



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

Following Jesus Means... Correct Vision

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Mark 10:17-31 (ESV)

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?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 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.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." 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." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

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!" 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! 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." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." 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, 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. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

One of my grandsons is having corrective eye surgery next week. He has eyes that are crossing. I guess this is not unusual and this surgery is a rather routine procedure that will fix it. Turns out, according to his doctor, that he's gone through life so far without ever having any real depth perception – he can't see in 3-D like we do. So this is going

to be a real “eye opener” for him when this is corrected and he has proper vision. Our story for the day is about an encounter Jesus had with a rich young ruler needing his vision corrected in regard to eternal matters. The man ran up and respectfully knelt before Jesus and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Now we immediately go to thinking about eternal life as Heaven. But we also know that the Jews looked forward to the age to come when God would rescue them and the whole world would be different: a place with justice and peace and prosperity and punishment for evil doers, a time of new life when God would finally rule. Their way of talking about this was to call it the “age to come,” as Jesus does at the end of this story for today. And the question pressing on every Jew who believed this was: how can I be sure that I will be one of those who will inherit the age to come; have eternal life with God?

Well, Jesus asked the young man, “Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone.” Could it be that Jesus was wondering if this man knows his true identity and believes he's the son of God? Well, we soon find out the answer to that is “no.” And Jesus says, “Well, you know the Commandments?” And he lists off the second table of the Ten Commandments having to do with loving your neighbor as yourself. And the man said, “I've done all these things for my youth. Kept them.” “Oh, really?” We wonder. He's basically saying, “I'm a pretty decent guy. I've done these things well. I haven't hurt anyone along the way.” He might have even been waiting for affirmation from Jesus to hear the words “Well, then, you're all set.” But Jesus just looked at him. It took a long pause and studied him. And what did he see? Well, externally he saw someone who was probably well-dressed and appearing very well off by society's standards. He was a rich man. Internally, he as he looked into the eyes of this man, though, he saw something was missing that the man needed. And we're told “and Jesus loved him.” Jesus loved this young man. What do you suppose was a look on his face as he said to this person, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have to the poor, and come follow me.” He loved him. And so he invited him to drop everything and come follow him, he liked him. Jesus would give him eternal life in the here and now and forever. The one thing he's lacking is Jesus. “There's one thing you lack: it's me.” But the man just sadly shook his head, walked away, turned down the opportunity because he had great possessions. That was a deal breaker for him. He couldn't let go of his money. He had a heart issue. He had idolatry at work in his life. He placed his possessions above God and the eternal life he was seeking. He could not lose his life in order to gain

it, as Jesus had talked about back in Mark 8. He had gained the whole world, forfeited his soul.

Now, as he watched him walk away, Jesus gives the disciples this little lesson on the danger of riches, he says, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter into the Kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." And the disciples were absolutely astonished by what he said. They're shocked. They'd always been taught differently. They thought wealth was a sign of a special blessing from God for one's obedience. So, someone like this guy surely had to be in with God already. So that's why they turn and ask Jesus in response, "Well, then who can be saved, if not this guy who can be saved?" And Jesus says, "With man, this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God." Only God can save us, rich or poor, by his grace through Christ. Peter, who seemed to need some words of reassurance from Jesus at this point said, "Well, we've left everything that followed you," and before he can go on with his question Jesus jumps in and says, "Peter, you'll be taken care of now and in the age to come." Yes, life will have its hardships and its sacrifices, but in the end, it's worth it.

The rich young ruler had vision problems that needed correcting. He seemed to be blind to three things, three things that oftentimes can be blinding to people today. The rich young ruler didn't see Jesus as anything more than a good teacher. That was the first thing. He didn't come to follow Jesus as a savior that he needed, he simply wanted some advice on how to ensure his place in this future kingdom to come under God's rule. He didn't see Jesus as the son of God to follow and serve. There are still so many people like him. When asked what they think about Jesus, one of the first things they'll say – in a complimentary manner – is, "Well, he was a good teacher and the world would be a better place if we took his teachings more seriously." But if you press them, they don't see anything more than that. But a follower of Jesus sees him as so much more than just a teacher, he's savior of the world. He was rich in the heavenly courts, the son of God who became poor, lived among us and suffered and died on the cross and rose again in order to make us rich with God in a restored relationship.

The second thing he couldn't see is that he needed Jesus for this eternal life he was seeking. Jesus says, "You're looking for eternal life with God. There's one thing you need. It's me. Follow me and I'll give it to you." But we see the rich young ruler didn't see Jesus that way, as the way to eternal life with God. He'd rather just follow some

more rules and continue on his own pathway to God. Notice his question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was under the impression that you get what you earned when it came to eternal matters. He was living under a merit system. And like those disciples, he thought that he must be in with God. Just look at how richly blessed he was. God must have seen him as a good, obedient person deserving his rewards, and that's what Jewish teachers had been teaching over the ages. "If you're good, I'll be happy with you and God will bless you." That's why the disciples were shocked, as well as this man, to hear Jesus say, "How difficult it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." So they asked, "Well, then who can be saved?" And they're thinking like the rich guy: he keeps the rules, look at his clothes, he's a decent guy. He hasn't already hurt anyone along the way. Surely, he must be in with God.

Still, you have to wonder, why is he standing there, then asking Jesus about what he must do to inherit eternal life? Could it be that he wasn't absolutely sure that he'd done enough, that he was missing something? His response to Jesus' list of commandments was "I've kept them," but in the back of his mind, there's a big "but..." And that's why Jesus points out to him the thing he really needs is Jesus. A lot of folks are blind like that when it comes to how one receives eternal life, Heaven. Life in the age to come with God. Just like this guy. If you ask them "If you died today, do you think you'd go to heaven?" And they'll say, "Well, I hope so." If you press them and say, "Well, why do you think you might?" And they'd say, "Well, I haven't done enough to hurt anyone in this world. I've been pretty good." They're rich young rulers.

But the follower of Jesus sees that that doesn't cut it. You can't save yourself with your good works and obedience, you always will fall short. Jesus taught salvation with man, this is impossible, but you'll never be able to do enough to earn eternal life with God, it's impossible. It's like trying to long jump the Grand Canyon, you'll always fall short. But then he goes on to say with man, this is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God. Only God can save you and give you eternal life. And he did through his son, Jesus Christ, who died on a cross as an atonement for your sins in mine. And so, we come merely as beggars with empty hands to Jesus and we receive the eternal life he wants to give us as a gift. And we follow him.

Finally, the third thing: the rich young ruler didn't recognize a good deal when he saw it. He was blinded by his vision of what life is about by his earthly riches. He didn't see the priceless treasure that was standing right before him. He was captive and blinded

by possessions, so when Jesus said, "Go liquidate what you have, give it to the poor, you'll have treasure in Heaven," he just couldn't do it. He chose to pursue the money rather than pursue Jesus, the son of God, the giver of life. Jesus is offering here a word of caution as he teaches his disciples – to those who want to follow him – about the danger of possessions and wealth in one's life. They can be a blessing, yes, but they can also get in the way of following Jesus, loving God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. There's always a danger of them taking over one's life, getting us off track, becoming a God that we actually love and trust and obey and look to for security and satisfaction and significance in this world, instead of looking to God and Christ. Wealth, whether it be greater small, can so easily become the god of our lives and controller that warps our personalities, confuses our values, and causes us to miss out on the life, the treasures that Jesus came to give us. And because of these riches, the rich young ruler missed out on an abundant life, an eternal life, with God that only Jesus could give. Because he had a heart issue. He loved his money.

It's a tragic story. He could have been the 13th disciple, think about that. He could have been in the upper room on Thursday, receiving the Lord's Supper and his teachings or seeing the resurrected Jesus in that upper room. He might have been one who could have written a biblical book and influenced millions of lost souls, but instead he gave it all up for the money. He couldn't lose his life in order to save it.

This episode seems to be pointing out to rich Christians, which includes most of us in the west, and it's also speaking to those that don't have much, the spiritual danger of riches: they can take over one's life and wreck it. Old story I heard about a man who tried to swim to safety from a wrecked ship. Unfortunately, he had a money belt about his waist; two hundred pounds of gold and money were in that money belt that he couldn't bring himself to leave behind. He was unable to reach the shore with this extra weight, and he drowned. Now here's the question as he was thinking: did he have the gold or did the gold have him? What about you? What's your relationship with your possessions and your wealth? Do you have the money or does the money have you? Some people might even think to themselves, "Well, Jesus doesn't want us to give everything away, does he?" Maybe he does. And what if he does: do you value the kingdom life that he's offering you that much that you'd be willing to give it away?

Finally, a personal question for you today: how is your vision when it comes to eternal matters? Are you a disciple or like a rich young ruler? Do you see Jesus as the son of

God, the savior of the world, the way, the truth, the life, the giver of eternal life? Are you trusting in him alone for salvation? Or are you struggling to earn your way to eternal life? Give it up; trust, Jesus. And what is your relationship with your possessions? Do have them or do they have you? Have you surrendered everything to Jesus, put everything at his disposal? Do you see yourself as the owner of what you have or the manager of what you have? Are you holding on to it loosely or are you holding on to it with a tight fist? Are you generously giving it away in his name or are you hoarding it? Is it a God in your life, an idol that you trust and love and serve? If so, you're in dangerous waters, my friend. Dr. Haddon Robinson writes in his book *What Jesus Said About Successful Living* these words:

If you're wondering how can we know if we're mastered by our money, a couple of questions come to mind. First, how did we get the money? Did we sacrifice something eternal to get it? If so, we have become a slave to money. Would we put a competitor down and destroy him to be sure, we got what was due to us? If so, money is determining your priorities. And second, what do we do with our money? Let's put it bluntly: is the cause of God in the world better off because you've been entrusted with money? Or does God only get your spare change?

The story that Kyle Eidelman tells in his book *God's at War* about a friend, he says,

I was talking to a friend of mine who was wealthy, but the only real indication of his wealth is his extreme generosity. He was recently talking to me about how easy it is for money to become an idol in his life. I asked him how he kept the god of money off the throne of his heart. And here's what he said: "Giving money away breaks its power. It's like you're saying to the money, 'I don't even care about you. You are so unimportant to me that I can just give you away.'" He explained that when you give like that, it destroys your idol of money because it can't stand not being important.

If you want to find out how important money is to you, then start giving it away.

There you have it, following Jesus means having correct vision. May this story of the rich young ruler serve as a procedure that corrects the vision of each one of us who are seeking eternal life.

Amen.