

WHERE IS YOUR HEART?

Covetousness, Kingdom, and the Great Reversal

PART ONE – WALKING AWAY FROM JESUS, WALKING AWAY FROM LIFE

By Pastor David Fields

Mark 10:17-22

I. The Request

Fishing for Compliments

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

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In Jesus' culture, one compliment requires a second compliment: a compliment in return.¹ If that was expected – a return of 'Most honoured and good sir' – well, Jesus does not play that game. He's not in the business of giving out titles or compliments to stroke this man's ego.

Instead, He (Jesus) challenges him: “*Why do you call me good? ... No one is good – except God alone*” (Mark 10:18). As we come to learn through the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is both good and God himself. That’s not the point of what Jesus is saying here. It’s to challenge the system this man is playing into. A status game.

Modifying the Command

The commands Jesus recites are from the final six in the Ten Commandments - the ones that deal with how we relate to others. With one variant. 'You shall not covet' is replaced, or maybe better, modified, to 'you shall not *defraud.*' You shall not covet is dealing with *motivation* - *with the inward, heart desire level.* Not exactly action; but to 'defraud,' that's an action.

It was commonly believed in the ancient world, that one of the only ways to really grow wealthy was by not properly paying employees.

The shift in Jesus' use of the word 'defraud' from 'covet,' seems to suggest economic exploitation. So, Jesus puts His finger on that thing that this rich young man maybe isn't yet considering about his own spiritual blindness.

Scholar Chet Myers explains: “As far as Mark is concerned, the man’s wealth has been gained by ‘defrauding’ the poor – he was not ‘blameless’ at all – for which he must make restitution.”²

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[illegible]

By rephrasing ‘you shall not covet’ to ‘you shall not defraud,’ it’s likely Jesus is revealing the rich man’s ‘blindness’ to his true need for God’s grace; for his need to make real, stark changes.

“Jesus looked at him and loved him.”

Mark 10:21

Unmasking False gods

He sees this man. He loves him; and out of love, He (Jesus) tells him the truth of his spiritual condition. It’s dire; and out of love, He (Jesus) says what he needs to do to find healing and true freedom.

Jesus offers a kind of healing by addressing his ‘kingdom issue.’ It’s not just defrauding the poor that’s at issue. That’s certainly part of it, but it’s the very reason he would find himself in this position. He loves his wealth, and what it gives, more than he loves and trusts God.

Notice which of the Ten Commandments Jesus *doesn’t mention*.

The first four commandments are all about how we relate to God. The first of the ten – ‘you shall have no other gods before me’ – every other command is just an elaboration on this one; the logical *outflow* from this one.

In the Bible this elevating of something above God as our ultimate, is called idolatry. An idol is anything – usually a *good* thing – that becomes our *ultimate* thing. An idol is a ‘God substitute.’ The thing we look to for our sense of worth and identity, for security or comfort. For this young man, Jesus presses on the real issue with his heart – something other than God was *his god*.

II. Invitation to the Way

Jesus hasn’t said it is a sin to have wealth. He hasn’t said: ‘those who are rich are bad,’ or those who are poor ‘are good.’ No. He’s saying something much deeper – more fundamental. He’s saying there’s something *wrong with all of us* – and the disciples pick up on this in the next frame when they blurt out, “*Who can be saved?*” Indeed!

It truly is impossible, as Jesus says, for *any one* of us to be saved on our own merit, our own steam. But with God – by His grace – all things are possible. That’s the miracle at the heart of the Gospel.

The Power of Wealth

Money, Jesus is showing us here, has an incredible

power to blind us – blind us to our own need of God’s grace, and to the needs of others around us.

What’s particularly difficult for those with money is that it is so easy for us to place our trust in our finances – rather than God.

Out of love for this young man, Jesus tells him to sell his property – the source of his wealth – to let go of what he’s white-knuckling for his sense of security and hope. To give generously to the poor – to grow a heart of compassion for those in need. Tragically, this rich young man walks away.

The NIV translation says he’s ‘sad.’ ‘Sad’ is one way to translate the Greek word here, but this same Greek word, *lupeo*, it is often translated ‘grieve’ (NRSV). The young man went away ‘grieving.’

We see the same word used of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was given over to be crucified. Jesus was ‘grieved in spirit’ to the point of sweating drops of blood. Why? Because He was going to lose what was most central to His identity – He would, for a time, have a sense of God-forsakenness. As Jesus says from the cross:

“*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”

Mark 15:34

That’s what grieves Jesus – any sense of ‘distance’ from the Father – the thing most central to His identity.

Why is the rich young ruler grieved? Because Jesus asked him to give up what was most central to *his* identity – his wealth.

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Calculations or Love?

The rich young ruler was asking Jesus, ‘What must I do to inherit life eternal?’ He was looking to *add* something to what he thought was already a pretty good life. The problem was, of course, that he was approaching religion from the same perspective of the Pharisees – that if he were obedient enough, surely God would have to bless him.

Biblical Scholar, Morna Hooker puts it like this:

“His obedience is based on calculations of self-interest rather than on a single-hearted love of God which is prepared to fling everything away.”³

Healing Our Blindness

This text begs us to ask ourselves some important questions. Like: How do we view God? Do we see Him as stingy? As unkind to us? How do we see our money? Is it just money, or something more than that? Does it have the center of our hearts? Is it even *our* money, or really more like a loan from God that we are ultimately to use for His glory?

We might wonder, ‘How can we really tell?’ Just take a moment and ask yourself:

- 1) Do I find it easy to give away large portions of money...or not?
- 2) Do I enjoy giving away money for the sake of others and for the sake of God’s kingdom work? And, not as a way to be *known* for my contributions, we are still getting something – honor, status, being ‘noticed’ – from that. I mean giving anonymously, simply for the sake of those who benefit?
- 3) Do I believe God is good, that His call to put aside our idolatry of money is the most loving thing He can say to us?

If this remains a struggle for you – if your money has you – there is truly Good News. There is the healing for our blindness.

“When he [Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”
Mark 10:47-48

- 1) The rich young man is calculating – Bartimaeus is crying out. What about you?

Bartimaeus calls out: ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.’ The rich man, on the other hand, asks: ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’

- 2) Bartimaeus knows that Jesus, and Jesus alone has the power to free him from his blindness. What about you?
- 3) Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the ‘road.’ He commits himself to apprenticing his life to Jesus. What about you? Will you ‘get up’ to follow Jesus on the way?
- 4) Are there areas of blindness you still need healing from? Where do you need more ‘clarity’ from Jesus?

III. Jesus, The Rich Young Ruler

This young man might be in his late 20’s or early 30’s. Here’s Jesus, probably 33-years-old. He looks at this ‘rich young ruler’ and knows what that’s like. For Jesus – also a young man – is infinitely more wealthy and infinitely more powerful than that rich young ruler could ever imagine. Jesus, God the Son, leaves His heavenly throne, sells it all, to seek and save us.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

2 Corinthians 8:9

Jesus gave up the riches of heaven to give us the richness of life – a life of generously and love for the sake of others.

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Open Up

In Canadian culture, polite dinner conversation with guests often means not discussing religion, politics, and... money. Why do you think these can be difficult topics of discussion for public conversation?

(Perhaps we see them as taboo subjects for the public sphere because each of these has to do with what is most central to our lives. They push us into the realm of truth, power and resources/security. How we answer questions in these areas has a lot to do with what we worship, what we really love).

Dig In

1. Read **Mark 10:17-22**. What parts of this encounter stand out to you? Which parts raise more questions?
2. Read **Exodus 20:1-17**. Notice which commandments Jesus recites, restates and which ones He doesn't mention.
 - a. Jesus restates 'you shall not covet' as 'you shall not defraud.' One is an internal 'desire' (covet), the other (defraud) is an action. Why might this matter in Jesus' directives to the rich man in v.21? (I.e., Why might it be important for this rich man to sell his property and give to the poor?)
 - b. How do Jesus' directives in v.21 relate to the Commandments He left out?
3. Many people in Jesus' day, and many today as well, view wealth as a sign of God's blessing. How might wealth be a hinderance to following Jesus? What about for you personally?
4. The story of the rich young ruler follows directly after the story about Jesus welcoming the children in **Mark 10:13-16**. Jesus even calls his adult followers 'Children' following the episode with the rich man (10:24). These stories juxtapose two very different approaches to Jesus. Take a moment to compare what it is that children have verses the rich young ruler. How might you need God's help to become more like a child and less like the rich man?

Prayer:

Take time to share your prayer needs with each other and pray for those needs. Ask God for His help to free you from any ways money might be gaining a larger place in your heart than it ought to. Pray for our broader church family and community, that we would be wildly generous, because God has been so generous to us.