

## THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIORITY (Mk. 10:23-31)

Mk. 10:23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! <sup>24</sup> 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! <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? <sup>27</sup> And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. <sup>28</sup> Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

People get excited over the lottery ... and yet, the statistics work it out that there is only 1 in an almost 14 million 'chance' of winning the jackpot! The lottery, of course, is an activity in which Christians should not be involved for it goes against the whole ethos which the Bible teaches concerning the work ethic and our financial affairs. ... Nevertheless, it would be lovely to have enough to pay all the bills, live comfortably, and have a wee bit left over 😊

Life is full of limitations though. When we were growing up, our elders would have told us we can do anything we put our minds to. Well, to a degree, if we want to achieve something, we must focus on it ... At the same time though, we know we cannot do *everything*. It is simply not possible!

Jesus was teaching along these lines when He said to His disciples, **Mk. 10:23** *How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! [implication ... how impossible it is for people, - even those who have plenty of money, - to work their way into Heaven].* This was completely 'out of the blue', and He followed up with another equally striking statement, <sup>24</sup> Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

Understandably, the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, <sup>25</sup> 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. ... The disciples were absolutely flabbergasted! What brought this question on?! What is Jesus talking about?! ... And they garbled out a kind of a response, <sup>26</sup> And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And even though they said it among themselves, Jesus heard ... <sup>27</sup> And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

Then, - after a few brief seconds, - Peter, in his usual blunt style, <sup>28</sup> began to say unto him [*the Lord*], Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. Now, since he

began to say ... *that* means he *intended* to say more than he was given the opportunity to say because <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you [*plural, i.e. to all the disciples*], 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, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. ... Notice the two stages ...“now” and “in the world to come”. He was speaking in relation to two very different settings, - in the present, and in the future.

At the foundation of the problem in dealing with this subject of salvation lay the impossibility of entering the Kingdom of God by our own means ... no matter how many of them or how much we have! In other words, riches and wealth are not a guarantee into the Kingdom.

... Remember the immediate context ... Jesus had just been speaking with the *rich* young ruler who had asked a very valuable question, **Mk. 10:17** *Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* ... How will I get into Heaven? What do I need to do to enter the Kingdom? What can I do to inherit eternal life and be saved? ... And when the young man replied to all of Jesus' questions, - and he reckoned he had done a good job, - Jesus went on to illustrate to him how obedience to the Law had not only to do with outward behaviour, but it had also to do with the attitude of the heart ... The problem was ... the young man's heart was not prepared to give priority to following Jesus. In fact, he was more inclined to want Jesus to follow him so as to facilitate every requirement in his already busy schedule.

In other words, the young man simply wanted to ‘attach’ Jesus on, and so, when Jesus said to him, <sup>21</sup> *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.* <sup>22</sup> *And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.* ... The young man was not prepared to pay the price of the *cost* to follow Jesus! ... Following Jesus was *too expensive* for him!

The lesson very simply is this ... If you want anything more than you want salvation, or more than you want Christ, or more than you want eternal life, - you are not going to want to hand over your life to Jesus! ... And the young man knew *exactly* what Jesus was saying for that is why he chose the option ‘to walk away’. He wanted eternal life ... but he wanted what he already had *more* ... and so he went away sad.

Jesus then began to teach His disciples a lesson based upon this young man's attitude ... and He is developing on what He had said previously in chapter eight, **8:34** Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. **35** For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. **36** For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? **37** Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

On the face of it, He is talking to them about earthly riches, **Mk. 10:23** How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! ... Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! ... But there is more to it than simply that ... He is looking around, - He is taking stock. ... He can see the houses of the well-off. He can see their comfortable and lavish lifestyles ... and He can see how so many of them rely on their achievements, to the extent they have little or no perceived need for God. And Jesus saw too that where their treasures were, their hearts were also. ... It was their life's ambition ... to never have enough of what this world offered. ... And all these aspirations were barriers.

Indeed, this was more than just about wealth because, to be quite honest, there is nothing wrong with a Christian being wealthy. Joseph of Arimathea was wealthy, so was Lydia from Thyatira ... There is nothing wrong with being a wealthy Christian *as long as* it does not take God's place and hamper what He expects of us. ... But the problem was, - whether you are rich or poor, - it is natural to put something else in the place of God, and when you put something else where He ought to be, then you are actually denying Him the position of being at the centre of your life.

According to the people in Israel though, wealth was an 'indicator' of God's blessing upon you. If someone walked into your synagogue in beautiful clothes, and he had the latest chariot parked outside, you would run up and welcome him because you were brought up to believe God has blessed the rich man, and that is how he has so much! ... That is the mindset James was alluding to, **James 2:2** if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; **3** And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool. ... If you were healthy and wealthy, it was a sure sign God was blessing you. Whereas if you were poor, it meant the opposite ... that you were under a curse. ...

And they could ‘prove’ it to you from Scripture because the religious leaders would point you to the teaching of the ancient Hebrew writings of Tobit and the Talmud. The Jews believed you could *buy* your way into eternal life, - you could *earn* it, - ... and that is how the disciples were also brought up to believe, but they were wrong, as Jesus was about to explain. And when Jesus told them, <sup>25</sup> *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*, they were completely thrown!

Yes, but they, - the disciples, - had come to faith in Christ, as Peter started to explain in v.28, *Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee*, ... but how true it is that you can take the man out of the system, yet it is so difficult to take the system out of the man! Peter and the disciples could not help seeing this issue from the point of view of the legalism of their Jewish religion. They could not see past how they always had been taught that riches and wealth were a sign of God’s blessing and favour, and were a means of gaining eternal life.

... *Almost* as an aside ... When you hear some people talking about how such-and-such a church is doing, and they tell you about the great numbers that are attending ... and how it is a sure sign they are being blessed (regardless of what is preached or taught). The implication is that small churches like ours are *not* being blessed. ... Since when did numbers and figures indicate God’s blessing? Where does it teach that in Scripture? ... Look at Elijah standing on his own, in the Judean wilderness, by the brook Cherith ... Look at old Simeon and Anna in the temple, - ‘has been’s’ as far as many people were concerned ... Look throughout God’s Word and you will find the blessing of God is not counted in numbers, but the blessing of God upon His people is counted in *faithfulness*. ... You might think it was very wrong of the Jews in Jesus’ day to think the rich were somehow more spiritual ... but it was a fallacy that is often being repeated in the Church today. ... Success is not measured by numbers ... success is measured by faithfulness to God.

Not a bit of wonder the disciples were shocked, <sup>24</sup> ... *astonished at his words*. And if a rich man could not achieve entrance into the Kingdom of God ... a poor man stood *no* ‘chance’! ... Jesus was teaching them how *hard* it is to be saved. ... It is not easy. It is not simply saying a prayer, and that’s it! It is *hard* to be saved ... to become a Christian.

How hard is it? Well, **25** 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. ... That is how hard it is! What does Jesus mean? ... Jesus knew the Talmud, - the Jewish Rabbinical commentary on the Old Testament Scriptures, - ... and in the Talmud there is a reference to an *elephant* going through the eye of a needle. It simply cannot happen, literally! It is ridiculously impossible, and that is what Jesus was saying. ... Mind you, all kinds of silly explanations are put forward to try and explain this illustration ... There is one that says there was a tiny needle gate in the city of Jerusalem where they forced camels through. Firstly, why would you want to do that, and secondly, no such gate has ever been found! ... Simply take the words of Jesus the way He simply meant them, - it is absolutely impossible to get a camel through the eye of a needle ... It cannot be done, and neither can it be done that a rich man with all his wealth can buy himself eternal life. As Matthew quotes Jesus saying, **Mt. 7:13** Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: **14** Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. And as Mark quotes Him saying, **10:27** With men it is impossible.

It cannot be done. You cannot save yourself. You cannot contribute in any way to your salvation. You cannot buy it! It is impossible! At least in a lottery, you pay your pound and you stand a 1 in almost 14 million 'chance' ... but in salvation, you have no 'chance'!! The sinner has no power in himself to be saved. That is the same as we read in Jer. 13:23, *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* You see, this is the problem of humanity's total depravity. I am a sinner not just in part, but I'm a sinner completely, and there is nothing I can do to rid myself of that sin ... but here is the good news, **Mk. 10:26** Who then can be saved? And here comes the answer from the Saviour, **27...** With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

That is the good news ... and that is actually the *only* good news, as far as achieving salvation is concerned. It is a gift totally of God, with which He gives us the ability to believe and receive. That is *saving grace*! ... Any other way to believe is an impossibility for saving grace is all of God, from start to finish! ... **Jn. 1:12** as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: **13** Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. ... How do you believe? You believe with your will? Where does the will with which you believe come from? It does not come from yourself ... because left to yourself, you would

never have believed, but the initial ability to believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour comes from the will and good pleasure of God. *That* is how we believe! ....

And that is what this was all about, for the young man had previously asked, **Mk. 10:17** what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? What shall I do that I may see the kingdom of God?

Here is what every person who comes to Christ must do. They must ‘open their eyes’ as to how sinful they are in the sight of God ... and to do that, **Jn. 3:7** *Ye must be born again. ...* <sup>3</sup> *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* And when you acknowledge God sent His Son to die for you on the cross of Calvary, and that there He took your sins upon His own body ... He suffered, and bled, and died for you ... to save you from a lost eternity in the roaring flames of Hell. Could you escape it on your own? No, absolutely not, **Mk. 10:27** *With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.* God’s salvation is the only salvation that works and saves forever.

**Lk. 18:13** *God be merciful to me a sinner.* *That* is the prayer God hears and answers. He doesn’t listen to the one who prays, **11** *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are ...* <sup>12</sup> *... I give tithes of all that I possess.* No, you cannot buy your way into Heaven, and neither can you earn it. It is impossible. It is **Eph. 2:9** *Not of works, lest any man should boast for* **Is. 64:6** *we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.*

Peter told Jesus, **28** *we have left all, and have followed thee.* No, they didn’t leave all for Peter still had his fishing boats, and his home, and his wife, and his family ... but it was *Jesus* Who left all, for **Phil. 2:7** *[He] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant* <sup>8</sup> *... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ...* There is no comparison! None whatsoever!

You could give up absolutely everything, - as far as you are concerned, - and go out to some far-flung region of this planet, and you *still* would never have given up as much as what Jesus gave up for our salvation. And that is what He meant when He said, **Mk. 7:29** *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,* <sup>30</sup> *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.* <sup>31</sup> *But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. ...* When you become a Christian, you *gain* brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers,

and a whole lot more in Christ for He said, **Jn. 10:10** I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly ... and when the rich are leaving behind their mansions, we have the promise we are going to an eternal home prepared for us in Glory.

The rich young man held on to his achievements that one day he would be parted from forever. ... There was another young man and he could not wait until his father died, and he went **Lk. 15:12** [and] said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. ... **13** And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. He had nothing left. ... Earthly wealth is expendable ... but Heavenly wealth is incomparable. Once grace gives it to you, you have it forever. It cannot be taken from you, not even in death.

And then, in Matthew's account of this story, - Matthew is the Gospel particularly written to the Jews, - there is a very significant inclusion, concerning the future. Let's read from Mt. 19, **26** But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. **27** Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? **28** And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ... That is referring to the return of Christ, His second coming. That relates to the time when He will take His throne in Jerusalem.

It is speaking about the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory. The word that is translated 'regeneration' (παλιγγενεσία) refers to a rebirth of the earth when Jesus returns, - the 'times of Refreshing/Restitution'. Peter used these two terms in Acts 3, **18** But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. **19** Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the *times of refreshing* shall come from the presence of the Lord; **20** And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: **21** Whom the heaven must receive until the *times of restitution* of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

John also referred to them in Rev. 20. ... As the disciples were listening to Jesus, they 'soaked in' His every word! ... Matthew explains how in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory He will undo all that the previous age did, for **Mt. 19:29** every one that hath forsaken houses, or

brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, *and shall inherit everlasting life.*

That is what is waiting for us. Jesus said, Put Me first and it will be yours. He said to the disciples, You will reign with Me, *ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* That is a future period, when Jesus returns. ... How poor that rich young man would be then, if he continued along the way he was travelling! On that day, all God's people will be equal, - there will be neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, male or female for we shall all be one in Christ (Gal. 3:20). There will be none pushing their way to the head of the queue.

The missionary Jim Elliot said the famous words, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to keep what he cannot lose". ... The Christian's priority is to put Christ first, - to give Him His rightful place in your life, **Mt. 6:33** *seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you ...* "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling ... Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee." Someone has explained it well, "Christ first, Christ last ... and everything else in-between ... *Christ!*" ... When you place your faith in Christ, no matter how difficult life becomes, you are living your life with Him.

There is a hymn which says, "I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go with Him, with Him all the way". ... As a Christian, there is not a journey you take in life that will become so bad He will leave you for just as you are committed to Him, He is committed to you. The final verse of the hymn says, "He will give me grace and glory, He will give me grace and glory, He will give me grace and glory, And go with me, with me all the way".

That is the lesson Jesus was teaching His disciples ... and it is the priority of the Christian that ... "Where He may lead me, I will go For I have learned to trust Him so". May we keep on learning from the Master! Amen.