

SALVATION – NOT BY WORKS, NOT FOR SALE

Mark 10:17-27

Intro: We learn from the first verse of Mark 10 that the Lord Jesus had left the northern part of Israel and what has been called *His Galilean ministry*, and he was headed for Jerusalem, but going on the east side of the Jordan River. Verse 32 indicates that they were going on up toward Jerusalem, and in chapter 11, verse 1, they were close to the city of Jerusalem.

So it was while they were on the way from Capernaum to Jerusalem, that the Lord and the disciples experienced the events that are described for us in chapter 10. It was a very solemn time for our Lord because He knew what was ahead for Him – nothing but suffering and death. He obviously had been encouraged by the parents who brought their children to Him that He might bless them. But again it was apparent that His disciples did not understand His mission in the world.

It was while they were moving along in their journey, that suddenly this man came running to Him, knelt down before Him, and addressing Him as “Good Master,” asked, “What shall I do that I might inherit eternal life.” Mark did not describe him, but Matthew called him a “young man.” See Matthew 19:22. Luke called him “a certain ruler.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke all agree on the one point, that he was very rich. Mark said that “he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). Putting all of these titles together, expositors have come up with the description that he was *a rich young ruler*. William Hendriksen and others think that he was the ruler of a local synagogue, which seems very reasonable. If so (and we would have assumed this), he must have been Jewish and apparently, like the disciples and many others, was expecting the Lord to be preparing to establish His kingdom on earth. It is very doubtful that he was talking about salvation as the Lord had been proclaiming it, and as He explained it, for example, to Nicodemus. We don’t really know what his expectation was. But it is very clear that the Lord responded to him in words that had to do with salvation. Obviously he knew that the Lord had been teaching about having eternal life. Evidently his heart had been touched by the Lord’s teaching, and it is apparent that he felt a great sense of urgency concerning his own need to be prepared for the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

Let us think for a moment or two about:

I. THE RICH YOUNG RULER'S QUESTION.

He wanted to know what he had to do in order to inherit eternal life. See verse 17.

I was struck with the idea that he expressed in his question that eternal life is something that we inherit. Those of us who have been studying the first epistle of Peter have learned in chapter 1 that we as Christians do have an inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us. But we haven't done anything to earn it, or to deserve it. I checked to make sure that this was not a problem in translation, but I found that this young man actually used the word "inherit" in asking the Lord His question.

But his question showed that he was confused by the little that he may have known about the Lord's teaching. Usually an inheritance is not based upon what a person does, but it is based upon the relationship that a person has, say, in the case when a parent dies. And it is usually a son or a daughter. Our right to our heavenly inheritance is based upon the fact that we have been *born* into God's family, not upon any works that we have done.

Now this young man's question showed that he was ignorant of a lot of things, and his response to what the Lord told him showed that there were other things that he did not understand.

His question indicated that he did not really understand how great his need was, and that he did not have the ability to meet his own need. He did not understand the sinfulness of His own heart. Nor had he actually recognized who the Lord Jesus Christ was. The Lord seemed to be prodding him to ask himself what he had called the Lord, "Good Master," when the Lord pointed out to him that God is the only One Who can be called "good" in the absolute meaning of the word. There is the suggestion in our Lord's question to him that possibly he had discovered that the Lord was more than just an ordinary human being. A better question would have been, "Good Master, what must You do in order that I might have eternal life?" In fact, that would have been the perfect question, wouldn't it?

But the Lord proceeded to answer his question as we learn from verse 19.

II. THE LORD'S ANSWER TO THE YOUNG MAN'S QUESTION.

If we were to consider what any of us must do to make sure that we will eternal life, it would mean that we must have a perfect record according to God's standards, not our own. It would mean not only that we have never done anything wrong, but that we have always done everything right. And it is not limited just to what we do, or don't do, but it includes even the thoughts that we think. Verse 19 gives us only a part of the check list, but it is enough because every one of us stands condemned. The Bible says that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. It says that there is not a just man upon the earth who does good, and yet has not sinned. It is too late for any of us to think that we can save ourselves. The reason we need to be saved, to have eternal life, is because we are all sinners and under divine judgment. So the correct answer to this young man's question is that you can't do anything to save yourself. We are all hopeless cases. Our sins require that we die, not just physically, but eternally!!!

So this young man, this ruler of a synagogue, manifested that he didn't understand God, nor did he understand himself, nor did he understand sin. Here he was leading those Jewish people who attended his synagogue, but he didn't know the way himself. People live like they do, they do what they do, they think the way they think, because they are ignorant of the truth, the things that really matter.

But you have to recognize that this young Jewish religious leader realized in his heart that with all that he thought that he knew, and all that he very carefully did in religious observances, he had a deep realization in his heart that he still did not have enough, he did not have what he needed. He did need to know what he should do, he needed to know who could deliver him from the judgment of God.

Only a fool would respond to the Lord like this young man did. He said, and I am sure that he felt that he was telling the truth: "Master, all these have I observed from my youth." He had no conviction of sin. He showed no sign of repentance. He felt no need for God. And yet he was not satisfied. How can you explain that? As I have said, it was just because of his pride and his ignorance.

At this point most of us would have been ready to jump all over him with our arguments, or we would have turned away from him in disgust. But what did the Lord do? Will you notice with me what the Lord did, and what the Lord said?

III. THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

You see it in Mark 10 21.

First, notice what the Lord did. What amazing words we have at the beginning of verse 21: “Then Jesus beholding him loved him.” When it is said that Jesus beheld him, that meant a lot more than if it had said that the disciples beheld him, or that I beheld him, or that you beheld him. Here was a young man who really claimed that he had never done anything wrong. He was the personification of pride. He felt that he could meet his own needs if someone would only tell him what he should do.

When the Lord looked upon this young man, He saw all that we would have seen, but much, much more. Do you remember when Samuel went to Jesse's house, and he began to look at Jesse's sons to discover the one that the Lord had chosen to be the king of Israel? When the first son came in whose name was Eliab, Samuel felt, because of what he saw, that Eliab had to be the Lord's choice. Evidently he was as we sometimes say about a man, “tall, dark, and handsome.” But what did the Lord say to Samuel? “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him.” And then the Lord added this: “For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

The Lord saw all of the ugliness that we can imagine that we would have seen after listening to what he had to say about himself. But the Lord saw even more. Looking into that religious leaders heart was looking into a deep, dark, ugly pit – so great was his sin! But what else does verse 21 tell us? It tells us that Jesus “loved him.” How would you explain that? How could the Lord love such a conceited, self-sufficient sinner as this Jewish synagogue ruler was?

I heard Dr. S. Lewis Johnson comment on this verse many years ago, and he said that he believed that this meant that this religious sinner was one of God's elect. The Lord knows those whom the Father has chosen and given to Him. You and I can't see that until after someone is saved. The Lord saw that this religious leader was one of the reasons that He was on His way to Jerusalem to die. But the Lord's death this man was going to learn later, although he did not understand it then, that it was not what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, but it was what Jesus had come to do

that his sins would be washed away in the Savior's blood and all of those sins that he claimed he had never committed, would be forgiven and washed away forever.

But you remind me that two verses later, in verse 22, we are told that when the Lord told him what he needed to do, this rich young ruler, that "he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions." Dr. Johnson said that he was well aware of that verse. But he added, "If my interpretation of verse 24, the first part, is correct, you can be sure that he came back, and you will meet him in heaven some day." Dr Johnson is in heaven as I speak to you now. I am sure that he is well acquainted with this rich young ruler. And when they met, I am sure that Dr. Johnson greeted him by saying, "I knew that you would be here."

This is an amazing story of the grace of God, isn't it? I am glad that the Lord did not say what He saw when He looked into the heart of this rich young ruler because I wouldn't want Him to tell what He saw when He looked into my heart before He saved me. Would you want Him to tell what He saw when He looked into your heart? Those are secrets that He will never reveal. We can all sing, can't we,

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

What was it that the Lord told this rich young ruler to do? Let me read what the Lord said. His words at this point are in verse 21. (Read.)

Let me ask you: Was this what the Lord told you to do when you came to Him to be saved? No? He didn't tell me that either. Does this mean then that there are at least two ways to be saved, and one of them is to sell all that you have, and give the money to the poor, and then come to Him. No, that is not the point in what the Lord was telling the rich young ruler. You answer my question: Who would the rich young ruler have to depend upon if he sold all that he had, and gave the money to the poor? You know! He would have to depend upon the Lord. Right! And that is what we have to do to be saved: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," said the Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, "and thou shalt be saved."

Money keeps a lot of people from salvation. Jewish people believed, like a lot of Americans believe, that if you have money, you can get anything

Mark 10:17-27 (6)

you want, go any place you want to go, and do whatever you want to do. That may all be true if you have enough money. But there is one place where our money is no good. It will never get you to heaven. Money will never buy the forgiveness of a single sin! You can't work for salvation. It is not a reward for good works. It can't be purchased with money. It cost the Lord His death for us to assure us of our salvation. He took the penalty that should have fallen upon us. He died for us, not because we deserved it (because we didn't), nor because we paid for it (it isn't for sale), but for the very same reason that He died for the rich young ruler. It was because He loved us.

Concl: Let me conclude by reading the verses that I haven't covered with just a comment here and there to make the meaning clear. But these verses tell us why there are going to be rich people in heaven. Riches are one of the greatest barriers to salvation in the world today. Men will not leave them of their own will, but for God's elect the Lord will teach them that they are not saved by trusting in their money, but by trusting in Christ, and in Him alone.

Notes: "Hardly" in verse 23 means how difficult it is. See also in verse 24. The Gospel is never popular among the rich, but what men cannot do for themselves, or for each other, God can do.