

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!”* Mark 10:23 Mark mentions how Jesus looked around several times in his Gospel (3:5ⁱ, 34ⁱⁱ). Peter must have relayed to Mark the intensity in Jesus’ powerful gaze. His eyes conveyed the seriousness of what He was about to say. It was a call to attention. It was the holy One looking at the pathetic state of man and sharing an urgent wake up siren from heaven.

A few days before working on this sermon, in a Bible study in my home all our phones went off with a loud warning tone. The message was to evacuate immediately due to our proximity to an out-of-control fire. That is a pretty good analogy to the gaze of Jesus as He looks around before making an important declaration.

The rich young ruler had gone away sad because his possessions meant more to him than God’s invitation. He had made a great effort to keep the Ten Commandments, but Jesus had shown him that his problem was the very first commandment. He had another god, which was his possessions. That encounter prompted Jesus’ warning, *“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”* When we hear that in our age we think of Elon Musk, or Bezos, or Zuckerberg. But if we are to compare the standard of living for that rich man that came to Jesus with today, most of us are rich men.

Jesus had earlier warned that the deceitfulness of riches can choke the seed of the Word of God so that it becomes unfruitful (Matthew 13:22ⁱⁱⁱ). The account of the rich young ruler illustrated that teaching. Jesus told the man the way to enter the kingdom of God was to forsake his god, which was his possessions, sell it all and give the money to the poor and follow Him. Then he could be assured of entering the Kingdom of God, not because of what he did, but because he would choose to put the God of creation first in his life.

The call to salvation is a call to put God first in our lives (8:34^{iv}). Jesus told those who asked, the greatest command was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (12:20^v). The prayer of salvation is just that. We repent of having other gods and ask God to give us the power to put Him first in our lives. That will mean letting go of the things that keep us from giving God the place in us that He deserves. We think at the time it is a hard thing to do, but as we come to experience the greatness of His love and faithfulness, we find it to be so much greater than what we once treasured (1 John 2:17^{vi}).

Sometimes a total forsaking of that thing may be necessary, which was the case with the rich man. In other cases, it may mean putting the thing in its proper place so that God is first in our life. Jesus spiritually satisfies those who are in the kingdom. When the soul is satisfied with Jesus, competing things lose the power of their appeal. Temptations are strongest when we have not been taking time in the Lord’s presence and drinking in the living water.

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!”* Mark 10:24 The disciples are shocked at Jesus’ declaration. The culture at the time thought the wealthy became rich because God had blessed them for their godly lives. That is a natural assumption based on

the Old Testament promises of prosperity when one obeys the Laws of Moses (Leviticus 23:3-5^{vii}). If obedience brought prosperity, how is it that the rich find difficulty entering the kingdom of God? Was not physical wealth a sign of spiritual wealth? The children of Israel were promised blessings for obedience, but wealth did not equate with holiness. It was so in the case of Abraham and Job (Job 1:1-3^{viii}). But it was the opposite in the case of Nabal (1 Samuel 25:3^{ix}). The Scriptures do not denounce wealth as evil, but they do warn about living for wealth. Jesus told us we cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24^x). One or the other will be first. If God is first, then our wealth is at His disposal. He tells us where to give and where to withhold. Our trust and security are not in the wealth but in God. Our wealth is simply a tool that we use to provide for our family and the work of God in the world. The security it promises is an illusion. It cannot buy what is eternal.

This does not mean that we become ascetics who deny all pleasure (Ecclesiastes 5:18^{xi}). *Tertullian, the Apostolic Father, was right when he called it irreligious to scorn this wonderful world and refuse to enjoy God's bounty and thank him for it. He says: "It was goodness, goodness, goodness that made it all." We are right to enjoy it.*^{xii} As a father takes pleasure in seeing his children enjoying the things he gives them, so the Lord enjoys us enjoying His gifts.

The Proverbs give us a balanced perspective. *⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me,⁹ lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.* Proverbs 30:8

⁴ Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. ⁵ When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven. Proverbs 23:4,5 Theft, inflation, taxation, and numerous other means can cause wealth to vanish. Then where is the security it promised? The point Jesus is making is that riches can distract us from eternal issues. Possessions can become idols. Thinking we are satisfied and secure can dull our ears to the cry of the evangelist telling us to repent and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Jesus promised that if we seek the kingdom first all our needs will be added to us (Matthew 6:33^{xiii}).

Notice that Jesus addressed them as children. Jesus is ten to fifteen years older than the disciples. Since He had just taught that you must be like a child to enter the kingdom of God, that might have been seen as a complement, but the immediate context I think implies they were spiritually immature in their understanding.

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." Mark 10:25 This was meant to be a humorous illustration. The camel was the biggest animal in Palestine and the eye of a needle the smallest hole. It is an impossibility for those who trust in their riches to enter the kingdom. They are the opposite of the little child who looks to his or her father for all that he or she needs without ever considering the need to earn it.

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." Mark 10:26,27 The disciples' shock shows us how engrained the idea of wealth being a sign of a blessed life was in that culture. If they were

not the ones in the kingdom, then who could make it? Now they are asking what the rich man asked. They did not understand the illustration of the kingdom of heaven consisting of those with faith of a child. Mark points out again that attention getting gaze of Jesus that calls them to listen up. He says plainly, “With man it is impossible!” We cannot keep the commandments. We cannot let go of our idols by merely willing to do so. But it is not impossible with God enabling, empowering, transforming our hearts and renewing our minds (Romans 12:2^{xiv}). He is the One who grants salvation as He shapes our hearts into those like the heart of an infant looking to their parents to meet what they cannot provide for themselves.

When Jesus asked the rich man if he kept the commandments, the right response would have been, “I try but I cannot even keep the first one. I need the heavenly Father to change my heart. Yes, You are good and that means You are God. Have mercy on me and save my sin sick soul.”

In saying, “with man it is impossible” Jesus included us all with that rich man (Psalm 14:3^{xv}). It is not only the wealthy that trust in their riches. As one rich man pointed out to me, the poor have more faith in the wealth they do not possess being the answer to all their problems than many who are wealthy. If they could just attain it they think they would be fine. And so, they gamble in hopes of gaining what they look to instead of looking to God. But even if our faith is not in wealth, salvation is still impossible for man to attain. It took Jesus’ total obedience, which is something we could never do. Then it took His willingness to take the punishment for our sin. It took Him offering His righteousness to all who would receive Him. But it also took Him drawing us to Himself. Only with God was that possible. That greatest of displays of love, Jesus on the cross, draws us to that childlike faith that simply receives what is offered, the gift of forgiveness and everlasting life. It is a promise to finish the work in us and make us fit for eternity in the presence of our heavenly Father (2 Corinthians 5:31^{xvi}).

²⁸ *Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.”* Mark 10:28 Peter, as the oldest disciple, blurts out for the others, “Look Jesus, we did what you were asking the rich man to do!” He was giving Jesus another opportunity to demonstrate the patience and steadfast love of God. Jesus just said it is impossible for man to be saved without God’s intervention. Peter responds that they had done what Jesus required of the rich man, as if giving up your things to follow Jesus merited salvation. He completely missed the point. It was Jesus who called and enabled them to drop everything and follow Him (Philippians 2:13^{xvii}). Did Peter forget the miraculous catch and how Jesus called him despite Peter asking Jesus to leave because he recognized how sinful he was (Luke 5:8^{xviii})? The rich man asked, “What must I do?” Peter says, “Look what we did!” Neither recognized it is what God does, not what we do. Next we see Jesus condescend to Peter’s limited understanding and encourage them with the perspective of heaven.

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, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.* Mark 10:29,30 Instead of reiterating what He had just said, and scolding Peter for

missing the point, Jesus encouraged them for yielding to His call on their lives. Anyone who chooses Jesus and finds that it causes them loss in this world can expect to experience much more than they gave up. Jesus did not say we will receive twice as much, but rather one hundred times as much!

Jesus did not ask me to forsake my house for him, though I did live for years out of bedroll because I thought He wanted me too. Recently we had to be evacuated from our home. We had so many offers from people in town and out of town we worried about offending people for not taking the many invitations we were generously offered. If your family members will not speak to you because you are following Christ, you have a hundred times as many around the world who would love to share their lives with you. I thank the Lord my children and grandchildren love Jesus, but I also have many more physical and spiritual children in the family of God whom I love and who love me.

This is not about heaven for Jesus said we would have the hundred-fold with persecutions. Jesus did not promise following Him would be easy, rather just the opposite (13:13^{xix}). But with that we have family of God who understand, love, and care for one another.

Then there is the eternal perspective. We will have eternal life! That is so much more than breathing and thinking, which is what we think of as life. Jesus is the life. We will live in what Jesus is and that defies description. Glory is one of those words we try to imagine and catch glimpses of, as Paul wrote “through a glass dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12^{xx}). We use words like love and home and peace and joy to describe it, but our earthly vision is so very limited. If Jesus is first in your life, your priority, the reason you live, the One to whom you long to be obedient to in every way, then the fullness of those descriptions will be yours.

³¹ *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*” Mark 10:31 It is the upside-down world of the kingdom. Those whom the world honors and thinks highly of will in many cases be the last in heaven. The ones we see as insignificant nobodies may be the most glorious in heaven (Matthew 23:11^{xxi}). Man does not see as God sees.

I met a middle-aged woman from a third world country who went into western Africa to remote villages to bring the Good News of Jesus to Muslims. Think of the danger a single woman would face doing that! She cares for the dying and prays for the sick. Village after village adopts her and sees how she cares for the least more than they do for their own. They give her a hut and a piece of land that turns into the village church. Young pastors from another town make each village she has touched a part of their preaching circuit. When I get to heaven I will look among the brightest stars to find her. Very few people know of this little woman. But she must be one of God’s favorites!

On the other hand, I have met famous pastors whose names you would recognize. All I can say is, “May God have mercy on their souls.” God sees the heart. The heart motivates the deeds. God sees the heart motivation behind the deeds. May our hearts belong to Him. May we with childlike faith always look to Him for direction, correction, and grace. May He always be first in our hearts (Psalm 73:23-26^{xxii})!

³² *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him,* Mark 10:32 The band

of brothers is headed down to Jericho. Then they will travel up the Kidron Valley over the Jericho road. Mark has left out the raising of Lazarus and the Jewish leaders' intention of killing Jesus and Lazarus (John 12:10^{xxiii}). The disciples are amazed and afraid because they are aware of how volatile the situation has become. Luke tells us that Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51^{xxiv}). Jesus knew what would follow. He was confident in His Father seeing Him through what He knew He needed to do (Isaiah 50:6-8^{xxv}).

³³ saying, *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. ³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”* Mark 10:33,34 Jesus took the twelve apart privately to tell them for the third time what was about to happen. He adds new details with the second and now the third warning. He wants them to know it is not accidental or that He is caught off guard. He is choosing to go through this.

First, He will be delivered over to the priests and scribes, those who have felt the most threatened by the crowds' allegiance to Him. The disciples already know what those men want to do. Those leaders will condemn Him to death and then hand Him over to the Gentiles. Jesus is setting the example for them and for us. He just told them they would face persecution but that it is followed by everlasting life. He is leading the way.

Then He told them how He would be mocked. The created beings will mock their Maker's power and authority. He will allow them to do so because He knows how ignorant they are (Luke 23:34^{xxvi}). They will spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. He will die as the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29^{xxvii}). The words must have pierced their hearts like a dagger.

But Jesus did not stop there. He promised that after three days He would rise! He will rise as the firstborn from among the dead (Colossians 1:18^{xxviii}). He will rise to show us that His promise of everlasting life is certain. He will rise for our justification, so that we need not fear standing before God when we leave this earthly life (Romans 4:25^{xxix}).

Let us continually have a heart of gratitude that what was impossible for us was one of the *“all things are possible with God”*. He can take a heart of stone and turn it into a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19^{xxx}). He can melt a stubborn heart with His love. He turns sinners into saints. He can help us put Him first in our lives. Praise His name forever!

Questions:

- 1 What prompted this passage?
- 2 Is the Great Commandment different from salvation?
- 3 Why were the disciples amazed at what Jesus said?
- 4 Discuss the wealth proverbs.
- 5 Why is it impossible for us to enter the kingdom of God?
- 6 How did God make it possible?
- 7 Why was Peter's response off base?
- 8 What is Jesus' promise to those who suffer loss for His sake?
- 9 Why were the disciples fearful to go to Jerusalem?
- 10 What details did Jesus give about what would be done to Him?

ⁱ **Mark 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

ⁱⁱ **Mark 3:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 13:22 (ESV)**

²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

^{iv} **Mark 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

^v **Mark 12:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

^{vi} **1 John 2:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

^{vii} **Leviticus 23:3-5 (ESV)**

³ “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places. ⁴ “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. ⁵ In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover.

^{viii} **Job 1:1-3 (ESV)**

¹ There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

^{ix} **1 Samuel 25:3 (ESV)**

³ Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved; he was a Calebite.

^x **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

^{xi} **Ecclesiastes 5:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

^{xii} ¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 64.

^{xiii} **Matthew 6:33 (ESV)**

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

^{xiv} **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xv} **Psalms 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xvii} **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

^{xviii} **Luke 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

^{xix} **Mark 13:13 (ESV)**

¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

^{xx} **1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)**

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

^{xxi} **Matthew 23:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant.

^{xxii} **Psalms 73:23-26 (ESV)**

²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

^{xxiii} **John 12:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well,

¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

^{xxiv} **Luke 9:51 (ESV)**

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

^{xxv} **Isaiah 50:6-8 (ESV)**

⁶ I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. ⁷ But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. ⁸ He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.

^{xxvi} **Luke 23:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

^{xxvii} **John 1:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

^{xxviii} **Colossians 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

^{xxix} **Romans 4:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

^{xxx} **Ezekiel 11:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,