

Riches and the Kingdom

Mark 10:17-27

We've covered a lot in Mark's gospel as we're here in the 10th chapter. If you think about it, we've talked a lot about and seen a lot of Jesus and His ministry and how He has interacted with people, how He has been flawless in His ability to communicate and to call everyday, ordinary people to follow Him and be His disciples. He's been supernatural and exactly what you would expect of the Son of God and the Messiah in the way that He has performed miracles and shown His mercy and supernatural ways in the healings and the feedings and the many different works that He has done. We've also seen His ability just to simply deal with the religious leaders of the time and put them to shame, make them look like fools at times for the sake of defending and upholding God - His character, and His Word. We've seen even recently Jesus talk about some more different subjects and different topics. We've seen a little bit more of the teaching of Christ. That's something that isn't really dominant or something you see much in Mark's gospel. Compared to the other gospels, there's a lot of teaching in those gospels. In Mark there's not as much, and so in chapter 10, we've been able to see now Jesus having little moments here to teach on different topics.

We started the chapter with His conversation and dialogue and even correction about the topic of marriage and divorce as He covered that with this challenge coming from the religious leaders and the Pharisees, and then the clarification with His disciples. Last time we got to see, again, another topic addressed, the topic of children as He was able to not only care for them, love them and bless them, but use them as an illustration for what it means to actually receive and enter the kingdom. And so, today, we turn our attention to this topic of riches. And while we do know we have money at hand, we have money that is being discussed, that is one of the reasons for this interaction between Jesus and this young man, as well as Jesus' follow up with His disciples. We understand that there, too, at the same time, is a greater theme, a greater important topic that is at play, that is continued to be at play throughout the entire gospel of Mark, and that is the kingdom of God, that's the kingdom of God for sure, this understanding again of a different topic like riches or children or divorce, but now seeing how that also connects to the kingdom of God and what it means to be one who is a

child of God, a citizen of the kingdom, one who has entered into the kingdom and received eternal life.

So, today, we get to see this again, the overarching theme of the kingdom of God being highlighted through the avenue, through the road you could say, of money and riches. So, that's what we'll see in our text. Let's read our verses this morning Mark 10:17-27; "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.' And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.' "

These are our verses for this morning, and as you can see, both themes are in there; both the theme of riches, clearly, and wealth and possessions, but also the theme of the kingdom of God, eternal life even. Just to kind of verify that and show that to you, if you just think about how all this all begins when this man comes in verse 17. He asks, "...what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And then, as you go down and you see how Jesus is responding to him and then talks to His disciples, He speaks in a similar manner in verse 23 about those who wish to "...enter the kingdom of God." And again in verse 24, "...how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God." And again in verse 25, "...for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And then again, we have, further down, the disciples and their response in verse 26; "Then who can be saved?" So, this constant theme, and it's all synonymous. It's all a parallel, this concept of entering the kingdom of God, being saved, inheriting eternal life. A big, massive and huge concept that, in the process of this passage, we

see the connection of how wealth, possessions, and riches, ties in to this massive concept of eternity.

And as we see, often times, the format, the structure, the breakdown, as Jesus has these interactions and as Mark records them for us, we have some interaction that takes place, and then a debrief afterwards. There's a dialogue between Jesus and this rich young man and then the follow-up with just Jesus and the disciples. And we have the same thing taking place today. So, two main sections, and we'll start with the first main section where we have this dialogue take place in verses 17-22. This is the disappointing exchange, the disappointing exchange regarding the kingdom of God - a disappointing exchange regarding the kingdom of God. It starts off for us in verse 17; "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'" This starts it off. We're introduced in verse 17 here to the determined man, a very determined individual that comes here, a very determined individual. You can tell this clearly as Jesus is getting ready to leave; He is setting out on His journey.

We saw at the beginning of chapter 10, Jesus had set out with an intent and a focus. He had now a purpose. He had a very specific mission in mind. No longer was Jesus in Galilee just interacting with people and teaching and doing miracles. No longer was He trying to withdraw from people and spend time with His disciples. Now, He had set His sight towards Jerusalem. He had set His sight south to go down to Judea for the Passover where He Himself would be offered up as the sacrificial lamb. He would be slaughtered and crucified for the sake of mankind. This is what Mark 10:1 tells us, and so, after He spent this time with His disciples and stopped and blessed these children in verse 17, He's setting out, He's back on mission. He's back on track to head down south, and He gets interrupted. He's interrupted in this; "...a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him..." A man comes and interrupts Him. First of all, a man running in this society is a little odd. Right? If there's a man running, there's something wrong. If there's a child running, it's not a big deal. It's pretty normal. You'd expect that. But if there's a man that's running to try and find someone, you think an emergency is taking place, and so we see he's a determined man. He's running up and he comes kneeling before Jesus, interrupting Him before he goes on this journey.

We often have this exchange, this popular passage that is also in Luke and Matthew, known as Jesus' interaction with the rich, young ruler or the rich young man as people have said, and in our text we see that he is rich. From verse 22, we realize, yes, he is a rich man. And it's from Matthew 19:20, we see that he was a young man, and then Luke 18:18, we learn that he was a ruler of some sort. We don't know the details of what kind of influence he had and what he exercised authority over, but this is the case, and so, you put it all together, and this is a rich, young ruler that is running and kneeling before Jesus and interrupting Him as He's setting out to go south. There's urgency, and it makes sense because we look at the question, and we understand there's something heavy, there's something burdensome that has come on this man. He had to know. He had to inconvenience Jesus. Now, He asked Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" There it is, that overall, big topic throughout the whole gospel, even the topic of eternity, the topic of entering the kingdom, of being saved, the huge question about the eternal.

It's interesting, and we can notice a little bit, and we learn more about this man as we move through the dialogue, but just notice first the way that he phrases the question; "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He's chiefly concerned with what he can do, what acts he can perform in order to receive something. He's concerned with what effort he can put forth and then what reward would come in the form of eternal life. And if you think about it, this flies in the face of what Jesus was just teaching in Mark 10. If we just look back to Mark 10:15, you'll remember this. When He was interacting with the children, He said, "Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." He made this statement very clear with the children there to show what does it mean, how does a child receive things? They don't work for it. They simply receive it like an infant, and it just comes to them. And in the same way, Jesus had said - this is how the kingdom of God works; it is given from God to mankind, and they simply receive it. But our rich, young ruler here has a different perspective. He perhaps missed Jesus' statement. He's running and trying to intercept Him, and he says, "...what must I do...?" He's caught up in this understanding of what effort he can put forth and what reward he would get of eternal life. Probably a sincere question, but he wants this affirmation. He wants all the boxes checked off. He wants all his bases covered, and so he has to interrupt Jesus to get this peace of mind for himself.

We learn a little bit more about this man in verses 18-20, not just that he's determined, but he's a daring man. He is a daring man, and we start to see this dialogue unfold and some of the things that he says and how he interacts with Jesus. He's a daring man. he's got some serious boldness and confidence. In verses 18- 20, "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.' " First, we see Jesus' response to this man. After He gets interrupted by him and asked about eternal life, Jesus doesn't jump straight to eternal life. He addresses something first, what He was called by this man. He says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." And people start to get concerned with a statement like this and they think, uh oh, what's Jesus doing here? He's starting to kind of admit, maybe, that He's just like the rest of mankind, and is He saying He's not perfect? Is He saying He's not God? What is He doing here? This is a scary statement potentially. Well, obviously, He's not saying something that radical or heretical even from what we know the rest of what Jesus says and what the Bible says. Instead, some notice this as a subtle hint toward His deity while testing this man to see if this man would actually acknowledge it, and what we find is this man does not, because after Jesus throws out this correction, the man no longer calls Him good and no longer acknowledges Jesus the good One as God alone.

And in this, there's actually more I think happening. It's not just Jesus reflecting on Himself, I think, more importantly, it's Him setting up for the conversation that's happening right now. He's setting this man up. Jesus as often as we see Him in the gospels, He's perfect. He knows exactly what He's doing. When people come to Him, He knows where they're coming from. He knows what's on their mind. He knows what's on their hearts. He knows exactly how to address them and how to deal with them. and this is a setup for that. This is exactly what Jesus is doing. He's not interested in engaging in some mutual flattery where, hey, "Good teacher..." Oh, yes, good, young man, and there's this kind of patting of the back that happens and goes back and forth. No, that's not what Jesus is doing because He knows that this man in fact is not good. He falls in the category of the rest of sinful mankind. So, He's not going to return the favor and call this man good

because he called Him good. That's not what Jesus is interested in. Instead, He makes a little correction; "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." This man approached this conversation thinking he was good.

I mean, as we just read on, we see that he says "...all these commandments I have kept from my youth." He has a pretty good and a high opinion of himself. He's a pretty good guy - that's what he thinks. He's coming to Jesus knowing this and feeling this. He has this confidence, and Jesus has to completely obliterate any type of thinking in this way. "No one is good..." ... "No one is good..." So, don't even try to claim that you have kept the commandments. As this guy comes and just tosses out this term, "Good Teacher..." and Jesus has to say, you know "No one is good..." Right? There's not anyone that comes close to God. There is one perfect, righteous, holy One, and then there's sinful mankind. So, just throwing out the term good and thinking you're good is incorrect. It's false. "No one is good..." so there's nothing you can do on your own that makes you worthy of inheriting eternal life. Jesus is essentially hinting at what this man's weakness is. He starts to hint at what this very man is bringing to the table that is wrong and incorrect and unacceptable to God. This man thinks that he's earned it. This man thinks that he is righteous. This man thinks that he is good, and Jesus has to correct him in this to help him realize, you know, there's an out here. You don't have to keep down this path about talking about how good you are because "No one is good..." Let me just get that straight out the gate, "No one is good..."

He's not just throwing this out there as some kind of new doctrine. This is exactly what Scripture goes on to teach. We think of what Paul says in Romans 3, and it doesn't get any clearer; "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ... "...no one does good, not even one..." And so, Jesus is kind of throwing this guy a lifeline and telling him, hey, you should probably humble yourself. You have the chance and realize that you aren't good as you think you are as you're coming to Me because "No one is good..." In fact, it literally reads, "No one is good except One, God. "No one is good..." except One. There's only One. It's so obvious. It's so clear. This doesn't need to be complex. It's God, and everyone else pales in comparison.

Well, Jesus goes on, not just addressing how this man called Him “Good Teacher...,” He goes on to kind of play the game with this guy. As he comes up, this rich young ruler, He says, “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” He throws out these commandments, and if you’re familiar with your Old Testament a little bit and more specifically with the Ten Commandments, you go, wow, there’s a lot. In fact, of the six commandments that Jesus just rattled off here on a list, five of them are straight from the Ten Commandments, really the second half of the Ten Commandments that have to deal with relating to people, the ones that are visible and known and seen, how to relate to one another, the commandments that God gave Israel in their relating to one another in the camp. Jesus, really, He recites commandments 6, 7, 8, and 9, and then He rephrases commandment 10, as we’ll see, and then He also states commandment 5 of honoring your mother and your father.

So, the one that jumps out as just the most interesting (and we need to understand what is happening here) is when Jesus says, “Do not defraud...,” because you might start thinking as your looking at this and maybe even what the disciples and others were thinking there, ahh, here goes Jesus; He’s rattling off the commandments. And so you think, good, check 6, 7, 8. And then he gets to the 10th one, you would think “Do not defraud...” Oops! Good try Jesus. It’s actually, don’t covet, here. Don’t covet. Right? Someone trying to whisper and help Him out. He missed it. Oops, not quite. Well, you know, we’ll give it to Him because there’s other places in Deuteronomy that talk about this, that you shouldn’t deprive people of their wealth and their possessions if they’ve worked for you. If a laborer has done his work, you must pay him at the end of the day, don’t defraud him of that. So, it’s true. It’s in the Old Testament, but He was kind of on a roll there, and then He kind of slipped and missed the covet one. No. As we’ve established over and over again, really, in Mark’s gospel, Jesus is so purposeful in what He’s doing, this isn’t a slip up. This is Him getting right to the point, getting even more zoomed in and honed in on what this man’s issue is. This man is a rich, young ruler, and he walks away disappointed, disheartened because of this very thing he covets. He’s a greedy man.

The commandment, specifically “Thou shall not covet...,” has a very pointed application that Jesus pulls out. He doesn’t just say do not covet. He could’ve easily said that, but He says more specifically “Do not defraud...”

You are a rich man and how've you got rich? You've coveted, and in your application of coveting and in your sinfulness, you have defrauded people, and you've amassed your riches. So, Jesus is getting even more specific. It's kind of like people list off things, and they kind of want you to pay attention to a particular one, and they cough when they say it. Right? Like, cough, cough, yeah, that one, that one I just said - kind of what Jesus is doing. Right? He's rattling off the commands. You know them: "Do not murder..." ... "Do not steal..." ... "Do not defraud..." (cough) That's you buddy. It's like He's looking right at him and slows down and says it. You know the commands. Right? "Do not defraud..." You know, that one. Right? Because you are totally guilty of it, completely guilty. It's Jesus being perfect. It's Jesus kind of alluding to what this guy's big problem is and his hang up. He covets. He's greedy. He loves his possessions. He loves riches more than he loves God.

What's even more amazing is after Jesus corrects him about the concept of good and after Jesus more specifically says, "Do not defraud..." this man presses forward. Look at his daring response; "And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.'" Wow! Really? You're going to say that after what Jesus has gone through? He has been so specific. He has actually tried to help you out by saying you're not there. You're not measuring up to the standard. This man still responds and says, oh, yes, I am there. I have kept the commandments "...from my youth..." I have done this. It's interesting to note too, the man stops calling Jesus "Good teacher..." He just calls Him a teacher, so obviously, that shows his view of Jesus. He wasn't confident that Jesus really was the Son of God or the Messiah.

This man's persistence is amazing. First, he says he's kept all these commands. That's just outrageous right there. Who's so bold as to say, yeah, I've kept all those commandments? I've kept the Ten Commandments perfectly especially the ones that are visible, especially the ones that are in relationship to how I treat other people. I've done all that. Well, it's possible. Let's give this man a little slack. Let's say it is possible. Externally speaking, what you can see about this man's life, he may have. He may have somehow been aligned with most of those commandments, kind of like, maybe, Paul. You think about Paul - you think about Paul before he was saved, and he was a Pharisee, and when Paul talks how rigorous he was in his upholding of the Law. He said he was blameless. He was blameless when

it came to upholding the Law in Philippians 3:6, and in a very external sense, in the way that you view people from the outside, Paul said I was blameless. And this guy is saying the same thing. I've got it covered, check. Yeah, Jesus, check, check, check, I've done that. I'm blameless in this sense. However, we know from the full teaching of Scripture, it's a different story when you factor in the internal attitude and motives that God also cares about, and Jesus makes that clear in His ministry as well.

But not just that he's kept the commandments, this guy says that he's kept all these commands "...from my youth..." ... "...from my youth..." and according to Judaism, and what they taught, that ought to have been around the age thirteen because it's at the age of thirteen that you become responsible for keeping the commands of God. And so, he says the moment I became responsible for obeying the commands, I was good. I didn't falter. I held to it. And again, our question has to be, really? Really, you honored your father and your mother since your youth? Is there a teenager that has ever existed that honored their father and mother? Let's be honest here for a second. Right? This is ridiculous. This is out of control. No way! But this is this man, so bold the audacity. Right? He's daring to say, yes, I did it. I've done it. Tell me something I don't know. I just want to have this certainty. I want to be confident that I have not only everything in order in my life right now in front of me, my riches, my possessions. My life is good, but I just want to have an ease and peace of mind about the future as well, and I've done all those things. Just guarantee to me that I'm good and have eternal life.

Well, Jesus doesn't just let it go at this point. He jumps in and addresses this man right where he needs to be confronted. In verses 21-22, this is the devastated man. He turns from determined and daring in this pursuit of attaining eternal life, and he leaves devastated. "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'" The man's response - verse 22; "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Notice first how Jesus interacts with this man. It's wonderful how Mark gives us this detail that he must've got from Peter who was right there; "And Jesus, looking at him..." (looking at this arrogant, cocky, rich, young ruler) "...Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." He loved him. There's so many things Jesus could've done at this point. He could've made him look way more foolish than what happens

in our account. He could've done so many other things and really given it to this guy, but instead, He stays on point, and He addresses this guy right where he needs to be addressed, in his heart because He loves him. He loves this man, and so He speaks honestly and truthfully to Him. The perfect Son of God looks at this sinful man and rather than just wincing and turning His back on him, He addresses the problem with this man. You lack one thing, one thing. It's a big one. It's a big thing, a big thing that you lack; "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

You have these three commands in a row: Go. Sell. Give. And the result will be heavenly treasure. And then you have the final command; "...and come, follow me." And so, some people might get concerned and think, okay, now Jesus is saying there's different ways to enter into the kingdom. If you just thought about last week's passage, you think sometimes you just receive it like a child, and then it just comes to you, and God gives it to you. And then you have a passage like this where, well, I guess if you're willing to sell everything you have and just give it away to the poor and charity, then you're good. That's another way. That's another way to get a ticket into the kingdom. So, you just kind of consider all these different ways, and you pick the one that works the best for you. Well, no, that's not what's happening. Jesus isn't teaching different ways to get into the kingdom. There aren't different ways of salvation and inheriting eternal life. He's actually just more specifically addressing this man and something that Jesus has been teaching all along. For instance, if you remember the very start of Jesus' ministry in Mark 1:14-15, we were given like a summary statement of what Jesus is teaching, and what was that? He went about in Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." ... "...repent and believe in the gospel." That has been this twofold message that has gone forth; that John the Baptist was giving the people before Jesus; that Jesus was faithful to do Himself, and that He passed on to His disciples as they went out and preached. Everyone was saying this; "...repent and believe..." There's two sides of the same coin here.

And when you think about that, it's exactly what He's doing with this man. Repent. These first three commands: Go. Sell. Give. You need to turn your back on these things that you are attached to. You need to turn your back on these loves of your life that you love far more than you love God. You need

to repent from those things. You need to turn from those things. This man needed to repent and turn from his love of money and riches; thus the commands to go, sell, and give. Also, this man needed to express belief and faith in Jesus alone; thus Jesus' command, then "...come, follow me." Enter into a relationship with Me. Follow after Me like these disciples. Learn from Me. Take up My way. Be like Me; this is the command.

This is not some different kind of preaching, some different kind of gospel message that we need to tell people now and say, if you truly want to be a Christian, you've got to sell everything you have. That's not it at all. It's just more consistent teaching where Jesus is specifically dealing with exactly what this guy needs to hear, what he needs to repent. He needs to believe, and for him specifically, that was his riches, that was his material possessions, that was those things that he cherished and loved so dearly. How do we know that? Because look at his response, "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." He's devastated. The guy is broken. He can't bear to even consider the words of Jesus. Seriously, he's like stunned by what Jesus says. It's a shocked dismay when Jesus tells him this, not what he was looking for. He wanted to have all his boxes checked off. He wanted to have the ease about the future, but Jesus did not give him that. Instead, Jesus addressed the very thing that was still holding him back from God, and thus, this man was devastated. He's not willing to part from his earthly possessions. He's not willing to repent, not willing to give up his sin, his coveting, his defrauding. He's not willing to put it behind him. He hangs on to it. He has these many earthly possessions rather than the opportunity of treasures in heaven like Jesus. If you would simply do this, you'd have your sights set on what's to come, the eternal, and you would have heavenly treasure, no longer earthly possessions. This wealthy man, this young ruler that had probably tons of land and other money and animals and possessions is not willing to part from any of them. Instead, he's devastated and walking away sorrowful. This is the dialogue that Jesus has with this man.

And it's at this point that, as we see often in Mark's gospel, Jesus now can turn and teach more. He uses this as an opportunity to instruct more, to help His disciples learn what is taking place and where they need to be and what they should be thinking. So, we turn to the second portion of our text this morning, the difficult entrance into the kingdom of God - the difficult entrance into the kingdom of God. We see this turn, this shift in verse 23;

“And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ And the disciples were amazed at his words...” This is the shift that we see in verses 23-24. It’s an opportunity for instruction, the instruction; Jesus turns to His disciples. As He was setting out on this journey, and He was interrupted by this rich, young man, the man walks off sulking, and Jesus turns to His disciples for a chance to instruct. He considered the reactions of everyone around, and He saw this as a great potential, another opportunity to teach, and He particularly continues to disciple these men that are following Him; “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” Just a flat out principle, a flat out statement that Jesus puts out there. The wealthy as a first glimpse into this topic.

Thus far in Mark’s gospel, we haven’t seen Jesus teaching about riches yet. We haven’t seen Him addressing this idea of possessions really. We’ve seen Him talking about other things, interacting with other kinds of people, but riches, possessions, wealth, this is it. This is the first glimpse, and Jesus doesn’t have positive things to say. It’s a warning that comes to the disciples, and thus a warning that comes to us. While it’s obviously true, everyone has to sacrifice in their own way in order to repent and come to God, there’s still something unique about riches. There’s something specific about wealth. There’s something that’s extremely hazardous when it comes to this idea of possessions, and Jesus has to teach them and address them. He boldly states, “...it will be [specifically harder] for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” It will be harder, not it might be. It will be. It absolutely will be harder.

We know that this was a big statement because of the disciples’ response. They’re “...amazed at his words...” They’re not thinking, yeah, that makes sense Jesus. I see what You’re saying. I can see how that guy was bummed out. Yeah, that’s true. They’re thinking, what? Are You really telling us this? Is this the case? You see their view of rich people and wealth was far different than what Jesus was bringing for them. They had this view, and not just the disciples, but this was the view of Judaism at that time, that rich people meant that they were blessed by God. You have the wealth, you’re doing something right. God likes you, and He’s showering blessings upon you, and you’re getting more wealth, so apparently, you’re doing something good. You are a good person if you have wealth; that’s what the people thought. That’s what the disciples right there are thinking, and then Jesus

turns around and says, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And they think, what? Of all people they ought to be in the kingdom (right?) because they’re doing something right - “...amazed at [Jesus’] words...”

This was the common Jewish perspective of the time, and even the Old Testament speaks to this a little bit if you think about examples of people like Job or Proverbs 10:22; The blessing of the Lord makes rich...” And so, these principles are there in the Old Testament. And you could think, well, okay, there’s a case that can be made. However, while those principles are there, at the same time, there are still plenty of warnings in the Old Testament about riches. There’s just the other end of the spectrum as well. There are warnings about the danger of riches, and the Old Testament speaks over and over again against the rich people who oppress the poor. So, there’s not this clear cut kind of obvious path when it comes to riches and that they’re objectively bad or objectively good. The Scriptures give us both to understand the warnings that are there with it, as well as the opportunities that come to be a good steward, but what won the day at this time when Jesus was ministering to these people, what was winning the day was this concept that riches mean you are religiously right - you are good. And Jesus has to throw that out the window, and He does so with an even stronger illustration that comes in verse 25.

This illustration in verse 25, it’s hard to think of a stronger illustration. Starting back in like halfway in verse 24; “Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.” He addresses His disciples as children. This is the only time He does that in Mark’s gospel, the only time He calls them children, and it kind of reminds us of what we have just seen back in verses 13 and 16 when He said the people who receive the kingdom of God, they’re like children. It comes to them, and they receive it. They’re not the rich. They’re not those that have earned it. They’re not those that’ve done all these good things and then they get the kingdom of God. They’re children, and so Jesus reminds His disciples, children, those that only receive the kingdom because God gave it to them; “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!” And Jesus speaks in even the generic sense as well. It’s not just difficult for rich people, but He says in general, “how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!” And then in verse 25, when He goes to the illustration, He zooms in again on the rich, on that

class of wealthy people and the difficulty that they face; “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

And a lot of people look at this illustration and they read it, and they kind of just feel uncomfortable with it. They think this is just so wacky. It’s just a weird illustration. He might’ve meant something a little different because this is kind of a ridiculous one, and so people say, you know, in Greek, the word for camel and rope is very similar. So, maybe what was intended to be written was rope, and that’s what He said because, you know, the picture of rope going through the eye of a needle, that’s kind of impossible. That’s hard. So, that might be a little bit more what He’s talking about there. Or, some people say, hey, the eye of a needle, that literal hole that is so tiny, maybe He’s more referring to the Needle Gate in Jerusalem which actually wasn’t really there until the Medieval time, but still, some people say that was a really tiny gate, and if you wanted to bring your camel into Jerusalem, and you wanted to go through that gate, your camel could barely get through it. Well, any attempt to soften or change Jesus’ illustration is because people find it a little too ridiculous. They just don’t want to embrace what He said, what He actually said, and that’s the point. It is ridiculous. Let the illustration stand as a ridiculous picture of an impossible scenario. Right? That’s what it is.

As one commentator states for us to help us understand a little bit, as evidence that Jesus meant what He said, are several rabbinic parallels that draw an equally absurd analogy of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle. While the elephant was the largest land animal of Mesopotamia where the Babylonian Talmud was compiled, the camel was the largest animal in Israel. The eye of a needle was the smallest opening imaginable. The image of a camel trying to squeeze through one is delightfully absurd and impossible, and that’s the point; let it be absurd and impossible. So, why give this ridiculous illustration, the largest animal in Israel, a camel, going through the smallest opening imaginable, the eye of a needle? It’s impossible. That’s the point. It’s impossible. Why? This is Jesus continuing to confirm the overarching teaching that He’s been giving about the kingdom. He’s spoken about riches and how difficult they are and how they give you a handicap when it comes to receiving the kingdom, but more specifically, as far as inheriting eternal life, as far as being saved, there is this truth that Jesus keeps hitting on over and over, that is you can’t get it.

You can't earn it. You can't work for it. It's impossible. Get your bank account as big as you want. It's no good. Do as many good things as you can, try to be blameless in the Law even, which you are aren't. It doesn't work. You have to receive it. Any other path, any other route is impossible, like a camel trying to go through the eye of an needle - let it be that. That's what He's saying; mankind has no chance. They need God's grace. This is His point; apart from God's intervention. Salvation is impossible for mankind.

And if the illustration is not clear enough, here Jesus just plainly states it at the end of our text. At the end of text, 26-27, that's where we find the impossibility, flat out, the impossibility. We read, "And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.'" Notice again, as their surprise continues to just mount up and build even more, they're surprised at first when He talks about "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom..." and now, as He gives this illustration of a camel and the ridiculous impossibility of a camel fitting through the eye of a needle, they're even more astonished and stunned at what He's saying. So much so, that they're saying, "Then who can be saved?" And you have to think of their thinking once again. Where are they coming from? They're thinking, if you are rich, you are blessed. If you are rich, you are doing something right in the eyes of God. So for them, if this man who has apparently kept the commandments his whole life and who has been blessed by God with great riches, if he cannot be saved, "Then who can be saved?" I mean, this is like the model citizen for them at that time. This is the guy. This is who you want to be. You want to be the guy who's kept the commandments from your youth. You want to be the guy that can prove it because you have the riches, and you have the responsibility. You're a ruler. Everybody wants to be that guy, and here he is walking away sorrowful, devastated, not receiving the kingdom, not saved, and the disciples ask, if he can't get it, no way I can.

And this is where Jesus has to correct them. He looks at them again in this dramatic way just as He dramatically looked at this man and loved him before He spoke to him; "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man it is impossible...'" It is! You're right. You're almost upset that you're saying, "Then who can be saved?" And Jesus says you're right; "With man it is impossible..." That's the point; "...but not with God. For all things are

possible with God.” Man cannot work his way to eternal life with God. Man cannot leap the Grand Canyon of good deeds and righteousness to somehow get to God, and in fact, any effort on man’s part to train for such a jump would be just stupid and worthless. Jesus could not be any more clear; “With man it is impossible...” With man, to be saved, with man, to enter the kingdom, with man, to inherit eternal life, it’s impossible. There’s nothing they can do even with this rich, young ruler.

Praise the Lord! Jesus goes on and says, “...but not with God.” It’s impossible with man, “...but not with God.” That is the key. That is the point that He keeps making known to His disciples in different ways as He’s teaching God is the One who grants salvation. He knows you’re helpless. He has compassion and mercy upon you. He has the power and ability to save you from your sin. He desires to bring glory to His name. It all comes together in this beautiful plan of salvation, and so, what does He do? He offers His Son. He offers Jesus, as the disciples would come to know very soon, to not just live this perfect life that goes far beyond what this rich young man was claiming to have, but then, actually, pure, perfect life, externally and internally. All just to be nailed to a cross instead of receiving the reception of king as He ought to have. He was crucified a criminal, but that is God’s perfect plan because of His love and mercy and compassion for mankind. To slaughter His Son in our place; this is God’s way. This is God opening the door. This is God saying you’re right. It’s impossible. Look what I have done, and Me only, not you. All your work, all your efforts - filthy rags. But when I send My Son, the door is flung wide open to know Me, to inherit eternal life, to enter the kingdom as Jesus says in the end; “For all things are possible with God.”

There’s nothing that can rise up to a level of difficulty as God’s salvation plan, the giving of His only Son and that sacrifice that came with it, taking spiritually dead corpses like you and me and bringing them to life. This is the greatest miracle. This is the greatest display of power and ability and God’s character. And if that is who God is and that’s what He can do, then even the rich and even those that have wealth and even those that can be distracted and obsessed and coveting. They too can still be saved because it’s the work of God. It’s the work of God in people’s lives. It’s the work of God in our lives. What a beautiful implication that is for the message we get to tell people. Stop trying to be the best person, the best version of yourself, and make that acceptable to God because that’s not it. I have Jesus Himself

right here saying that's not it. That's impossible. Don't do it. Let Me give you a different route. Let Me give you the right route. Let Me give you Jesus; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..." Jesus the One who is grace and truth in human form, who came down to die on your behalf, who rose again and is victorious in heaven now. You want to have all the boxes checked. You want to have ease and peace of mind about the future. Come to Christ and beg for mercy. There's not a more safe place you could be than at the feet of Christ; that is the message that we cling to, and that is the message that we declare. Beautiful! This is a beautiful message of the kingdom. We enter the kingdom not because of anything we have brought or anything we have done, but because of Jesus alone. This is God's plan because "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."