 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 (KJV).

THE GREAT DIFFICULTY

Mark 10:23

²³ And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, |With difficulty| shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God (KJV)!

Jesus looked about surveying His disciples and began to give them a valuable life lesson from the rich young ruler's attitude toward his wealth. He begins by telling them the difficulty the wealthy will have entering the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that it would be difficult although not impossible. Jesus is exposing the danger of trusting in riches. It is necessary to place this in context of the first century Judaism. The prevailing Jewish view was that riches were viewed as divine favor and a sense of piety (Job 1:10; 42:10; Psalm 128:1-2; Isaiah 3:10). Some today share this view. Some of the Psalms though seem to portray the poor as the righteous who depend on God for their material needs (Psalms 37:14, 16; 69:32-33; 86:1-2). During the Maccabean period (142-63 B.C.), the rich became associated with the priestly aristocracy ready to align with Greek oppressors so they could keep their wealth.

The Bible actually depicts both rich and the poor. In the Old Testament riches are a mark of favor with God (Psalm 112:3), whereas God gives power to acquire wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18). Both the piety and the wealth of Job are well known (Job 1:1-3). Solomon was perhaps the richest man who ever lived; God granted him "riches, possessions, and honor" because Solomon had asked for wisdom and discernment rather than material things (1 Kings 3:10-13; 2 Chronicle's 1:11-12). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as Joseph are examples of the wealthy. But the Bible makes it clear that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 12:15).

Contrasting with the Old Testament frequently the New Testament condemns the wealthy for oppression and greed (James 5:1-6). Luke 6:24 pronounces woe against the rich, and all three synoptic Gospels speak of the dangers of riches (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; 10:23-25; Luke 8:14). The New Testament also provides examples of Godly rich men such as Nicodemus who made provision for Jesus' burial (John 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea who provided the tomb for Jesus's short entombment (Matthew 27:57).

THE DIFFICULTY OF RICHES

Mark 10:24-25

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 (KJV).

The problem with riches is the self-sufficiency they create which frequently turn people away from God. They just don't see the need for God when they have anything they can imagine acquiring. So what the wealthy view as abundance actually is deficiency. They don't realize their ultimate end and can't see the Kingdom of God. It is as if a blinder has been drawn over their genuine needs. So if they persist in this view to the end of their life they lost the greatest prize of all, salvation in Christ Jesus, Heaven, and the Kingdom.

The disciples knew that the wealthy and influential Pharisees loved money (Luke 16:14) and wanted to lord it over them. They were also aware of the prevailing view of the time that riches were a sign of God showing favor toward someone. So they *were astonished at his words*. In fact He repeated them. This was very difficult to understand. This is because the Pharisees who thought that they were surely on their way to the Kingdom trusted in their money. So with the prevailing attitude toward wealth they must have thought the rich young ruler was a prime candidate for the Kingdom. When he went away empty handed and sad at Jesus' words they were amazed. This sad picture of a wealthy young man exchanging eternal life for some temporary materialism was what provoked Jesus to explain the situation to them.

In explaining this Jesus included both wealthy and poor who would place riches before God and the eternal life He provides. One can be poor materially but have a lust for wealth that will cause a subordination of God, eternal life and His Kingdom for the potential acquisition of wealth. It is therefore an attitude not the accumulation of some volume of money or wealth that keeps one out of Heaven. The apostle Paul characterized this well.

I Timothy 6:10

¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows (ASV 1901).

The problem of having a love of money is that it will cause people to do all kinds of nefarious things to further their acquisition of wealth. Some will forsake genuine relationships for economic gain through others. This results in using people and loving things instead of loving people and using things. Coveting enter in and possible thievery if the love for money is very strong.

Jesus then went on to draw an illustration to clearly explain the degree of difficulty one with wealth would have getting into Heaven. He simply said, "*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.*" The camel being a large and burdensome beast being inserted through an extremely small orifice such as a sewing needle's eye characterizes the chances of one with wealth making it into Heaven. There just did not seem to be any way a wealthy person could enter Heaven according to Jesus.

THE DISCIPLES CONFUSION

Mark 10:26

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

In light of the prevailing Jewish attitude of riches originating from divine favor and so many Old Testament examples the disciples were *astonished out of measure*. This just did not make any sense. Jesus seemed to be saying that the wealthy could not be saved. The Bible does not say anywhere that having possessions and becoming wealthy are wrong in themselves. Jesus himself never taught that it was sinful to be rich. The problem was and

still is today that affluence can destroy one's peace (Mark 6:24-34) and act as blinders to the needs of others (Luke 16:19-31). And in this chapter Jesus showed through the rich young ruler that it was a blocked path to eternal life. Jesus did not have any issue with the wealth itself, but with the attitude toward it. He told His disciples not to accumulate wealth as a focused endeavor (Matthew 6:19). He even praised those who gave up their personal possessions for wholesome reasons (Matthew 19:29). The whole issue is the means of acquiring wealth and the attitude associated with it. Longing for riches regardless of the actual level of wealth chokes out spiritual life like weeds (Tares) in a field of grain (Matthew 13:22). The greatest danger of all is when riches become the master of one's life. In contrast to Jesus's teaching of the wrong attitudes toward wealth He also taught the right attitudes.

We do not own anything in this earth. It all belongs to God. As soon as we realize this we will be able to serve the Lord with them (Luke 12:42-44). Instead of being stingy riches should be used to express love in many practical ways (2 Corinthians 8:2). And instead of having their inward peace, which God provides, ruined by anxiety-produced greed, people can find the secret of peace through a dependence on their heavenly Giver (Luke 12:29-31; 1 Timothy 6:17). Looking toward heaven where your focus should be is where your heart and thoughts will be (Matthew 6:21). Your heart, mind and thoughts will follow your genuine focus in life.

JESUS'S AFFIRMS GOD'S ROLE

Mark 10:27

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

What Jesus says to conclude this discussion is to affirm God's role in salvation. He does it all. Man cannot save himself through his own work or merit. But God can if we exert the necessary faith to receive the blessing that God has for us.

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹ not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (KJV).

What we learn in this capstone set of verses to Jesus discussion of the impossibility of a man saving himself is the basis of our salvation. It starts with God making salvation available to us. Then by exercising of our faith, it becomes the conduit through which God will pour His grace. This is His gift. Our faith is not a work and does not "merit" salvation; it is only the means by which one accepts God's free salvation. Since this all comes from God and not by the works of man no one can boast about obtaining salvation.

But we are created unto good works, which God has foreordained that we should walk in them. Therefore, when riches are in a believer's life they should be viewed as a means to further ministry for the Kingdom. They should not be viewed as an anathema if they are acquired legitimately and are not the central focus of one's life. Use them wisely as the

Bible teaches and God will be pleased. This all leads to the attitude that wealth has in our lives.

WHAT WILL THE APOSTLES GET

Mark 10:28

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

Interestingly Peter as the self appointed spokesman for the apostles reminds Jesus that they are not rich and still gave up everything they had to follow Him. The implication he seems to be making is “What do we get”? This is another instance where the apostles still did not get the whole picture of Jesus’ mission and the Heavenly view and goal they should have had. He was thinking materially instead of spiritually. They were still thinking of material honors in God’s Kingdom (Mark 9:33-34; 10:35-37; Matthew 19:28-29). In fact Matthew’s gospel in the corresponding passages records Peter’s words as “What do we get out of it” (Matthew 19:27)?

JESUS DESCRIBES THE ACTUAL EXCHANGE

Mark 10:29-30

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 an 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 (KJV).

Jesus says that the sacrifices of each of the disciples in the name of Christ will be rewarded a hundred times as much both in this world, and with eternal life in the world to come. Jesus lists our relationships and allegiances—homes, families, and fields—that must be forsaken, for the call of Christ. It had to take a priority over them and meant they had to discontinue old allegiances. One cannot follow Jesus adequately with former baggage. They had to give up their fishing nets (Mark 1:16-20), and here their riches. Ironically, however, whatever they relinquish they will receive a hundred times over. Jesus says in this list will be persecution. Its presence in the list reminds disciples that Christian existence is not trouble free. Christian faith is not insurance against adversity and hardship. Not only is this generally true of discipleship, but the presence of “persecutions” likely held special meaning for Mark’s audience in Rome who were suffering so desperately under Emperor Nero’s persecutions. The things Jesus assures them of having are not necessarily the same as what they gave up. For example they gave up their families to follow Jesus and gained a larger body of believers that were a family to them and were invited into houses they would never have been able to see or enter before. For each person the sacrifice may be different but not any less difficult. The temporal gifts will be different but the spiritual rewards will be great with the greatest being the assurance of eternal life.

THE FIRST WILL BE LAST

Mark 10:31

³¹ *But many that are first shall be last; and the last first (KJV).*

This verse has several directions. On one level it directs our attention to the fact that if we have a lot of wealth, position and power here on earth but no salvation we will lose it all with no possibility of eternal life in Heaven with Jesus. It takes from those who follow Jesus things they would keep, and gives to them things they could not imagine. So positionally any one with position (First) will lose it without salvation. Then those who have little or not position or wealth (Last) but receive Christ will be first in the Kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus always mindful of the Pharisees and Scribes knew that most of them had great wealth and high positions in the first century society. Without salvation in Him they would be last in the Kingdom.

JESUS AGAIN FORETELLS HIS DEATH

Please call or e-mail with any questions or comments

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