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Mark 10:17 - 10:31



Gospel of Mark - Steve Gregg

In this passage from Mark 10:17-31, Jesus encounters a man seeking to inherit eternal life. Jesus emphasizes the importance of loving one's neighbor and invites followers to achieve eternal life through consistent acts of love towards others, surrendering possessions to God, and following Jesus without question. The passage warns that riches can hinder one's path to God, but ultimately, nothing is impossible for those who seek Him. The message encourages Christians to become stewards of God's things, to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel, and to make wise investments in the kingdom of God.

Transcript

We'll turn now to Mark chapter 10 and we will pick it up at verse 17. In the earlier part of this chapter, we had the teaching of Jesus on divorce when He was asked about that subject, and His comments about children on the occasion where people brought infants to Him to be blessed by Him. The disciples had not anticipated His degree of importance that He would place on children, and they didn't place that importance on Him.

Apparently, they thought that children were not important enough to bother Jesus, but He felt otherwise. And He said, do not forbid the children's company, for of such is the kingdom of God. Now, verse 17.

Now, as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him and asked Him, Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? So Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is God. You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery.

Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness.

Do not defraud. Honor your father and your mother. And He answered and said, Jesus, teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, One thing you lack. Go your way, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And

come, take up the cross and follow me.

But he was sad at this word, and he went away grieved, for he had great possessions. Now, this just refers this man as one who came running. This story is also found in Luke and in Matthew.

In Luke's gospel, it's found in Luke chapter 18. And it specifically says in Luke 18, 18, now a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? The man was a ruler, but not a king. He was a ruler of a synagogue in all likelihood.

He was Jewish. Jews didn't have Jewish rulers in the political sense, except in the Sanhedrin, but they were more like judges. They had in their synagogues an official called the ruler of the synagogue or the president of the synagogue.

He was not a real high ranking official in the Jewish religion, but he had some responsibility. He was a man who had been entrusted with presiding at the synagogue meetings, and therefore he was respected as a man who was at least true to his religion. And he was also rich.

And as we find out, he was also good. He was a man of status in the religious system. He was a rich man and he was also a good man, a moral man.

And yet he did not feel that he could be certain that he had, as he put it, eternal life. It's interesting that he would use the term eternal life. The word eternal means pertaining to the age.

Or age abiding or somehow related to the age, probably referring to the messianic age, the life of the age. Jesus did refer to eternal life in his teaching, but not very often. We find probably most of Jesus references to eternal life in his teaching in Gospel of John.

And those references were usually made in talking to religious leaders. We don't really find Jesus doing a lot of talking about eternal life to the crowds. He talks about the kingdom of God and obviously the kingdom of God and eternal life were overlapping subjects.

Actually, in a sense, almost synonymous. Because as we saw in chapter 9, Jesus said in verse 43, in the middle of verse 43 of chapter 9 of Mark, it is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go to Gehenna. And in verse 45, in the middle of that verse, he says it is better for you to enter life lame than having two feet to be cast into Gehenna.

And then in verse 47, in the middle of that verse, it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes be cast into Gehenna. So the first thing he said is better to enter into life. And apparently as an equivalent, he says, it's better to enter into the kingdom of God than go to Gehenna.

So almost all of Jesus teaching was using the term kingdom of God. And only as far as the record would indicate, on rare occasions that he talked about eternal life. And those are mostly in his talks in the Gospel of John.

But here this man had picked up on that term eternal life that appealed to him. And although he was a good man and a religious man, he didn't have confidence that he had done all that was necessary to have eternal life. His conscience was not entirely clear or or if it was clear, he was just wasn't sure what the terms were that God was going to hold out for.

It's obvious he was not a proud man because most Jews would assume they're going to have eternal life simply by virtue of being Jews. And if they had kept the laws, well, this man did. They'd be like the Pharisees, you know, proud of themselves and think, well, of course I have.

You know, if God's given out eternal life, I'm a prime candidate. The Pharisees certainly thought of themselves as first in line for such things as those kinds of favors from God. This man apparently didn't.

He was a humble man. It would seem he didn't have very much against him. And the way this conversation takes place, it's somewhat abbreviated both in Mark and Luke, and it's very similar in Mark and in Luke in that the man just asked you, what shall I have to do? What should I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus answers by reciting the law.

But before he does so here in Mark 10, 18, Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? No one is good, but one that is God. Now, some feel that this should be translated. Why is it that you ask me concerning what is good? And so it's not entirely clear what Jesus statement was depends on how it's translated.

King James and New King James have it. Why do you call me good? And that. That has bothered some people because, you know, why wouldn't they call Jesus good? But Jesus follows that by saying there's none good but God.

And it almost sounds like he's saying, you know, don't equate me with God. Don't call me good. Only God deserves to be called that.

On the other hand, that doesn't seem like an appropriate response in this case. The man wasn't, you know, the man was not misdirected. Jesus was good, in fact, and is good.

I mean, he's simply referred to as a good teacher. Why should that be rebuked? I don't think Jesus was rebuking him for calling him good. He said, why do you call me good? As if calling on that man to reflect on the implications.

He said, there's none good but God. But you have called me good. Now, either Jesus is saying I'm not good and therefore he shouldn't call me good.

Or else he's saying I'm God. And that's what you are. That's what you should realize.

You recognize I am good and yet only God is good as I am. And therefore, he's either saying I'm not good or I'm God. It's a strange statement, a difficult one to really kind of make sense of.

But for Jesus to deny that he's good would be quite contradictory. Certainly he was good. He was sinless.

Was he a good teacher? Of course he was good and he was a teacher. He on another occasion in John 10 called himself the good shepherd. What would be wrong with calling him a good shepherd? Why do you call me good? Well, he's not saying that he shouldn't be referred to as good.

He's apparently trying to call the man's attention to the fact that the man recognizes something in Jesus. A goodness in Jesus that really only God has such a goodness as that. And therefore, realize that he is God.

But I'm not sure why he'd make that comment here. On the other hand, I'm not sure he'd make any other comment of this sort there. It's not entirely clear why Jesus responded this way.

But as I said, either he's saying the man should never refer to Jesus as good, in which case Jesus breaks that on his own policy on that and speaking about himself as the good shepherd. Or else he's saying I'm God and why he'd make that point here. On this occasion, I'm not entirely sure.

Perhaps he's saying you think you can do something good enough to have eternal life. There's no one good but God. You're asking me about goodness.

Well, I may be good, but that's because I'm God. You're not. But there are things you can do to inherit eternal life.

And the interesting thing is he didn't give the answer that we would expect the New Testament to give. He said, keep the law and you'll have eternal life. That's what he said.

Now, it's the conversation expanded a little differently in Matthew 19. There we have the conversation running just a little differently. It would appear that Mark and Luke have simply compressed it into a shorter version, including all the essential elements, but not giving all the exchanges that took place.

Because in Matthew 19, verse 16, it says, behold, one came and said to him, good teacher. What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said, why do you call me good? No one is good, but one that is God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.

And the man said, which ones? Now, this is just expanding the conversation a little bit, because in the other gospel, it just had Jesus rattles off the commandments without this extra verbiage here. And Jesus said, you shall not murder, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal, you should not bear false witness, honor your father and your mother, and you should love your neighbors yourself. Now, that's not that that one isn't in the list in Mark or Luke.

Love your neighbors, you love yourself. Matthew includes that. And the young man said to him, all these things I have kept from my youth, what do I still lack? Now, in Mark and Luke, it doesn't have the man saying, what do I still lack? He just said, I've done all these things to my youth.

And Jesus then said, oh, OK, well, then. He said, you lack one thing. Jesus in Mark and Luke seems to be the one who introduces the fact that the man still is lacking something.

But Matthew has it that the man still feels a lack. So I still lack something. Lord, what do I have to do to have eternal life? Well, keep these commandments.

Well, I've done that. But I still am, you know, despite your statement that if I do those things, I'll live. I still feel like I'm lacking.

I still feel like I don't measure up. What is it I'm still missing? And in verse 21 of Matthew, Jesus said to him, if you want to be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me.

So the conversation is just a little different. The same information is in it, no matter which gospel you read. I would just say that if we look at Mark's gospel, which is the one we're working from in verse 19, when Jesus says, you know, the commandments and he lists them.

The list is pretty much the same in all the gospels with a few minor differences. In Mark 10, 19, it says, do not defraud. That's not in the other lists.

Do not defraud. But the others are there. And what he gives are essentially most of the commands from the second tablet of the law.

You know that the Ten Commandments, the first four commandments have to do with one's relationship directly with God. The second tablet has to do with your relationship with man, your parents. Honor your parents.

That's in the list here. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery.

These are in different order, but they're there. Don't steal. Don't bear false witness.

In fact, the only command that's not listed here from the second tablet of the law is the

last one. You should not covet. Jesus doesn't mention that one.

It would appear that this man's problem ended up being in the area of covetousness, which is, you know, over overly attached to material things, though I don't think it would be appropriate to say that he is violating the command. You should not covet because that commandment is you should not covet what is your neighbors. We don't have any reason to believe that this man was coveting what other people had.

But it turned out that he was much more attached to his own things than was healthy. And it actually actually prevented him from following Jesus on this occasion. But we saw also that in Matthew's gospel to the list of commands that Jesus gave was and you shall love your neighbors yourself.

One thing we see is that when a man asks what what he has to do to have eternal life. Or what he has to do to be in the kingdom of God, or, you know, what he has to do to meet God's requirements. Jesus doesn't mention any religious requirements.

Only social or moral requirements. He doesn't talk about no other gods. He doesn't talk about, you know, the name of God or the Sabbath or those things that are related to one's relationship directly with God.

He says, you know, eternal life, you've got to treat your neighbor right. You've got to love your neighbor as you love yourself. All those commands of the second tablet of stone were about loving your neighbor.

And Matthew's version cuts off by listing them and saying, and you shall love your neighbors yourself. You know, in other words, to sort of seal up that whole category, cover it all. Now, this man's problem was a bit of a defect in this area.

Because what Jesus told the man to do ultimately was to sell what he hadn't given to the poor. Well, that would suggest, of course, that he has to love poor people as much as he loves himself. He has to think that their needs.

Their financial issues are as important as his own. Now, when John the Baptist came preaching in Luke chapter three and the people said, what must we do? He said, he that has two coats, give one to him that has none. And he that has food do likewise.

Now, this was simply a way of saying, love your neighbors, you love yourself. You've got two of something that everyone needs one. You've got two, you only need one.

And here's someone who doesn't have one. So you give one of yours to him and then that's loving him as you love yourself. Putting himself, putting him on the same level as yourself.

Of course, it means putting yourself at a lower level so that his circumstances can be

elevated. And that on another scale is what Jesus was telling this man to do. Sell what you have and give it to the poor.

That's loving your neighbors, you love yourself. Now, see, Jesus had told him you want to enter into life. You have to love your neighbors, you love yourself.

And here's some commands that you're already familiar with from the Old Testament that illustrate the need to do so. But the man had not made the connection to loving them in terms of sharing his goods with the poor. That's loving your neighbors, you love yourself, too.

And the man had a blind spot to that. It wasn't something that really crossed his mind that loving his neighbors, you love yourself required that. It just meant to him, you don't murder, you don't kill, you don't steal, you don't bear false witness on your parents.

You don't defraud people. I've done all that. I've obeyed all those laws.

But had you really loved your neighbors, you loved yourself. Now, what's interesting is that the man. Well, before I go there, what's really kind of interesting as an evangelical is that Jesus, if you do these things, you'll have eternal life.

Because it does not appear to be the teaching of the New Testament that anyone would ever have eternal life by keeping the law. And that's Jesus apparently says, if you do that, you keep you keep these laws, you'll have eternal life. But I think what he means is that those who have eternal life are people who consistently live this way.

That is, if they're going to have eternal life on their own works. If you're going to do a good thing to have eternal life, then you must consistently always do the right thing toward your neighbor. If you do that all the time, there will be nothing for God to condemn in you.

Now, of course, no one does that all the time. But it's interesting that Jesus indicates that what would prevent a man from having eternal life is not something that's a born in condemnation, but a behavioral defect. If you do all these things as you should, you'll have eternal life.

There isn't some sin of Adam that would condemn you despite all your good behavior. It is what you do that God will judge you for. Now, it just so happens that no one, including this man, had consistently done these things.

He thought he had, but he had not. And there's nobody who can have eternal life by doing these things because no one will do them all the time. No one has ever yet put his neighbors on the same level with himself in all respects.

No one has ever yet loved his neighbor as he loved himself all the time. And even if a

person would at this point turn his life around and from that moment perfectly love his neighbor as he loved himself until the day he died, there would be all those times previous that he hadn't done that. There's still defects.

He still falls below the line because the sum total of his actions is not always obedient. You can't really redeem yourself from sin by obeying in the future. Jesus is saying these are the standards a person must always live by if they want to not be condemned, if they want to qualify.

And since nobody has always lived by these standards, no one qualifies. But of course, what would give him eternal life is if he became a follower of Jesus. And that's what he's ultimately invited to do.

He lacked that. He lacked more than he knew. He was not a proud man as the Pharisees were, but he was not fully aware of his own defects.

And that was because I think of a legitimate blind spot. Jesus was not angry at him. Jesus has looked at him and loved him.

There's not very many times the Bible talks about Jesus loving a particular person. The Bible talks about the love of Jesus in general and the compassion that he has. But this is a very rare thing.

It says Jesus looked at him and loved him. We read that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus also. And there was a disciple whom Jesus loved.

But you can quickly exhaust the list of individuals that are specifically in the Bible said to have been loved by Jesus as individuals. This man particularly was... Jesus had a heart for this man. He was a man who truly was trying to do the right thing in his life.

And he had a hunger for God. I mean, the man is really commendable. He came running to Jesus.

You know, Jewish men did not run. At least not if they wanted to be dignified. That was a Middle Eastern thing.

You don't run if you're a man. It's undignified to run. And that's why when Jesus talked about the prodigal son and his father's son and ran out to meet him.

It's like the father's son just threw off all social dignity and just ran out to meet his son. A thing which would be considered to be, you know, almost shameful for a man to do. Running, just in the Jewish society, that was not what old men or dignified men did.

And here's a man who is a man of stature, a man of wealth, and yet a man hungry for eternal life. And that's why he came running to Jesus and said, tell me what I need to do. And Jesus said, well, here's what you're going to have to do.

And he says, well, I've done that. And Jesus is essentially going to say, well, actually you haven't. He doesn't say it in those terms.

He waits for the man to say it. The man says, I still lack something. What is it? And Jesus says, OK, if you really want to be perfect, then that's what you've got to be.

If you want to be a perfect man, if you want to qualify for eternal life, you're going to have to do more than you've done. First of all, you're going to have to be more consistent in loving your neighbors as you love yourself. You're going to have to sell what you have and give to the poor.

But more than that, you're going to have to come and follow me. Because it's being a follower of Jesus that covers for the defect. When you become one of Jesus' followers, that's when you have eternal life.

When you're abiding in him, like a branch in the vine, the life that Jesus has becomes your life. You can only have eternal life in him and through your attachment to him. So if you want to have eternal life, you want to be perfect.

You say you've kept all these laws, but you can sense in your own conscience that you haven't. You know you're still missing something. I've just told you what you have to do and you've told me you've done that.

But you don't really feel like you have done that. And you haven't. And so since you're wanting to know, I will do you a favor.

I love you and I'll tell you what you need to hear for your good. Do you want to be perfect? I want you to be perfect too. Here's what you need to do.

Sell those goods, give to the poor. You'll have treasures in heaven, by the way. You're not going to miss out on anything.

You think it's a big sacrifice to give up treasures on earth in order to have treasures in heaven? What kind of sacrifice is that? That's a trade up. That's trading up, not down. You see, the only reason one would object to doing so is if they didn't really believe about the treasures in heaven part.

Because anyone, if you ask a child, would you like to have a penny today or a quarter tomorrow? The child would take the penny today if they're small enough because they want something now. They're not into delayed gratification. They don't know the relative value of the quarter and the penny anyway.

All they want is a shiny penny now instead of a shiny quarter tomorrow. But anyone who's intelligent and knows the value of things would say, I'll take the quarter tomorrow. I don't need to have a penny today if I can have a quarter tomorrow.

I can delay gratification. And so that's really what Jesus is calling people to do, is to delay gratification. If you sell what you have and give to the poor now, you will, in heaven, you'll have treasures.

Now, in another place, of course, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, He said, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. Why? Because moth and rust corrupt them and thieves break through and steal. You can be ripped off of everything you lay up on earth.

But He said, but lay up treasures in heaven because there moth and rust does not corrupt and thieves do not break through and steal. However, in the Sermon on the Mount, when He makes that statement to lay up treasures in heaven, He doesn't say how it's done. How do you put your treasures in heaven? I've got treasures right here on earth.

How do I transfer them to heaven? Here He tells the rich young ruler, you give it to the poor and then you'll have treasures in heaven. The deposit box for the bank of heaven is at the door of the poor person. It's not the only door.

Also, I'm sure that, you know, when you give to the church, when you give to missions, when you give to support the gospel, that's also laying up treasures in heaven. But the point is, you're using the things that you have, which you could use for your present advantage. You're giving those up for someone else's advantage, whether it's to help the poor with their physical needs or whether it's to help people hear the gospel.

It's helping other people. And that is loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Now, when the man heard that particular application, he was sorrowful and he went away.

And as far as we know, he didn't come back. It's so sad because the man was a good man. He was not an arrogant man.

He had a desperate spiritual hunger that caused him to come running to Jesus. He was a wealthy man. And yet he was not proud.

And yet he just didn't have the faith. He couldn't do what Jesus said. He just didn't believe that there were treasures in heaven that would be equal to or more valuable than the treasures on earth.

He couldn't make that investment. And therefore, he went away sorrowful. And as I often point out, and I'm certainly not the only one, preachers have often pointed this out, and I think it's a good thing to point out, is that Jesus was not happy about the man leaving.

Jesus was not happy that the man turned him down. Jesus loved him, it says, and wanted him to come along. But Jesus didn't force him.

The man had free will. Nor did Jesus modify the terms when he saw that the terms he stated first were not acceptable to that. He didn't say, well, let's negotiate this then, because I really want you in my team.

Most pastors would really want this man on their team. Most pastors don't have enough rich people in the church as far as they're concerned. The more rich people you've got in the church, the better.

And especially if they're men of good reputation and good character, like this man was. And he'd be an elder in the church, any church today. There's not any church I know of today that would make him sell his goods and give to the poor or not come at all.

Most churches would say, well, listen, just pay your tithes and that'll be good, you know. In every other way, you're a good church member, church leader even. If you're a leader in the synagogue, you can just be a leader in the church.

Because, I mean, you've got all that we're looking for in a man like that. Except he was not willing to surrender fully to the terms that Jesus gave. And the lordship of Jesus is really the terms.

It's not that Jesus tells everybody to sell all their goods and give to the poor. There are in the book of Acts, among the disciples, people who had possessions that others did not own. There were people who owned houses.

There were people, I mean, not everyone is exactly at the same economic level. Now, Paul did say that those who have extra should be concerned to help those who had little, so that there might be like an equality, at least approximated equality. I don't think that there's got to be an absolute equality.

But as he gave the example of gathering the manna in the wilderness, those who gathered little had no lack, and those who gathered much had no extra. You know, once those who gathered little had no lack, I don't think there was any problem with someone else having some extra. But the point is that even when those principles were being observed in the book of Acts, there were still some people who had more things than other people had.

And we read of some people having houses, for example, and such, that they owned. But this man was given specific instructions to part with his goods. And it was the thing he was not willing to do.

And what was at stake here was not the man's property, but the lordship of Jesus. Will you do what Jesus said, no matter what it is? Will you follow orders without question? If so, you can follow me. And here's your test.

Will you sell what you haven't given before? If so, then you can follow me. And if you

follow me, you'll have eternal life. Now, he might give a different test or different orders to different people.

This is the man's test. And what's interesting is we think of it, at least sometimes people call these kinds of things the hard sayings of Jesus. There's books called the hard sayings of Jesus.

And a lot of people refer to Jesus' terms of discipleship that he gave as the hard sayings of Jesus. But I don't think he intended for this to be taken as a hard saying. He looked at the man and loved him.

Therefore, he said, you want to be perfect? Well, I want you to be perfect, too. Here's what you need to do. And it's not a hard saying to say, give me your penny today and I'll give you a quarter tomorrow.

Is that really a big demand? Or is that a generous thing to do? If you go to somebody who handles your investments, and he says, listen, you write a check for \$100 today, I'll put it in an investment, you'll get \$1,000 by the end of the month. Is that a hard saying? Now, if I don't have very much money and you say, give me \$100, I might say, well, that's going to pinch me. But if you say, but you're going to get \$1,000 at the end of the month, I think, well, that sounds like a good deal to me.

And Jesus says, give what you have before and you'll have treasures in heaven. It's the same kind of offer. If someone really believes that there are treasures in heaven.

And if one does, and then they follow Jesus and obey him, then they're a disciple. And that's what it takes to have eternal life, to be a disciple of Jesus, do whatever he says. It's his lordship that the man was not going for.

It was because of his money and his attachment to his money that he was not doing so. But what was the decision he was making was not to embrace Christ as Lord, not to let Christ be his commanding officer, not to obey without question what the Lord said. Therefore, he was not accepting Christ as his Lord.

And that was where he failed here. Now, did the man later come around? We don't know. If he did, probably we would have been told about it because it would have made Christ happier if he had.

But he went and grieved for he had great possessions. And verse 23 says, Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were astonished at his words.

But Jesus answered again and said to them, Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches 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. And they were astonished

beyond measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? But looking at them, Jesus said, With men it is impossible, but not with God.

For with God all things are possible. Now, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God is apparently one of the things that are the most difficult things. There are others and other conditions that also don't find it easy to enter the kingdom of God.

The Pharisees, whether rich or not, were not going to find it easy to enter the kingdom of God because they were self-righteous. There are different conditions that make a man less prone to meet the terms of discipleship in their life. Because they either already feel like they qualify or they should be good enough or God should change the terms for them.

Or else it's just more costly than they want to put out or whatever. There are certain kinds of people more than others who find greater difficulty in entering the kingdom. Jesus said to the Pharisees, The prostitutes and tax collectors will enter the kingdom of God before you do.

In other words, people who were down and out, the disenfranchised, the marginalized, certainly the ones who were not self-righteous, those ones were the ones who would be the quickest to come into the kingdom. And among those that would be the least quick to do so would be those who already really were pretty comfortable where they were. Already had things comfortable enough in their life that there's not really much for them to seek after that.

Now it is possible, Jesus said, nothing is impossible with God. It is possible for a person to be a rich person and comfortable in his life and still have a heart for God. Still be one who seeks God.

But it's less common and it's more difficult. Because our circumstances in life do tend to incline us or disincline us toward seeking something other than what we now have. If you are poor, if you are marginalized in society, if you are feeling condemned and guilty and, you know, you don't have worldly advantages at all, then you're more interested in considering what must be done to seek another world.

Especially if it seems to you like your prospects in this world are never going to get very good. Of course, the next thing is, well, is there another world better than this one that I could get into? But when this world is already pretty comfortable and nice for you, contemplation of another world is not the first thing on your mind, generally speaking, because you're not uncomfortable with this one. And then when one hears about another world in which to invest, one has to really believe in that world to want to give up a bird in the hand.

You know, the rich man has a bird in his hand and he's being told to give that up to go

for two in the bush. And he's not sure if there's any birds in the bush. Can't see inside the bush there.

And so it's very difficult, but not impossible. It's impossible with men, but fortunately in the area of salvation, men alone are not the only actors. God is also in the picture.

However, in the case of the rich young ruler here, even God apparently was not able to get him to make the right decision because the choice to follow Christ is a choice to cooperate with God. God will get you in. God will get you over the hurdles if it's your desire and your choice to go there.

And basically, if you give God as a blank check with a sign, you know, sign your name and say, God, here's the check. You write what you're going to withdraw from me. And I don't know what it is.

Well, you know, I'll let you take whatever up to up to and including, you know, everything in the account. And by the account, I mean my life. I'm not talking about your literal bank account.

I'm just talking about God here. Here's me and everything I have and everything, all my assets, all on my future, all of my potential. And it's all represented this check as my name signed on it.

You fill in the numbers, God, that you want. You take whatever you want. When you make that kind of a surrender to God, then that's what it takes.

But if you're thinking, well, you know, up to this amount, God, you can take anything up to this amount. And no matter what the amount is. Until it's until it's truly a blank check, then the lordship of Jesus hasn't really been.

Understood correctly and embraced correctly. And so it is harder for people who have a lot to lose to put what they have at risk for some future unseen birds in the bush. And that's why I think it's harder.

Now, the disciples were surprised to hear Jesus. And he had to say it twice. He made the general comment in verse 23, although there he said it's hard for those who have riches.

When he restated it in verse 24, he said, how hard it is for those who trust in riches. Now, in some of the parallels in the other gospel, just as a rich man. But here it's interesting that Mark brings it out in Jesus words that that those who have riches are seen to probably have their main problem in this area because they trust in riches.

It's not really the question of having them. It's not trusting in them. But the implication is, if you have them, you can hardly not trust them.

How could you not trust in them if they are there? And I have told this story in other

settings before. I've only been a rich man one time. Actually, probably I'm a rich man all the time.

And by international standards, we're all rich people. I mean, we all stand to be challenged by what Jesus said here. Whether we are counted as rich or poor in America, we are rich compared to people living in many parts of the world because we have indoor plumbing.

We have food deep besides just rice, beans and beetles. You know, we have more than one change of clothes. We have climate control in our homes, even in our cars.

We have electric running through our walls that you can just throw a switch and you can have lights on. The things we enjoy, even the poorest of us enjoy, are things that the richest kings 500 years ago couldn't have had for any price. We are truly comfortable people, more comfortable than we realize.

And we don't realize we're comfortable because we compare ourselves with people who are better off than we are. But we are all really rich. But in my own case, I've usually not been rich by American standards.

But there was one time when I felt very rich. And that was, frankly, when my wife was killed in an accident and an insurance settlement came to me, which the amount of it by today's standards would not be or by most people's standards would not be really very much. But by the standards I was living by, and this is now 30 years ago, money was worth different amounts then than it is now.

It was really enough money that I could live on it at my present standard of living at the time for about five years. Now, I had lived by faith forever before that, for years before that and since then. And I remember thinking, you know, well, I never really had a lot of money.

I never expected to have a lot of money. I never even wanted a lot of money. I just wanted enough to pay my bills month by month.

And that's usually how it came, sometimes day by day. And so suddenly I had in the bank enough money I could live on for years. I didn't have to trust God day by day for my food.

I didn't have to trust month by month for my rent. I didn't have to worry about my car breaking down, which I always drove an older car, which I never knew if it was going to break down. And if it did, I didn't know how I'd afford to get it fixed because that would take another, you know, amount of money coming out of the sky, as it were, because I didn't have any visible means of support or any predictable means of income.

That's how I'd live all my adult life until this point. And suddenly there was this money

there, more than I needed. And I realized at the time, you know, this could change the way I think.

This could change the whole dynamics of my walk with God, because one reason I had chosen to live by faith from the beginning was that I wanted to keep God and his intervention in my life obvious to me. You know, God is always providing for us all the things we have, but it's not always obvious because sometimes we can see a direct natural cause and effect relationship between, you know, I go out and work a job and money comes in. I see that's God's provision, but it's not obviously God's provision because the person working at my job who doesn't even know God also gets the same paycheck.

You know, I have to say that whatever my sources of income are, they're from God. Even if I have to work, even if there's very visible natural sources, it's still God, but it's not as obviously God as in some other circumstances. And going into the ministry, I knew that I didn't have a miracles ministry, but I wanted to see miracles anyway.

I wanted to see God obvious in my life all the time. And that's why I felt it was an advantage to live by faith because then I had to see divine intervention on a regular basis. But, I mean, that did really contribute something to the dynamics of my own relationship with God and my sense of his reality, of course.

But with this extra money that was there, I was suddenly a rich man, at least by my standards. And I thought, I don't want that to change anything in the dynamics of my relationship with God. And I determined it would not.

But it did. I mean, it did only in this respect, that I never had to worry about where the money would come from to pay the rent. I didn't have to pray about it.

The money was already there in the bank. I didn't have to worry about whether my car broke down. I could buy one.

If my car broke down, I could leave it at the side of the road and just go buy another car. Write a check for it. I mean, it was like I didn't really have any needs that had not already been provided for in advance by this money that I had.

And I honestly didn't like that, the feeling. It changed my mentality. It didn't change the way I lived, but it changed my whole sense of dependency on God dramatically.

And I couldn't think of any way to make it not change that. I don't know how you can be desperate when there's no reason to be desperate. Being desperate is for God.

It puts you in kind of a relational situation with God that keeps Him close and real. And especially every time a provision comes, you know it was God because you just saw it happen in a timely way in response to prayer and so forth. And yet the provisions of God,

if He makes them all in advance and they're in the bank, it just... I'm not saying I couldn't be a good Christian.

I was still an obedient Christian. But it changed something and I realized in that experience that I don't know how you can have riches and not in some measure trust in them. Knowing that they are there, there's no reason to be desperate.

There's no reason to be concerned. There's no reason to really have to say, well, God's got to come through for me in this situation. It's covered already.

Now, is that an evil? I don't know that it's an evil. It's just something I don't like. In fact, what I decided was I would dispense with all the money I got from that settlement within one year.

And I bought a few things I needed. A used car and a school bus to live in. And then I gave the rest of the money away in a year's time.

And so a year after my wife was dead, the money was gone. And I was able to go back to my old way of living with no visible means of support. And frankly, it was a real relief.

I mean, it was nice to have that life back. But only that year have I ever known the phenomenon of what it's like to have a lot of extra money. And to know why it would be difficult for a person who has a lot of money to trust God in the same way.

Now, they can trust God, but it's different trusting God when you need to. And for more things than other people have to trust him for. So there's a direct relationship between possessions and trust and dependency.

And Jesus said that relationship is such that it puts a rich person in a much more disadvantaged position. That's why it was a loving thing for him to say that and sell what you had and give to the poor. It didn't say Jesus decided to get harsh with him.

It says Jesus looked at him and loved him. He said, sell and give to the poor. Why? Because that's going to be to your advantage.

And it's going to remove a barrier. It's a narrow path that you're called to walk. Like walking a tightrope.

If you have to walk a tightrope across Niagara Falls, you might not wish to take with you a backpack full of money and possessions and all kinds of things hanging on you. You know, you're going to need to travel life on such a narrow road. And so it's harder, harder to walk that road, harder to get on that road, harder to want to be on that road.

When there's when the one's default circumstances are are more comfortable. And that's what Jesus said. He said it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Now, some have said that a couple of things about this statement that I don't necessarily find to be convincing. One is that in the Aramaic, the word camel and the word table are very, very similar. And some scholars say maybe Jesus or table or rope.

Some feel that Jesus in Aramaic said it's easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle. Which would be the imagery would make more sense. You usually put a thread through an eye of a needle, but a rope would be like a thread only too thick to go through.

And so some think that's what Jesus said and that somehow it got lost in translation, became a camel instead of a rope. On the other hand, some people say the eye of the needle is a reference to a gate in the walls of Jerusalem. That was a lower gate than the average.

And they say that when the night came and they locked up the gates of the city, a traveler who arrived late would have to knock at this smaller gate and could be allowed to get into the gate after dark. But it was small. It'd be hard to get a camel through it.

In fact, if you had a camel load that you're trying to get through, they say that you'd have to unload the camel and the camel would have to squeeze through that gate on its belly. Makes good preaching, a nice visual image. And they say that that small gate was called the eye of the needle.

You'll hear preachers say that all the time. The only problem with that is there's no historical evidence that there ever was a gate in Jerusalem that they ever called the eye of the needle. That's just a preacher's just a preacher's story.

It's not really. There's no documentation anywhere for that being true. And so it seems easiest just to take it as it has come down to us in all three gospels.

He's not a camel going through a needle, which is, of course, absurd. And even if he had said a rope going through the eye of the needle would be absurd. The point is, he's not trying to describe something that can be done with difficulty, like unload the camel and have it squeezed through a tight gate barely.

He says, what I'm describing is impossible. He's trying to describe something that is impossible, humanly impossible. With men, it's impossible.

With God, all things are possible. So God does work a special grace in some rich men. I always think of my my ex-father-in-law in this connection, who I consider to be one of the great men I have known.

His name is Keith Larkin. So I'll memorialize him by name. Keith Larkin is not a very well-known man, but he was a multimillionaire who devoted everything he had to God.

He donated millions to missions. He is at the time I'm recording this. He's still alive, but he's in an Alzheimer's care facility so far gone that he doesn't recognize his family members.

And I don't know how long it'll be before he's gone to be with the Lord. But he's dying in poverty. He gave everything he had away.

And some people say, well, I thought if you give to God, he'll give you a hundred times more. Well, he didn't give with that in mind because God did keep giving him more and he kept giving it more away. You know, eventually, if you give it all away, you can't have anything.

But he was a man who got saved rather late in life and already was a rich man when he got saved. And he just he just believed that he felt that the terms of discipleship were that he should give it away. The years when he was young and wealthy that I knew him, when he was in the process of giving it all away to people, he was living as a multimillionaire.

He was driving an early model Oldsmobile. You know, he's like a CEO of a high tech company in Scottsdale, California. And the other CEOs of the companies like his were all driving Porsches and they were living in fancy houses.

And he lived in a condo, sort of middle class condo. And he was just he lived a modest lifestyle. And he and he gave his money to missions and mostly to Haiti, to the poor in Haiti.

He gave most of the money away. And although he is looks like when he dies, which may not be very long from now, he's in his 80s, late 80s. Looks like he'll die penniless.

But that's exactly what he planned on. He didn't give his money away to get more back. He gave away to lay up treasures in heaven and to be obedient to Christ.

And he is just about my most admired man. And always has been as long as I've known him. And by the way, I didn't get much money from him because he always told me I could.

I just thought I never asked. He said, oh, you're just too proud to ask. I'm not too proud.

It's just my policy. I don't ever ask. But he always said, you know, Steve, if you ever have any needs, God's got a bank up here in Scott Valley.

Just come in. I said, Keith, I'm never going to ask you for money. Just know that.

And I never did. And I got, you know, God sent my support from other sources for the most part. But he's a great man who gave his money away.

And that's unusual. It shows that it's not impossible for rich man to enter the kingdom of God. It's very unusual, though.

And it's when it happens, it's a special kind of work of God that God does, obviously, in a man. Contrary to natural inclinations. But then again, all of us get saved because God does a supernatural work against our natural inclinations.

Our natural inclinations are to live for ourselves. And none of us would ever get saved if God didn't do something. All conversions are truly the work of God.

But some are more unexpected. Some are more difficult, I suppose. God has to work against greater obstacles in some cases.

Now, verse 28, Peter began to say to him, see, we have left all and followed you. And this is a good example of what it means to leave all. Because Jesus said in Luke 14, in verse 33, I think it is.

He said, unless you forsake all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. And Peter and the disciples were examples of those who had, in fact, done that. They had left all.

But what did their lives look like? Peter still owned his house. He still owned his boat, his nets. He was still capable of going fishing.

He still had his equipment. And for that reason, we see that forsaking all doesn't necessarily mean that you don't have anything. Forsaking all means that you have disowned everything.

It now belongs to God. You've transferred the title of everything to God. But you remain the steward as long as he wants you to.

And therefore, a steward of God's things might have a lot of things. Might have a very large bank account. Might have a big house.

Might have lots of things. But they are God's things and he knows it. And therefore, he has left all.

Because leaving all is a matter of the heart first. It becomes a matter of actual transference of things only as God leaves the individual. And therefore, because every person is a steward of God, when you become a Christian, you forsake all that you have.

That is, you transfer the ownership from you to God. Then you are his steward. And no one has any right to judge anyone else's steward, to judge God's stewards.

God judges each one as for their faithfulness, as in the parable of the stewards. Each steward did whatever he did. And when the Lord came back, each one stood judgment before the Lord, not before each other.

And so we can't look at somebody else and say, well, they're not a good steward because look how much stuff they have. Well, it's not a question of how much stuff they have. The question is, are they doing what God wants them to do with it? And that's between them and God, not between them and any other human beings.

But Peter and the disciples say, we have left all and followed you. So Jesus answered and said, assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or fathers or mother or wife or children or lands for my sake and the Gospels, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last and many who are last first.

That is, people who are ranked last in this world are often the first ones to come to the kingdom. Those who are ranked as the first and the mighty and the important ones in the world are often the last to come into the kingdom, he says. But what's this about forsaking? No one has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children for my sake and the Gospels, who will not receive a hundredfold more in this time, plus eternal life in the next life.

Now, from this verse, many have deduced that you can invest in God by, you know, giving up something for God and you'll get a hundred times back more. And there are preachers who try to give you the impression that if you send them a hundred dollars, you'll get, you know, ten thousand dollars back a hundredfold. And one wonders if the preachers really believe this and they really need the money, why don't they send money out themselves? If they really need the money, why don't they send all that they have out to some other ministry so that God will give them a hundredfold back? My suspicion is they don't believe everything they're saying, but they hope you do because they're trying to bilk you for your money.

Actually, a hundredfold is not a statistic. It does say a hundredfold in Matthew's version also. But Luke's version, I think, is helpful to see what is meant here, because in Luke 18, instead of a hundredfold, it just says many times as much.

It's Luke 18, 29 and 30. So he said to them, assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who shall not receive many times more in this present time. Hundredfold is just a figure of speech, just like the number thousand or just like 70 times seven.

These are just examples of using large numbers to simply signify a large number. You'll receive a lot more. Whatever you give up in this life, you'll receive more in this life and in the next life you'll receive eternal life.

But does that mean that if you want to get a lot back, you should give some now and you'll get a lot back? Or does it mean that what God gives you in this life is far times,

many times more than what he'll really call on you to give up in terms of turning over? That is to say, if I gave everything right now that I have away, I'll still receive in my lifetime far more than I ever did give away. You people have left houses, lands, etc. Well, you're going to receive a lot more than that in your lifetime.

God's going to take care of you. And in a sense, the disciples who had left those things, even families in some sense, received a hundredfold or many times as many children and families and brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers in the houses in the body of Christ. I didn't mean they own the title to a hundred houses.

It meant that everybody's house was their house in the body of Christ. Everyone's doors were open to all other members of the body of Christ. The apostles could go anywhere in the world where there were Christians and they had brothers, sisters, spiritual mothers and fathers, spiritual children, host houses that they could they could sleep in because they had the church had essentially pulled their ownership in a sense so that they had much more in the body of Christ than what they gave up.

You give up one house, you get a hundred houses not to own, but to to to sleep and to have access to when you need them, because the body of Christ becomes your host in all the houses. And that's what the disciples, I think, found when they traveled was that every Christian's home was open to them, although they'd given up their own. Now there is one thing I need to bring up and we'll be done with this, and that is he talks here in Mark 10 about forsaking, among other things, wife and children.

Now, I would point out that the word wife in Mark 10 and verse 29 is not found in the Alexandrian text. So the Alexandrian text does not say anything about forsaking the wife here in Mark 10, 30 or 10, 29, but rather the Alexandrian text says, Assuredly, I say to you, there's no one who has left house or brothers, sisters or father or mother or children or lands that leaves out wife. Likewise, of course, here in verse 30, who talks about receiving a hundredfold more, he talks about houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, but no wife.

You're not going to receive a hundred wives. That's what Islam offers. That's not what Christ offers.

Is wife one of the things that have to be forsaken? Well, in the Alexandrian text, this passage does not say so. However, in Luke's version, it does. In Luke's version, we saw a moment ago in Luke 18, it says in verse 29, Assuredly, I say to you, there's no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife.

And this is in the Alexandrian text too, or children. But what does it mean to leave wife or children? Does God actually call anyone to walk away from their family for the kingdom of God's sake? I don't think he does, because he's already given instructions to men about taking care of their wives and children, and it would be a violation of his

standing orders for them to leave those responsibilities for the kingdom. However, a person might be in a position to have to choose the kingdom of God over the preferences that their wife and children have for their lifestyle and for their living situation.

A man in obedience to God might have to override the approval of his wife and children. They might even leave him over it. That has happened at times because a man follows God, his wife or his children who don't want to follow God, just abandon him.

That could happen. And Jesus said, well, if that happens, you still made the right choice. Remember, he said elsewhere in Matthew 10, anyone who loves father or mother more than me or wife or children more than me is not worthy of me.

There comes a time when sometimes the choice is between God's will and your family's will. You go with God's will. You might end up losing the family over that, although the family should be welcome to go with you.

You don't just walk away from them. But it's also possible that this has more to do with people who are not yet married and don't yet have children and would like to. But they make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

For the sake of the gospel, they don't get married. Paul said that he was a person like that. He said that he and Barnabas are the only two apostles who do not have a wife that they take around with them.

And he said, we have the right to, but we have not used this right because we don't want to hinder the gospel. And so Paul, who perhaps would have found some consolation in having a wife, didn't choose to have when he gave up wife and children for the kingdom of God's sake. Not an actual wife or child that had been in his life that he walked away from, but the prospect of having a normal family life was something he surrendered for the sake of the ministry.

And that might be what Jesus is talking about when he talks about leaving wife and children. Not so much that you have a wife and children that you abandon, but rather the prospects, the normal prospects of a domestic life, which most people would like to have. To sacrifice that, to forfeit that for the kingdom of God's sake is, he says, you're not going to be sorry about that.

You'll find that you'll have much more in this life and in the next life than you could possibly give up for God. God is never going to let you invest more than the returns he's going to give. The returns may not all be in this life.

And the greatest returns are definitely the treasures in heaven that he told the rich young ruler he should invest in. But there are even in this life more benefits than we can keep up with. If we want to keep giving to God, the benefits come in more.

Without being specific, I myself made a policy when I was young to give away a certain percentage of my income. And my income increased, so I actually increased the percentage. And I've increased that percentage three or four times now, so that now I'm giving away a much larger percentage than I started out with, only because I couldn't keep up with... I wanted to live at a certain standard of living, and God kept providing more than was necessary for that standard of living, so I actually increased the amount I was giving because it's hard to keep up with God's blessing.

I'd love it if the time came where I'm giving away 90% and I can live on the 10%. I don't have that kind of income now, but I've just found that though I started out giving away more than the percentage that churches ask you to give away, that amount that I've given has been too small for the provision that God has given. God has been too generous with me for me to keep it at that level.

And the more you give away, it seems like the more blessed you are. It's not a law. Like I said, my father-in-law has given away millions, and finally the income has pretty much dried up for him.

He's at the end of his life. It's not time anymore for God to bless him with more money. He wouldn't even know what to do with it.

He's got Alzheimer's. But when he was in his right mind, he used it all in a God-honoring way, and God kept blessing him. The point is that even in this life, God's blessing will far exceed any degree of generosity that you may exhibit in your giving to him, if it's really for the kingdom of God.

Obviously, you can do stupid things and throw your money away and be a poor steward. But if it's really invested wisely in the kingdom of God, then the dividends, the outcome of the investment, is definitely going to come out in your favor, Jesus indicated to his disciples. And I believe that's true not just of them, but of any disciples of his.

All right, we're done with that.