

**International Sunday School Lesson  
Study Notes  
March 13, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Mark 10:17-31  
Lesson Title: Simple Faith**

**Introduction**

The first nine chapters of Mark contain a record of the Galilean ministry of Jesus. This first phase of our Lord's ministry appears to have lasted longer than any other, and in it Jesus performed most of His miracles. Chapters 10-15 give an account of His final Judean ministry as he moves closer towards Jerusalem and the final days leading up to His crucifixion (Mark 10:1).

Mark also records several accounts of private instruction to the disciples during our Lord's journey to the Passover in Jerusalem. Some of the individuals Jesus spoke with in Mark 10 were the Pharisees (Mark 10:2), a few children (Mark 10:13), a rich man who was anxious about eternal life (Mark 10:17-22), some disciples (Mark 10:23-27) and Peter (Mark 10:28-31). The last three are the focus of our lesson text.

**Simple Faith and a Rich Man (Mark 10:17-22)**

Verse 17

“And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

We know from the account of this story recorded in Matthew 19:20 this “one” who came “running, and kneeled” before Jesus is described as “young.” Luke tells us he was a “ruler” which probably refers to a position held in a nearby synagogue somewhere, probably near Jericho (Luke 18:18). Both Matthew and Mark tell us “he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22).

His “running” to Jesus indicates his eagerness to find the answer to his need. In spite of his wealth, position, and prestige, he still was not satisfied. Jesus saw the man's earnestness and sincerity, because he “kneeled to him” with his question. He addressed Jesus as “Good Master,” or, “Good Teacher,” which is a term of respect. He asked, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” The subject of his question, “eternal life” is admirable. The words “What shall I do” is the problem. Jesus, the great reader of the heart, knows this young man actually believes he can “do” something to “inherit eternal life.” Eternal life is not about “doing,” it is about simple faith and believing.

## Verse 18

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.”

The emphasis in this verse is not on “thou” or “me;” it is on “good.” Jesus was not disclaiming goodness or denying His deity. He wants the young man to recognize His true identity as the God-man. Jesus is saying, “Why call me good, unless you recognize me as God, for none is good but God.” This mild rebuke means Jesus will not allow someone to address Him with mere social courtesy.

By asking the young man this question, Jesus sought to achieve two goals. First, He attempted to turn the attention of the young man to God, who alone is essentially good and therefore worthy of trusting. Second, He attempted to correct the young man’s superficial view of what was “good” in life. In this case, the young man obviously viewed wealth and riches as “good.”

## Verse 19

“Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.”

In response to the young man’s question, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life,” Jesus met him on his own turf, reminding him if eternal life was to be based upon works, he already “knew” the requirements of the law. Jesus cited a summary abbreviation of several of the commandments for the purpose of self-examination on the young man’s part.

“Thou knowest the commandments” means this young man saw only works as a means of salvation. In that regard, he had no need for Jesus to teach him. If keeping the law was the requirement for salvation, he already knew what he needed. Jesus’ point is, perfect obedience to the law without failure would bring eternal life, theoretically speaking. However, this young man apparently had not realized because of his sin nature it was impossible for him to keep the commandments perfectly.

## Verse 20

“And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.”

The rich young man was a conscientious man. He claimed to have kept God’s commandments perfectly from his “youth.” “Youth” indicates this man was young, possibly in his teens or early adulthood. While we cannot be sure of his

exact age, we can conclude he came to Jesus early in life, which is beneficial to anyone. So many people waste their entire life on self and sin and never give thought to eternity. At least this “young” man is talking to Jesus.

The young man also wanted to know what else was necessary for “eternal life.” In all probability the young man’s claim to have “observed” the law was true as far as external obedience was concerned. He did not seek to deceive Jesus by his statement. However, the truth is he was breaking the First Commandment by making his possessions his god. Could he have kept the Law flawlessly? No. He may have kept it externally, but he could not have kept it perfectly in his heart (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 10:10).

*Note: This young man is not ignorant. He just does not understand how to get to heaven and he wants to know. This young man is near salvation. He is kneeling in the immediate presence of the Savior and asking the right question. Do you know how to get to heaven? If not, are you willing to ask? When Jesus answers and tells us to repent of your unbelief and confess your sins, are you willing to place simple faith and trust in His Jesus? If so, you can have eternal life (John 3:16; 6:68; Acts 4:12; Romans 6:23).*

#### Verse 21

“Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”

“Beholding” means “intense, searching gaze.” Jesus looked right into his soul. He recognized the young man’s sincere desire to satisfy his spiritual hunger and saw the tremendous possibilities in this young man if he would simply trust Him for salvation.

Jesus’ love for this young man is the basis of His response and directions.

“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.” Jesus directed the young man to sell all his possessions, give the proceeds of the sale to the poor, identify himself with Christ in the shame and humiliation of the cross and follow him. The point Jesus was making was not that eternal life can be obtained by giving to the poor, but people are unable to receive eternal life because of possessions, things, and earthly attachments. Unfortunately, the young man was not willing to do what Jesus asked.

“Take up the cross, and follow me” is a command for renunciation of earthly possessions and living for self. To “take up the cross” and “follow Jesus” involves total self-renunciation and total commitment to Jesus Christ. When the young man heard the word “cross” he would know immediately Jesus was

speaking about death. Simple faith is about the cross, following Jesus Christ, and living in obedience to Him. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be willing to identify with the “cross” and be willing to die for Him.

### Verse 22

“And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”

The young man longed for eternal life but made a fatal choice. He was attached to his earthly possessions and therefore forfeited eternal life. He went away “sad at Jesus’ saying.”

“Sad” comes from the Greek word, *stoog-nad-zo*, and means “the dark sky covered with clouds.” This sincere young man went out into the darkness lost and alone with nothing to hold onto but his earthly possessions. His earnestness turned to sadness. Simple faith in Christ could have changed his life forever.

### **Simple Faith and Jesus’ Disciples (Mark 10:23-27)**

#### Verse 23-25

“And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Following the interview with the young man Jesus proceeded with a word of private instruction to “his disciples.” He asked, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” “Riches” may suggest more than monetary wealth. It is a broad term which could well be translated “things.” It included business dealings, goods, and a variety of luxuries.

Our Lord’s words “astonished” his disciples because they ran contrary to Jewish thinking. “Astonished” means “bewildered.” It was commonly supposed in the Jewish mind that “riches” were a sign of divine favor. Much like the health wealth gospel preached today where financial blessings are a sign of being right with God. Jesus made it crystal clear that riches may be a handicap rather than an asset. This was a truth so foreign to Jesus’ disciples that he repeated it to enforce its truth. Yet Jesus thought it was a basic truth to be understood for the word with which He addressed the disciples is “children.” “Children” is a word used for those receiving their first lessons.

Twice Jesus used the words “hard to enter the kingdom of God.” The words “hardly” and “hard” mean “impracticable.” In other words, Jesus is saying, “You cannot imagine how difficult it is to get to heaven trusting in riches. It is impossible.” If His uses of the word “hardly” and “hard” was not enough, in His next breath He uses a figure of speech that leaves the impression that it is impossible for a rich man to go to heaven. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The “eye of a needle” must be taken literally to balance with Jesus’ solemn and serious warning. The “eye of a needle” does not refer to a gate in the wall of a city that would require a camel to bow down in order to access. The words “eye of a needle” was a Jewish statement to emphasize the impossible. Jesus was saying it was impossible for a man like the rich young man He had just encountered, to go to heaven while still holding on to his riches.

#### Verse 26

“And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?”

Literally “astonished out of measure” means “shocked or stricken with panic.” Their astonishment as J.B. Phillips writes, “knew no bounds.” The disciples were utterly dumbfounded. They asked, “Who then can be saved?” It was their theological presupposition that riches indicated God’s favor. If a rich man could only with difficulty be saved, how could others be saved?

#### Verse 27

“And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”

In spite of their astonishment, Jesus was able to press home the message salvation is impossible for any man to achieve by his own works. Jesus said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.” Even the impossible task of saving sinful men is “possible,” but only “with God.” How beautifully and masterfully our Lord conveyed the ultimate truth in salvation, that is, it is wholly a work of God in saving grace. He can save the rich, however improbable that might be! Bless His name!

### **Simple Faith and Peter (Mark 10:28-31)**

#### Verse 28

“Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or

lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.”

Peter's mind immediately starting spinning and he said, “Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.” Peter is suggesting to Jesus he and the disciples had done the very thing required of Jesus in that they had left all to follow him and they did not have earthly possessions. There seems to be a hint of discontent or question among Peter and the disciples as to what they will get in return for what they had given up to follow Jesus.

Jesus' response to Peter in verse 29 began with “Verily” or, what he was about to say was going to be a new revelation of truth to them. He reassuringly affirmed there would be compensation for those whose hearts are centered on heaven. There will be ample rewards for sacrifices here on earth (verses 29-31). Everyone who had forsaken the things most precious and dear to them would “receive an hundredfold now in this time” and “in the world to come eternal life.” An “hundredfold” was the generous measure of the abundance of earthly blessings given to the followers of Christ. To follow Christ means we will be rewarded and given back all we have sacrificed, although it will all be in another form and for another purpose and have another value.

“With persecutions” was a stern reminder to Peter, the disciples, and to us that while we enjoy the blessings and benefits of following Christ, trouble will be a part of our present experience. Simple faith in Christ does not mean a life of wealth, health, and ease. Persecutions were natural to the following of the Lord in Jesus' day, the days of the apostles, and must be expected today (John 15:18-20).

### Verse 31

“But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.”

Jesus presented a final word of assurance to Peter and His disciples by declaring God's assessment of greatness is not the same as the world. Indeed, in any instances God's judgment will reverse the judgment of the world. The young ruler and others like him might be rated high by the standards of the world, but not by God. To the contrary, those accounted to be small and insignificant by men may be considered great in the eyes of God. The difference is simple faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

The rich young man probably had access to most venues of his day. He was no doubt greeted and welcomed with open arms among the rich and famous. The text indicates he was a moral man who earnestly kept God's law and

commandments. He was doubtless a man most fathers would have their sons emulate. But he was a man without simple and saving faith.

Jesus loved this young man, for He saw the possibilities and potential for a changed life. But Jesus likewise saw one fatal weakness. The young man loved his wealth too much to give it up, even for Jesus. Jesus did not argue with the young man or condemn him. He used his sadness to teach His disciples a valuable lesson. If one would be a follower of Christ, he must make a commitment of faith to Him. This requires renunciation of self and sin and simple faith to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This rich young man failed to trust. What about you?

*“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).*

Amen.