

WITH MAN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT NOT WITH GOD
Mark 10:17–31

INTRODUCTION

What do you treasure in life? That is the question raised in our Bible passage today. The question is presented to a man seeking religious satisfaction; yet, by interacting with this text, God is giving us the opportunity to answer the same question. What do I treasure in life? What do you treasure in life? And, which treasure truly satisfies?

TEXT: Mark 10:17–31

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 man is eager to meet Jesus. He is looking for something: eternal life. He is not there to test Jesus nor to challenge Him. He sincerely is looking to acquire the truest and best treasure of all – eternal life. Rightly is mankind obsessed with the seeking life after this life. Ponce DeLeon, the first European explorer to discover Florida, was seeking a fountain that would give eternal youth to all who drank from it. Almost all the religious efforts of mankind point towards the afterlife. People instinctively desire to continue on after their bodies are gone. In answer the question, "Do you seek to become immortal by your work?" Woody Allen replied, "I'd want to be immortal by not dying!"

So would this man. He has realized that this good life ends. He wants to continue on. He has heard of Jesus and believes that He can show him the path to the treasure he seeks.

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

Who is morally good? God alone. The man is right to call Jesus a good teacher. Jesus does not deny that He is good, rather He points out that only God is good. How can Jesus be good unless He is God? Of course, we know that Jesus is God, and therefore good.

19 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.'

20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

Jesus began listing the ten commandments. Now He is evaluating how good the man is. The man says he has kept these commandments since childhood. By this, he reveals at least two things. One, he is convinced that he has been as good as he can be. Two, he feels a need for more than obedience to commands.

He has been a "good" boy, a good man. But Jesus has pointed out already that none is good but God. The man did not argue the point. In fact, he acknowledges that keeping the commandments as best he could still leaves him wondering if he will be able to gain eternal life.

21 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 question Jesus is answering is, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Having evaluated the patient, Jesus gives him a practical and simple answer. What the man lacks is only one thing. He only needs one thing to gain eternal life. The man had been working to keep the ten commandments his whole life. That had not gotten him what he wanted. Well, he only needed one thing.

What was that one thing he lacked? Treasure in heaven. Treasure on earth is nice, but no matter how long you have it, it cannot stretch into eternal life. So, sell the treasure of earth, give it away, and follow Jesus.

All that seems to be one action. Ditch the stuff of earth, do good works, and I'm inviting you to join Me. That is His path to eternal life.

Does the eternal life come in selling his possessions? Taking a vow of poverty? Nope. Poverty on earth does not equal riches in heaven. Does eternal life come in giving away your things to help the poor? Nope. In fact, in one place Paul shows how futile it is to simply divest yourself of your wealth only when he writes:

"If I give away all I have ... but have not love, I gain nothing." –1 Cor 13.3

The eternal life is in following Jesus. Jesus declared this several other times, saying things like, "Take up your cross, follow Me," and "I am the way, the truth and the life," and "I am the bread that comes down from heaven...whoever believes has eternal life."

It is logical then to ask, "Well, if following Jesus is the way to eternal life, then why does Jesus also tell the man to sell all he has and give it to the poor in order to gain treasure in heaven?"

Fair question. There are a number of ways of getting at that answer, but perhaps the illustration of a good golf swing will help. In order to do well at a golf swing, you must do several things. You must have your weight over your feet, and your feet the proper distance apart, and with your head not moving, you must look at the ball, pull straight back with your club, not bending your left arm nor wrist, swing down towards the ball, turning your hips as your swing comes down, shifting your weight from your back leg back to the front, etc. That's a lot of things to do, but it is one only one move. It is a golf swing.

To follow Jesus, you have to give up your treasure, period. It is one move. The man liked to get things. He had many things. He wanted one more thing, eternal life. In order to get that thing, he had to let go of what he had. Jesus put him at a crossroads: He sensed his spiritual need, and now he was told what it would cost to meet that need.

He can follow Jesus, but he can't bring his stuff with him. The same is true for you and I. You can follow Jesus but not bring your stuff with you. Am I saying that in order to follow Jesus you have to sell your things and give them all away? That's between you and God. What I am saying is that if you will follow Jesus, you cannot bring your stuff with you. In this world, it is impossible to have no possessions at all. At the very least, we all need clothing and food. The issue is, what is your treasure? What do you hold with an open hand and what will you give

away? Jesus was telling this man to take all his wealth, open his hand, and give it away. But the treasure he wanted, that he could keep only by following Jesus.

I know that we all want to know what Jesus is saying to us on this matter, right? Should we all quit our jobs, sell everything, and wander around looking for people to serve? That's not practical! We would be begging for bread ourselves! Also, we are instructed to work and earn money to take care of our own needs and to share with others. Then, practically, what is Jesus saying to us? The practical part, each one of us must work out ourselves, but there is one thing I am sure of: **The ownership of everything we have, even our own lives, must be relinquished at the moment we follow Jesus. It's all one move.**

My house? God's house. My money? God's money. My things? God's things. My job? God's job. My hobbies? God's hobbies. My time? God's time. It is impossible to live this life without possessions –but where is my treasure? Can I, and will I, happily part with anything I own to serve my King? That is the issue.

In the case of this man, Jesus is giving him a great invitation –one I'd hope none of us would have passed up if we were there. He is inviting him to join His traveling band of disciples. What an honor. All he has to do, is free himself up for service by ditching his stuff. That's all. What will the man do?

22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Well, that settles that. He wanted eternal life, but he wanted his stuff more. If following Jesus meant parting with his stuff, then it was not for him.

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!"

24 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!"

25 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."

26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"

27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

How difficult is it for Americans to enter the kingdom of heaven! We have so much! We, like the man in the story, are asked to follow Jesus but told we can't bring our stuff. We live to gain and keep our stuff. To give up our stuff is to give up our status, our goals, our lives, isn't it? Or is it?

Jesus points out that getting into heaven is hard, period. Getting a rich man in? even harder. Camel through a needle's eye! The disciples are blown away by this, and perhaps a little worried themselves. Can anyone be saved?

Jesus lets them know that just because it is hard that does not mean it is impossible. Mankind can't do it. **With man salvation is "impossible." But not with God.**

And this simple truth is the hinge of the door of heaven. Man cannot do it. He cannot find a way to eternal life. With man's religions? Impossible. Can't be done. With man's wealth?

Nope. With man's learning, science, genetics? Uh-uh. With man's goodness? Not gonna work. With man, salvation is impossible. But not with God.

God can do what man cannot. God sent His Son from heaven. His Son came down from heaven, in the form of a man, and did what man cannot: He lived a morally good and perfect life. Then, having died on a cross to pay for man's sins, He did something else that man could not –He rose from the dead. He attained eternal life. Now, He can do what man cannot –He can give eternal life away to anyone He pleases. He has purchased forgiveness of sins. He can share the joy of forever with anyone who wants.

This rich man came to the right place. He came up to Jesus and said, "How can I attain eternal life?" He was so close to getting what he sought. Jesus told him: Follow me, but don't bring your stuff –and the man turned away.

How about you? Do you remember when you first came to Jesus for eternal life? What did you choose? What do you love now? Where is your treasure?

Upon seeing this man, and hearing Jesus say that it is hard for a rich man to get to heaven, Peter began to consider himself and his comrades. Compared to the rich man, had they not given up all? Maybe they did not have that much (except maybe Matthew, who was rich), but they had followed Jesus. What about them? Peter asked Jesus this very thing:

28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."

29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,

30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands,

Ironically, Jesus tells Peter that he will have both heavenly and earthly treasure. Did you make the choice to follow Jesus, Peter? Did you leave behind your home and your lands and even family members who did not believe? That's okay, because you have joined a large family right here on earth. Whatever they have is shared with you for all they have they see as belonging to God.

Jesus is referring to the home people find in the church, in Christian community. This is why we must meet together. Meeting online is the best we can do for now, but it is not best. What is best? Meeting together, to worship, in homes, in public. A healthy church is made up of people who welcome others into their community, who love one another.

So, Jesus points out, practically, though you have left all, you have all. You have what matters: other people to love. Your needs will be met in the church, physically and emotionally, as family members.

Then Jesus throws in two other important things you receive when you follow Jesus:

30....with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

With persecution, and in the age to come, eternal life. How's that for a fly in the ointment? **You get family and homes but you also get persecutions in this life. We do not have a perfect world yet. This whole beautiful earth is scarred with pain, and this good life is**

marred by death. People of earth will at times hate you for following Jesus. But that's okay, because when this good life ends, a better one starts.

There is a beauty and comfort in knowing that though this life is painful, we are not alone in it. We have Jesus, and we have other people who care. It is also good to know that no matter what the loss, it is worth it. The day will come when the powerful of this world, those who saw their treasure as belonging not to God but themselves, will one day have nothing at all—where as those who gave up all for Jesus will have the treasure of eternal life. So, Jesus ends this teaching like this:

31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

How then should we live?

1. Give up all we own to God, because it belongs to Him.

All we have belongs to God. All I have belongs to God. Do you live like that? Are you stingy, greedy, and ambitious, living life for this earth alone? If so, let it all go and find the joy of living with open hands, generously sharing all for the sake of the kingdom of God.

2. Actively live as members of God's family, meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters, and being vulnerable about our own needs

Be the family of God that you want to be a part of. Treat others more warmly than you naturally do. Compete to be more kind and respectful to fellow Christians. And take risks with your own needs and weaknesses. Let people know how they can help you. They are your brothers and sisters.

Also, go to church. If you are listening on line but do not have a church home, come and join us if you are close. If not, find a church nearby of imperfect people who are following Jesus and join with them. Family is no family that does not meet and get to know others.

3. Enjoy this good life, enduring persecution patiently

Stop being surprised by the pains of this life. They are to be expected in a fallen world. But we have a hope that cannot be stopped, so we should enjoy every good thing that comes our way, and wait patiently for the day when all pain is gone.

4. Follow Jesus every day

We are not seeking to have a life well-lived, but rather we are seeking God. We are not to be focused on how to constantly improve ourselves, but to constantly follow Jesus. He is the treasure. He is the life. He is the prize. We want and need more of Him every day. So follow Him.

Let go of the things of earth, do good, follow Jesus, and eternal life is yours.