

### Mark 10:17-31

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” <sup>20</sup> “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” <sup>28</sup> Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you! <sup>29</sup> “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

I CANNOT SPEAK FOR LITTLE BOYS, BUT MOST LITTLE GIRLS ARE DELIGHTED BY FAIRY TALES.

THE ONE NICE THING ABOUT MOST OF THEM IS THAT THEY USUALLY END WITH THE HERO AND HEROINE LIVING HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

IN FACT, ONE SURE SIGN THAT A STORY IS A FANTASY IS THAT IT PROMISES THEY WILL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

IT IS FANTASY BECAUSE IN REAL LIFE NO ONE REALLY LIVES AS HAPPILY EVER AFTER AS THOSE STORIES PROMISE, SINCE REAL LIFE IS A MIXTURE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THERE IS HOWEVER A SLICE OF CHRISTIANITY THAT TEACHES THAT GOD WILL GIVE THE FAITHFUL, THE EARTHLY, HAPPILY EVER AFTER OF FINANCIAL PROSPERITY AND GOOD HEALTH, THEY DESIRE.

THEY DRAW THEIR VIEWS FROM SEVERAL BIBLICAL PASSAGES, INCLUDING MARK 10:29-30.

IT IS THERE JESUS SAID GOD WILL RETURN A HUNDRED FOLD ALL WE GIVE TO GOD.

THIS LEADS SOME TO PROMISE IF YOU GIVE MONEY TO THEIR MINISTRY OR CAUSE, GOD WILL RETURN TO YOU SO MUCH MORE THAN YOU GIVE.

MANY PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TO CHURCHES AND PREACHERS WHO SAY THINGS LIKE: “GOD WANTS YOU TO PROSPER FINANCIALLY”, OR “YOU CAN HAVE GOOD HEALTH IF YOU HAVE ENOUGH FAITH.”

THERE ARE ALSO FACEBOOK POSTINGS THAT PROMISE IF YOU TYPE “AMEN “, AND SHARE THE PAGE THAT EITHER QUOTES SCRIPTURE OR SAYS SOMETHING POSITIVE ABOUT JESUS, GOD WILL SHOWER YOU WITH BLESSINGS, OR ANSWER YOUR MOST HEARTFELT PRAYER.

ALL SUCH PROMISES, WHILE TEMPTING, ARE ALSO UNBIBLICAL IF YOU LOOK AT THE PRIMARY MESSAGE OF SCRIPTURE WHICH IS ABOUT SALVATION.

LOOK BACK AT THE GOSPEL STORY AND JESUS’ PROMISE AND THINK ABOUT IT. IN THE FIRST PLACE, NONE OF THE DISCIPLES PERSONALLY BECAME RICH.

RATHER THAN PERSONAL WEALTH, THEY WERE BLESSED WITH THE LARGER FAMILY OF BELIEVERS, AND A SHARE IN COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

SECONDLY, AFTER JESUS SPOKE ABOUT THE RETURN THOSE WHO GIVE TO GOD AND FOLLOW JESUS WILL RECEIVE, HE ADDED- PERSECUTION WILL GO ALONG WITH BLESSINGS.

SO MUCH FOR LIVING HAPPILY EVER AFTER! IF THAT IS WHAT WE SEEK, THEN FOLLOWING JESUS DOES NOT PROMISE TO PROVIDE WHAT WE WANT.

IT IS TRUE THE BIBLE PROMISES GOD WILL GIVE BLESSINGS. AND, THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH WANTING THEM.

BUT WHAT IS NOT GOOD IS IF OUR MAIN FOCUS IS ON WHAT WE DESIRE WHEN IT COMES TO: WEALTH, OR FAME, OR RELATIONSHIPS, OR CAREER, ECT.

OVER AND OVER AGAIN, THROUGHOUT BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS, THE MESSAGE IS THAT OUR GREATEST NEED IS FOR GOD, AND WITHOUT GOD WE GAIN NOTHING THAT IS LASTING.

THE STORY ABOUT THE RICH MAN AND JESUS OFFERS US AN EXAMPLE OF THE DANGERS OF THINKING WE CAN INSPIRE, PERSUADE, OR FORCE GOD TO GIVE US WHAT WE ASK FOR AND DESIRE.

TODAY I'D LIKE US TO APPROACH THE STORY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RICH MAN, LOOKING BACK, ON THE EVENT 20 YEARS AFTER JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

IMAGINE A MUCH OLDER MAN SITTING OUTSIDE HIS HOME SPEAKING TO SOME ONE HAS COME TO HIM BECAUSE HE HEARD THIS MAN MET JESUS.

“DID I KNOW JESUS OF NAZARETH YOU ASK? WELL I SAW HIM AND HEARD HIM, BUT SO DID MANY PEOPLE IN THIS REGION, AND ELSEWHERE.

HOWEVER, I DID MEET HIM AND SPEAK TO HIM FACE TO FACE, ONLY IT IS NOT AN ENCOUNTER I WOULD BRAG ABOUT.

I REMEMBER THE DAY VERY WELL. I WENT TO HIM TO ASK A SERIOUS QUESTION, WHICH WAS -HOW COULD I INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

I CAN STILL SEE MYSELF KNEELING IN FRONT OF JESUS, HUMBLE, AND YET PROUD WHEN HE ASKED HOW WELL I FOLLOWED THE LAW.

PROUD BECAUSE I COULD TELL HIM I HAD FOLLOWED THOSE COMMANDMENTS SINCE MY YOUTH.

I CAN STILL SEE HIS FACE RIGHT BEFORE HE SPOKE TO ME AGAIN. YOU SEE, IT PUZZLED ME.

I THOUGHT I SAW PITY IN HIS EYES, COMPASSION, AND PERHAPS EVEN LOVE.

I WAS CONFUSED BECAUSE I WONDERED WHY HE WOULD PITY A MAN WHO DID AS WELL I HAD IN FOLLOWING THE COMMANDMENTS TO LOVE OTHERS.

BUT THEN, HE SPOKE TO ME AGAIN, AND WHEN THE MEANING OF HIS WORDS SUNK IN- I WAS DEVASTATED.

THE MESSAGE BEGAN WELL, FOR JESUS TOLD ME I ONLY LACKED ONE THING MORE.

HOWEVER NO SOONER DID HOPE AND JOY ARISE WITHIN ME, THAN JESUS FINISHED HIS COMMAND.

HE TOLD ME TO SELL ALL OF MY POSSESSIONS, GIVE ALL THE PROCEEDS TO THE POOR, AND FOLLOW HIM.

I WAS SO SHOCKED I COULD NOT SPEAK, AND SO I WALKED AWAY IN GRIEF, WITHOUT EVEN RESPONDING TO HIM.

WHAT JESUS ASKED OF ME WAS IMPOSSIBLE. I COULD GIVE MORE TO THE POOR, I MIGHT HAVE EVEN BEEN ABLE TO SELL HALF, BUT NOT EVERYTHING.

NO, I WAS NOT MERELY BEING SELFISH, ALTHOUGH I MUST ADMIT GIVING UP EVERYTHING WAS A HARD TASK, EVEN IF I HAD BEEN TEMPTED TO DO SO.

I WAS NOT, BECAUSE I HAD A FAMILY. EVEN IF I WAS WILLING TO LIVE IN POVERTY AND FOLLOW JESUS, HOW COULD I FORCE MY WIFE AND YOUNG CHILDREN TO DO THE SAME?

HOW COULD I GIVE AWAY MY SON'S INHERITANCE, OR NOT PROVIDE A DOWRY FOR MY DAUGHTER?

NO, NO, IT WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK JESUS ASKED OF ME THAT DAY.

IN FACT, WHAT HE ASKED ME TO DO IN ORDER TO EARN SALVATION WAS THE ONE THING I COULD NOT DO.

AND SO I WALKED AWAY, FEELING SAD AND REJECTED, AND THEN LATER- A LITTLE ANGRY AT JESUS.

I MIGHT EVEN HAVE STAYED ANGRY, EXCEPT THAT I WAS IN JERUSALEM FOR PASSOVER THAT SAME YEAR, AND HEARD JESUS WAS ARRESTED AND CONDEMNED TO DEATH, WHICH WAS SAD BECAUSE I STILL THOUGHT HE WAS A GOOD MAN.

NO, I DID NOT WATCH HIM CARRY HIS CROSS, NOR DID I LEAVE THE CITY TO VIEW THE CRUCIFIXION, BUT I DID GRIEVE FOR HIM AND HIS FOLLOWERS.

OF COURSE, AS I AM SURE YOU HAVE HEARD, HIS DEATH WAS NOT THE END OF THE STORY.

GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, AND JESUS SENT HIS FIRST DISCIPLES, AND MANY OTHERS TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE SALVATION HE OFFERS.

HOW AMAZED I WAS TO HEAR THE NEWS, AND YET IT MADE ME SAD ONCE MORE, BECAUSE I WAS CERTAIN I HAD LOST MY CHANCE TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

AFTER ALL, JESUS PERSONALLY INVITED ME TO FOLLOW HIM AND I WALKED AWAY.

SURELY IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO BE FORGIVEN, TO BE SAVED, ESPECIALLY SINCE I KEPT MY MONEY AND MY POSSESSIONS.

ODDLY ENOUGH, ALTHOUGH I BELIEVED I HAD LOST MY ONE CHANCE, I STILL WAS DRAWN TO LISTEN WHENEVER ONE OF THE APOSTLES SPOKE ABOUT JESUS IN THIS AREA.

IN FACT, IT WAS AFTER ONE SUCH EVENT THAT MY LIFE CHANGED IN A WAY I NEVER EXPECTED IT WOULD OR COULD.

ON THAT DAY I LISTENED AGAIN TO SOMEONE TELL ABOUT JESUS.

I TURNED AWAY AFTER THE DISCIPLE FINISHED SPEAKING, FEELING AS SAD ON THAT DAY AS WHEN I TURNED MY BACK ON JESUS.

BUT THE MAN, MUST HAVE SEEN MY FACE BECAUSE HE STOPPED ME AND ASKED ME WHAT WAS WRONG.

I HESITATED TO ANSWER AT FIRST, BUT THEN I TOLD HIM HOW TWO YEARS BEFORE I HAD SPOKEN TO JESUS, BUT WALKED AWAY FROM HIM.

I ADDED THAT JESUS TOLD ME WHAT TO DO TO EARN ETERNAL LIFE, BUT I COULD NOT DO IT.

EVEN NOW, WHILE I HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE GENEROUS WITH MY GIVING TO THE POOR, I STILL HAVE FAMILY AND SERVANTS WHO DEPEND ON ME-HOW CAN I IMPOVERISH THEM, AS WELL AS MYSELF?

HE LISTENED INTENTLY TO MY WORDS AND I SAW IN HIS EYES SOMETHING CLOSE TO WHAT I HAD SEEN IN THE EYES OF JESUS.

AND SO I TURNED AGAIN FROM THE DISCIPLE, BUT HE GRABBED MY ARM AND ASKED ME NOT TO GO.

I WAS A LITTLE EMBARRASSED WHEN HE REMINDED ME THAT HE HAD BEEN WITH JESUS THAT DAY, AND HE HAD HEARD THE CONVERSATION.

THEN HE TOLD ME JESUS SPOKE ABOUT ME AFTER I HAD LEFT HIM, AND THE WORDS WERE HARDLY COMFORTING TO ME.

JESUS SAID, 'IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH AN EYE OF A NEEDLE THAN FOR SOMEONE RICH TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD'.

NEEDLESS TO SAY THOSE WORDS DISTRESSED ME, BUT THE MAN STOPPED ME AGAIN WHEN I TRIED TO WALK AWAY, SAYING THAT I NEEDED TO HEAR WHAT ELSE JESUS SAID THAT DAY.

I DID NOT WISH TO HEAR ANYTHING MORE, BUT I LISTENED ANYWAY. HE TOLD ME WHEN HE AND HIS FELLOW DISCIPLES ASKED HOW CAN ANYONE BE SAVED? JESUS SAID THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US, BUT NOT FOR GOD.

THEN HE SHARED WITH ME THE GOOD NEWS THAT I CANNOT EARN MY SALVATION, NOT EVEN IF I WERE TO GO AND SELL EVERYTHING AND THEN GIVE THE MONEY TO THE POOR.

HE SAID IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO BE GOOD OR RIGHTEOUS ENOUGH, OR DO ANYTHING TO EARN ETERNAL LIFE.

THEN HE TOLD ME THE REASON WHY JESUS DIED. IT WAS TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE, WHICH WAS TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS.

THE DISCIPLE TOLD ME IT WAS NOT TOO LATE FOR ME, BECAUSE GOD, THROUGH JESUS, HAS GIVEN ME ANOTHER CHANCE.

HE SHARED THAT THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS WAS FOR MY SAKE, ALL OUR SAKES; RICH AND POOR, JEW AND GENTILE, MALE AND FEMALE, SLAVE AND FREE ALIKE.

ALL I NEEDED TO DO WAS TO BELIEVE IN JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR. HOW WONDERFUL HIS WORDS WERE FOR ME TO HEAR, AND THEY WERE EVEN MORE WONDERFUL TO BELIEVE.

AND I DID BELIEVE. SUDDENLY I FELT IN MY HEART THAT MY SINS WERE FORGIVEN, EVEN MY SIN OF WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS.

I WAS BAPTIZED, AND MY HOUSEHOLD WAS AS WELL. NOW I AM A MAN WHO HAS A RICHER TREASURE IN HEAVEN THAN I CAN EVER HAVE ON EARTH.

SO TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION MY FRIEND, I DO KNOW JESUS, AND I LOVE HIM BECAUSE I KNOW HE FIRST LOVED ME.

NOW, LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION-DO YOU KNOW JESUS?"

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WE, OF COURSE CANNOT KNOW WHAT REALLY HAPPENED TO THAT RICH MAN, WHO WALKED AWAY FROM JESUS, BUT PERHAPS WE OUGHT NOT TO WRITE HIM OFF AS MANY CHRISTIANS DO.

AFTER ALL, SALVATION IS NOT EARNED BY WHAT WE GIVE TO OTHERS OR GIVE UP FOR GOD, IT IS EARNED BY JESUS AND IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

THAT WAS THE ULTIMATE POINT JESUS WAS MAKING, IN GIVING WHAT WAS FOR THAT PARTICULAR MAN AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK.

IT WAS ALSO THE POINT HE WAS MAKING BY HIS WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT ENTERING INTO GOD'S KINGDOM. SO COULD IT NOT BE POSSIBLE THIS MAN, LIKE MANY OTHERS EVENTUALLY CAME TO BELIEVE IN THE RISEN CHRIST?

REMEMBER, THE RICH MAN WANTED JESUS TO TELL HIM WHAT HE COULD DO TO EARN OR INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE.

THE SAVIOR'S RESPONSE WAS MEANT TO REVEAL THAT THERE WAS NOTHING HE, NOR ANY OF US, CAN DO TO EARN SALVATION-THAT WAS JESUS' TASK NOT OURS.

WHAT WE CAN DO, IS BY FAITH, RECEIVE THE GIFT OF SALVATION JESUS EARNED FOR US, AND FOLLOW HIM.

CARING FOR OTHERS, GIVING TIME AND TALENTS, AND MONEY OR OTHER POSSESSIONS IS PART OF HOW WE FOLLOW. BUT WE MUST NEVER FORGET THAT NONE OF THOSE THINGS CAN EARN US OUR PLACE IN HEAVEN.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, HELP US TO TRANSFORM OUR PRIORITIES, SO THAT WITH OPEN HANDS AND THANKFUL HEARTS, WE WILL OFFER TO YOU ALL WE HAVE, FOR IT IS ALREADY YOURS. YOU SO FREELY GIVE US WHAT WE NEED, ESPECIALLY SALVATION. AND YOU PROMISE THAT GREATER AND LASTING TREASURES AWAIT US IN HEAVEN. WE THANK JESUS, FOR THE SALVATION AND ETERNAL LIFE WE OURSELVES CANNOT EARN. HELP US TO SHARE GENEROUSLY WITH OTHERS ALL THAT YOU SO GRACIOUSLY GIVE TO US. IN JESUS' NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

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