

**Introduction**

1. We have a stained glass window related to this scripture in our sanctuary.
  - a. The plaque below it reads, “In Memoriam Arthur & Monroe Holliday; Bob & Helen Holliday”
  - b. Bob Holliday was born August 16, 1915 and died January 16, 1985. He served in the Navy during WWII and was a deacon here at ABC. He married Helen Johnson, who was a SS teacher at ABC for many years and a leader in VBS, GAs, and the YWA. She died September 4, 2012. While they had no children of their own, they influenced the lives of many young people.
  - c. Bob and Helen gave the window in honor of Bob’s father, Arthur, and his brother, Monroe. Arthur and Monroe were tragically killed on January 25, 1932 when struck by a bakery truck while walking to work along Rt. 11 about one-half mile west of Abingdon. Arthur, age 44, was a janitor at the Abingdon post office. Monroe, age 21, was a highway department employee. Both of them were members of Abingdon Baptist Church. Bob, just 16 when his father died, was one of six children.
  - d. The scripture noted on the plaque is Mark 10:17-22, which records the encounter of Jesus with a character we know as the rich, young ruler.
2. This is an important encounter. It made such an impression on the disciples that all three of the synoptic gospel writers recorded it (cf., Mk 10:17-31; Mt 19:16-30; Lk 18:18-30).
3. In this passage Jesus taught that riches can be a hinderance for those seeking to enter the kingdom of God.
4. **Read Mk 10:17-31.**

**A. A Man Dialogs with Jesus About How to Gain Eternal Life (17-22)**

1. “a man” (Gk., *eis* = literally “one”) (17)
  - a. We know this scripture as Jesus’ encounter with the rich, young ruler.
    - 1) Mark only refers to him as “one” with “man” being implied by the gender of the noun in context.
    - 2) Lk 18:18 includes the detail that he was a “ruler.”
    - 3) Mt 19:20 adds the detail that he was “young.”
  - b. Putting the details from all three synoptic gospels together, we call him the rich, young ruler.
2. This man may have heard Jesus’ truth saying about the children, “Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Mk 10:15; Lk 18:17).
  - a. He wanted a place in God’s kingdom too and wanted to know, “. . . What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (17)
  - b. We each stand in the rich, young ruler’s shoes asking Jesus this same eternal question at some point in life: Is there eternal life, and if so, how do I obtain it?
    - 1) Certainly, there is something beyond this life in eternity.
    - 2) God himself has “. . . set eternity in the human heart . . .” (Ecc 3:11).
3. Jesus deflected the man’s buttering-up comment about Jesus being “good” (Gk., *agathe*). (18)
  - a. The man was respectful in his statement about Jesus, but Jesus had questions about the man’s definition of “good.”
  - b. What makes us “good” in the eyes of God? On our own, it is perfect obedience to God’s Law.
  - c. None of us are capable of that high mark (cf. Ro. 3:23).
  - d. Jesus does not apply the statement that “no one is good” to Himself in particular but in general to the whole of humanity, including this man.
  - e. Jesus said, “No one is good—except God alone.” Certainly Jesus, as God in flesh, was good, but He was not yet ready to reveal His divinity publicly (i.e., the Messianic Secret).
  - f. Warren Wiersbe notes, “Jesus was not denying that He was God; rather, He was affirming it. He just wanted to be sure that the young man really knew what he was saying and that he was willing to accept the responsibilities involved” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 122).

4. Jesus' answer to the man's central question was not the stunning affirmation that the ruler sought.
  - a. Jesus gave what we might call "a Sunday school" answer—"You know the commandments . . ." (19).
  - b. Jesus cited the Law, the Ten Commandments.
    - 1) Jesus only mentioned the five laws of the second table, which relate to our relationships with others.
    - 2) Certainly, our relationship with God, defined in the first table, is implied in how we treat others.
  - c. We know that relationship with God cannot come from rule-keeping, but the rules point us to God.
  - d. Paul later noted, "Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:23-24).
  - e. Jesus came to open another way, the only way, to the Father through his sacrifice on Calvary.
5. The man replied, "Teacher . . . all these I have kept since I was a boy" (20).
  - a. In his answer, we can hear the man's implied pleading for his hoped-for answer.
  - b. "So, I'm in, right? I will be a part of God's kingdom in eternity?"
  - c. Wiersbe writes, "With all of his fine qualities, the young man was very superficial in his views of spiritual things. He certainly had a shallow view of salvation, for he thought that he could *do something* to earn or merit eternal life. This was a common belief in that day among the Jews (John 6:28), and it is very common today. Most unsaved people think that God will one day add up their good works and their bad works, and if their good works exceed their bad works, they will get into heaven" (Wiersbe, 122).
6. This is where Jesus let the other shoe drop—"One thing you lack . . ." (21)
  - a. Wiersbe further notes that the man ". . . measured obedience only by external actions and not by inward attitudes. As far as his actions were concerned, he was blameless (see Phil. 3:6), but his inward attitudes were not blameless, because he was covetous" (Wiersbe, 123).
  - b. Jesus showed the man three steps on the path to overcome what was lacking, his covetousness toward his many possessions, so that he could fully follow Jesus into the coming kingdom of God.
    - 1) ". . . Go, sell everything you have . . ."
    - 2) "and give to the poor . . ."
    - 3) "Then come, follow me."
  - c. Jesus called for a real show of this man's faith by actions flowing from a changed heart.
    - 1) The command to sell all and give to the poor would be evidence that he truly understood/kept the law.
    - 2) Daniel Akin insightfully notes, "His wealth occupied the place that only God should have in his life. It was his idol, his god. . . . Jesus offers Himself as a substitute for the man's wealth" (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 223).
    - 3) Whatever we have in sufficiency and trust in for happiness (e.g., wealth, job, family, friends, power, position, fame, lifestyle, sinful passion) can easily become our wealth, our idol, our substitute for God.
    - 4) Note that selling all was not a requirement of salvation but evidence of right priorities in following Jesus. The willingness to sell everything may have been all that Jesus required.
    - 5) Akin adds, "What [Jesus] was about to ask this man to do was not unfamiliar to Him! He had already left it all behind. Paul says it perfectly in 2 Corinthians 8:9, 'Though He was rich, for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich'" (Akin, 221).
  - d. Remember God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac, to him in Genesis 22.
    - 1) God tested Abraham with this command to prove his faith by his actions.
    - 2) At last moment, God spared Isaac's life and provided a substitute sacrifice for the altar.
    - 3) God knew Abraham's faith, but Abraham's actions proved his faith in God to Abraham himself.
  - e. You see, it's really the last action that Jesus wanted: ". . . follow me" (21).
    - 1) Jesus knew the man's riches were a hinderance to be overcome before he could truly follow.
    - 2) Jesus spoke to him about life PRIORITIES and CHOICES.
    - 3) Our CHOICES in life each day reveal our underlying faith in God or the lack thereof.

- f. James Brooks concludes, “This entire section emphasizes that riches make being a disciple difficult but the rewards of discipleship are worth more than material possessions. Jesus did not teach that wealth is evil. He did not teach that poverty is better than riches. He did not teach that only the poor can be saved. He did teach that discipleship is costly and that wealth often is a hindrance to repentance and acceptance of the gospel” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 161).
- g. The stained-glass in our sanctuary dynamically depicts Jesus’ call for the ruler to leave his riches behind and follow him.
  - 1) Jesus motions for the ruler to take a place following him on the pathway of self-sacrifice/self-denial.
  - 2) The young man is nervous/stressed, with his arm behind his back and no eye contact. He has a look of concern, confusion, even pain on his face as he looks back over his shoulder, perhaps at his riches.
  - 3) He wants both riches and to follow Jesus, but it’s hard to leave what he has to follow Jesus.
  - 4) When the pursuit of wealth, position, success, anything becomes a higher priority than following Jesus, it is a serious problem. It is a time to CHOOSE.
  - 5) Jesus seems to ask, “Will it be this or that? Riches now or eternity with me? The choice is yours.”
  - 6) Our priorities and commitments cannot be divided. We can serve God or something else but not both.
7. At the end of the encounter, the man was sad—“the man’s face fell. He went away sad . . .” (22)
  - a. Both the man and Jesus were sad for the same reason. They realized that the ruler’s wealth had hindered him from entering the kingdom, from following Jesus, from gaining eternal life.
  - b. Notice, Jesus did not force the man to give up his possessions and follow. He gave him the CHOICE.
  - c. God does not force us either. He shows us the right way but allows us to CHOOSE.
  - d. Wiersbe concludes, “Money is a marvelous servant but a terrible master. If you possess money, be grateful and use it for God’s glory; but if money possesses you, beware! It is good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don’t lose the things that money cannot buy” (Wiersbe, 124).

## **B. Jesus and His Disciples Discuss Riches and the Kingdom of God (23-31)**

1. Jesus’ drew an important conclusion concerning riches. (23)
  - a. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” (23)
  - b. The disciples were “amazed” (Gk. *ethaoubouto*) at Jesus’ teaching (24) just as they and others had been at his earlier teaching and miracles. This was something new that they had never heard before.
2. Jesus reinforced his conclusion. (24-26)
  - a. “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!” (24)
  - b. Jesus added a word picture of the difficulty riches present to one seeking entry into the kingdom.
    - 1) “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (25)
    - 2) The disciples were “even more amazed” (Gk. *perissos ekseplessonto*). (26a)
    - 3) Akin notes, “The camel was one of the largest animals found in that part of the world. The thought of trying to squeeze it, humps and all, through the eye of a needle would strike His disciples as funny, and also impossible. ‘I guess salvation is harder than we thought,’ they said. And it takes only one thing like wealth to keep you out of God’s kingdom” (Akin, 224).
    - 4) Wealth is not the only thing that can keep you out. Anything or anyone that you love more than God will hinder your entrance into the kingdom as a true follower of Jesus.
  - c. The disciples “. . . said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’” (26b)
    - 1) The disciples believed that riches and wealth were signs of God’s blessing and favor.
    - 2) So now, they wondered, if a rich man can’t get into the kingdom just who can?

3. Jesus answered the disciples' question. (27)
  - a. Either Jesus heard them talking, as He did when they walked together discussing which of them would be greatest in the kingdom (cf., Mk 9:33-37), or he simply knew what was on their minds.
  - b. Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (27)
    - 1) God calls us to come to Him in repentance, but salvation is always an act of divine initiative and grace.
    - 2) By faith in God, the Lord enables us to overcome every obstacle to join His kingdom if we only choose to do so.
    - 3) What is impossible for us is possible with God. So, everyone, including the rich, *can* be saved.
    - 4) Riches can be a liability because they lead one who is rich to believe that he/she is self-sufficient.
    - 5) Those with wealth must steward all the resources that God has entrusted to them in His kingdom work.
    - 6) Salvation is never found in riches but in following Jesus and using all we have and are to His glory.
  - c. William L. Lane concludes, "Salvation is completely beyond the sphere of human possibilities; every attempt to enter the Kingdom on the basis of achievement or merit is futile. Yet even the rule of the impossibility of entrance into the Kingdom for the rich is limited by the sovereign action of God himself. The ability and the power to effect deliverance reside in God alone (cf. Rom. 8:7). 'Eternal life,' 'salvation,' or 'entrance into the Kingdom' describe a single reality which must be bestowed as his gift to men. The conclusion to the account rejoins the beginning in directing attention to the ability and goodness of God, and constitutes the basis for the renewal of a theology of hope" (William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 370).
4. Peter made a statement to which Jesus responded. (28-31)
  - a. Peter again was most likely acting as spokesman for the other disciples. They were all thinking the same thing—"I should be able to get into the kingdom of God. Look at all I have given up!"
  - b. Peter was quick to point out everything that the disciples, unlike the ruler, had given up in order to follow Jesus.
  - c. What riches had the disciples given up?
    - 1) Peter, James, John, and Andrew had given up their fishing businesses.
    - 2) Matthew had given up a lucrative job as a Roman tax collector.
    - 3) We aren't certain what jobs/businesses the other disciples had given up, but they all had certainly left at least their families behind as they followed Jesus on His itinerant journey.
  - d. Within his statement Peter implied the same hope as the ruler: "So, we have eternal life, right?"
  - e. Jesus replied with a strong truth statement: "Truly I tell you (Gk., *Amen lego humin*). . . ." (29)
    - 1) Jesus said, ". . . 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—along with persecutions—and in the ages to come eternal life" (29-30).
    - 2) Wiersbe proposes, "Jesus assured His disciples that no one who follows Him will ever lose what is really important, either in this life or in the life to come. God will reward each one" (Wiersbe, 124).
    - 3) Three things will be gained as Jesus' disciples leave hinderances behind and follow Him. (30)
      - a) First, faithful followers will receive ". . . a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields . . ."
      - b) Second, the good will come ". . . with persecutions . . ." (Gk., *meta diogmon*)
        - 1) Wiersbe comments, "Note that Jesus also promised 'persecution.' He had already told His disciples what both the Jews and Gentiles would do to Him in Jerusalem, and now He informed them that they would have their share of persecution. God balances blessings with battles, developing mature sons and daughters" (Wiersbe, 124).
        - 2) Daniel Akin adds, "Following Jesus may involve great personal cost, but it always results in great eternal gain" (Akin, 219).
      - c) Third and ultimately, those who follow Jesus will receive ". . . in the ages to come eternal life."

- f. Jesus issued a final statement of caution: “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (31)
- 1) Don’t over-estimate your importance or place in the kingdom of God.
  - 2) The disciples continually fell into this trap.
    - a) They argued about who would be greatest in Jesus’ kingdom (cf. Mk 9:33-34).
    - b) They hindered a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name (cf. Mk 9:38-41).
    - c) They hindered children and parents from coming to Jesus for blessing (cf. Mk 10:13-16).
    - d) They would continue to seek places of personal honor in Jesus’ kingdom (cf. Mk 10:35-45).
  - 3) Remember, Jesus had already taught them this important kingdom principle: “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk 9:35). However, they weren’t listening yet. Are you?
  - 4) We can’t out-serve Jesus who said of Himself, as we will see in just a few verses, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).

### C. Questions for Reflection

1. What does Jesus point out in your life that hinders you from following Him completely?
  - a. Daniel Akin asks it this way, “If you desire for Christ to be your Savior, you have to replace what you have been looking to as a savior. We all have something, What’s yours? That is an excellent ‘life question’ to consider” (Akin, 224).
  - b. Whatever it is, you must be willing to leave it behind in order to follow Jesus.
  - c. Will you choose to give up whatever hinders you and in doing so follow Jesus wholeheartedly?
2. How do your actions reflect the reality of your faith? They either reveal faith or no faith.
3. Are you certain you are “in” the kingdom of God?
  - a. If you said yes, what evidence can you give to support your conclusion?
    - 1) What have you given up in order to follow Jesus?
    - 2) Whom among the least are you serving?
  - b. If you said no, what is hindering you from coming in?
    - 1) Will you surrendered that hinderance, even wealth, to Jesus now?
    - 2) Will you embrace Jesus or walk away from Him as did the rich, young ruler in this passage?
4. The key command from Jesus to his disciples, to the rich, young ruler, and to you is: “follow me” (21).
  - a. With God’s help, CHOOSE to leave behind whatever hinders you from fully following Jesus.
  - b. CHOOSE to follow Jesus each day from this day and into eternity.
5. Do you seek a place of honor in our church or do you seek to live by the kingdom principle that “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”