

**Mark 10:17-31**  
**(Psalm 49:7-15; Ephesians 2:8-10)**  
**“Who Then Can Be Saved?”**

**Introduction**

This year, we have two Sundays, this Sunday and next, between the end of our Global Mission Conference and the beginning Holy Week, which begins with Palm Sunday and ends with the celebration of Easter. All of this – the conference, Holy Week, and everything else we do here – is about the gospel. But what is the gospel? It comes neatly packaged these days: a few sentences of Scripture truth to which I am asked to nod my head in assent, and then go my way rejoicing that I am right with God. Is that how Jesus understood the gospel? What would Jesus say if I were to ask him to explain the gospel to me?

Here in our text, we find Jesus doing just that. If we could somehow see this scene unfold before our eyes, we would be as astounded as were the disciples. Jesus clearly loves this young man too much to lie to him, to seek only to put him at his ease. Jesus understood what people need in order to be made whole. Those who recognized their own brokenness, he treated gently and put at ease, but those who thought themselves whole, he challenged in creative ways that pierced through their defenses and made them confront the unpleasant aspects of their own brokenness.

Now, we must be honest: this is not Jesus’ only presentation of the gospel, and it may not be the one that you most need to hear this morning. You may have come here badly broken in your spirit, needing tender mercy and the comfort of the Lord. If you will listen all the way through to the end of Jesus’ conversation with this young man, you’ll find him finally get to those words your heart needs to hear this morning. But for most of us here today, I suspect that this young man is a reflection of where we live our lives, at least in our unreflective moments, and we may not appreciate the miracle and gift of the gospel – indeed, we might miss its meaning altogether – unless we first sit still for a few moments this morning, and let Jesus speak to our condition.

Consider this young man: a fine, upstanding, clean-living, successful leader – the sort of young man every father wants his son to be, and every mother wants her daughter to marry. We would welcome him with open arms into our congregation. We would delight to have him lead our young people. But what does Jesus do when this young man comes to him? He speaks to him in such a way that the young man goes away sorrowing. Did Jesus fail to understand him, to see his tremendous potential, to meet him at the point of his needs? No, Jesus did for him what only love dares do – he told him the truth.

That is what Jesus wants to do for each of us again this morning: to tell us the truth about himself and about ourselves, so that he can make us what he created us to be. Would you listen to Jesus this morning, and ask him to tell you the truth, as well?

## Body

### 1. Jesus first makes us think about God (10:17-18).

However sophisticated our education, in the press and crush of life, we tend to think of God in parental terms, either as a parent who is always affirming and encouraging, always forgiving, whether or not we obey him and trust him, or as a parent whom we can never manage to please, no matter how hard we try. Jesus simply asks a basic question: Do you understand what it means to make moral judgments, to speak of what is good or to call someone good?

- God alone is God: "No one is good except God alone.."
- God's law is good: "You know the commandments.."

### 2. Jesus then makes us think about ourselves (10:19-22).

Jesus confronts us with our tendency to make judgments about what or who are good or bad. "What about you," he asks. "Are you good enough to make such judgments? Have you even come to terms with your own brokenness and sin?" Until we hear the law of God turned into a personalized and immediate challenge to us to follow, to obey, to set aside everything that holds us back from knowing and loving him, we may think that we are pretty good.

- A call to radical repentance: "Go, sell and give."
- A call to radical obedience: "Come, follow me."

### 3. Jesus sets in sharp contrast our impotence and God's power (10:23-27).

Until we begin to feel deeply this contrast, and to grow desperate at our impotence to do what is needed to gain eternal life, we cannot hear or understand the gospel. We will misunderstand it at its very heart.

- The contrast: "with man this is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

### 4. Finally, Jesus shows us our future (10:28-31).

Peter is distressed at Jesus' words. He says, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Mark mercifully stops quoting Peter at that point, but Matthew tells us that Peter continued speaking and asked, "What then will there be for us?" Amazingly, Jesus does not turn on Peter and ask him why he is seeking rewards. He does not cut him to pieces for desiring something more. We would expect Jesus to say, "You have fellowship with me, the Son of God. How could you possibly ask for anything more?" But instead, he treats Peter with infinite compassion, and tells him

that great things are in store for those who follow. Peter, himself, will later write of the wonder of what is already ours as believers. Yet he will speak with even greater wonder of “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven” for us (1 Peter 1:4). Until we begin to understand that this world is not all there is, and that for the Christian, the best is yet to be, the gospel will only seem like one more coping mechanism for dealing with life’s crises.

- God’s reward: you will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

## **Conclusion**

Why continue to think of the gospel in neutered terms that lack the power make us what we were meant to be? Look at God, and look at yourself. Then claim his power to make all things new.

The gospel is nothing less than a radical call to leave your old life behind and follow Jesus. It begins with the admission that we cannot do that apart from the Lord himself coming to us and making us new. But that is what he has done through the life, death and victory of Jesus, and by sending his Spirit to apply that work to our lives. He offers us nothing less than a new life, a new righteousness not our own, the very righteousness of his Son, a new power, the power of his Spirit, and a new family, the church entrusted with this message.

But we cannot merely add that to our lives. Like the rich young man of the story, we must either go away sorrowing because we are not yet ready to follow Jesus, or lay everything down and say, “I am no longer my own. I am yours. Take me and do as you will.”

What will you do in response to Jesus’ call today?

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