



March 1 - You Have to Give Up Everything

WEEKLY READING - MARK 10-14

TODAY'S PASSAGE - MARK 10:17-31

MAIN POINT

Following Jesus changes everything—our identity, our priorities, our eternity.

BACKGROUND

Having seen the ever-expanding authority, power, and claims of Jesus in the first half of Mark, the reader is now confronted with the severe testing of these claims and the display of power in Jesus' suffering and even death. Specifically, the second half of the Gospel describes the necessity of Jesus' passion as well as what it costs the disciples to follow the Master. The narrative climaxes in the ultimate test of Jesus' bold claims and powerful deeds, namely, in his crucifixion (and subsequent vindication). This shapes and characterizes the disciples not only in their fundamental self-understanding but also in their participation in the mission of God through Jesus.

According to most commentators, the second half of the Gospel begins at 8:27. As Jesus has displayed his messianic authority and power in 1:1–8:26 and has been met with much opposition (2:10; 3:6, 22–30), he is now tested in his claim to be the authoritative Messiah of God (8:27–16:8). While the disciples did not really grasp who Jesus was in the light of his expanding authority and power, they are now, in the second half of the Gospel, further bewildered by Jesus' teaching that the Messiah of God has to suffer and die (see, however, Isa. 52:13–53:12; Dan. 9:26). Such teaching runs contrary to the Pharisaic interpretation of, for example, 2 Samuel 7:13–14, as well as Isaiah 9:6–7; 11:1–10.

Our passage is a continuation of this challenge to his authority, Jesus speaks to the challenging tension between material possessions and entry into God's kingdom, as well as the cost and promise of discipleship (Mark 10:17–31). The third prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection (10:32–34) is followed by renewed instruction in humility and servant leadership (10:35–44). His instructions culminate in Jesus' prediction of his own unique substitutionary atonement (10:45).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Various kinds of possessions can convey a false and deceptive sense of safety, in which a trusting dependence upon God would seem superfluous (e.g., Ps. 39:6; 49:6; Prov. 23:4; 28:22). Such a deceptive sense of security does not, however, remove the fact that human beings are utterly dependent on God. Jesus speaks directly to such a false sense of security in possessions by warning, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

(Luke 12:20). It is thus congruent with reality to rely personally and wholly on him. Various people from different religious traditions are willing to “acquire” or merit life with God in some fashion, at times even at great cost and sacrifice. Others do not want the cost to be too high, desiring to continue the familiar and comfortable life. In contrast to such approaches, Jesus fundamentally and radically challenges any form of self-sufficient persistence, offering what cannot be paid for by any human being: eternal life and relationship with God as an unmerited gift, based on his unique death.

The false teaching on prosperity as a goal in discipleship, especially in poverty-stricken areas of the world, fails to take Mark 10:26 seriously. Sadly, such false teaching is associated with the so-called prosperity gospel or health-and-wealth gospel. Unfortunately, this is far from the gospel of Jesus. From his perspective, the following must be considered:

(1) Honestly acquired wealth does not grow by faith promises but by hard, sacrificial, and sustained work (e.g., Peter and Paul), both individually and corporately. Often, systemic corruption and greed obstruct healthy economic growth. Such an emphasis does not deny that God might grant, at times, unexpected and prayed-for resources to pursue a godly, biblically warranted, nonselfish task.

(2) The heart attitude of the person is at stake: What motivates work? Is it to provide for others and share with the truly needy, or to hoard and consume?

(3) One of the core purposes of wealth is to be able to share it with the truly needy and those who cannot help themselves

THE FLOW

- 15 minutes - Conversation and relationship-building
- 5 minutes - Create interest (icebreaker, activity, or quote)
- 10 minutes - Year of Prayer guided prayer time
- 40 minutes - Study and apply the Bible
- 5 minutes - Prayer requests

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use at least one of these questions to introduce the topic of discussion.

- **What are the first three things you usually tell people about yourself?**
- **How important is your profession or achievements to your identity?**

Share information from BACKGROUND and CHRIST CONNECTION to help group members understand the context

Transition/Say - It's in our nature to define ourselves based on external attributes like what we do or where we are from. We often approach our spiritual identity with that same performance-based agenda. The young man in today's passage comes to Jesus asking, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He has a resume full of accomplishments but lacks what he most longs for—true significance and peace. Jesus invites the man to let go of the marks of his identity in order to embrace the source of his identity. Jesus is calling us to do the same.

YEAR OF PRAYER - GROUP PRAYER

GUIDE YOUR GROUP TO OFFER THEIR PRAYERS OUT LOUD WITH THE ENTIRE GROUP OR PUT PEOPLE INTO GROUPS OF 3-4 TO PRAY TOGETHER.

Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

Heavenly Father, how wonderful You are. Creation cries out in awe of Your power, the universe shines with your glory and greatness. Psalm 104 :1 says “Let all that I am praise the Lord. O Lord my God, how great you are! You are robed with honor and majesty.

Please share your words of adoration now. (pause)

Father, in the quiet of this moment, still our hearts before You. 2 Corinthians 11:21-30 reminds of the importance of confessing those times of subtle boasting of how much we do for You and for Your church. Help us to commit, at all times, to quietly helping another person through prayer, encouragement, or deed without self-recognition. Confess personal burdens that you haven't committed to Him and which rob you of that “good cheer” (2 Corinthians 5:4).

Take a moment to silently confess any unconfessed sin the Father brings to your mind. (pause)

Father, give us hearts that are filled with thanksgiving for Your goodness in our lives. We thank You that our salvation does not depend on our wisdom but by His grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Please share any words of thanksgiving that you have at this time. (pause)

Father God, we ask You to guide our thoughts as we share our petitions and intercessions. Help us to commit ourselves to doing what the Lord requires of us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Please lift your words of petitions and intercessions now, as we all pray in agreement. (pause)

What a joy to come into your presence to pray with our brothers and sisters in Christ—to pray believing and in faith as You work in our midst. In the name of our Savior, we pray. Amen

STUDY AND DISCUSS

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 10:17-21.

- **10:17** Mark began the section by reminding his readers/hearers that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem and the cross. Commentators are divided as to whether the man's running up to Jesus, falling on his knees, and calling Jesus “good”—all of which were quite unusual—indicate flattery or respect. In view of Jesus' reaction the latter seems more probable. The question is also unusual because most Jews would have no doubts about what to do: observe the law. Probably the man had heard about Jesus' teaching that mere obedience to the law was not enough. It was natural for a man who may have inherited some of his wealth to ask about inheriting eternal life. Although common in John's Gospel, the term “eternal life” is found only here and in v. 30 in Mark (and elsewhere in the Synoptics only in Matt 19:29; 25:46; Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30). The emphasis is on the quality rather than the quantity of the life.
- **10:18** In Jewish thought God was preeminently good (1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; Ezra 3:11; Ps 118:1; 145:9, etc.), so much so that it was unusual to apply the term to anyone else. That was the main reason for Jesus' question and statement. The statement does not reflect a

consciousness of sinfulness on the part of Jesus. It is not a disclaimer of goodness or deity. Such ideas are totally irrelevant. It simply points to God as the supreme example of goodness and the source of all good things, including the commandments in v. 19 and the commands in v. 21. Throughout his life Jesus was concerned to exalt and glorify God. Luke 18:19 lets Mark's statement stand, but Matt 19:17 restates it so as to minimize the possibility of misunderstanding or offense. Certainly the church would never have invented the Markan statement. It is unquestionably a genuine saying of Jesus.

- **10:19** Jesus further directed the man's thoughts to God by calling his attention to the second table of the Ten Commandments of Exod 20:12–16 and Deut 5:16–20. According to the best attested text, the Commandments are listed in an unusual order: six, seven, eight, nine, and five. The command "do not defraud" between the references to the Ninth and Fifth Commandments is substituted for the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet." Fraud is a concrete example of covetousness and a special temptation of the rich. Jesus probably limited his reference to the second table of the law, the one dealing with relationships of human beings to each other, because obedience to it provides evidence of obedience to the first table, the one dealing with the relationships of human beings to God.
- **10:20** How to evaluate the claim made in this verse is difficult. On the one hand, Jesus did not explicitly deny in v. 21 that the man had kept the letter of the Commandments; on the other, he asked him to do something to demonstrate that he was willing to observe the spirit of the last six Commandments. Alternately, Jesus called the man to a greater obedience than that embodied in the Ten Commandments (cf. Matt 19:21, "If you want to be perfect"; also Matt 5:20–48). According to v. 22 he was not willing to do what Jesus asked of him. The rich man apparently did not understand what was involved in keeping the Commandments. Alternately, the "one thing" this man lacked was not understanding of the requirements of the law but radical trust in God, who alone is good, that would allow him to abandon all his property and follow Jesus.
- **10:21** The word "loved" in the present context refers to something more than embrace, attraction, or affection. It refers to genuine love based on need and not merit or response. The one thing the man lacked was devotion to God, as demonstrated by compassion for the needy. Had this man truly trusted in the goodness of God (v. 18), he would have welcomed Jesus' command as God's best for him. The command "sell everything ... and give to the poor" should not be universalized and applied literally to every professing Christian. It pertains to the need of a particular person. It should not be ignored either. Other persons may have to give up other things in order to follow Jesus: a vocation, a style of life, a sinful passion, or a relationship. The call is not to poverty but to discipleship, which takes many forms. Discipleship, however, is costly. It involves sacrifice. It involves obedience. It involves following the example of Jesus. It also involves reward, something that is elaborated in vv. 29–31.

What is your impression of the man who came to Jesus?

How does Jesus respond to the rich young ruler's question?

At first glance, how does Jesus' response contradict your general ideas about salvation?

Jesus' response makes us ponder. From the whole of the New Testament, we know salvation to be a product of faith and grace as opposed to simply doing good things to earn God's love. In light of that, you would think Jesus would have said, "There is, in fact, nothing at all you can do to inherit eternal life; the issue at hand is not your works, the issue is one of faith. Do not do, but believe."

But Jesus didn't respond this way. He didn't even mention faith. In fact, He seemed to do the opposite by calling the man to do more. The key to understanding Jesus' response is found in the first part of verse 21, "Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him." Jesus looked at the man and loved him. He loved him in his desperation. He loved him before he did anything. Jesus loved the man before he refused the command to do more. The love of God wasn't dependent upon what the man did.

Do you ever feel like God will love you more if you do better and less if you make a mistake?

How would you describe a person who lives consistently in the truth that Jesus' love for him or her is not contingent upon his or her performance?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MARK 10:23-31.

- **10:23** The event became the occasion for a brief discourse. Jesus' statement must be contrasted with the Jewish attitude toward riches. The dominant Jewish view was that riches were an indication of divine favor and a reward for piety (Job 1:10; 42:10; Ps 128:1-2; Isa 3:10). Although provision was made for the protection and assistance of the poor (Deut 15:7-11; Prov 22:22-23), rarely was poverty associated with piety. The teaching of Jesus was nonetheless revolutionary in its time and remains scandalous even today. However, Jesus did not condemn riches as evil in themselves. They are a temptation, a hindrance, a diversion. They provide false security that makes radical trust in God difficult.
- **10:24** In view of the prevailing Jewish attitude toward riches, the disciples' amazement is not surprising. Whereas v. 23 describes the difficulty of the rich in entering the kingdom, this verse, according to the best attested Greek text, affirms the difficulty of all in so doing.
- **10:25** A few witnesses of medium quality reverse the order of vv. 24 and 25 and make minor changes in v. 25. Verse 25, however, appropriately follows v. 24 as a concrete example of the uncompromising statement in that verse. All attempts to ease the harsh meaning of v. 25 must be resisted, e.g., the substitution of the Greek word meaning rope for the one meaning camel (there is only one letter difference in Greek) or the idea that the reference is to a small gate in Jerusalem called "Eye of the Needle" through which a camel could go only with great difficulty. The mere existence of the word meaning rope is unattested until at least the fifth Christian century and perhaps until medieval times. Furthermore, to put a rope through the eye of a needle would be almost as difficult as to put a camel through it. No early evidence exists that there was a small gate called "Eye of the Needle." The claim first appears in the ninth Christian century, long after the destruction of the Jerusalem of Jesus' day. The contrast between the largest Palestinian animal and one of the smallest openings is clearly intended to indicate the impossibility of a rich person—or anyone else (v. 24)—entering the kingdom by doing something for himself or herself.
- **10:26** For once the NIV, NRSV, NEB, and GNB do not follow the earliest and usually best manuscripts, which have "to him" (RSV, NASB). The latter probably is a grammatical improvement upon the former reading "to each other" by the Alexandrian text-type, which is sometimes guilty of such a thing. It should be noted that being saved, the kingdom of God (vv. 23-25), and eternal life (v. 17) all refer to the same thing, a right relationship with God.
- **10:27** This verse probably is the key to understanding the entire passage. Inheriting eternal life, entering the kingdom, and being saved are impossible for any human being, but not for God, who is good and desires the salvation of all. Therefore all must depend entirely upon God. Such absolute trust in God makes possible a life of faithful discipleship (v. 28).
- **10:28** Again Peter appears in the narrative as the spokesman for all the disciples. One may question, however, the accuracy of his use of the word "everything." It is probably an exaggeration. In leaving occupation and family, however, observe that Peter, James, and John did leave far more than many modern-day disciples (1:18, 20).
- **10:29** From warning, Jesus turned to promise. The medieval text adds the word "wife" after "mother" (KJV, NKJV), doubtless in an attempt to apply Peter's example to celibate priests and monks.
- **10:30** Though v. 29 mentions leaving father to follow Christ, fathers are noticeably absent in the enumeration of relationships in v. 30. This absence suggests that God is the one "Father" of disciples. Some commentators have questioned whether Jesus included the word "persecutions" as part of the "reward" of discipleship, and they have suggested that it is the addition of the early church in light of its experiences. Jesus, however, could have foreseen the persecution of his followers. He himself was persecuted, and it was reasonable to expect that his disciples would be also. Significantly, both Matthew and Luke omit this reference to

persecution. If this had been added by the early church, it most likely would have found its way into all three accounts. Persecution is a specially Markan emphasis.

- **10:31** The different contexts of this saying in Matt 20:16 and Luke 13:30 suggest it was probably a “floating” saying. It is, however, the kind of statement Jesus could have made more than once. Mark likely placed it here to provide an appropriate warning about being preoccupied with rewards and also to summarize and nicely conclude vv. 17–30.

If we are surprised by Jesus’ response, we are not alone. Notice the reaction of the disciples. The passage mentions twice that they were amazed. Perhaps their amazement came from their ideas of what it meant to be blessed by God. To the first-century Jew, if people were wealthy, if they were healthy, if they had many children and also many goats, then clearly they were blessed. On the other hand, if they were sick or poor, then God was cursing them because of their behavior. When we understand that context, we see why the disciples would be so flabbergasted at the words of Jesus—He was telling this man to rid himself of the very things that, in his culture, evidenced God’s blessing in his life. It would have made more sense to first-century ears for Jesus to say, “Blessed are the rich. Blessed are the healthy. Blessed are the comfortable.” Jesus, of course, flipped that idea upside down. Into this culture defined by material blessing He said things like, “Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the hungry and thirsty. Give away all you have.”

How about you? Does what you consider a blessing match up with how Jesus defines blessing?

If you were in the hot seat, what would be most difficult for you to give up?

Jesus’ words to the rich young ruler pointed beyond any external blessings and attributes he had based his hope upon and got to the man’s core, to his real self. Selling his possessions, even considering it, would strip this man of his marks of identity. Only by stripping those things away could he define himself the way Jesus wanted—by whom his faith was in.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does your perspective of works change when you learn that you already have God’s acceptance?

What kind of freedom can you find by becoming a nobody?

Is there something in your life you are holding onto because to let go would challenge your identity?

Are your finances serving the kingdom of God or the kingdom of yourself?

The question of identity can really only be answered in a moment of crisis, a moment when something attached to your core is taken out of your control: health, achievements, career, family life, and so forth. Who are you when those things are altered or threatened? Who would the rich young ruler be if he sold his possessions? He would not be rich or a ruler; he would have nothing external left to offer—no money, no works, no prestige—just himself.

Jesus called the rich young ruler to let go of what had previously given him significance and embrace an existence in which he had nothing to bring to the table. Actually, this is what Jesus wants from all of us—to be nobodies. Nobodies cannot come to God offering their contributions or rely on trivial marks of identity; their significance comes from something deeper. They find their meaning in life and identity in Christ alone.

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

Activity: “Hands Open, Hands Closed” (Visual Exercise)

Materials:

- Whiteboard or large paper
- Marker
- Sticky notes or index cards

Step 1: Draw the Scene (2 minutes)

On the board, draw two simple hands:

- One labeled Closed Hand
- One labeled Open Hand

Explain: “The rich man came to Jesus with a closed hand—holding tightly to something. Jesus invited him to open it.”

Read Mark 10:17–22 aloud.

Step 2: Group Brainstorm (3 minutes)

Ask participants to call out things people often hold tightly to.

Write them in the Closed Hand, such as:

- Money
- Status
- Comfort
- Control
- Reputation
- Security
- Relationships
- Plans

Then ask: “Which of these makes Jesus’ words feel hardest?”

Let a few respond.

Step 3: What Goes in the Open Hand? (3 minutes)

Now read Mark 10:23–31.

Ask the group: “What does Jesus promise to those who trust Him?”

Write answers in the Open Hand:

- Eternal life
- True treasure
- Community/family in Christ
- Freedom
- God’s power
- Purpose
- Joy in following Him

Discuss briefly: "Why does Jesus connect sacrifice with abundance?"

Step 4: Personal Sticky Note Moment (1-2 minutes)

Invite participants to write one thing they may be holding tightly and place it in the open hand.

Optional sharing in pairs: "What would trusting Jesus in this area look like this week?"

Closing Visual Thought (30 seconds)

Circle the words "With God all things are possible" (v.27).

Say: "Opening our hands isn't about loss—it's about trusting the One who gives better life."

Close with a short prayer for trust and freedom.

PRAYER

Prayer Requests of Group Members (be sure to share these with the group and check in on relevant requests)

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-
-
-
-

Those we are Asking God to Save

Friends -

Family -

Co-workers -

Others -

Close in prayer, Close in prayer, asking God to reveal anything your group might be clinging to for significance other than a relationship with Jesus. Pray that each person will be overwhelmed by the love of God this week and will run to Him as the true source of life and peace.