

**Gospel of Mark Part 18**  
**The Rich & the Kingdom**  
**October 27, 2019**  
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**Turn to Mark 10**

In modern American culture today, you've probably observed that **more and more people are learning to live comfortably without God**. There are so many products, services and opportunities available in our culture that anyone with a half-way decent job can buy enough stuff to live a very comfy life. And I'm not even talking about being a millionaire. You don't have to be a millionaire to live comfortably without God. It's not even so much about how much money you have, but more about how people are learning to live without God. **That's what a post-modern, post-Christian society looks like**: people living their life without God. To a typical post-modern person, Jesus' death on the cross was a long, long time ago, in a galaxy far far away – an irrelevant story written by people without the knowledge of modern scientific discoveries and technology. An ancient myth-text that has no meaning or bearing on modern life. What do you need Jesus for if you can make a decent living and can take care of things yourself when they go wrong? What do you need Jesus for if this life is all there is, and you pretty much have what you need, or you can order it online from Amazon and have it delivered overnight right to your doorstep for free? Jesus can't do that. Jesus can't deliver what I need, when I need it, and where I need it as fast as Amazon can!

**It's true that you don't need Jesus to live comfortably. But I believe you do need Jesus if you want to live eternally.** Comfort is fleeting. Comfort is temporary. Comfort can disappear in a moment. Just ask anyone who's lost everything in a flood... or a fire... or a tornado... or a hurricane... or some other natural disaster or tragic accident. **Living in comfort can easily lull us into a false sense of security. That's especially true the more money you have.** Do you know anyone who lost their job

during the Great Recession? Many of our parents and most of our grandparents had to live through the world-wide Great Depression back in the 1930's. And what about people today living in real poverty, or who've been victims of human trafficking, or who live with constant famine, in war zones or with civil wars, or with the fear of genocide or persecution, or are trying to survive in drought-stricken areas. Ask any of them about comfort... and they will just stare at you.

Back in Mark chapter 8 Jesus said **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me... What good is it for someone to gain the whole world yet forfeit their soul?” (Mark 8:34,36)** Let me paraphrase: **Following Jesus is not comfortable. (*repeat*)** It was never meant to be comfortable. **Christianity is not a religion of comfort, safety and security. It is a relationship of faith... and faith implies risk.** Those verses in Mark 8 are crystal clear. Following Jesus is not easy. If it's comfort you're after, don't follow Jesus. We're going to see in our next passage in Mark 10, that not everyone will choose Jesus over comfort. Let's read **Mark 10:17-31**

This man who came to Jesus was an Elder or leader in a Jewish synagogue. Since the time he was a boy he had been taught to obey the 10 commandments and probably the rest of the Jewish Law of Moses. This was to his great benefit because he was obedient to the Law. He was a good kid! Yet, despite knowing and obeying the commandments, he still had a nagging sense that something was missing in his life. I say that because he was the one who came to Jesus, fell on his knees and then asked an insightful question in v17 **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life”?** (v17) This is not some random question. He had thought long & hard about this and really wanted to know the answer. I think he realized that despite following the Law - like he had successfully done all his life - he still was not sure he had done everything to guarantee his place in heaven.

V22 also tells us that he was very wealthy. That was probably because he inherited land and livestock and money from his father. Because he had great wealth, it's highly likely that he had never worked a day in his life. At the very least, we could safely say that he lived a most comfortable lifestyle for that time and place. **He had lived comfortably.. but he wasn't sure if he would live eternally.** Jesus liked his question because he could tell it was a sincere question from a sincere heart. All the other Jewish leaders that Jesus had interacted with so far had only asked trick questions to trap him, to trip him up and get him to sin, to blaspheme. But this guy was different. **This wealthy man was a seeker.** This wasn't a trick question. So Jesus responded kindly, compassionately. In fact, v21 says Jesus loved him for his obedience and sincerity.

Let's see how Jesus starts to respond in **v21 "One thing you lack.."** Now that's gotta be a tongue-in-cheek statement if there ever was one! You mean to tell me that this wealthy guy who did not lack for obedience and did not lack for money, did not lack for comfort or status or respect in his community – **this guy who had everything – still lacked something?** Jesus catches the guy completely off-guard, saying something totally unexpected! He says to the guy who lacks nothing and has a comfortable life that he should give all he has to the poor – that he should leave it all, give it all away to the people who truly lack it. But that's only part of what Jesus asks. He also asks the man to come, follow him. This is special! Just like Jesus called the 12 disciples to follow him, **Jesus invites the man to become a disciple.** *This is an invitation from Jesus for this man to imitate Him, to imitate his life.* And what did we learn about disciples in Mark 8:34 that I mentioned at the beginning of this message? Disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross daily. Do you realize that Jesus doesn't ask anyone to do something he hasn't done? When he asks the man to leave his wealth and give all to the poor, the Spirit reminded me that Jesus left heaven itself to dwell among us! An authentic disciple – a true follower – takes on the values and practices of Jesus.

**The very thing this man lacks is a relationship with Jesus.** He has gained most of what the world has to offer. But he lacks the one thing that is most important. He lacks Jesus. You remember when Jesus visited the home of his good friends Mary and Martha and Lazarus? While Martha busied herself cooking in the kitchen to feed everyone, Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. And Jesus said that she had chosen what was better because she had chosen to spend that time with Jesus.

You and I can busy ourselves – focus our time and energy - in a quest to make money for a comfortable life. Some of us will even put that quest for comfort high above any other pursuit – even the pursuit of God. That’s the trap the rich guy in our story fell into. Jesus warns against that. He says in v29 that nobody who has left what we all consider the good life – a nice house, a good job, a supportive family of brothers & sisters, parents – no one who’s left that for Jesus’ sake will regret it. No one who has left that behind to follow Jesus and do his will, will be disappointed. Don’t miss the financial-giving principle Jesus teaches here in verses 21, 29-30. Possessions and wealth you give away or give up for Jesus’ sake (and the Gospel), those don’t compare to the treasures you will receive. Kingdom disciples are not to be stingy, tight-fisted, or ungenerous. **Jesus will honor a Kingdom-disciple who sacrifices to be generous and willing to share.** Some people I know are quite generous with their time, their hospitality, their money, their home, their car. They look for opportunities to open their home to small groups & meetings, they take in a homeless person for a while, they are willing to share what God has blessed them with. They are self-less. They are generous. They tithe faithfully to the Church. Other people are far less generous and more self-ish. Martyred missionary Jim Elliot who was killed trying to reach the Auca Indians of Ecuador with the Gospel, gave us this memorable quote, **“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose!” (Jim Elliot)**

Of course we know this wealthy guy was greatly disappointed to hear that he had to let go of his wealth & possessions, to let go of what he valued so much, to let go

of his comfort, and follow Jesus. That didn't make much sense to him. Remember his question? All he wanted to find out was what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. He wanted to know what he was missing on his list. He had a checklist, you know. No murder. Check. No adultery. Check. No stealing. Check. No lying. Check. No defrauding. Check. Honor mom & dad. Check. This is awesome! He'd already checked off everything on his list! But maybe the good teacher Jesus would know something he had left off his list. When Jesus told him what he must do, he couldn't bring himself to do it. It deeply saddened him to think he would have to risk leaving his life of comfort and stability to follow somebody he barely knew. All he knew about Jesus was that he was a good teacher. Not only was this going to be way too risky a step for him to take, but it was going to be way too costly.

The disciples were amazed when Jesus told them it was very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven – as hard as getting a literal camel to squeeze through the eye of a literal sewing needle. Something clearly impossible. Peter pipes up in v28 and says that all of them had left everything to follow Jesus. But isn't that what Jesus had just asked the rich guy – to leave everything and follow him? I think Peter's calculating in his head that what he had left was nothing compared to what the rich guy would have to leave behind. I mean, Peter & James & John left some nets and fishing boats (which were still in the family by the way, because they went back to fishing later on). But Peter's calculating that the rich guy was being asked to leave a whole lot more than that! So, **I wonder if the disciples are thinking that Jesus is being a little too demanding, even a little unfair.**

Look, when it comes to deciding whether it's worth following Jesus, the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, God in the flesh, the Alpha and the Omega, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King, is there any calculation to be made? Is there anything to compare with Him? It reminds me of an 80's worship chorus by Lynn Deshazo. Would you say this with me...

**Lord, you are more precious than silver**

**Lord, you are more costly than gold**

**Lord, you are more beautiful than diamonds**  
**And nothing I desire compares with you.**  
**Who can weigh the value of knowing you?**  
**Who can judge the worth of who you are?**  
**Who can count the blessings of knowing you?**  
**Who can say just how great you are?**

Lyrics taken from [this page](https://www.elyrics.net/read/l/lynn-deshazo-lyrics/more-precious-than-silver-lyrics.html)

Jesus isn't being demanding or unfair! Jesus is showing love and compassion by inviting this guy to take the journey to eternal life – a journey that is worth every single penny! **No earthly success or fame or status qualifies you to receive eternal life. Only Jesus.** Listen, if you are here this morning and you've hesitated to commit your life to following Jesus, let me tell you the journey is worth every penny! Jesus invites you right now. Jesus is calling you right now. Will you come to Jesus today?

Jesus should be your #1 relationship above all others. He asks for complete devotion, complete loyalty. **Every other attachment or pursuit a Kingdom-disciple has in life should be secondary to Jesus.** It's not that you can't have other pursuits, but they should be secondary. How do you keep Jesus as your #1 relationship? Well, like any relationship, you have to make it a priority, keep it in focus. It doesn't happen automatically. You don't keep your marriage alive by ignoring your spouse or being selfish or doing whatever you want. You can't neglect your spouse or have little or no interaction and still expect a healthy, vibrant relationship. We call that *living like married singles*. Two ships passing in the night. Spouses in a healthy marriage check-in with each other, talk, communicate, help out, care, take time for each other, serve each other, are considerate, and loving. You consult one another. You nurture your relationship. In similar fashion, **you nurture a relationship with Jesus through worship, prayer, listening, serving, waiting.** If your first love is on

something else – like the pursuit of money or comfort or success - you end up neglecting your spiritual relationship. Maybe Jesus doesn't hold the #1 place in your heart. Maybe other things in your life are crowding him out, pushing him to the side. Be careful.

I don't want you to think self-denial - or denying self - to follow Jesus means you have to avoid pleasurable things in life. Or not having fun. Or not enjoying a vacation or never buying a nice car, or never celebrating with an expensive night out with your family. That's a legalistic, dried up and bitter kind of Christian discipleship that morphs into a long-faced, woe-is-me religious drudgery and self-pity. The kind of self-denial that Jesus is talking about with this rich guy and with the disciples is not a legalistic self-denial. You can't drink, you can't dance, you can't go to the movies, you can't eat chocolate cake, you can't waste your money on expensive clothes, you can't do this, and you can't do that. That is not the kind of self-denial he's talking about. **Jesus teaches a life-giving self-denial.** It's a **letting go of the things in life that have gripped your heart**, that have bound your heart. Like possessions. Like wealth. Like the pursuit of a comfortable life. But if you want to be a Jesus-follower, then you must pick up your cross and voluntarily commit to getting rid of old selfish values. Jesus will replace what you let go of with life-giving inner renewal that produces the fruit of the Spirit. All things are possible with Jesus. But you must lose your old life and take on the new life from Jesus.