

## **Jason Upchurch - The Good News is Treasure Now and Later**

My hope this morning is that we will walk away encouraged by this passage maybe in a way we haven't been encouraged before, at least not in this gospel.

Last week we looked at the rich young man - rich young ruler. This was a man who appeared outwardly to possess godliness and God's favor because he had great possessions, he was part of the aristocracy of Israel at the time. He was young so he was seeming to advance faster than those around him.

But he went away. And the warning was simply that riches can keep you from the Kingdom. People will often trade all the riches of Christ for the riches of this world. And for most people, the riches of this world aren't even all that much.

And we looked at the the ridiculousness of that trade a little last week. Because what Jesus promised was that if the man gave away all that he had he would have treasure in heaven. He could actually roll over his wealth into eternity.

We know that there's no way to take your checking account, family inheritance, your gold or your car into heaven. But what you can do is give generously to those in need for the glory of Christ and you'll essentially roll that generosity over into eternity. Jesus says you'll have treasure in heaven. Paul says you'll lay up a foundation for the future. Jesus says your reward in heaven will be great.

If you've ever dealt with wills or trusts or retirement accounts the whole idea of most of those is to somehow keep the money you've saved safe from being taken by taxes or wrongful disbursement for as long as possible once you retire. You're sheltering it from the inevitable onslaught of government taxation and wasteful heirs once you die. There's no way to take it with you. Except Jesus says there is.

This man didn't believe that. Or he was too busy focused on the here and now to understand what Jesus was offering. He had great possessions, how could he give that up? So he goes away.

Well, what we find out is that had he waited just a little longer, he would have heard the rest of what Jesus would say to his disciples which is that the rewards for following Jesus aren't just eternal rewards. Oh, those are fantastic. Those are beyond comprehension so much so that Paul can't even describe the glory he sees when he's taken up into heaven. And it's so fantastic that when John describes the New Jerusalem the pavement - the most common thing everyone walks on - is pure gold. The eternal rewards and glory is beyond description.

But Jesus tells us that the reward for following him isn't just the next life. There are rewards for following him now. And those rewards are amazing too.

And here's why this matters: because many people think that following Jesus is a net loss - at least in this life. That's why they don't want to follow him. Because they'll lose out on what they want in this life.

They lose out on their sin. They really want that one thing that they know God hates, but they want it. Well, Jesus promises true joy.

They'll lose out on their family. Their family will think they're crazy and cut them off or treat them as the outcast. Parents might disown you, children might hate you or think you're a fake. Where would they go?

I've known several Christian's who have been cut out of the inheritance because of their beliefs. They could have had half a million or a million if they had just kept their mouth shut about Jesus.

But many see following Jesus as a sacrifice - that they are giving up more than they're gaining into order to one day be in a magic floaty place they can't see.

Well, Jesus puts that nonsense to rest. And what Jesus promises is that following him is not a loss. It's a net gain, here and now and in eternity.

So that's the big picture: Following Jesus is a net gain now and in the future.

Let's dive in.

### 1) The difficulty of salvation. **Read 23-27**

So here we have it. Salvation is hard. Jesus says entering the Kingdom of God is difficult. To enter the Kingdom of God is a synonym of salvation, for following Jesus.

Jesus told the rich young man that if wanted to follow him - and have eternal life - he had to give up everything. Go sell it all, give to the poor, and follow him. Yowza. That's not seeker sensitive evangelism.

That guy goes away, everyone is standing around in shock. "Jesus, did you just send the rich guy away? You've looked at our balance sheet, right? We could have used him. We keep putting money in and somehow it gets lost. We don't know who keeps taking it. But maybe you could have told him to sell half his stuff." But sell it all?

And he uses this guy's reaction as the point of his teaching. It's hard for rich people to be saved. And the disciples are amazed. Shocked. How could Jesus say something like this? And they must all have their jaws on the floor because Mark doesn't record that they said anything. They're just standing there dumbfounded. So Jesus says it again. But this time he shows just how hard it is. **Read 24-26**

It is difficult to enter the Kingdom of God. Now, let's pause and talk about that for a minute. Is it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God? And the answer is: yes. Jesus says it is. Twice. And a third time he says it's impossible. You can't get in to the Kingdom of God.

I once heard a preacher tell a bunch of kids just the opposite: that it's difficult to go to hell. He actually said the precise opposite words of Jesus. He said, "You got all these people praying for you, you've got God who loves you, you've got the truth being preached. It's hard to go to hell." Is that true?

No. It's really easy to go to hell. Do you know what you have to do? Nothing. The default setting of our lives is hell-bound because we are lost in our sin, we are guilty in Adam, children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

**John 3:18:** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not believe is condemned **already** because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Some people think that the only way to go to hell is to hear the gospel first, then reject it, then they go to hell. No. Jesus says everyone is condemned **already**. If you believe in him, then you have eternal life. But you don't have it before believing.

We're dead on arrival. We're in Adam. We're incapable of saving ourselves. Adam was given a perfect Garden, every blessing, and he chose the sin. Adam was the **best** humanity had to offer. This man is looking at God and remembering his checking account and he fails. It's difficult.

So, as Jesus usually does, he doesn't ease the tension for the disciples. "I'm just kidding, guys. Salvation is easy." No. He adds to the shock value. They're literally dumbfounded and Jesus says it again but this time he gives us one of the greatest sayings in the New Testament. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God.

I don't know if you've had any experience with needles or camels recently but it's not hard to understand Jesus's point. Needles have the smallest opening imaginable and camels were one of the largest animals in Israel in Jesus's day. Trying to get a camel through a needle wasn't difficult. It was what? Impossible.

It's impossible. Salvation from man's perspective is impossible. And especially for a rich person. There's no possibility of salvation for a rich person. Why's that?

Because rich people can't take their eyes off of riches. The problem with riches is that they provide just enough comfort and just enough enjoyment that people don't think they need eternal life.

It's like if you're really hungry and someone promises you a steak dinner. And on your way to get steak dinner you happen to pass by McDonald's. And so you start chowing down on McDonald's thinking you're living high on the hog in life. And really what you're doing is giving up something far better now and later and instead filling yourself with garbage.

That's what riches do spiritually. They distract you from the real goodness of Jesus here and now and in eternity. So much so that it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of heaven.

That's radical. And the disciples know it's radical. They are now exceedingly astonished. Salvation is difficult, it's impossible.

## 2. The Apparent Sacrifice. **Read 27-28**

This is the apparent sacrifice. Now, I'm going to be honest, I used to take this as Peter being self-righteous. "Lord, look at what we've done for you - we've left it all."

Almost as though Peter is pointing to his own self-righteousness. Which is actually just as bad as the rich young man because that's what he was banking on. So I always thought this section was just an utter demolition of self-righteousness. And it may be. I'll show you the alternative in a minute. But first, **turn to Rom. 1:28-2:5**

It may be that Peter is pointing to his own sacrifice for Jesus to claim some kind of favor. This is very common not only among unbelievers, but I think unwittingly of believers.

We look around at people who reject Jesus and think, "Well, obviously *that guy* rejects Jesus. Look at him: he's a liar, he's greedy, he sexually immoral. I'm better than that." And what we functionally do in that moment is deny the gospel. We think we are salvation material because we're not as bad. Jesus didn't have to try as hard to raise us to life. He didn't have to die for as many sins for us, so we're in. That couldn't be further from the truth.

Pauls deal with that here in **Rom. 1**. He started earlier in the chapter talking about how people reject God from even general revelation. And in their sin they get worse and worse; God hands them over to sexual sin, then homosexual sin, then a debased mind. Sin begets more sin. **Read 28-32**

So we read this and we think, "Yeah, they're horrible. Send them all to hell!" But then Paul says this. **Read 2:1-5**

What's he saying? He's saying that we get all mad at liars and thieves and those who are arrogant. And we forget that we too have lied, and have stolen and are arrogant.

And just as God was kind to us to lead us to repentance, we should hope that God's kindness would lead those other people to repentance as well.

See, although salvation is impossible from our perspective, salvation is not impossible from God's perspective. This is what God is in the business of doing: saving wretched sinners. And usually the bigger the project the more God desires it.

Remember the woman who was washing Jesus's feet with her hair and the religious leaders all rebuked her? "If Jesus was really a prophet he'd know who this woman was?" They were disgusted by her. Jesus said: if a man has 2 people who owe him money, one 50 and one 500 and he forgives both, which one loves him more? It's the man with the greater debt. The woman who sins were many actually turns into greater praise.

Did you have a lot of sin when you were saved? Praise God he saved you. You don't have to look at those sins in shame, you can look at them as even more reasons to praise God. Do you know people who are steeped in sin and need to be delivered from their sin? Don't view them as unlikely candidates for the Kingdom. Those kind of people are usually who God brings into the Kingdom.

We have to be so careful because we love pointing to our own righteousness, our own goodness, our own intellect, our own credits for why God saved us rather than the mercy of God and the kindness of God.

Now, that could be what Peter is doing back in **Mark 10**.

Jesus says salvation is not just difficult, it's impossible. It's impossible for man to save himself. But he leaves a little gap, doesn't he? "But not with God; with God all things are possible."

Salvation is wholly brought about by God. Even though we can't bring it about, God can. He is the author and finisher of our faith.

Here's other way we could understand Peter's confession: that he's actually doing what Jesus wanted. The rich man was told to sell it all and he refused. Peter and the apostles did exactly what Jesus implies: he has sold everything and left everything to follow Jesus.

And his panic is not one of self-justification. But he's panicking because to him it sounds as though even if he were to do exactly what Jesus tells him to do he's still denied eternal life.

So which is it? I don't know. It's hard to know for sure. Jesus doesn't rebuke him for the statement. He does seem to qualify it a little bit.

But here's the thing I think we need to take away about eternal life: You have to be **willing** to do anything to get it, but **admit** you can't do anything to earn it.

Put a different way, if Jesus said you had to swim across the ocean to get eternal life would you put on a swim suit and give it a go?

If that's what it took to have my sins forgiven I'd give it a go.

If Jesus said you had to spend the rest of your life in prison to get eternal life, would you turn yourself in?

If Jesus said you had to give up, I don't know, all your money to have eternal life would you do it?

What if you had to give up your family or go to hell? Give up your cush job, your inheritance, your home, all your electronics, your car? What would you give up, what you do to get eternal life with Christ?

And the answer better be you'd give up everything for him. Family, friends, wealth, health, lands, sin and you'd do anything he asked. If he said "jump" you'd jump as long and as high as possible - in joy and for his glory.

That's eternal life: you have to be willing to do anything to get it. That was the problem with the rich man. He wasn't willing. Peter and the disciples were. "You're telling us to follow you, but you're saying it's impossible, but we've left it all!"

That's the desire Jesus is looking for. Would you be willing to do anything for him?

And then you remember, it's impossible. If Jesus told me I had to swim across the ocean, I'd give it a go. I'd dive in. But I'd also know I couldn't do it. I mean I've probably got a couple hundred yards in me max.

It's like when Jesus tells Peter to walk on water. That's not possible. But he commands Peter so he does it.

Or when he calls Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. God often calls us to impossible things so that we're reminded that only he can deliver us.

This is what Jesus is calling people to. Are you willing to give up everything, or do anything to have eternal life? The answer better be yes.

Can you earn eternal life? The answer better be no. This is the gospel tension.

But here's the thing. Even though Jesus calls us to be willing to give up anything and everything for the sake of the gospel, it's never a loss.

We've seen the difficulty, we've seen the apparent sacrifice. Here's the reward.

### 3. The Reward. **Read 29-31**

So here's the reward. See following Jesus isn't just about spiritual rewards far off in heaven that we can't see. Jesus promises rewards now, in this life. And he promises them to everyone.

"Truly I say to you, there is **no one**." These are two absolute statements. When Jesus says "truly I say to you" he's emphasizing the importance of what he's about to say. You can take it to the bank. "Assuredly I say to you."

And then he says there is no one who has left house...so on. There's never been a person who came to Jesus who didn't experience the blessings he's about to describe. There's no one who actually traded down to follow Jesus.

If you had to leave your house to follow Jesus, you received another 100 houses. What does that mean? Sounds health and wealth-ish to me. I don't know what your real estate portfolio looks like but I don't have a hundred houses. I've got one.

What is he talking about? He's talking about the communion of the saints. I look around our congregation - and frankly most congregations - and if someone really was kicked out of their home because they followed Jesus I sincerely can't imagine anyone of you not opening your home to them.

See, it's not that we own homes, it's that we have homes. They've received more homes than they can possibly imagine - in a sense.

In Christ if we lose our home because of the gospel we have any number of homes where we would be welcomed with open arms. This is true all around the world.

What about your family? If you follow Christ and your siblings disown you. What do we call each other in the church? Brother and sisters in Christ. I have 3 sisters in my family. I have hundreds of sisters in Christ that I know. I have hundreds of brothers in Christ that I know.

Land. Maybe you lost your job and foreclosed. Maybe you lost out on the inheritance. Big deal. In the body of Christ we have more than we could ever ask for.

JC Ryle: "To all who make sacrifices on account of the Gospel, Jesus promises "an hundred-fold now in this time." They shall have not only pardon and glory in the world to come. They shall have even here upon earth, hopes, and joys, and sensible comforts sufficient to make up for all that they lose. They shall find in the communion of saints, new friends, new relations, new companions, more loving, faithful, and valuable than any they had before their conversion. Their introduction into the family of God shall be an abundant recompense for exclusion from the society of this world." (Thoughts on the Gospels)

This is true. When I was saved I found mentors, and family and friends that I had never known. I entered into a whole world that I had never experienced before.

Some of you don't have that contrast because this is all you've ever known. That's okay. Sometimes it's hard to appreciate what you have when you haven't experienced the opposite.

But what we have in Christ is fantastic - here in this life. But that doesn't mean it's without troubles. **Read 29-31**

Leaving family - or having family leave us - is never easy. And Jesus does promise persecutions. He promises persecutions just as much as he promises blessings.

We might lose family and friends and stuff - those are real losses. Those are difficult. He's not minimizing that. But he is saying there's reward for that. That when we feel as though we're last, we'll actually be first. This is the upside down Kingdom Jesus offers not just in the future, but here and now.

John Piper writes about a missionary named David Livingstone who was a missionary to Africa in the 1800s. He was talking to students at Cambridge when one asked about the difficulty of life in Africa compared to England. He said this:

"For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. . . . Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. (*Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 1981, 259) (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/i-never-made-a-sacrifice>)

Is it hard? Sure. But the rewards for faithfully following Jesus and serving Jesus in the here and now and in eternity future...there is no sacrifice we make for Jesus.

All the sacrifice is on his part. He simply invites us in to enjoy the riches of his Kingdom and his glory.

**Pray**