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Sermon Notes

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## **Jesus Probes the Heart of a Rich Seeker**

**Mark 10:17-27**

Jesus is the “Great Physician,” who has come to address the deep-seated diseases of the human soul.

**“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”**

In today’s account, we see Jesus probe the soul of a man who seems to be the perfect seeker, probing to the very core of his corruption. In so doing, he exposes one of the greatest idols lurking in the heart of all people – greed. Lust for material wealth.

The best we can do as we read this is to be willing to lie under the probing, searching examination of the Great Physician ourselves; to say to Jesus:

***Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. <sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting***

To have our own idol of materialism – greed – exposed will be painful. To see ourselves in this Rich Young Ruler, and to realize that Jesus is demanding that we lie under his penetrating scalpel of truth, will cut us to the heart. But we need it done!

Is there anyone here that is willing to say, “I don’t struggle with greed! I have no such idol in my heart! I fully realize all my

money and possessions are truly gifts from God for his personal use; that Jesus has every right to command me to sell them all and give to the poor."? No one would be so bold! We know that this green-eyed monster of materialism is lurking in the darkest recesses of our flesh, of our divided minds. We need Jesus to perform surgery on us.

## I. A "Perfect" Seeker Approaches Jesus

### A. What Made this Man Seem Like the Perfect Seeker?

1. He was rich

***Mark 10:22 ... he had great wealth.***

Think of all the poor people he could help, the missionaries he could support

2. He was young

***Matthew 19:22 the young man ...***

He had years ahead of him... all that time to spend on the Kingdom, all that youthful zeal, strength, energy, idealism

3. He was a ruler

***Luke 18:18 A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

He had a position of influence which he could use to shape and mold the future direction of his community

4. He was pious

- a. He is deeply concerned about his soul

- b. He says he has kept all the commandments of God from his childhood

5. He was seeking: He feels something missing in his life... he is not satisfied with his life or his piety

***Mark 10:17 "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

***Matthew 19:20 "What do I still lack?"***

Usually a rich young powerful man like this feels he has the world by the tail

6. He was respectful, even worshipful toward Jesus

***Mark 10:17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

He was not ashamed to be seen with Jesus. Nicodemus came to Jesus  
AT NIGHT

7. He was eager for **eternal** life

***Mark 10:17 "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

a. He is definitely thinking of his condition in eternity, because he uses the word "inherit" and "eternal"

b. "eternal life" is not a thought usually in a young man's heart

8. He is wise enough to come to Jesus for his answers... he knows Jesus alone can help him

B. This Seems to be the EXACT Kind of Person We Want to Talk To!

II. Jesus Probes and Exposes His Soul

A. Jesus Takes a Very Surprising Approach

1. This man was LOW-HANGING FRUIT, we might think!

2. That shows how wrong we can be... how worldly in our appraisal

***1 Samuel 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.***

B. Randy Alcorn's Insights from *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*

"We would certainly handle the situation differently! First, we would probably commend the rich young ruler for his interest in spiritual things. Then we might tell him, 'Just believe, that's

all; ask God into your life – you don't really have to do anything.' When he said, 'Okay, I believe' (which no doubt he would, since it cost nothing), we would consider him a follower of Christ. Think how blessed we would feel, knowing that God's Kingdom was greatly enhanced by the conversion of this well-known wealthy man! Soon, there would be articles and books about him. He'd be on TV and radio talk shows. He'd be put on mission and church boards, speak at rallies, and receive invitations to share his testimony in churches and conferences across the country, likely making him a *richer* young ruler...

Notice that Jesus didn't tell the young man to give ten percent to the poor. (If he was truly an obedient Jew, he already did that.) Neither did Jesus say, 'Set up a trust fund, keep the principal intact, and give the interest to the poor.' The young man would have gladly done that. Instead, Jesus stopped him dead in his tracks by telling him to give up everything and follow him."

Jesus must perform deep surgery on this man's soul to bring him to salvation...he must expose and excise the idol of greed in his heart. And even deeper than that, he has to show him his corruptions, his deep need of salvation

So he begins by attacking his conception of GOODNESS

### C. Attacking His Conceptions of "Goodness"

***Mark 10:17 "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"***

1. We throw this word "good" around all the time... "He's a good man" we say very easily.
2. In one of the accounts, the man also speaks of good deeds for salvation:

***Matthew 19:17 "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"***

3. One of the most common misconceptions about salvation is that we can earn heaven by GOOD WORKS... if our good deeds outweigh our bad, we will go to heaven
4. So Jesus has to expose this corrupt idea of human GOODNESS

***Mark 10:17-18 "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone.***

5. Jesus is not nitpicking... he goes to the core of this man's corruption... **and ours**
6. We tend to think of ourselves as "basically a good person" occasionally doing some bad things that are out of character
7. What a LIE!! We are not 98% there, and just need a little help. I think that's the way this man thought of himself... just needing one last good deed to put him over the top!
8. Goodness here according to Jesus is likened to PURITY... perfect love, to the very core of our being
9. Only GOD is characterized by goodness right to the core

***1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.***

In a similar way, Jesus is saying "God is GOOD, and in him there is no EVIL at all." But human beings are deeply corrupt; NO ONE IS GOOD but God alone, and we are deeply soiled with sin.

That means that none of our works are purely good. Imagine a pig farmer coming in from cleaning the pigsty. He is caked in nasty, smelly mire from head to toe. Imagine him coming in and folding the laundry... or ironing his wife's Sunday outfit... or wrapping a gift for the wedding reception... or cooking dinner with filthy hands... or reaching out to hug his wife or pick up their toddler and fondle him. GROSS!

He can't help but soil everything he touches with his filth.

So it is with all our good works:

***Isaiah 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags***

Jesus is saying to this prideful man who thinks of himself as basically good: the standard for heaven is PERFECTION, to be as good as God is!

And the only ones who will be welcomed into heaven are those who seek it as abject beggars, not basically good people

***Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

#### D. Jesus Wisely Deals with Each Person As They Need

1. In John 6, when the people asked Jesus the same question this man asked, "What good work must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus gives this answer:

***John 6:29 "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."***

2. But here...

#### E. Jesus Applies the Law

1. So... in order to humble this man and show him his need for a Savior, he applies the Law of God
2. This is the purpose of the Law... to show us our sin and lay us low

***Mark 10:19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'***

3. Lesson for us evangelists: USE THE LAW OF GOD to expose people's corruptions; to show them that they're not "basically good people"

***Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.***

4. Notice that Jesus uses the horizontal laws... those that deal with other people, the “love your neighbor as yourself” laws
5. Four of them come from the Ten Commandments... one of them, **“Do not defraud”** does not; to defraud someone is to swindle them for money; it is possible that Jesus added this to expose some secret false business dealings he has been guilty of

#### F. The Rich Man’s Deep Corruption and Self-Deception

***Mark 10:20 "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy."***

1. The Jews of that time tended to look on the Law as something that you could keep... it was an external standard that only the worst people violated
2. The religion of the Pharisees and teachers of the law was of this sort... the “whitewashed tomb” religion that was external
3. This rich young ruler really believed that this was true... he HAD kept all these commandments from childhood
4. Think carefully: had he perfectly obeyed all of these? Had he actually perfectly honored his mother and father? Had he truly loved his neighbor as himself? O how readily we excuse our sins and how loftily our pride elevates our meager achievements and calls them perfect!
5. He didn’t understand the HEART purity that the Law required
  - a. The tenth commandment:

***“You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.”***

Heart purity!

***Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart***

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took that concept and applied it to the first two commandments he gave to the man:

***Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.***

***Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.***

And this man actually claimed to have perfectly **honored** his parents from childhood... that was a HEART commandment as well!

b. Therefore see the self-deception of this man

6. BUT this man's greatest problem was his IDOLATRY... he loved his money and possessions more than God or his neighbor!

7. Jesus is about to expose it

G. Jesus Sees the Heart

***John 1:47-48 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." <sup>48</sup> "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."***

***John 2:24-25 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. <sup>25</sup> He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.***

Jesus knew what this man needed to expose his true corruption

H. The Stunning Command, Promise, and Invitation

***Mark 10:21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."***

1. The statement **"Jesus looked and him and loved him"** is amazing and significant

2. It connects with what I just said... that Jesus knows a person's true state, true heart condition...



3. Revelation 1:14 depicts Jesus as having “**eyes of blazing fire**”
4. It also impresses me that it says Jesus loved him
  - a. This actually gives me ultimate hope for this man
  - b. Though I have no proof at all that this man eventually repented and changed his mind, it is always possible
  - c. And Jesus ultimately speaks about salvation being impossible with men, but possible with God
  - d. So perhaps we will find this rich man in heaven having later repented of his sin in walking away from Jesus
  - e. In any case, it is significant to me that it says Jesus loved him
5. The diagnosis: “**One thing you lack...**”
  - a. Its not the only thing he lacks
  - b. But it is a significant thing... faith enough to love God and neighbor more than his money and possessions
6. The shocking command: “**Sell everything you have and give to the poor**”
  - a. His materialism is essentially SELFISH toward the poor
  - b. And even worse, it is IDOLATROUS in relation to God

*Colossians 3:5 greed... is idolatry.*

- c. This command is similar to the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price... in both of those cases, the man sold everything he had to obtain it
- d. It is also clearly related to this:

*Mark 8:34-37 "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet*

*forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?*

7. The Promise: **“You will have treasure in heaven...”**
  - a. Jesus is calling this man’s bluff
  - b. Do you really care more for heavenly treasure than for earthly?
  - c. Prove it!
  - d. What an amazing promise! Treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal!
8. The Invitation: **“Come follow me!”**
  - a. The real treasure... intimacy with Christ!
  - b. Then... a whole new life of service to God and others

#### I. The Man’s Tragic Decision

*Mark 10:22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

1. The opposite of the treasure hidden in the field
2. That man went and in his JOY sold everything he had
3. Why was this man sad? He had to CHOOSE between God and his money! And the choice he made was fundamentally to worship the idol of money

*Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

4. The sadness is tragic... the fact that he went away from Jesus is even more tragic!
5. Imagine if he did this:

*Mark 9:24 "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

Now... is it possible he later changed his mind?

*Matthew 21:28-31 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'<sup>29</sup> "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.<sup>30</sup> "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered.*

Many assume that this rich young ruler is in hell right now because of his bad choice. But the fact that Jesus loved him and then taught "With God, all things are possible" gives me hope!

### III. Jesus Teaches Us About Wealth and Salvation

*Mark 10:23-27 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!<sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

#### A. Teachable Moment! Faulty Views of Worldly Wealth

1. Jesus **looks around at all of them**... with that penetrating look!  
With his eyes of blazing fire
2. Then teaches on the difficulty for the rich to enter the Kingdom

#### B. Why It is Hard for the Rich

1. "Hard" = significant challenges, obstacles to overcome
2. Why? Money is an IDOL... a Substitute Savior
  - a. Rich people TRUST in their money rather than God to protect them from harm; **it gives them security**

- b. Rich people DELIGHT in their money rather than God... **it gives them pleasure**
- c. Rich people FOCUS on getting more money rather than seeking God... **it gives them purpose**

3. So... rich people often don't think they need anything else

But... as Jesus said to the people of Laodicea:

***Revelation 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.***

### C. The Disciples Shocked Reaction

1. The disciples were stunned!! Like most Jews of their day, they looked on wealth as a sign of God's great blessing
2. Wealthy people were seen to be uniquely in God's favor
3. Jesus actually says that rich people are in a much worse situation
4. When the disciples were stunned by this, Jesus doubled down:

***Mark 10:24-25 But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."***

5. Some people have sought to explain this and reduce its impact
  - a. One theory is that there was a particularly narrow gate in Jerusalem called the "eye of the needle" that a camel could get through only if it unloaded all its pack and stooped down; but there is literally no archaeological evidence that such a gate ever existed... and it makes no sense anyway, since the camel's owner would not go to such ridiculous lengths to enter such a gate; he would just go around to a wide open main gate in Jerusalem
  - b. Another theory is that this is a mistranslation... the Greek word for camel is *kamelos* and the Greek word for rope or cable is

*kamilos...* as if the idea was to pare down the rope strand by strand until at last it could fit through the eye of a needle

6. BUT all this misses the real point... that salvation for the rich is not merely DIFFICULT but IMPOSSIBLE

***Mark 10:26-27 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."***

D. Only By God's Transforming Work Can Anyone Be Saved!

There are NO seekers

***Romans 3:10-12 "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."***

It is therefore IMPOSSIBLE to come to God unaided

***John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him,***

But if God transforms the heart, the impossible becomes not merely possible but ACCOMPLISHED

***John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.***

Though it is hard (even impossible) for the rich to be saved, God is able to work the change in human hearts so that they see the emptiness of wealth and turn away from it toward God and toward Christ!

What about YOU? Has this happened to you?

Have you seen the emptiness of wealth and been willing to turn away from it to find true riches in Christ?

#### IV. Lessons

##### A. “No one is good but God alone...”

1. Understand the doctrine of the depravity of man
2. Reset your expectations of human nature
3. Meditate on the pervasiveness of sin in your own life
4. Cry out to Lord for grace... it is the only force strong enough to handle sin’s dreadful plague
5. Worship the God who IS good, meditate on the perfection of His goodness, know and understand how GOOD God is, and how GOOD Jesus is and how GOOD the Holy Spirit is
6. And know that, when God is done with us, we will be good too!

##### B. “If you wish to enter life...”

1. Come to Christ, if you are presently on the outside looking in
2. You must ENTER the Kingdom of Heaven... you must be born again into it, since no one is naturally born into it
3. Do you have the desire to enter life? Come to Christ!!!

##### C. “Sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...”

1. We know that this is not a universal commandment that Christ is giving to all people, that if they want to go to heaven, they must divest themselves of all their earthly property
2. However, we need to understand how generous God wants us to be
3. Too many Christians are caught up in the idolatry of wealth
4. The surest remedy is to begin to live a simpler life, a life of open-handed generosity to the poor

5. Randy Alcorn's *Treasure Principle*, and *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* are excellent books to help us develop an "Eternal Perspective"
6. Meditate much on heavenly treasure, heavenly rewards, our heavenly life; strive to gain as much glory and as many rewards as you can by living sacrificially now

D. "It is hard for a rich man to be saved..."

1. Understand the special dangers of wealth in the Christian life
2. Watch out for idolatry here

***1 Timothy 6:9-10 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***

3. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!!!

E. "With man this is impossible..."

1. Human salvation is impossible, if only humans are involved
2. It doesn't matter how effective an evangelist you are, no one will ever be saved unless God gets involved
3. Worship God, therefore, if you are a Christian! You are a miracle of God's grace

F. "With God, all things are possible..."

1. Trust fully in God to lead others to Christ
2. Understand how omnipotence functions to advance the Kingdom of Christ
3. Let the statement "With God, all things are possible" characterize your outlook, your prayer life, your optimism, your hope!!!