

RICHES, REDEMPTION AND REWARDS

Imagine the scene. In verses 17-22 a very wealthy man has just turned his back on the Lord Jesus and is walking away. In v. 21, Jesus had told this man how he could be saved. He was to sell everything he possessed and give everything away to the poor. Jesus promised him real treasure in Heaven. Then, Jesus told the man to take up his cross and follow Him. This is a call for this young man to make a public, once for all commitment to die to self and to live for Jesus.

Jesus' disciples were probably excited about the prospect of that fellow joining their number. They imagined all that he could do with his wealth, power and position.

Jesus had a somewhat different approach! Jesus was not impressed by the young man's portfolio, by his position in the synagogue, or by his prominence in the community. Jesus saw the man as he really was. He saw him as a poor, lost sinner in need of a Savior. Jesus offered the man everlasting life.

But when this young man hears the words of the Lord Jesus, he turns around and walks away. He chose his wealth over salvation. He chose his way over God's way. He chose eternal death over everlasting life. He chose the world over the Kingdom of God. He chose Hell over Heaven.

When he leaves, Jesus uses the moment to teach His disciples about the danger of riches in this world. He teaches them a few truths that we would do well to take to heart.

Follow along in your Bibles with me as I read Mark 10:23-31:

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches 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 man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?"

27 But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

28 Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."

29 So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's,

30 who shall 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.

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

Today, I want to look into these verses and talk about the truths revealed here. I want you to see The Truth About Riches; The Truth About Redemption; and The Truth About Rewards. Notice these truths with me as we try to grasp everything the Lord is saying here.

I. THE TRUTH ABOUT RICHES (v. 23-25)

Jesus' Announcement (v. 23): As the Rich Young Ruler walks away, Jesus looks around at His men and makes an astonishing statement. He says, **"How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!"** The rich young ruler had come to Jesus asking about eternal life (10:17). Jesus then comments that it's hard to enter the Kingdom of God. Meaning entering the Kingdom of God and eternal life are the same. The disciples respond by saying, "Who can be saved?" Meaning entering the Kingdom of God, receiving eternal life and being saved are all the same.

So Jesus makes a statement about how hard it is for the wealthy to be saved, to have eternal life, to enter into the Kingdom of God. The problem is not with a person having money. That was not the young man's problem. His problem was that his wealth was more important to him than following Jesus. The Rich Young Ruler was wealthy, but he did not possess his riches, his riches possessed him. This is always a recipe for spiritual disaster.

The Disciple's Amazement (v. 24): **"And the disciples were astonished at His words."** What these men heard blew them out of the water!

These men were from a culture that saw financial prosperity as the blessing of God on a life. The Jews were taught that riches and prosperity were from the Lord, 1 Chron. 29:12. Most Jews believed that health, wealth, and prosperity were the blessing of the Lord on a life. Many of their religious heroes like Abraham, David, Job and Solomon had been very wealthy men. All of! It's no wonder they are amazed!

Many in our day hold the same mindset. Consider the claims of the "Health and Wealth Movement". Those preachers tell us that when we are right with God, we will have plenty of money and perfect health. Anything less than that standard proves that you don't have enough faith or you are not right with the Lord.

I suppose that all of us think that way to an extent. How many of you, when you have plenty, say, "The Lord sure has blessed me!"? And when you go through lean times, maybe you have said, "I wonder what I did to make the Lord stop blessing me?" When you think about what Jesus said, it really is an astonishing statement.

Jesus Teaches with an Analogy (v. 25) – Jesus senses their amazement and clarifies what He means. In verse 24 He says, **"Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!"** He tells them that people who "trust in riches" will find salvation impossible. It would be like trying to stuff a camel through the eye of a sewing needle.

This is a hyperbole. It is an exaggeration used to emphasize a truth. Jesus is referring to a literal camel and a literal needle.

Some people have tried to soften the Lord's words by making them refer to a small opening in the wall of the city that was about four feet high by three feet wide. After the

gates of the city had been closed for the night, this tiny door was the only way in or out of Jerusalem until morning. For a camel to enter this gate, it would have to have all of its burdens removed. It would have to bow and it would have to wiggle its way through this gate. There is no evidence of such a gate!

Jesus said exactly what He meant! If a person trusts in their riches, they will not go to Heaven!

That was the Rich Young Ruler's problem. His wealth was his god. His wealth was the focus of his faith. His wealth was his reason for living and he refused to let it go.

In our world, riches are viewed as blessing. From God's perspective, riches are a handicap. Why? Often, those who possess much of this world's wealth come to trust in that wealth. They come to believe that their money can buy them anything. They surround themselves with people who will not tell them no.

Often, they come to believe that their money can shield them from any problem, save them from any danger and provide them with peace, joy and happiness.

What they fail to see is their money becomes an object of worship. Every waking moment is spent thinking about their wealth. How will I spend it? How will I protect it? How will I increase it? What can this money do for me?

People who seek salvation in their own resources will be disappointed at the end of life's way. They will find that their money, their fame, their power and their position cannot provide them with the one thing they need above all other things: salvation for their souls.

No one who trusts in money, fame, position or power will be saved. The only people who will ever leave this world saved and ready for Heaven are those who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone. He is the only path to salvation, Acts 4:12; 16:31 and He is the path to the Father, John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5. The key word here is "trust". There is nothing wrong with having money, possessions and power. It is when these things become the object of our desire and worship that they become our god. It is when we trust things instead of Jesus that we condemn our souls to Hell. Where is your trust today?

This passage ought to speak to our hearts today. We look around today and say, "Why, preacher, there are no rich people here. There may be a few who are comfortable, but most of us are just getting by. What does this passage have to do with us?"

It has everything to do with us! I realize that we don't have many millionaires in our congregation. In fact, we probably don't have very many thousandaires either. But, I submit to you, we are all rich.

We are rich and here's why I say that. Fifty-six percent of the world's population, or 3.4 billion people, live in extreme poverty. They survive on less than \$2.00 per day. Half of that number, or 1.7 billion people, lives on less than \$1.00 per day. At minimum wage, the average American worker earns over fifty times more than that. We are rich!

If you compare yourself to some people you know, you might not think you are rich, but the fact is, you are. We are all tempted at times to trust in what we have and what we can do.

One of the major problems with wealth is that wealth can cause us to trust the wrong things in life. Here is the problem with riches.

Riches can tempt people to hoard up what they have. There can be a strong temptation to think what you have been given is to be used to gain even more.

Riches can bring false trust. You might think your money can buy you anything, even salvation. It can't!

Riches can bind us too tightly to earth. Having too much of this world's wealth can cause all of our attention and affections to be focused in this world, to the exclusion of Heaven, Matt. 6:19; Col. 3:1-2.

Riches often lead to other sins. Sometimes, people with wealth come to think that there are no boundaries in their lives. They often begin to live in a way that is not pleasing to the Lord. Sins like pride, arrogance, insensitivity, indifference, self-satisfaction and worldliness feed on affluence.

Riches can destroy the qualities that are necessary for a person to enter Heaven, childlikeness and humility. **Earthly riches are a hindrance to entering the Kingdom of Heaven.**

According to Jesus, the rich are not privileged, they are actually underprivileged!

II. THE TRUTH ABOUT REDEMPTION (v. 26-27)

Again in verse 26 the disciples are astonished at what Jesus had to say. When they hear this, they are "**greatly astonished**," or "astonished out of measure". They hear these words and they just stand there with their mouths hanging open and with their chins lying on their chests. They are dumbfounded by what they have heard Jesus say.

Their response is to ask, "**Who then can be saved?**" They have considered the situation and they realize that, if those who are blessed by God with riches cannot be saved—then we all have a problem. They hear Jesus and it seems to them that He has forever slammed the door of salvation to everyone, at least to everyone who has possessions. Is that what Jesus is saying?

Jesus lets them know that there is hope! He tells them "**With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.**" Men may find it impossible to break the hold of their things, but God, in His power, can set them free.

If that Rich Young Ruler would have obeyed the clear call of the Lord Jesus, God would have given him grace to relinquish his hold on his wealth. The Lord would have saved his soul and blessed him with heavenly and spiritual riches beyond his wildest dreams.

We have the same promise! There is no way that you and I can turn our attention from this world without the Lord's help. That help comes with His call to come to Jesus.

When He reaches out to a lost sinner, the Lord calls that person to come to Him, John 6:44. When that person responds, God gives them the faith they need to believe on Jesus alone for their soul's salvation, Eph. 2:8-9. **It is impossible for us to save ourselves. It is only possible for God to save us.**

God is able to help anyone break the grip of whatever it may be that holds them captive. He can break the grip of riches. He can break the grip of drugs and alcohol. He can break the grip of sex. He can break the grip of physical addiction. If you will come to Jesus, you will find that He has the power to set you free, John 8:36.

God can bring redemption to anyone, regardless of who they are, how they have lived, or what they have done. He is able to do what no man can do for himself: save his soul!

III. THE TRUTH ABOUT REWARDS (v. 28-31)

When Peter hears this, he speaks up. Verse 28, **"Then Peter began to say to Him, 'See, we have left all and followed You.'**" He reminds Jesus that they had walked away from everything to follow Him. These men had turned loose of all their earthly responsibilities to follow Jesus. They had given up money, homes, families, businesses, all because Jesus had asked them to. Peter wants to know what's in it for them.

A lot of people have this same attitude about serving the Lord. They see the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer and they wonder what good it does for a person to follow Jesus. Jesus is about to tell us that those who follow Him have a definite advantage both here and in the hereafter. The Lord has a word of encouragement for everyone who has ever chosen Jesus over the wealth, trinkets and things of this world.

Jesus says, **Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall 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.**

God sees, records and rewards every sacrifice that is made for Him. What the disciples have walked away from might seem like a lot to them, but God has far more in their future than they left behind in their past.

They left one house; God knows how to open a hundred doors. They left one family; God has made them a part of a family that encompasses the world. They may have become separated from an earthly brother, but God has given them more brothers in Christ than they can imagine. Those who willingly turn loose of this world to follow Jesus will discover that God has far more in store for them than the sum total of all they left behind.

When Jesus speaks of **"a hundredfold"**, He simply means that it is more than you can imagine. He is not saying that if you give a dollar, He will give you one hundred in return. He might, but He might give you a thousand! He is simply telling us that He has far more for us than anything we could ever give up to follow Him.

He also lets us know that His **"hundredfold"** will come to us with **"persecutions"**. There will be a price to pay for following Jesus. Not everyone will be excited to see you serving the Lord. Difficulties and trials will come because of your commitment, 2 Tim. 3:12, but God will bless you in spite of any trials you might face along the way.

Then Jesus ices the cake! He tells us that those who turn loose of this world to follow Him will be blessed in this life, but they will also receive eternal life. So, Jesus tells us

not to worry about what this world has to offer. It simply cannot compare to what the Lord has for those who trust Him.

Do you have what matters most? Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? In the end, it will not matter how much money you have accumulated, or what you leave behind. All that will matter is Jesus. If you have Him, you are saved and you get to go to Heaven. If you do not have Him, you are lost and you will go to Hell.

The Jesus gives a clear warning – **But many who are first will be last, and the last first.** Those who are first in this world's accounting will finish last in the race to Heaven. We see the celebrities and the wealthy people and there is a tendency for us to think that they are somebody's. In God's eyes, it is not riches that make a person somebody special; it is faith in Jesus.

There are billionaires and millionaires who do not even make a blip on God's radar. But, there are poor, faithful saints of God who have His attention all the time. One day, when we get home, all those who reached for first place here will not even cross the finish line there. At the same time, those who faithfully lived for the Lord here will be rewarded there, Ill. Matt. 25:21.

So, what can we take away from this message? There are several things to think about as we close.

1. Are you truly saved? What do you trust to take you to Heaven? Anything but Jesus will ultimately fail. If you are not save, come to Jesus now.
2. What is your attitude toward your money? Do you love it? Do you want to hang onto it? Are you doing all you can to increase what you have and to add more to it? Or, do you see money as a tool to be used in your service of the Lord?

That's what money is for! The Lord gives us what He does so that we might use everything He gives us for His glory. Forget about giving just 10% to the Lord. Instead, ask God what He would have you to do with the 100%.

God's plan for our wealth is two-fold. 1. Divest – Let go of what you have; and 2. Invest – Sow into God Kingdom, Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6.

If your attitude toward money needs work, come to Jesus and let Him straighten it out.

3. What have you given up to follow Jesus? Has your faith ever cost you anything? Do you have any reason to expect that God would have any reason to reward you for your service?

If this message has spoken to you on any level, I invite you to come to Jesus and let Him do in your life what He desires to do.