

It Is Difficult for Americans to Enter Heaven

by Tim Conway

Tim Conway's sermon explores the challenges wealth poses to entering the Kingdom of God, emphasizing the need for humility and reliance on God rather than riches.

Duration: 1:12:51

Scripture: Mark 10:17

Topics: "Wealth And Greed", "Spiritual Discipline"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the spiritual implications of wealth, highlighting the dangers of being self-sufficient, smugly content, and bound to this world by riches. It challenges listeners to surrender their wealth to Christ, be disciplined, prayerful, and abominate selfishness and greediness. The message warns against the snare of money and the need to be watchful, desperate, and prayerful in using wealth wisely for God's glory.

Transcript

Each year when we do our financial meeting, that Sunday, which is today, I typically bring a message concerning wealth or money, and I intend to do that likewise on this last Sunday of January when we have our financial meeting. Would you open your Bibles to Mark 10? It is said, although I have not personally compiled the data, it is said that Jesus Christ said more about money than He said about heaven and hell put together. Again, that's what I've heard.

I have not personally done the research myself. It is said likewise that Jesus taught more on money than He did on prayer. Jesus had some startling things to say about money.

I want us to look this morning at one of these accounts where money and wealth come to the forefront. And it's not even like you see it coming. We're going to consider this account in Mark 10, and the truth is that until Jesus actually puts money out there on the table, so to speak, you don't even really see it coming.

Here's a young man whose problem is apparently self-righteousness, and next thing we know, our Lord takes us to a lesson on money. Let's look at this. Let's read this account.

Mark 10, v. 17-31. So here's our Lord. Now, just to put it in proper setting, if you go over to chapter 11, v. 1, you'll see the triumphal entry.

Now, if you have your chronology of Jesus' life worked out, you know that this is towards the end. In v. 17, He was setting out on His journey. You know where He's going? To Jerusalem to die.

That's the time frame here. So He's setting out on His journey. We see that.

A man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? 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. God, honor your father and mother. And He said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from My youth.

Jesus, looking at him, loved him. 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. 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. They were exceedingly astonished. And said to Him, Then who can be saved? Now, I'm going to stop right here and say this.

You can tell that in the disciples' minds, to answer that way, Who then can be saved? And their estimation, This guy is the most likely sort of guy who can be saved. Now, look, why? For one, when it came to morality, external integrity, this guy's life was blameless. You remember how Paul talked about, in his lost days as a Pharisee, that when it came to the law, he was blameless.

That's what this guy is like. I mean, if you're watching this guy externally, this guy is moral, he's upright, he's got integrity, he's honest. They're looking at this guy and they're saying, not only that, in their minds, they very much connected calamity.

Remember how the disciples were? Oh, there's a blind man. Well, he must have sinned. Or his parents did.

Whereas, when you see somebody that has health, or they have money, you think, well, that's a sign of God's blessing. Abraham was rich after all. Right? Job was rich.

I mean, the thing is, to be a Jew and to see that, hey, David had wealth, Solomon had wealth, these are examples of very godly men who God blessed. Wasn't that a blessing? Solomon said, Lord, if You're going to allow me to ask anything, I pray for wisdom to know how to lead Your people. And God comes along and says, since you didn't ask for these other things, I'm going to give them to you.

It's a sign of blessing. And so they're looking at this young man who when it comes to character, he looks blameless. It looks like God has blessed him.

These guys are sitting back saying, wow, this guy's a shoe-in. He's probably going to be added to us disciples here. He'll be led into our group.

They had this guy pegged for heaven. They are shocked. They are utterly shocked by the way this thing comes out.

And that's what Mark tells us. Exceedingly astonished. By the way, Mark gives us the most extensive account of this.

Mark loves the superlatives. He loves the adjectives. Exceedingly astonished.

None of the others put it like that. Mark likes to show us what people are doing in a more meticulous way. Like in v. 23, Jesus looked around.

Matthew and Luke don't tell us that. But he likes to show us where Jesus is looking. He likes to show us how people are feeling.

V. 26, they were exceedingly astonished. Said to Him, then who can be saved? It's like, if this guy can, who can? You've just made this thing out into the realm of impossibility. 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. I mean, we've done what this guy's not doing. 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.

And this time, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, lands, not always in the way we expect. There's spiritual realities to all this. You remember how they came to Jesus and they said, you know, Lord, Your family's here.

He said, you know who my family is? It's over here. Rebecca Hamilton has said this. She left her family here, she went to China, and God gave her far more children than she ever had here.

With persecution in the age to come, eternal life, but many who are first will be last and the last first. Now, my basic flow of logic here this morning is very simple. It is this.

In verse 23, Jesus says these words, How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Now, Jesus says this, right? This is a fact. It's not debatable.

It's proven. It's proven by the fact that Jesus says it. So, here's proposition number one.

It is difficult for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Here's proposition number two. Americans are wealthy.

Guess what the conclusion is? What is the necessary deduction here? The logical conclusion? Yes. Therefore, it is difficult for Americans to enter the kingdom of God. We know number one is true.

If I can prove to you number two is true, then number three must necessarily follow. Right? Basic deductive reasoning. If I say to you, all eagles are birds, there's an eagle, it's a bird.

And so, our text can nicely be broken up into two parts. I think you can see how it falls out. In fact, a lot of your Bibles probably have some kind of special notation at verse 23.

From 17 to 22, we have the interaction between Jesus and the young man. And then from 23 to 31, we have Jesus' instruction based on that interaction with the young man. His instruction to his disciples.

So first, overview of the first part. Verses 17 through 22. Let's meet our characters here.

Jesus, we know. But I want to just remind you of something. You know what? Most of you probably are aware of this account.

You've read it. I want to caution you about becoming overly familiar with Jesus' words. What I mean by that is familiarity breeds what? So they say.

Contempt. What happens is we have this certain mechanism, where if we think we've heard it before, we tune it out. I don't need to hear it again.

But brethren, I just want you to remember that when the crowds first heard Jesus, they were astonished at His teaching. You remember how it says that? What is this wisdom that's been given to Him? That's how people in His own hometown reacted. The people, we are told by Luke, were hanging on every one of His words.

Or John tells us, remember the officers? Remember when the leader sent the officers to go get Him? And then they come back empty-handed? And they say, why didn't you get Him? Remember how they answered? No one ever spoke like this before. What you have to recognize is when Jesus is speaking, He speaks like no one else. But you know what happens, we get familiar with accounts like this, and so we just can read them and we get familiar.

But as familiar as we might be, Jesus' words are really no less astounding and breathtaking right now. I mean, you just have to imagine you're watching Him. People were hanging on every word because it's like, what is He going to say next? Jesus is wisdom incarnate.

I mean, His answers are perfect. And here's this young man, you just look at him, how in the world is He going to answer? What good thing do I have to do to get to heaven? And we can start thinking about all the reasons or all the answers that we might give. Here is absolute perfect.

We should just marvel. I want you to hear His wisdom in a fresh way this morning. No one speaks like this man.

Now the other character that we need to introduce, Mark says this, as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up. He just calls him a man. Now, Matthew, we don't need to look at Matthew, but in Matthew's account, he calls him a young man.

And Luke calls him a ruler. This account shows up in all three of the synoptics. Mark just calls him a man.

Matthew calls him a young man. Luke calls him a ruler. Now, if you look down at v. 22, we find this information about him too.

He had great possessions. Luke puts it this way, he was extremely rich. Now, it doesn't tell us what kind of ruler he is.

He's either a political ruler, or he's a religious ruler. We're not told which. But you know what? His immaculate morality might lend itself to him being a religious leader.

But we're not told specifically. But, what we do see is he's a ruler and he's got wealth. And whether this position he's in is associated with this wealth, or he was already wealthy and so he got the position.

We're not really told, but we know this. He's got prestige. He's got status.

He's got position. He's got money. And he's young.

I mean, not a lot of people have position, power, prestige, and money, let alone young men. A very rare sort of guy that you've got here. Relatively young age, this guy has gotten into position and power.

He's ruler. He's exceedingly wealthy. So here he is.

He suddenly comes on the scene. And here's the thing. The encounter introduced is my next... Look at this encounter.

Look at him. Jesus is setting out on this journey. A man ran up and knelt before Him.

Now, you have to kind of put this... We can read these stories and we forget what things are really like. We just take it for granted. Well, you know, that's how it happened.

But he comes on the scene in surprising fashion. Look, rich people are not used to running. Rich people are used to being served.

Rich people, they're used to having others run to them. This guy breaks protocol. Mark 10.17 says Jesus, He's setting out on His journey.

You can imagine. Here, He's got His disciples. He's going to Jerusalem.

He's been on the other side of Jordan. If you go back to the early parts of Mark 10, you see that. He's heading to Jerusalem.

They're on a trip. He's setting out. You get this picture of this young guy comes running.

He ran up. He goes to his knees. He's trying to catch Jesus before He leaves.

That's what you have here. Out of breath, falling on his knees before Jesus. This is not the typical posture for one who's rich and powerful, you can be sure.

Now we've got the question asked. Verse 17, good teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now here's what I want you to notice.

Where good falls out here. Good teacher. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Now Matthew says it this way.

In Matthew's account, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? Well, you say, which is it? Well, it's probably both. I mean, just because one author leaves part of it out doesn't make it untrue. I suspect that, and plus a lot of times, we get abbreviated reports.

It means not everything that was said gets said to us. It's just like in the news. You read an article in the news, it doesn't mean that they're telling you every single thing that happened.

I suspect what happened here is this man used the term good to describe Jesus, and then he also used it, we can be certain of it, he used it to describe Jesus because Mark tells us that, and then he uses the word good to describe the deed that he thinks he has to do to obtain eternal life. How do I get saved? Now, put this in proper perspective. Listen, imagine I invite Mack Tomlinson here to preach.

And Mack walks through the door over here. And you just all of a sudden see me sprint from that corner over there, over there, and I fall on my knees before Mack, and I say, Mack, what do I have to do to be saved? I mean, this guy's a leader. He might very well be a spiritual leader, and he doesn't know how to be saved.

He doesn't know what it takes. This guy is supposed to have the answers. You see, he's made himself very vulnerable.

You know this, there's at least 13 sets of eyeballs on this guy. Matthew starts this out by behold, because this is unusual. This man, what he's doing is he's exposing his own ignorance.

He's making himself vulnerable. Out of breath, on his knees. But I can tell you this, whatever shame this guy might have felt, it's overshadowed by an intensity to get an answer.

He doesn't care at this point. He doesn't care what people think. He's seeking an answer.

Right? And as we look at this, so far, so good. You've got to say, hey, this is good. This guy's willing to humble himself.

He doesn't care what other people think. He's a rich leader. Young men with money tend to be proud.

This guy is actually taking a very humble position. He's out of breath there. He's asking Jesus, trying to catch him before he goes.

This is so far, so good. Nothing else is important as eternal life. Nothing else in life demands so much effort and haste.

Things look very promising at this point. Now here's the answer given. Verse 18, why do you call me good? Now you just have to think, how would you have answered this guy? Why? Why do you call me good? You see where Jesus takes the attention? It has to do with Him.

Young man, you need to think about Me. Why did you just call Me good? I mean, Jesus, let's marvel at His answer. Perfect wisdom.

Why do you call Me good? Well, let me ask you this. Isn't Jesus good? Isn't Jesus God? Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. Or Matthew, more consistent with where good is found in his account, Matthew shows us Jesus responding with, why do you ask Me about what is good? Why do you ask Me about what is good? You see, Mark wants to point out that the man said, Jesus is good, and so he also points out in the answer that Jesus says, why do you call Me good? Where in Matthew's account, he's saying what good deed do I have to do? And Jesus says, why do you ask Me about what is good? And you can be sure in the more extended, if you were able to see this whole thing play out, you'd see that both of these are an issue.

The man is casually throwing the term good around to describe Jesus and to describe his own deed that he thinks he has to do to get to heaven. And Jesus comes back and He calls him to task on His use of good. Why are you so casual with it? Why are you using it the way that you are using it? You're just throwing that term good around.

You have very little idea. This is what He's saying to the guy. You have very little idea of who I am.

You called Me good and you don't even know where good falls with Me. And you're talking about doing a good deed to get to heaven? You obviously have no idea about what is good and what is not good. Why do you call Me good? Why do you ask Me about what is good? Jesus is aware this man does not understand the word good.

And I'll tell you what, it's life and death that you understand that word. It's life and death that you understand what good is. That's why He brings it up.

This is no small matter here. This guy is ignorant that Jesus is good to, and we're in the way and to the degree that this guy has never dreamed He's good. And this guy really has no idea that he himself is far from being good.

I mean, that's the issue here. This man doesn't understand good. Brethren, this is not exactly what we find all around us today.

I mean, go out in these streets right now. Ask people, are you good? Yeah, I'm good. They have no idea.

They have no idea. They don't know good just like this guy didn't know good. Then Jesus says this, I read it already, no one is good except God alone.

Now there are those that have argued from this that Jesus is saying He's not God. That's not what He's saying. Jesus does not say to this young man, I am not God.

He does not say to this man, I am not good. Jesus is not denying that he's good or that he's God. He's claiming that if he is good, what is the necessary conclusion? He is God.

And if you are not God, you are what? Not good. That's the issue here. You know what his answer did? His answer perfectly described that man and himself.

That's what it did. He didn't really give the man a whole lot of time, at least in the account, the way it's given to us. He didn't give him a whole lot of time just to think on that.

I mean, the man should have thought, you know, his answer, there's none good but God. And so, this teacher, if he's not God, he's not good. If he is God, he is good.

I'm not God, so I must not be good. You see, that's the kind of conclusion that that kind of statement ought to lead us to. He's saying, young man, if you're not God, then you're not good.

There's two categories. You are either in the category of no one is good, or you are in the category of you are God. Now, next the commandments quoted.

Before this guy can hardly process this, Jesus immediately appeals to a standard of goodness. That's what he does. The commandment in Romans 7 is called good.

It is good. The law is good. And so he quotes it.

This man is definitely familiar with these. He knows he is. Mark 10.19, 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.

Matthew says this very clearly to the young man. If you would enter life, keep the commandments. That's how Matthew puts Jesus' response.

Now, what is Jesus doing here? Again, marvel at the way he's dealing with this guy. We would say, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. But that's not where he goes.

And I think it's probably obvious to most of us exactly what he's doing here. Right? Don't turn there, but just listen to this. In Romans 3, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law.

Now, this guy's under the law. This guy is seeking to keep the law to get to heaven. This guy is keeping the law and he's looking for any other thing that he has to do, good deed, to obtain eternal life.

If there's ever a guy that's under the law, in bondage to the law, being driven by the law, that is seeking to justify himself by works of the law, it's this guy. And what we are told is that whatever the law says, what does it say? Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't defraud, honor your father and mother. Those are the things it says.

Whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. For what purpose? So that every mouth may be stopped. Stopped from what? From boasting.

Boasting. When we hit people with the law, it should shut mouths. That's why Jesus brings it up.

And then, Paul goes on and says this, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Why does the law shut mouths? Because it shows people they haven't kept it.

It reveals sin. That's what it's for. That's how Jesus is using it.

Like a skilled physician, the law of God in the hand of Jesus Christ is meant to shut this man's boasting mouth. The young man, very carelessly, using the word good. Jesus wants him to see that whatever else he may be, he is not good.

He wants to take out of this man's mind any possibility of accomplishing any standard of good that's going to be acceptable by God. But it doesn't stop his mouth, does it? He still doesn't get it. So next, we have the self-righteousness exhibited.

Look at verse 20. Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth. Matthew puts it this way.

All these I have kept, what do I still lack? But you know the thing about this? This guy's being honest. I mean, there's every evidence that this guy is totally sincere. I mean, of course it's not true.

Of course he's full of great ignorance. But he's being sincere. I mean, isn't it interesting? Jesus does not say, Get behind me, Satan! Or He doesn't say, Woe to you, you hypocrite! I mean, He did say those things to some people.

But He doesn't say that. And you've got to love the way Mark records this for us. Verse 21, Jesus looking at him.

And notice how Mark points out where Jesus' eyes are. I mean, where were they? Where were they before this? But it's like, wherever they were. Whether He was looking off in the distance or looking at His disciples, or looking down at the ground.

He hears this man say, I have kept all these things. And Mark shows us His eyeballs go right to the man. And Mark says he loved Him.

And I think it's because he was being sincere. And he looks at him and what next? Well, he lacks something. Jesus says, you know the commandments? He says, yep, I know them and I've kept them.

So what? Case closed, right? Here's the commandments. Here's the standard. You've kept them.

What I'm wondering is this. Think about it. You're this young man.

You come to Jesus. What do I have to do to obtain eternal life? Keep the commandments. Okay, I've done it.

Why not just turn and walk away? Great! I am on my way to heaven. Why does he even think he lacks something? Jesus hasn't told him so. Not up until now he hasn't.

Now He's going to tell him He does, but he doesn't know it yet. Why would he even assume he lacks anything? He's very confident he's kept the law. Why? Brethren, I think we should look for an answer at the point of conscience, right? I mean, no matter how hard you've tried to keep the law, what is your conscience? This is the thing about being under the taskmaster of the law.

It says, it's snapping and cracking that whip. Work! Work! Work! Work! And what's the issue with working? You never know when you've done enough. I mean, that's the thing with every false religion that is works-based, works-driven, keep the rules, keep the list.

Well, how do I know when I've done it? This is the thing about Catholicism. I remember as a Catholic, you're always wondering, how good do you have to be? When have I done enough? You're just going, going, going. I remember talking to a Jehovah's Witness.

They don't believe in grace. It's you've got to do, do, do. Why are you coming to our doors? Why are you out on the streets? Well, because I've got to earn my way.

I'm earning it. It's not so much I love you and I've come to bring a message to you. It's not so much the glory of God and I need to proclaim Jesus Christ.

It's I've got to work, I've got to work, I've got to work, I've got to do. And see, conscience, when you're under the law, it's just constantly saying, you've got to do more, you've got to do more, you've got to do more. It's not enough.

Now, at this point, Jesus does not directly call this guy out. In other words, He does not say, you have not kept the law. You're a liar.

You have not. Now you get the feeling that John might call the guy a liar. You know, John was there.

Remember, John's in the group. He's looking. John would later write 1 John, which we've been going to.

He likes to use that term liar. Jesus doesn't just bat this guy over the head. Jesus, you know what He does? He takes it in stride.

He doesn't even confront it. Don't you love that? Next, we have the idol exposed. Verse 21, Jesus looking at him loved him and said to him, you lack one thing.

He doesn't say, no, you've broken the law at every single point. What are you talking about? Jesus just says, allowing all you've said to be true. You lack one thing.

And Matthew actually says, has Jesus saying, if you would be perfect. In other words, you know, we'll allow all this, but you want to be perfect? Here's what you have to do. Sell all that you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come follow Me. One thing holds you back from perfection. Surrender your wealth to Me.

And that's the real issue. I mean, you have to see this for what it is. This is Jesus telling this man what He wants him to do with his money.

This is an issue of surrender to Christ. This is an issue of trust. That's what this is about.

Young man, what are you going to trust? Where is your hope? Where is your confidence? Next, the test failed. Verse 22, disheartened by the same, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Do you recognize what just happened? This man failed.

The greatest test of his life. And you notice this, he doesn't question what Jesus says. None of that.

He doesn't call Him into question. He doesn't debate or argue with Him. I mean, what we see here is he wanted eternal life as an add-on to what he already had.

I've got my life. I just want to make sure that I can add eternal life to it. I don't want it to disrupt my present life.

I just want to know that when this present life is over, I've got eternal life. There's lots of people like that today. I just want it as an add-on.

I'm not interested in eternal life. It's going to really radically change my life right now. I just need it as an add-on.

And by the way, I'm talking to Americans here who have wealth. You guys are not in another category. I've got more to say about that in just a second.

But here it is. The cost was too high. I mean, even though eternal life was at stake, the cost is too high.

Isn't it amazing? What's amazing to me at this point is Jesus' silence towards this young man from this point. He says nothing else to him. You would think He might seek to explain Himself more fully.

Isn't that what we would do? If we would say, you've got to surrender your wealth to Christ, and they just said... They got sad. They didn't argue. They recognized.

And they just turned and walked away. Wait, did you not hear clearly what I said? Let me explain further. We would want to entice them.

Jesus doesn't negotiate with this guy. Look, Jesus, when it comes to serving God or serving money, He doesn't negotiate. He puts it out there on the table, and when the man says, I want my money, case closed.

That's it. Jesus does not go after him. He does not plead or beg.

He does not at all. Your money must be His. It must be surrendered.

It must be at His disposal. Or it is not. It's one or the other.

You are surrendered or you are not. He doesn't give any other information. Why? It's not necessary.

It's just not necessary. You don't have to put a lot of qualifiers in here and a lot of explanation. Jesus said you cannot serve God and money.

Jesus is Lord. And look, if you would be saved, then you need to be saved from everything you need to be saved from. And one of the things God promises to save all of His people from is from their idols.

And if you come to Him and you say, I want eternal life, but I'm not willing to be saved from my idols. And one of the big ones is money. Because when Jesus talks about you can't serve God and... I mean, what other thing? What would be one of the biggest things that He could put into that slot right there? You can't serve God and... Somebody might say, sin.

You can't serve God and the devil. You can't serve God and yourself. Isn't it interesting, Jesus says, you can't serve God and money.

Money is just the fullness of what man can do. Man has power through his money. And the issue is this, is Jesus Christ Lord of your money? When you say, no, I am Lord of my money, and you may not say it in word, but you say it in attitude, you say it the way you spend, case closed.

There doesn't need to be any more debate. That's what you see here. Brethren, this is not a parable.

This is a true encounter that Jesus Christ had with a young man. Now, this brings us to the second part of this episode. It's time for the lesson.

It's time for us to all sit at the Master's feet and hear the wisdom that we are supposed to glean from this incident. Now look at verse 23. Again, we see where Jesus' eyes are.

Jesus looked around. Now His eyes have come off this man and He's scanning the eyeballs of His disciples. He says to His disciples, how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.

You can imagine. Imagine this guy. He had an encounter with the Christ.

And right now, they can see this guy. This guy came running from somewhere to get to Jesus in the first place. He's obviously now going back to the somewhere he came from.

Jesus is on a journey. They're out on the road. You can watch this.

You can see. Those 12 disciples are watching that man walk away. His back to Christ.

He's failed the test. And you can imagine, He's not leaving like He came. When He came, you can tell there was excitement, there was desperation.

He ran. I doubt He's running away. He's sorrowful.

He's sad. He's disheartened, it says. You can imagine Him walking away, kind of His head down.

His shoulders not held so high anymore. He's sad. They're watching Him walk away.

He's walking away from eternal life. He's walking away from the life giver. He's made a bad transaction.

Bad. Deadly. It's going to cost Him His life.

That man is in hell right now. There's no reason to believe He ever did have another confrontation with Christ. No evidence.

The last we see of Him in Scripture is right here. He's walking away. Sad.

So, He's rejected Christ for the sake of His wealth. And here's Jesus' words to His disciples in verse 23. You know what they clearly indicate to us? They indicate that this man will not enter the kingdom.

I mean, that's what He's saying. It's difficult for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And this man has been a living demonstration of that very truth.

He's showing us the reality of the difficulties behind wealth. He shows us by a man with wealth rejecting eternal life to secure His wealth in this life. And that's what we see.

The truth demonstrated. Now, notice verse 23. Jesus looked around and said to the disciples how difficult it will be for those who have wealth.

I want you to think about some statistics for just a moment. Because I know this. There are some of you in this room that are saying, I'm not wealthy.

According to Forbes, in an article dated 6-1-2013, listen to this. The bottom 5% of those in America, and I'm talking about when it comes to wealth, the poorest 5% in the United States of America, the American income distribution, those that are in the lowest 5% in this country, are richer than 68% of the rest of the world. The same Forbes article says this.

The bottom 5% in the United States of America are about the same, roughly the same income levels as India's top 5%. That doesn't mean that there aren't some people in India with wealth greater than ours. What it's saying is, if you take all the wealth in the bottom 5% in the United States of America, and take all the wealth in the top 5% in India, it's roughly equivalent.

Listen to this. I went to an income rank calculator. There's actually a calculator on the internet that if you put in what you make, it will estimate where you fall with regards to this world's richest people.

So it will rank you. It will tell you you're 5,123,000th. I mean, obviously it's making... But you can put it in there.

And it will show you where in the percentage of wealth you fall with regards to the whole world. I plug this number in. If you make \$50,000 a year, you are in the top .31% of everyone in the world.

Now you need to grasp that. You need to really get what that means. That means that how much percentage of the world is poorer than you.

If you're in the top .31%, how much of the world is poorer than you? 99.69% 99.69% of the world has less money. Now you tell me. If you come before the judgment bar of God and God says, I put you in the top 1% of wealth holders in the world.

Are you going to be able to make a claim? I wasn't wealthy. Let's keep going here. If you make \$20,000 a year, it puts you in the top 3.65% at \$20,000 a year.

That's saying 96% of the world is poorer than you at \$20,000 a year. How about if you just make \$10,000 per year? You're in the top 16%. There's 84% of the world that is poorer than you.

Now look, if you only make \$1,300 a year, a little more than \$100 a month, that only puts you halfway. Half of the world is poorer than you. If you make \$100,000 a year, you're in a category with regards to the whole world where only 8 out of 10,000 people have that kind of wealth.

8 out of 10,000 in this world. If you make \$10,000 a year, you are in the top 16%. Look, if those of you who make \$10,000 per year or more, you're in this top 16% of the world's richest people.

If 84% of everyone else in this world is poorer than you, are you going to argue whether you're rich? And you know what? You will argue. Why? Because you're not Mark Cuban. Because you're not Warren Buffett or Bill Gates or Donald Trump.

Or one of the things is, you compare yourself to that family over there. And you say, well, look at the house they live in. I can't even afford a house.

Look at the car they drive. I can't afford a nice car. But what you're doing is you're comparing yourselves with one another.

Donald Trump could compare himself to Warren Buffett and say, I'm not wealthy. Why? Well, because he's got bazillions of billions, and I've only got around a little over one. You see, it's comparative.

It's relative. But the thing is, if we are living in a country, just think about discretionary spending. What's discretionary spending? That's money that you have that you can spend any way you want.

Do you know vast amounts of this world have no discretionary spending? It means their money goes towards the clothes on their back, a roof over their head, and food in their stomachs. And they have no more after that. It's questionable whether they're going to be able to supply those needs.

Do you know that when we have conferences in northeast India, we have to pay the pastors to come to the meetings? Why? Because if we don't, they won't come. You know why? Because if they don't work that day in their fields, their family doesn't eat that day. You bring them for a three-day conference, three days their family won't be able to eat.

We have discretionary spending. That puts you in the category of the wealthy. We are wealthy.

And here's the thing. Don't argue. Don't argue that.

I mean, you can't argue it. Like I say, are we going to go before God, before the judgment bar of God, and He's going to say, you had wealth like 90% of the world didn't have. Do you think that puts you in the category of being wealthy? I mean, you know what? If we could bring that rich young ruler up here that had so much money, and say to him, do you have a refrigerator in your kitchen? Refrigerator? What's that? Do you have an automobile in the garage? Automobile? What's that? We have things he would not have even thought about.

Have you ever flown on an airplane? What's that? I mean, do you ever get water from a faucet in your kitchen? Do you ever take a shower with hot water that actually came out of a hot water heater? Brethren, we have luxuries. We have such things. It's almost like this entitlement mindset.

Even the poorest among us. Oh, we're poor. Why? I mean, I can go to the poorest parts of this city, and they've got the television, they've got a refrigerator, they've got a stove, most of them have air conditioning, they've got some form of public transportation.

They weren't going to Jerusalem by bus. Brethren, we have so much, and because we're so used to it, and because we look at other people who are able to go spend long vacations over on the ski slopes and out on paradises in the South Pacific, and have billion dollar yachts and airplanes, we look and we like to think, well, we're not wealthy, but we are wealthy. But look, you need to look at the spiritual realities behind this.

Because the issue isn't just what number you have in the checkbook ledger. The issue is something else. Jesus is saying that if you have wealth, it makes it difficult to get to heaven.

Why? You see, we have to ask the why. Once you ask the why, and then you start looking at what we have, see, the thing to ask is this, what is it about the wealth that that man had that made it difficult for him to get to heaven? And if you start looking at the spiritual realities, this doesn't come down to just how much is in the bottom line. Or whether that family makes more than this family.

What it comes down to is if you have wealth, there are spiritual implications. What are those? What makes it so difficult? Well, doesn't money have a way of making us just very smugly content? I'm good. I'm good.

I've got my discretionary spending money, and I think I'm going to go do this when I want to, because I've got the ability myself to do this. I don't have to worry about praying for my daily bread. I've got money in the bank.

Are you kidding me? Pray for my daily bread? One of those pastors in northeast India would not be kidding you if he said, I pray every day that my family will eat. I doubt a single person in this place prayed this morning, unless you did it simply by memorization of the Lord's Prayer. But I doubt you prayed.

I'm not saying you didn't pray and thank God for what you got, but I doubt anybody here prayed with desperation. Lord, would you please feed my family today? And yet, I'll tell you this, every mouthful they eat came from Him. But you see what wealth does? You see what it does? It puts us to sleep.

It makes us self-confident. This is why it makes it so difficult, because we're not desperate. Because when you've got money, you're not used to looking outside of yourself for resources.

Lord, help me, help me, give to me. Lord, I need, I need, I need. You see, when we have wealth, it blinds us to what we truly are and to where our needs truly are.

That's what this man couldn't see. His greatest needs were to be found in Christ, but because of his money, he was blinded to it. He actually did such a foolish thing as to turn his back on eternal life itself and walk away.

It just deludes us. It makes us feel good. It makes us feel important.

We like how money makes us feel. It gives us control. People act certain ways towards you when you have money.

They treat you certain ways when you have money. You let your money run out, you find those people that treated you this way don't treat you that way anymore. Money.

Our hope gets fixed on what Scripture calls uncertain riches that seem to have this ability to get wings and fly away. But we put our confidence there. We're not desperate.

Riches tend to bind us to this world. Why? Because money can buy things in this world. It's like Brother Andy said one time, what does money do? Money can buy food to fill bellies of orphans.

It can buy clothing for those that don't have any. It can do good things for the kingdom. But the problem is we tend to rest in it.

And you know what we do? Well, we get money and then we justify rest. We justify play. We justify doing the luxury and just amassing the stuff.

We justify ease. We justify amusement. That's what happens.

You get it and you think, well, you know, I can do this. Why? Because I have the ability to do this. That's what happens when we get money.

And you know, statistically, the more money you get, the less you give, the less you think about others. Usually it's the poorest people that give the most, at least proportionately. Typically the rich give token expressions.

They never give enough to affect their lifestyle, their standard of living. That's always protected. Brethren, rich people are the people that have this kind of discretionary spending ability.

Brethren, it's like a spell that gets put on us. It really does lull us to sleep. And Jesus says to this man, surrender it.

Surrender all that it is, all that it stands for, all that it is in your life. Surrender it. To Me.

You come follow Me. I'll take care of you. You move your trust off of that.

Trust Me. Brethren, we're rich. We are rich.

We need to come face to face with that reality. Jesus looked around and said to His disciples how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God. We as Americans are wealthy.

We have much to answer for. And it means as Americans, we will find it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God. You remember this, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force.

We have to battle our way in. Jesus said, you pluck out eyes, you cut off hands. We've got to persevere to the end.

And money is a snare. Isn't it interesting how we want to amass money. We want to leave bunches of it to our children.

Isn't it amazing the very thing that Jesus says will make it difficult for our children to get in Heaven. We want them to have a bunch of it. Think about that.

I mean, can you imagine? Well, I amassed lots of money so that I would have a lot to be able to give to my children. And God says to you, you put the knife to their throat and slit it. Here God said in His Word that this would make it hard to get into Heaven and you wanted them to have a whole bunch of that which would be an obstacle to them to get to glory.

And you just saw to it that they had lots of it. Wow. Brethren, if this is true, if this is true that it's difficult for the wealthy, Jesus said this.

We need to let it sink in. Brethren, we're not talking about some far removed 2,000 year ago story about a guy. As I told you before, this is no parable.

This is real life. But it's not just real life for him. It's real life for us.

This truth stands today. This has to do with my life in death. Your life in death.

This has to do with us making it. And listen, Scripture does never come along and say, well, you're Christian so you don't have to worry about it. No.

The way Scripture says it is if you amputate, if you serve God to the end, if you don't give place to the love of money, if you walk surrendered to Christ, if you persevere to the end, then you will be saved. We like to start with this assumption, well, we're Christians, therefore, none of this applies to us. Don't you believe that for a second.

That is not how Scripture deals with it. Scripture says to you, unless you live a life that proves you're serving God and not money, you will not make it. Unless your money and your wealth are surrendered to Christ.

We may have people here make \$10,000 a year. But you have discretionary giving. That money that you used to go to McDonald's, or you used to go watch a movie, or you used to buy a new cell phone, you're going to be accountable.

Listen, are we surrendered? Lord Jesus Christ, how do You want us to spend our money? Now His voice may not be audibly clear to us, go sell it all. But He tells us in His Word what He wants us to do with it. And if you're able to look over and see a brother or sister in need, but you'll go buy the phone instead, woe to you that can do that.

We're going to get to that in 1 John. But how can you do that? When you hear the widows and orphans in this world and the desperate need, and you don't give? Brethren, if this is true that it is going to be hard for Americans to enter the kingdom because of our wealth, how watchful must we be? Are you watchful on this? Are you watching how much the wealth in your life has snared your heart? Are you free and able to give it all away, even all of it, if that's what the Master wanted? Well, it's very easy to say yes. But the way you can know whether you'll give all of it is if right now you're giving good sums of it.

I'm not laying claim to your money for the sake of this church or the sake of myself. What this is about is, is your money surrendered to Christ? Is it surrendered to Christ? That's the issue. How disciplined must we be? Brethren, how desperately prayerful? Listen, what God has done to us is this as Americans.

He has come and He has given us a mass of wealth. He's entrusted us with that which can be used tremendously to His glory. But He puts warnings on it.

Beware, I'm giving you Americans an amount of wealth that is going to make it difficult for you to enter the kingdom. Use it wisely. Beware lest it grab hold of your heart.

Beware lest it take your allegiance. Oh, how disciplined, desperately prayerful. Brethren, we've got to be.

How should we abominate selfishness and greediness? Listen, what you want to watch out for is any sort of financial security that keeps you from not needing God. Beware. Beware.

If you find you are resting on your money, whatever shape or form it may take, whether it's insurance, whether it's savings, whether it's retirement, whether it's big bank accounts, whether it's a 401k, whatever it is, whether it's your properties paid off, whatever, brethren, I'll tell you this, if you look at your wealth and you recognize it is creating an environment, it is saturating your life with a sense of ease and self-dependency that is leading you away from trusting and being desperate for God, put it on the altar. Brethren, you get one shot. And I recognize we live in the power and the grace of our God, but you recognize what Jesus said to His disciples.

He said, look, if your eye offends, you tear it out. It is better that that eye be out and on the ground there than that you go to hell. That's how Jesus talked.

That's how this race is. Brethren, be sure of it, that if God promises under the New Covenant that He is going to cleanse His people from their idols, be certain He is going to be coming after your money as it's connected to your heart. And if Jesus Christ says you cannot serve God in money, you better believe His eyes are on your money and He's watching what you serve.

And you should be watching what you serve. When Jesus Christ said watch, one of the things that you want to watch is how you relate to your money. Is your money at God's disposal? Is it for His kingdom? Is it for His work? Is it surrendered to Christ? Be certain that God is going to test you.

Just as Paul said, He buffets His body. Why? Because He wanted to make it. So buffet your purses and buffet your billfolds and your savings accounts.

Buffet them. Into what? Into submission to Christ. Are you living for yourself? Brethren, we have to look at this.

We have to test this. Verse 31, many who are first will be last, and the last first. There are some very prominent teachers who say, well, how can this be? This is a paradox.

How do we explain this? Well, they would say that based on what's said at the end of verse 30, that if you give up everything, in the age to come, you'll have eternal life. And I've heard it said that what this means is the first will be last and the last first. Well, how can that be? It's because everybody crosses the finish line at the same time.

How can it be that the first is last and the last is first? Well, you only have one runner. Two, they all cross the line at the same time. But I don't think that's the idea here.

I think the idea is this. Those who are first in one sense will be last in a different sense. Because you know what we have on the table here? We have the rich young ruler who walked away.

And we have Peter who said, Lord, we gave up everything. You see, that's the comparison, brethren. That's Peter saying, hey Lord, we've done what this young guy would not do.

Jesus' point is that although this rich young ruler was first in this world, he was first in law keeping. He was first in being a ruler. He was first in authority.

He was first in prestige. He was first in possession of wealth. Because this guy was unwilling to place himself in utter dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, he will finally lose his soul and be damned.

The first shall be last. But the last, pathetic Galilean fishermen. Now, it's not in Mark's account, but it's in Matthew's account.

You know what Jesus says to them? You twelve, you're going to sit on thrones. You're going to have eternal life. In this world, you'll have a hundredfold.

I mean, what He's saying is, you guys who have gave up everything, you guys who the world looks at and says, Galilean fishermen, and now they have nothing. They've given it all away and they're following this carpenter. You see, this is all about reversal.

You make yourself poor for Christ's sake. You take what He gives to you and you give and give and give. You give it to the things that He wants and the things that concern His kingdom.

You make yourself poor for the sake of the kingdom, for the sake of Christ. There's going to be a reversal. You're going to find, has Jesus not said, you will sit with Him on His throne.

That's, I think, what you want to do with that. Brethren, are you following Christ with your whole heart? Is your wealth surrendered? Surrendered to Christ. Remember, He looked around.

He looked around. And He said, how difficult will it be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom. Imagine Him looking right at you and saying that.

And you're knowing, whoa, yeah, and I have a lot of wealth. How careful should we be?

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