

To Inherit Eternal Life
Mark 10:17-31
Key Verse: 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.’”

In this passage a rich man comes to Jesus with the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” What a great question! He did not ask for healing or investment advice, but eternal life. This may be the most important question a person can ask. Eternal life is what all of us really need. Jesus answered with the truth of God. Jesus taught us how to inherit eternal life and to live the most blessed life in this world as well. Let’s listen to Jesus’ teaching and practice it.

I. Jesus teaches a rich man how to inherit eternal life (17-22).

Look at verse 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?’” Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. There, rejection, condemnation, mocking and beating awaited him. There, the rugged cross awaited him. It was God’s will for Jesus to solve our sin problem. Jesus had fully accepted this and pressed forward step by step. On the way to the cross, Jesus was most concerned about helping his disciples to accept the fact that he would suffer and die and the promise that he would rise again. But their minds were fixed on earthly things. Jesus had to struggle with them. Yet, Jesus was not desperate or stressed out. Jesus cared for people who came to him.

This time, a man ran up and fell on his knees before Jesus. This tells us that he had a desperate problem. Usually people come to Jesus like this for healing from fatal disease or to plead for the life of a loved one. This man did not have such a problem. His question was, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” To him, this was a desperate question that drove him to Jesus with urgency.

According to verse 22, he was a man of great wealth. Most people would think that he had it made, like Bill Gates. Of course, he had many advantages over ordinary people. And yet he had no peace. Rather, he had a growing sense of desperation about his life. In that sense, he was just like anyone else, like the mass of men who lead lives of quiet desperation (Thoreau). Here we must acknowledge that money cannot give us eternal life or buy our peace of mind. Actually, many recent scientific studies confirm that money does not make people happy. An April 17, 2000 article on WebMD was titled, “Too Rich for your Health?” It suggests that sudden wealth leaves people alienated, anxious and miserable. The Wall Street Journal ran an article on October 5, 2005 by Jonathan Clements with the title, “Rich, Successful—and Miserable.” There is even an alternative music group called “The Miserable Rich.”

How did Jesus help this man? Jesus taught him basic truth about God and man. Look at verse 18. “‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone.’” God alone is good and the standard of goodness. On the other hand, human beings are all no good. Only God is good. Still, there are many who think that they are good based on a relativistic standard. If one thinks he is a little better than others, he feels good about himself for a few minutes, and does not repent. However, before the holy God all people are sinners and this is a Biblical absolute (Ro 3:23). This man did not know the basic truth that God alone is good and that all men are sinners.

Jesus pointed this man to the law of God. Look at verse 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.’” Jesus says that this man already knew how to inherit eternal life; it was written in the Bible. This man simply needed to apply his Bible knowledge by doing his best to practice the law. Anyone who does so will find the truth that God is holy and he is a sinner. This is the beginning point to having a relationship with God. God gave us the law to expose sin. Romans 3:20 plainly says, “Through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (NASB). However, when this man did not really try to practice the law, he remained in spiritual ignorance. So he boldly declared to Jesus, “Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Of course, there was a sense in which this might be true. He had never killed anyone, slept around, cheated in business, or spread false rumors, and he always gave birthday cards and gifts to his parents on time. But this did not make him good. He was a sinner.

The real problem of each person is a sin problem. Mankind lost eternal life because of the sin problem. In order for us to have eternal life, we must deal with the sin problem. However, the young man standing before Jesus thought he was okay. Though he was empty, confused and desperate, he declared that he had kept the law well. It is not easy to deal with such people, who are self-righteous. How did Jesus see him? Verse 21a says, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Jesus loved him with God's love. Jesus loved this man's soul and told him the truth that would lead him to eternal life.

Look at verse 21b. "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." Jesus spoke to him in understatement, saying, "One thing you lack." Jesus genuinely wanted him to listen to one thing and learn one thing and practice one thing. Dr. Samuel Lee often said that putting one word of God into practice was more valuable than knowing ten thousand theological arguments. Jesus helped this man to practice one thing. However, it was a challenging one thing. One thing was actually everything.

Look at verse 21 again. Jesus told him to go and sell everything he had and give to the poor. He must sell his multi-million dollar lakeshore home, his Ferrari, his art collection and music collection, and so on. Then he must give the money to the poor. Jesus promised that he would have treasure in heaven. Then Jesus invited him to follow Jesus. This is the way to eternal life. Though Jesus' words apply to this young man, there are several truths that we can apply generally.

First, love God more than anything. Jesus helped this rich man to struggle with the issue of who was first in his heart: God or money. To inherit eternal life we must love God more than money, or anything else. To some this may mean to love God more than their sweet home, their reputation, their career, or their children. In Genesis, there is the story of Abraham. God helped him to live by faith and to learn to love God, putting God first in his life. After more than forty years together, one day God gave him a test to see if he loved God most. God told him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. To Abraham, Isaac was everything. It was not easy for him to sacrifice Isaac. Yet Abraham got up early in the morning and went out to do so in obedience to God's word. In this way, Abraham proved his love for God and God promised to bless him forever.

Second, love others as yourself. Jesus taught this man to be concerned for the poor and those in need. It was a practical challenge to overcome his selfishness and to love others as himself. Those who inherit eternal life must learn to love others sacrificially. One Christian leader in America wanted to show his love to his wife. He knew she wanted their kitchen to be remodeled. But they had no money. So he sold all of his sports memorabilia, accumulated over many years. With the proceeds, he remodeled the kitchen for his wife. She was so happy and has cooked him many delicious dinners.

Third, have treasure in heaven. Jesus taught this man how to have treasure in heaven. This is important because where our treasure is, there our heart is also. If our treasure is on earth, we will be anxious and nervous because the things of the earth perish and spoil and fade away. But when our treasure is in heaven we have peace and joy because it will never perish, spoil or fade. King David was a man who had everything. But one day he realized that it would all perish. He began to be depressed. Then he looked up to God in heaven. He found God's promise that he would not be abandoned to the grave. He put his hope in heaven (Ac 2:25-27). Then his heart could rejoice in God and he had peace. Those who have treasure in heaven have peace and joy in any situation.

Fourth, follow Jesus. Most of all, Jesus invited this man to follow him. This was a most precious invitation that Jesus gave with discretion. It meant to join the ranks of Peter, James, John and the others as those with the privilege to follow Jesus as his disciple. It meant to know Jesus very personally. This is the way to eternal life. In John 17:3 Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." When we know Jesus we have life in our souls. We can have the joy of growing spiritually in his image. We also have a holy mission from God that gives absolute meaning and purpose to our lives. When Jesus said, "follow me," it was the best invitation Jesus could give and the best blessing of God.

How did the man respond? His face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth (22). He could not accept Jesus' words. It was because he loved money more than God. So he failed to do what he should do to have eternal life. It might have been his first failure. What about us? Do we love God most? Do we love our neighbors as ourselves? How would we respond to Jesus' challenge?

II. Jesus teaches his disciples to depend on God (23-27).

As the rich man walked away, Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” Jesus deeply understood the agony of the rich man and had compassion for him. The disciples were amazed. They were amazed at Jesus’ absolute attitude toward the truth, at Jesus’ compassion, and that a rich man had a serious life problem. Those who are in amazement have not accepted Jesus’ teaching. So Jesus repeated it, “Children, how hard it is to enter 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 the kingdom of God” (24,25). At this, the disciples were even more amazed and said, “Who then can be saved?” They had begun to realize that salvation is a very difficult matter.

How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 27. “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’” No one can save himself by his effort. However, God can save men. God was sending Jesus to the cross to die for the sin of the world. God was making a way to justify wicked sinners and adopt them as his children. Salvation is possible because of the work of God through Jesus Christ. We can have eternal life by trusting Jesus with simple faith. Jesus promised in John 5:24, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

III. Jesus teaches the way to abundant blessing (28-31).

It is likely that Peter had been sympathetic with the rich man. Perhaps Peter’s heart sank as the rich man walked away. But when Jesus talked about God, Peter came back to his senses. He realized that he and his fellow disciples were different. Jesus called them, “Children.” They had a personal relationship with Jesus. They had made a life commitment to Jesus. They had left everything to follow Jesus. And Jesus had mentioned a reward. Suddenly, Peter blurted, “We have left everything to follow you!”

How did Jesus answer? Look at verses 29-30. “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.’” Jesus rewards not only in the age to come, but also in this age. Jesus promises that anyone who leaves anything for him will receive 100 times as much in this present age without fail. However, there will also be persecutions. But these persecutions are a blessing because they purify our faith. Consider the case of Isaac. He stayed in the land of promise according to God’s command in a time of famine. When he planted crops, he reaped 100 times what he sowed. Genesis 26:13 says, “The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy.” However, this aroused the envy of the Philistines and they began to stop up his wells. Isaac struggled hard to trust in God and overcome the persecution. Then his faith in God’s promise grew. God’s presence was so evident in his life that the Philistines were afraid of him and made a treaty with him. Those who follow Jesus by faith are blessed beyond imagination in this present life. Most of all, Jesus gives us eternal life.

Look at verse 31. “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” God’s blessing is not like a scientific formula that we can figure out and use according to our desire. God’s blessing is under his sovereign control. At any point in time, it may be hard for us to understand. But in the final analysis, God never fails to pour out his blessing on his people.

In this passage Jesus taught us how to inherit eternal life. We must love God more than anything else. We must love others as ourselves. We must have treasure in heaven. Most of all, we must follow Jesus. This lifestyle springs from simple faith in Christ. May the Lord bless each of us to receive Jesus simply and have eternal life.