

03.07.10 / Mark 10:17-31

Passage Insight

Following Jesus is not about keeping a to-do list always checked off. In his own mind, this rich young man had been justifying himself by the works he's been able to do in the name of God. He goes to Jesus looking for the missing link, some secret key that will unlock eternal life for him, and what he's looking for is another simple to-do that he can accomplish or obey. It's logical for him. . . "The Law says to do certain things to stay in God's good graces. I've done those things. Now I hear about eternal life. I want that, so I'd better figure out what I need to DO to get it." What this young man didn't yet know is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law he had been following, that the Law reveals the heart of those it encounters like a mirror. At first glance it might appear that Jesus has the same mindset as the young man and is saying, in essence, "Great. Here's the last item on your to-do list! If you DO this, then everything will be fine." But that is not the case. What keeps this man out of the kingdom of God is not wealth. It is the fact that he loves his wealth more than he loves his God. It is his idolatry that keeps him out of the kingdom of God. Jesus is not saying that if the man fulfills one final task, he will then inherit eternal life. Instead, He is revealing for the man the one thing that he loves more than God. What a gracious thing for Jesus to do! Jesus knows that if this man were to take this action, it would reveal that his heart had changed. It would reveal to Jesus, to those around him, and to the man himself that he in fact did love God more than his idol, and what a revelation this would be. In addressing the man in this way, he addresses his idolatry. Jesus addresses his heart.

He came to Jesus excited, and he left sorrowful because he loved what he stood to lose more than he loved God. This, in a word, is idolatry. Had he loved God more than what he stood to lose, he would have gone away in good spirits, excited to do whatever Jesus had told him.

After the man walked away, Jesus went on to explain to His disciples the difficulty that the wealthy face when trying to enter the kingdom of God. In verse 26 we see the disciples finding themselves "astonished" and asking Jesus, "Then who can be saved?" The Jews often equated monetary / material abundance as a sign of God's blessing, and so in their mind, they reasoned that if rich people couldn't enter the kingdom of God easily, then what hope could there be for anyone else? The truth of the matter is that God's blessing most clearly manifests itself in the eternal, not the temporal, and while He may choose to provide some of His followers with great wealth on earth, He may also choose to allow much suffering for His followers in this life as well. Ultimately, our lives are opportunities to reflect God's nature and to glorify him, regardless of what material or other kinds of wealth are to be found in them.

Those in the world who are monetarily rich have always been and will always be tempted to rely on their earthly goods rather than on God. The logical outcome of this is that they do not find it easy to cast themselves on the mercy of God. The same is true for anyone who is rich intellectually, who is rich in morality, who is rich in artistic achievement, athletic prowess, or anything else. Revelation 3:15-17 provides us with fair warning if we rely on our own efforts as Jesus addresses one of His churches:

I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

These blessings aren't even ours to own. We didn't create them. We can't give them to someone else. All we can do is use them, steward them. What's more, they were not given to us for us to boast in them. They were given to us to be used to glorify God. If they're not being used in this way, they are being used to glorify ourselves.

While we don't know the rest of this man's story, what we see next in the passage gives us hope. Jesus is saying here that when we stop trying to meet our needs and trust God to meet them, He generously provides with something far greater than we'd imagined, a tremendous family and limitless resources. Jesus not only then meets our needs with the help of those around us. He also meets THEIR needs by working through US.

The sidecar to these wonderful things is persecutions in this life, followed by a promise to have eternal life with all these things LESS the persecutions. Jesus allows persecutions, but make no mistake – they are not a penance for us to pay in order to earn our salvation or to earn God's love. Jesus allows persecutions so that through trial we may bring Him glory. According to the words of Jesus Matthew 5:11-12, those who are persecuted in the name of Jesus are blessed:

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Following Jesus costs us everything. Our idols, our self-glory, and, thank the Lord, our sin. What better to be rid of than those things that stand in the way of whole-heartedly following our God and bringing Him glory upon glory. Praise Him for His salvation. Praise Him for His love.

Application Questions (feel free to use the ones that best meet the needs of your group)

Walking Away Sorrowful

- 1) What would make you sorrowful if God told you to give it away?
- 2) If it's true that our idols are something we love, trust, and obey more than God, is this thing an idol in your life?
- 3) If so, what specifically do you think this idol can give you that God cannot?
- 4) What are you failing to believe about God here?
- 5) What would you need to know is true about God for you to trust Him more than your idol?
- 6) Who in your Community Group knows this well and can share it with you?

Relying on our Riches

- 1) What gifts has God given you that you have taken false ownership of?
- 2) How do you rely on these gifts rather than on God's mercy?
- 3) How do you boast in these gifts?
- 4) If these gifts were suddenly gone tomorrow, where would you turn?
- 5) If the absence of these gifts would cause you to turn to God, what's keeping you from turning to God while you still have them?
- 6) How will you root that stumbling block out of your life?
- 7) What does repentance look like for you in this?

Self-Glory

- 1) How do you use God's gifts to bring glory to yourself?
- 2) Where do you claim credit for something in your life when the credit truly belongs to God?
- 3) What's at the heart of this boasting?
- 4) Consider Matthew 5:14-16:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Our "good works" are to be a response to God's saving grace so that others may give **HIM** glory. When we take the glory, we are robbing from God. How does this change your view of self-glory?
- 5) Despite our sinfulness, God continues to give us grace upon grace even though we try to steal from Him. How will you now respond to this grace?

Receiving a Hundredfold

- 1) If you're a follower of Jesus, how have you seen God fulfill this promise in your life, to provide a hundredfold when following Him?
- 2) If you're not a follower of Jesus, what do you think about this promise?
- 3) If you're a follower of Jesus and are not seeing this promise fulfilled, how are you blinding yourself to God's provision in this way?
- 4) How are your needs being met by this family?
- 5) How are you working to meet the needs of this family?
- 6) How can your Community Group family make one another more aware of the needs within the group?
- 7) Who in your group can help manage this?
- 8) We are all called to have our needs met and to meet the needs of others. Which specific needs will you meet?

Sources

- ESV Study Bible Commentary
- New International Commentary on the New Testament
- Tyndale
- BEC
- Tim Keller