



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Riches in Christ

February 4, 2024

Mark 10:17-31

Clint Pressley

¹⁷ 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?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 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.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ 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." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessio²³ 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!" ²⁴ 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! ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ 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, ³⁰ 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. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

(Pastor prays)

In Christ, God Loves Us With Impossible Grace

Henry VIII was the most infamous ruler that England ever had. He was not supposed to be king though. He had an older brother named Arthur. Henry VII named his oldest son, Arthur, after King Arthur, who fought the Anglo-Saxons. He was trying to give some legitimacy to the Tudor Dynasty. Arthur was a young man when he married the formidable Spanish princess, named Catherine, thus bringing together England and Spain, because England needed the legitimacy that Spain could provide, and Catherine became part of a political marriage. Soon after they were married, Arthur, who was just 15 years old, contracted some illness. That's why it's always been said in England that if you are a king, you need to make sure that you have more than one child. You need an heir and a spare. That's what Henry was, the spare. He never thought he'd be king, but all of a sudden it was thrust on him. He asked the Pope, because they needed the allegiance of Spain, to give a special dispensation so that he could now marry his brother's widow, Catherine. The Pope allowed it and they got married and began the Tudor Dynasty. All was well except for Henry's propensity to have a wicked wandering eye. He would be distracted very often, and he ended up marrying six times. Only three of those wives lived through the marriage. Henry had a way of cutting their heads off. Henry would be named the Defender of the Faith by the Pope. Henry wrote a long letter to Martin Luther as Martin Luther was starting the Protestant Reformation. Henry wrote how terrible it was, and the Pope called him the Defender of the Faith and that title has lasted for the English Crown, even up to this day. But to get a divorce, he needed the Pope to give him another special dispensation, and the Pope would not grant it. So Henry VIII started his own church called the Anglican Church. Here in America, it's called

the Episcopal Church. He inadvertently founded the Anglican Church which would eventually create the Tudor Dynasty and set England on a path for success. He would establish a kingdom of his own, but miss the Kingdom of God. And any way you cut it, when you think about Henry VIII, he was a rich young ruler. He had everything you'd ever want, and he missed eternity.

That is much like the young man in this passage, the young man that we call the Rich Young Ruler. That title, Rich Young Ruler, is actually a composite title. We've put it together because we read the Gospels and saw it and heard it in church. Matthew's the one that tells us he's a young man, Luke's the one that tells us he is a ruler, and Mark right here tells us he is a rich man—so, the Rich Young Ruler. But in spite of his riches—in spite of his youth, in spite of his position, in spite of his power—there was something wrong with him. There was something in his soul that he was not satisfied with, so he runs to Jesus. He's looking for some sort of internal confidence to match the external security. And from this sad story, we learn that God cannot be bought by a successful, good life. But He can be known by the gift of grace found in Christ.

When this sermon is done, I want you to see that, in Christ, God loves us with impossible grace. In Christ, God loves you with Him. You've already seen that it's a long story. It's broken up into three sections. Those three sections will give us the points, so let me just give you the sections. From verses 17-22, the rich young man is running up to Jesus. The event that happens from verses 23-27 is Jesus now taking the event and teaching from the event. And then you have verses 28-31 where Peter is scratching his head, and he said, "What about us?" And finally, you have the promise that Jesus gives. So you have the event, the lesson, and then the promise. Let's go to the event. Here's the first point, number one:

Being Good Is Not Enough

The first lesson of Christianity is that being good is not good enough. But oftentimes, those that are one step removed from Christianity, when they think of Christianity, they think that what we're saying is that your life is like a

scale. If you can accrue doing more good things in life than you do bad things in life and the good outweighs the bad, then when you get to heaven, God sees your scale. You are more good than you are bad so He's going to let you in. But this passage tells us that being good is not good enough.

Let's go to the scene in verse 17. You notice how it opens up in verse 17: *And as he was setting out on his journey...* Jesus is on a journey. Where is He heading? He is going to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, He will be crucified for the sins that you and I commit in our sinful life. He will be buried, and God will raise Him from the dead. There He will secure our redemption. That is where He is headed. And as He starts on His journey, in verse 17, something unexpected happens— *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him.* When Matthew wrote about this, he says, "Behold," like we didn't see this coming. Something completely unexpected happens, and this young man is running up to Jesus. We should back up and say this about a young man running. Mark tells us that he ran up to Jesus. Nobody ran. Little boys ran. Little girls ran. But when you became a man, after bar mitzvah, you didn't run anymore. It was considered disrespectful, especially if you were a rich man. You've got stature. We find out from Luke that he's a ruler. He has some position of authority. This man didn't run to people, they ran to him. But not in this passage. In this passage, the Rich Young Ruler ran. And we find that when he gets there in verse 17, he ran, and then he knelt down. Do you see that? Nobody kneels down like that. He knelt down like a beggar. He knelt down like a leper, like a supplicant. He knelt down like somebody in desperate need. Here is this young man, he is riddled with some sort of sincere anxiety, some kind of concern. I mean, even after all of his success at such an early age, something's not right. Something's empty. We're gonna hear all he says, and he's a remarkable young man. He believes in God. He is moral, he's kneeling—that means he's humble. He's sincere. These are all really good qualities. In fact, when you look over at verse 17, he is asking the right question in the wrong way. This is what he says in verse 17: *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Teacher, I'm a doer. If there's a hurdle in front of me, I'll jump over it. I'm a fixer. I've done all of this. You can see the

trappings that I'm carrying. I didn't get to this position by just coasting. I am a doer. What must I do? I'm all about self-improvement. I want to set those goals out there. I want to work toward those goals. I want to get better. I want to achieve. I have achieved a lot, but something is aching. So can you tell me, Teacher, "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Just tell me and I'll do it. I'm an achiever.

I was watching documentaries this week of wars on television and I ran out of World War II documentaries, but I came upon a documentary about NASCAR that I had not seen. In six episodes, I learned a few things. One is I didn't know that they cuss so much in NASCAR. I guess it makes sense, but they cuss a whole lot. And the second thing is about the drivers. They are young. They are wealthy, and they have made a lot of money. They've worked hard to get it, and every time you interview the driver they were just talking about, even if they lost the race, that it is going to make them better. People insult us, it makes us better. We are achieving, we're moving forward, we're growing. This is the kind of young man who's falling down in front of Jesus and says, "What do I need to do?"

We've been going through the Gospel of Mark for a little over a year and a half now. We have never seen anybody like this in front of Jesus. This young man had such promise, he had such potential. Usually, when the people with power come to Jesus, they want to pick a fight with Him. They're always trying to argue with Him. Or the other people, those who are hurting and suffering, they need Jesus to do something. But here comes this professional young man, he's got everything you could ever want and he falls down in front of Jesus. There's something dogging him—maybe it's unsatisfied guilt or unfulfilled longing. Maybe it's something nagging, there's this doubt about his relationship with God. So he asked, "What do I need to do? Please tell me." Oddly, in verse 18, Jesus doesn't comfort the young man. He's been told his entire life, look, you've got such great potential. You're gonna do great things. You are a winner. We believe in you. But when he gets to Jesus, he asked the question—because of his emptiness—"What do I do?" There, Jesus addresses

the root of his problem in verse 18. Join me there: *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."* This is not Jesus saying that He is not God. This is Jesus addressing his problem. Why do you use the word, *good*? Jesus says, let me give you a little education right here. Nobody is good. You don't understand that only God is good. Jesus now starts to bore down and call attention to his superficial understanding of what good is. We do this all the time. We use it in all kinds of ways to provide excuses for bad people. So, we'll say he's basically a good guy. He made some bad decisions but, actually, he's got a good heart. He's got a good heart, but he's just been with the wrong crowd. That's our understanding of good. And in this shockingly short statement, Jesus is teaching him something he has not heard before. Do you think you've done good? You're bankrupt. This is what Paul told us in Romans 3:10-11. Paul quotes the Psalms and Isaiah, so he takes the whole Bible and brings it to us. He says, *"None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God."* Or, as Jesus said here, no one is good but God. Now, before we can understand the gift of God's grace, before we can grasp the gospel and understand what it means to be a Christian, we need to see the cavernous hole of our need in our hearts.

Let's walk through what Jesus says to this humble, self-righteous man. Jesus starts with the Commandments in verses 19 and 20: *"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.'"* So Jesus walked him over to the 10 Commandments, and He lists those that have to do with relationships. And because he is a really nice guy, he says, in verse 20: *And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."* I've been doing this my whole life. My mom and dad raised me right. I use good manners. I honor people. I've never killed anybody. I've done everything you said I should do. He's a nice guy. Honestly, if this guy shows up at your daughter's house, you want him to come in. You are doing all you can to make sure that she's nice to him so they'll go out again. He is a really nice guy. He is respectful, he's got a great job. He is everything you want in a young man.

But, in fact, as they stand there looking at those five commandments, Jesus knows that he's done all of that. Then Jesus gets to the heart of the issue. Let's read verse 21. Jesus says that he's got an idol. This is not Jesus saying you shouldn't have money. He's saying that this young man made it an idol—*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...* Before I get to the other, let me just stop there. Just look at that. Jesus looked at this young man, and loved him. This is before he gave his life to Christ. In fact, we know he's going to walk away. Jesus loved him. Here is the compassion of Jesus, here's the love of Jesus for sinners. Jesus looked 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."* He loved him enough to tell him the truth. Don't be duped into believing that if you love people, you must accept them the way they are, and if you don't accept their lifestyle, then you don't actually love them. That is not what Jesus did. The Scripture says in verse 21 that He looked at that young man, He loved him, and then He told him the truth. You do it lovingly. You do it kindly. You can do it with humility. In verse 21—*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."* Jesus says, so here's the thing, you've got an idol that you're worshipping, that you've given your life to. You lack one thing. Go now and sell all that you have, and give it to the poor. You'll have treasure in Heaven. Come and follow me.

R.C. Sproul, the great Presbyterian preacher and teacher, looked at this passage and said that here's what Jesus did: He took the young man to the relational part of the 10 Commandments, and that young man was confident he had kept all of those, although he must have not heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And then Jesus took him over to the other side of the Commandments that have to do with serving God, and pointed out to him, "You shall have no other gods before me." What does Jesus do with us? He gets to the heart of the issue. And here in verse 21, at the end of exposing this young man's problem, he came asking Jesus, "What is my problem?" And Jesus said, "I'll tell you what your problem is. You're hiding behind this cloak

of self-righteousness. You're hiding behind this cloak of really respectable, good behavior, but underneath, you have an idol that you're worshipping." And Jesus, at the end of verse 21, invites him to change the entire course of his life. Jesus invites him to do something completely contrary to the direction of his entire life. It is the supreme, glorious test, Jesus says to drop the crutches and trust Him. Turn your eyes away from depending on something else and trust Him. Verse 22 stuns the young man. In fact, we've never seen anybody react like this to Jesus: *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.* The Greek says that his face fell. He was disheartened by the saying. He went away sorrowful because he couldn't let go of his god. He had great possessions.

This is the only person who's ever come up to Jesus, asking for help, and then walks away disappointed in the whole Bible. This is the only time that ever happens. He walked away sad, but he still walked away. Being sorrowful is not the same as repentance. He was sad, but he wasn't wrecked. He's going to rely on his own goodness, but according to Jesus, that's not good enough.

That's why we explain the gospel. That's why we teach the gospel. That's why we need the gospel. The gospel tells us, simply put, that God in His goodness created us in His image. The image of God in you is disfigured by your own sin. That sin is a crime against God, and you deserve condemnation. That's where we come into this world, under that condemnation. No matter how good we act, we never get rid of the condemnation on the inside. This young man had condemnation. It was his. But that's not the way God leaves us, because God loves us. In fact, Jesus loved this man. God in His goodness sent Jesus to live perfectly as the God-Man, fully God and fully man. He lived perfectly for us. That's important for our salvation. He lived the life that we don't live. He earned righteousness as a man. He was already holy because He is also God. But He earned righteousness as a man, and at the cross is where the divine exchange happens. We sang it this morning. At the cross, Christ takes your sin and the wrath of God. He gives us His righteousness so that you don't depend on your righteousness. It's good that you look at the 10

Commandments and seek to follow them. They are there for that. They also remind us that we can't follow them perfectly and we need the perfection that Jesus gives to get rid of the guilt trip of trying to earn the favor of God. We then put on the righteousness of Christ that comes in grace. It's the gospel. Why? Because being good is not good enough. Let me give you a second point. Okay, that's the event. Let's go to the teaching. What did Jesus teach? Here's the second point, number two:

God's Grace Is More Than Enough

God's grace is more than enough. Let's pick up the speed just a little bit and turn our attention to the lesson as Jesus teaches it in verse 23: *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!"* He didn't say it's bad to have things, it's just hard. Why? Because they are distractions. You've got things, you're distracted by them. They eat up your time, your effort, and your thoughts—they're distractions. Or, if you have enough money, you can feel independent. You can feel like you don't actually need God to provide for you. If you have things, money can start to dominate who you are. And Jesus says in verse 23 that you guys need to see this: that it is really hard if you've got a lot of money to get over those hurdles.

Then the text says in verse 24, *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!"* The disciples had never heard anything like that. Now wait a second. The disciples were raised with the Jewish Deuteronomic mindset which said that if you are doing well, God will bless you. And if you are not being blessed, God doesn't love you. So the disciples, before the cross, would have been great prosperity preachers. They would have said, look, if you just live right, and pray enough, God's gonna bless you. And if you're not being blessed materially and financially, then He must not love you. And so in verse 24, they are listening to this and they are astounded. In verse 25, Jesus hits them with a great metaphor, and in verse 26, they're dumbstruck—*"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?” Don't weaken the metaphor. Jesus says 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. Oftentimes this has been understood that there was a gate in Jerusalem called the Eye of the Needle that was low so that when a camel came to it, the camel had to get on its knees to go through the gate. So that was traced back and it stops about the 11th century. Somebody made that up in the 11th century. That's not what this means. That is Jesus giving this unbelievable, impossible reality. He says it is easier for the biggest animal you can think of—a camel—to go through the smallest hole you can come up with—the eye of a needle. It is easier to make **that** happen than to get a rich man into the Kingdom of God. In other words, it's impossible.

In verse 26 the disciples are like, well, then who can be saved? That wrecks their theology. Verse 27 is the key to the entire passage. The whole point of the whole passage is in verse 27. Jesus looked at them and said, “You're getting it now. I have been trying to teach you that with man, it is impossible. But not with God. With God, He gets the camel and puts it through the eye of the needle. With God, all things are possible.” Verse 27: *Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”* God can save the rich man. This takes away any idea of a works-based salvation. This rich man had everything—great looks, he was young, he had money, he had power. But he won't get in, because he couldn't come to Christ.

What is salvation? What do we mean by the Kingdom of God? You being saved, you being a Christian, is the work of God. It is a gift of God. It is the grace of God. It is only the kindness of God that can save you. But how do you get into the Kingdom? I characterize it like this: the Kingdom of God is received as a gift. It is entered through faith. It is displayed in your life. That is grace. Jesus Christ lived perfectly, and died on the cross, in your place. God raised Him from the dead. He gives that to us. Redemption is given. Righteousness is received as grace through faith in Christ. How that applies to

you is when you appropriate that—you take that in faith—you believe and you trust your whole life. How do you know it works? It is displayed. It is shown in a life lived for God. And what this passage is telling us is that in Christ, God has loved us with an impossible grace. The truth is, being good is not good enough. Only Christ is good enough, and God's grace is more than enough. God's grace in Christ covers all of your sin. The event has happened. Jesus teaches the lesson, and Peter is scratching his head. I'll close with the third point, number three:

God's Provision Is Always Enough

God always provides. Peter speaks up in verse 28: *Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."* He says, "Let me just kind of tell you where we are. We've left everything to follow you. Are we OK?" And in verses 29 and 30 is the most expansive promise you ever hear in the Gospel of Mark; there are fewer wider promises. So Jesus addresses them and here's what He says: "I know you've walked away from things. I know that you've left some things to follow me." Verse 29: *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,"* Here is the promise, verse 30: *"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."*

Jesus says that you're going to be provided for. God provides for His children in Christ. You can see the promises in verse 30. If you had to break some family relationships and your parents turned away from you because you came to Christ, or you have a child who has rejected Christ...Jesus says there's a greater family. There's a greater family than the blood family. There is a family that's built on the blood of Jesus. It's the fellowship of believers that come together. I'm going to provide you with a better family. Better than what you had. They're going to love you more than those had loved you. They're going to support you. Jesus says that He'll give you a place to stay and land. He'll give you a family.

And you'll notice, in verse 30, the persecutions. That's only in the Gospel of Mark. Mark is writing this for the church in Rome that is under the boot of Nero. And there's some joy in being treated like Christ was treated. You will go through persecution, but He'll take care of you. You'll have a great family and then you'll go to spend eternity with God. That is the promise. And then He comes back around to a principle that He teaches over and over again in verse 31. It's what you noticed in this passage. You knew it when I read it: *"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."* But many who are first, like that young man that just came up, will be last. But if you are last, you're not seeking the things of this world. Those are the ones that will be first. In other words, there is a greater, more glorious Kingdom that awaits all who have put their trust and faith and their whole life in Jesus Christ. Because the truth is, in Christ, God loves us with impossible grace. His forgiveness is real. His restoration brings hope. His goodness is ours.

As we close today, have you caught yourself relying on your own performance? You've been trying, and you've heard now that you need to come off of that treadmill. Come rest in the grace that is in Christ. Or maybe you carry the guilt of some terrible sin, and it's a terrible sin. But you've just been told that God does the impossible. He gets the camel through the eye of the needle. Nothing is impossible with God. Or you have been brought to church and you wondered, what would it cost you? Maybe you feel alone. Remember that one of the great promises of Jesus is the fellowship of believers. It's people from all walks of life that only have one thing in common, but man, what a thing it is. It is the blood of Jesus that runs through us. Come and give your life to Jesus.

(Pastor prays)