

- ***Read Mark 10:17-27*** Fresh off of discussions concerning marriage/divorce and becoming as little children, our Lord begins to prepare to set off on a preaching journey. The trip barely begins when a young man comes running up to Him asking what he needs to do in order to have eternal life? We know Jesus's response well when He begins to list different commands from the Law. The young man responds positively by saying that he has kept all of these things. Jesus goes on to tell him that he lacked one thing. He needed to sell all he had and give it to the poor. The man was deeply saddened and grieved by what has been said by Jesus and leaves disappointed.
- As the Master Teacher did so well, Jesus then turns to those around Him and uses what just happened as a teaching moment. "How hard it will be for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God!" is the exclamation by our Lord. Surely this is an extremely difficult teaching for the wealthy to hear. In fact, Jesus goes on to say that it is difficult for anyone to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. But our Lord emphasizes the wealthy for a reason. This saying can be difficult to accept and understand all at the same time, but we will give a good effort to understand this teaching of Jesus this evening.
- But before we really get into this lesson, let's first consider who it is that is rich. When a lesson like this is introduced, it might be our tendency to quickly dismiss it because "we're not the wealthiest people in the world." We might think that this is a lesson better suited for that top 1% of wealthy people. However, let me suggest that this isn't an appropriate response to this lesson because the truth is that each and every person who is here this evening is rich. Each and every one of us have all of our needs accounted for and because of that we are rich and wealthy. This is a lesson that every single person here can benefit from and not just those who are the most wealthy among us.

I. DIFFICULTY OF SAYING: The odds of getting to heaven are stacked against the rich.

- A. Let's first acknowledge that Jesus does say that it is difficult for anyone to get into heaven. **(10:24)** But before this He specifies that the wealthy with especially have a difficult road to heaven. Why is this? Why is it difficult for the wealthy man?
- B. Let me suggest that it will be difficult because the rich have more road blocks in the way of heaven. The wealthy have everything they could need to enjoy this life. Good food, nice clothing, comfy houses. What more could they want? What needs might they have from anyone else outside of themselves? Why search for God when things are so good?
- C. The temptation to rely upon earthly wealth and riches just isn't present for those who suffer great need in this world. This might be one of the reasons the Gospel is so much more readily accepted in countries where there is great need. Places like Africa, South American, and Asia have a much higher poverty rate than we have in this country, so there is often very little chance of having what happened with this rich man take place there. There is also a false dichotomy that exists when people try to pit having earthly riches and faith opposed to one another. Some would try to say that those things can't exist together, but is that really what Jesus is trying to teach in his text?
- D. What Jesus says in **vv.23,24** is simply backed up by what happened in **vv.17-22**. The wealthy simply have road blocks between them and heaven that others just don't have, and this makes these teachings difficult for us to hear and follow.

II. A failure in just one area can cause us to miss out on the glory of heaven.

- A. Think about where this man's mind must have been as he went to Jesus. He wanted to know what he needed to do in order to have eternal life. Jesus tells him some things, and to his excitement he already practiced those things told to him by Jesus. The man must have been flying high in his mind thinking that he was on his way. **(vv.19,20)**
- B. However, that bubble is quickly popped when he learns that he must go the final step by giving up his earthly wealth in order to gain all sorts of riches in heaven. **(v.21)** The man isn't willing to go this final step. He had put in much hard work to do the things Jesus had mentioned before, but he wasn't willing to go all the way. He let one thing get in his way of heaven.
- C. The young man, much like us, had a vice that he had to fight within his life. For us it might be wealth, it might be pride, it might be some sort of immortality, or it could be any number of other vices. We must keep in mind that doing a whole lot of good can quickly be undone if we allow ourselves to be taken over by that one thing that can tempt us and control us unlike anything else. **(James 2:1-11)**

- D. We must be a people are bring our vices and temptations under control. We ought to seek to emulate the attitude that Paul had when he talked about running this race and now allowing himself to become disqualified by being undisciplined. **(I Cor. 9:24-27)**

III. It is impossible for the self dependent and world loving rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- A. Much has been made by many people about the camel and the eye of the needle comment made by Jesus. Some have tried to explain Jesus's words by talking about the small opening in the wall of Jerusalem and how camels would barely squeeze through there. I personally don't buy much into that explanation because I don't see very many people barely squeezing into heaven. Instead, I take Jesus words very literally. No camel is going to go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible. In just the same way, a rich man who fails to depend upon God or love Him more than anything else will not be found within the Kingdom of Heaven.
- B. "Impossible" is a strong word, but I believe it to be appropriate with this discussion because the person who loves this world more than God and is more inclined to trust in self that God simply will not go to heaven. The love of money will condemn the wealthy. **(I Tim. 6:10)** The lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life will cause a person to pass away with the stuff that they love so much of this life. **(I John 2:15-17)**
- C. Those who rely upon themselves in this life will ultimately fail. Pride is often associated with an inclination for self reliance. Time and time again in Scripture we see admonitions from inspired writers to not rely upon self, but to rely upon the mighty God of heaven. **(Prov. 3:5,6)** The wealthy man who came to Jesus had the perfect opportunity to show how much he trusted in God, but he wasn't willing to part with what he had in this life. He simply didn't trust God enough to give it all up for Him.
- D. The denial of self and desires is paramount to obedience to God. **(Mark 8:34-37)** It truly is impossible for the one who fails to deny self and this world to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

IV. The rich man can be saved if he is willing to put his full trust and faith in God.

- A. So can the rich man be saved at all? Jesus answers this for us with what He says in **v.27**. By himself the rich man will never enter heaven, but with his reliance upon God the rich man can enter the Kingdom of heaven.
- B. How does the rich man rely upon God? Begins with being content with what we have. In **I Timothy 6:6-12**, Paul talks about being content with what we have and not allowing the desires for riches in this world to cause us much grief.
- C. Beyond this, Paul says that we need to be willing to use the riches we do possess to do as much good as possible within the Kingdom of God. **(I Timothy 6:17-19)**
- D. And then if necessary, if push comes to shove and we must choose between following Jesus or keeping our earthly wealth, we must be better than the rich man and give it all up for God. Faith and trust in God will take far beyond anything this world has to offer.

There was so much promise in the mind of this rich man when he had talked to Jesus about his desires for eternal life. Things were looking up in his mind, but his love for riches made it impossible for him to follow Jesus as He demands. May we learn from this sad example and never allow things of this world to dominate our lives. May we, as rich individuals, use God's blessings to His glory and the Kingdom's gain above all else. May God be gloried as we put our faith and trust in Him to overcome the devil and this world.