

Fame, Fortune & Eternal Life -- Mark 10:17-31

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

Lord, we are about to open Your Word. We lay aside confidence in ourselves, realizing we know nothing about Your Word as we could if we were filled with more of Your Spirit. Lord, we want to be taught by You and believe that Your Word has the power to make us like You. May we all leave here filled with more of Your Spirit than when we came. In Jesus' name, amen.

How rich are you? This story is in particular about those who are rich. Most of us probably never put ourselves in this category, and may feel that this story doesn't relate to you. But you might be wealthier than you realize.

Consider this. Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names. One fourth of the world lives without electricity. And half of the world lives with water and sanitation problems. Now let's think in terms of our income. In 2008 almost half of the world, over three billion people, brought home less than \$1,000. At least 80 percent of the people in the world lived on less than \$3,500. There's a website, globalrichlist.com, which calculates how rich you are compared to the rest of the world. Their figures are based on figures from the World Bank Development Research Group in the year 2000. Based on their calculations, if your annual income is \$100,000 a year, you are richer than over 99% of the people in the world. If you bring home \$40,000 a year, you are wealthier than 97% of the world. If you make \$20,000 a year, you are still in the top 11% richest people in the world. In order to be in the world average, you only need to make \$850 a year.

Do you feel richer than you did a minute ago? So maybe this story on fame, fortune, and eternal life has more to do with us than we first thought.

Let's now consider a summary of today's story:

A man came running up to Jesus, asking what he could do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus referred him to the commandments, he claimed to have kept all of them. Jesus then told him to sell everything he had, give the money to the poor, and then follow Him. The man, however, was unwilling to do this and walked away. Jesus then declared that it is impossible for a rich person to enter God's kingdom. The disciples were stunned by this, asking, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus assured them that with God it was possible. When Peter reminded Jesus of how they had left all for Him, He assured them of a reward, but He also warned them against putting themselves first.

Let's now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. For, you see, this story is not so much about the "Rich, Young Ruler", as this story is commonly referred to. This story is more about Jesus than the rich man. Mark took the time to write down this story so that we might know Jesus and our hearts might be drawn out to Him.

This story is found in Mark 10:17-31, page 893 and 894 in your pew Bibles. I would encourage you to follow along in your own Bibles, as I will not be reading all the verses or putting them on the screen.

So, first of all, Jesus experienced an urgent request. This has been a common scene in the book of Mark. Many people have come to Jesus with an urgent request. Father have come to Jesus pleading for healing of their son and daughter. A mother has come to Jesus crying out for Him to deliver her daughter. On and on the stories go, with urgent requests. And yet this time the urgent request is not for someone else. It's a man asking on his own behalf. He doesn't ask for healing. He asks for advice and counsel. In Matthew 19:20 this same story is recorded and this man is referred to as being "young". Luke 18:18 records this man as being a "ruler". Later on in the story we will read that this man was very wealthy. Hence, the common reference to him as the "Rich, Young Ruler". Mark 10:17 pictures this man running up to Jesus. Jesus was walking down

the road and was stopped by this man, who knelt in front of Him. He has but one request: "Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He felt that he was missing something. If only he could know what to do to be worthy of being in God's family, an heir to eternal life.

Second, Jesus experienced showing the way to eternal life. In Mark 10:18 Jesus directed a question back at the young man: "Why do you call Me good?" This man had addressed Jesus as "good teacher". This was not a common expression for rabbis. This man was going over the top, revealing a conviction that Jesus was more than just another rabbi. So Jesus called him on it – "Why did you call me a *good* teacher?" Then He reminded the man that in reality no one is good, except God. It seems that Jesus was giving this man an opportunity to express faith in Him as God's own Son. Well, the man refused to respond to Jesus' invitation, so Jesus moved on. In verse 19 of Mark 10 He listed five of the Ten Commandments and another direction not given in the Ten Commandments, "Do not defraud". The five commandments Jesus listed are from the last six, which deal with our duty, not to God, but to one another. So, this gives us a clue to this man's need. He was lacking in love to his fellow man. Just for your information, the New King James Version switched the first two commandments. In the original Greek Mark actually records Jesus as stating, "Do not murder", before He stated, "Do not commit adultery." The last commandment Jesus mentioned is actually commandment #5. For whatever reason Jesus moved that one to the end, and it is only the one of the six commands that is in the imperative form. The others are in the subjunctive form, implying a command, but not expressly being so grammatically.

In Mark 10:20 the man replied by stating that he had kept all of these commandments since he was a child. Apparently he had been raised in a devout Jewish home. And yet, something was still missing. He had been given, it seems, the best training Judaism had to offer, and yet it left him with no satisfactory answers to this all-important question, "What should I do to inherit eternal life?" Mark 10:21 begins, "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him." It gives us the picture of Jesus looking this man over. He reads him inside and out. He sees all that this man could become. He feels his confusion and agony of soul. And His heart goes out to him. The word translated, "loved" is the Greek word, "agapao". It's the word John uses so often in his writings: "God so loved the world." "God is love." "Let us love one another." This is the first time Mark has used "agapao" in his gospel account. Clearly, what Jesus was feeling in his heart for this man was a special admiration and affection. He wanted so badly for this man to become one of His own disciples.

Then Jesus spoke. He made His counsel as simple and attractive as He possibly could. "One thing you lack," He said. In other words, "There's only one thing you're missing. Your great riches have failed to give you this one thing." Jesus' directions began with three commands: (1) "go away", (2) "sell whatever you have", and (3) "give to the poor". Jesus then assured the man that his return would be out of this world: "You will have treasure in heaven." It seems that the directive to "take up the cross" was added in the later, less authentic Greek manuscripts. So, perhaps Jesus next words were actually, "Come. Follow Me!" The word translated, "Come" is an imperative form. But its meaning is rich. When God called Moses to Egypt, He used this same word – "Come!" When Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, He used this same word, "Come!" When Jesus appeared to the apostle John in vision and invited him to see the New Jerusalem, He used this same word, "Come!" Jesus was calling this man to be one of His own disciples. He was extending to him the greatest privilege in all of the world. He was inviting him to let go of fame and fortune in this world and offering this man an eternal relationship with Himself and unlimited treasures in heaven. Jesus showed him the way to eternal life. He showed him the way to what his heart was longing for.

Third, Jesus experienced mourning the loss of the wealthy. Mark 10:22 records the man's response to Jesus' counsel and directions - "But he was sad at this word..." "Gloomy" might be a better translation of this Greek word, which is only used one other time in the New Testament. And in this reference it refers to the skies as being "overcast". It gives us the picture of the radiance and hope in this man's face suddenly fading and turning into an expression of gloom. Mark then records that he went away "grieved" or "distressed". Why was he so heartbroken? Mark says it was because he had "great possessions". He was overwhelmed by the thought of losing them. He refused to give up his current fortunes and his hopes for greater fame and wealth. And so he walked away from eternal life. He walked away from the only One who could supply what his heart desired. Mark 10:23 records Jesus' response. First of all He "looked around". It's as if He was in a state of

shock. In disbelief and sorrow He searched for words and probably a shoulder to grieve upon. His words are mournful: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" As He looked upon the fading figure of this rich man, He spoke of all those who are in the same condition. "These people will have such a hard time getting into heaven!" The reason is because their riches have stolen their hearts' affections and hold them captive. They are lost to the love of God.

Fourth, Jesus experienced speaking hope. Mark 10:24 records the disciples' response to Jesus' words: "And the disciples were astonished." They were stunned and shocked that it could be so hard for the wealthy to make it into God's kingdom. Jesus no doubt recognized their disbelief and yet He only intensifies His former declaration. In Mark 10:25 He declares, "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." Some have speculated that the "eye of a needle" Jesus referred to here was actually a small opening that camels had to squeeze through in order to enter the city gates. However, there is no Scriptural evidence for this whatsoever. The word translated "eye" actually means "hole". So, it could be referring to the hole that a needle makes in a garment that is being sown. Clearly Jesus was picturing an absolute impossibility. The disciples got the message loud and clear and their astonishment in verse 24 increases to being astonished beyond measure in verse 26. In complete disbelief they cry, "Who then can be saved?" It is evident that in this culture wealth was seen as a divine favor. Only those who were specially favored by God were given riches. He didn't give them to just anybody. So, if it was impossible for a rich man to be saved, it seemed that nobody was good enough.

But here is where Jesus spoke hope. In the midst of this mournful and distressing situation Jesus revealed a place where the impossible becomes possible. In Mark 10:27 He pictured two possible locations in which someone can live. One location is "with men". The other is "with God". Jesus was, in essence, telling the disciples, "If you live among men, this is impossible. But if you live in the presence of God, nothing is impossible."

Last of all, Jesus experienced giving a qualified reassurance. In Mark 10:28 Peter expressed his own words of hope: "See, we have left all and followed You." In other words, "Look! We have done what this man wasn't willing to do! We're Your best pals!" He set themselves up as worthy candidates of eternal life in God's kingdom. Jesus didn't make them a special offer. Instead He said that anyone who leaves everything for Him will be compensated a hundred fold in this life. And in the life to come they will receive eternal life. So, without feeding their ego, Jesus did reassure His disciples of a reward for their sacrifice. But He also reminded them in Mark 10:30 that on this earth the blessings are mixed "with persecutions". And finally in verse 31 He added a word of caution to His disciples, who wanted so much to be first in His kingdom: "But many who are first will be last and the last first." In the life to come a great reversal of roles is coming. In Luke 16 Jesus told a parable that illustrates this quite well. It is often referred to as the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Lazarus was a poor beggar who lived by the house of the rich man. After both of these men died their positions were reversed. The rich man lost his comforts and experienced torment, while the poor beggar was freed from his hardships and comforted. And so Jesus revealed to His disciples that many people in this world who spend their lives trying to be the greatest will find themselves last in God's kingdom.

Let's now consider how this story reveals Jesus as our example. This story has been recorded for us not just so we can learn what Jesus experienced. It has been given to us so that we might become people who live like Jesus lived. Jesus shows us in this story how a healthy Christian lives in the year 2011. First of all, He is revealed as our example in that He worked to awaken love. The man in our story already had an earnest desire for eternal life. He wanted to know what he needed to do so he would be worthy of attaining this eternal life. Jesus in essence showed him that what he was missing was the love of God in his heart. He exposed this man's riches as being the great barrier that was keeping him from loving his fellow man more than himself. Jesus' heart was overflowing with love for this man. And He tried every possible means to awaken His Godly love in this man's heart as well.

So, Jesus reveals that a healthy Christian is someone whose heart is full of love. Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets in the Two Great Commandments. Do you remember what they are? Jesus will mention them in Mark chapter 12: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all

your mind, and with all your strength." And the second one is similar, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus made it clear that love fulfills the Law. A healthy Christian is someone whose heart is filled with God's love. Notice what Ellen White says in the book *Desire of Ages* pg. 522 – "*If [the rich man] had realized the value of the offered gift, quickly would he have enrolled himself as one of Christ's followers.*" If this man in our story would have realized how God's love satisfies as nothing else, he would have grabbed a hold of Jesus' invitation with all he was worth. Many will be lost simply because they never realized how satisfying God's love is. The happiest, most contented people on earth are those who have let God's love fill their hearts.

Second, Jesus is revealed as our example in this story in that He showed how the impossible becomes possible. Jesus revealed to His disciples to very different worlds. One is "with men" and the other is "with God" (Mark 10:27). Each of us can choose which world we want to live in. But Jesus shows that a healthy Christian is someone who lives "with God". It's someone who experiences the impossible. It's someone who lives in the world but has also learned how to live where God dwells. I invite you to turn with me to Hebrews 11:24-27. The author of Hebrews is describing people in the Old Testament who were people of faith. One of those people was Moses. Notice what is said about him in these verses. (Read) Moses lived in an invisible world, beyond Egypt. He lived where the impossible becomes possible. Because He lived "with God" and not "with men", he led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea on dry ground. And so Jesus, Moses, and others reveal that a healthy Christian is someone who experiences the impossible. They are free to witness God work miracles. I don't want to know what is possible. I want to know what God says, and to move ahead based on that.

It is tragic that this man in our story walked away from Jesus so that he could walk with the world. His possessions held him captive and he couldn't see how he could live without them. Wherever we might be on this chart, some of us might find ourselves held captive by our possessions. What if God called you to leave everything, including your family and friends, and go overseas as a missionary? What if He called you to empty your savings or retirement account and give it to charity? Is there anything God could ask you to give up that would seem too much? Adam was tested with obeying God even if it meant losing Eve. And he failed. Abraham was asked to give up his only son. He passed. Yes, these are exceptional cases, but Jesus makes it clear that nothing and no one can come between us and Him. Our closing hymn is entitled, "Nothing Between". Is there anything more important in your life than God? I pray that we all might not let anything come between us and our Savior.