

## Exegetical Notes, Mark 10:17-31

### *“Rich Young Men”*

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### Mark 10:17-31

#### Verse 17

*As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

- Mark says, “a man.” Luke calls him a ruler (Luke 18:18) and Matthew says he was “young” (Matthew 19:20). Therefore this man is known as the rich young ruler. His status must have made him unusual. His falling down before Jesus indicates the intensity of his request.
- The man earnestly wants to know what HE MUST DO to earn eternal life. He truly wants to know how to be saved but indicates that he thinks salvation is related to some task or set of accomplishments that are dependent upon him.

#### Verse 18

*“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good -- except God alone.”*

- Jesus’ response highlights the error that dominates this man’s thinking about salvation. The man believes that he will be saved if he is good. Jesus points out that only God is good. Therefore, if salvation is dependent upon being good it is not attainable by any.

#### Verse 19

*“You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”*

- Jesus points the man to the Law of Moses. For Jews, this law determined goodness

### **Verse 20**

***“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”***

- The man wants Jesus to know that he has kept the laws of Moses diligently since he was just a boy. And yet, he knows that he has not kept it perfectly. He knows that partial obedience to the law is not enough to bring salvation.

### **Verse 21**

***Jesus looked at him and loved him, “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”***

- Jesus was full of compassion for this man. He was earnest in his search for salvation but was seeking to secure it in the wrong way. He thought that he could earn it. But salvation is a free gift from God given to those who follow Jesus.
- Therefore, Jesus asks of the man the supreme act, knowing that the man will not be able to do what is asked. There is no chance that this man will release his wealth, and there is no chance that he can ever earn his salvation.
- While he is sincere in his search, he is looking in the wrong place. Jesus’ response was designed to show him the impossibility of his request. He cannot earn his salvation -- not by keeping the Law or by giving all his possessions to the poor.

### **Verse 22-23**

***At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”***

- The man recognized that his search to secure eternal life through good works was impossible. He could not do what was required so he was sad.
- Jesus’ remark was not to condemn the rich but to show that those who think they can earn salvation will find it very hard to understand that salvation is a gift.

### **Verse 24-25**

***The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.”***

- The disciples had been listening to Jesus’ discussion with this man. They were perplexed by what Jesus said to him. Even for them, the concept that salvation is not related to works was hard to understand.
- The “Eye of the Needle,” was the name for the little door in the huge city gate that was there to allow people to enter the city when the big gate was closed. This little gate was very small. An animal as large as a camel could not physically fit through this tiny gate.
- Jesus’ point was that if you think you can earn salvation by your own efforts you will discover it to be impossible.

#### **Verse 26**

***The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”***

- Jesus’ disciples were completely lost. They could not understand how people could be saved if what Jesus said was true.

#### **Verse 27**

***Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”***

- Jesus pointed them in the right direction. He told them that what they could not accomplish on their own, their salvation, could be had simply by trusting God. What was not possible for them was entirely possible with God.

#### **Verse 28**

***Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”***

- Peter still did not understand the point. Jesus had told the young man to sell all his possessions and he would have eternal life. Peter’s point is that he and the other disciples had done just that. So, surely, they would be saved because of what they had done.

#### **Verse 29-31**

***“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields -- and with them,***

***persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”***

- Jesus reassures Peter that those who give up the blessing of this world to serve and honor him will be blessed beyond measure.
- He also reminds Peter that the blessings of God are mixed with persecutions, the term is plural, because serving Jesus also brings conflict with people in this world.
- Jesus says that those who trust the Lord in this age, as opposed to trusting their own wealth or position or goodness, will also be given eternal life in the age to come.
- Jesus’ last remark about the first and the last indicates that those who have little to depend upon other than God will find this all much easier to understand than those who have wealth, position, and goodness of their own.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Rich Young Men*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)