

**SEEK THE LORD AND LIVE PART II**  
21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
Rev. Steven D. Spencer – Pastor Messiah Lutheran Church

**MARK 10:23–31**

*Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.” And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

Last week we saw the rich young man’s reaction to what Jesus said. He asked, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Jesus took him through the checklist of the Law. And the man claimed he had obeyed all of them since his youth. But then Jesus added this last command: **“Go sell all that you have and give it to the poor and come follow me”**. The man left disheartened for he had much wealth. This week will see the reaction of this dialog from the disciples’ point of view.

Jesus could see the shocked look on His disciples’ faces. Jesus said **“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”** They had just witnessed a sincere religious young man turn away in despair upon hearing Jesus’ words. I’m sure the disciples were shocked at Jesus’ answer, and then He let this eager young man go away to ponder his riches. I imagine Jesus evangelism and stewardship boards wanted Jesus go and chase him down? Why would Jesus scare him off like that? This is no way to grow a church or a kingdom!

The disciples were surprised by Jesus words, perhaps even outraged. They were in danger of losing their faith. They lived in a culture where wealth was admired. It was considered a sign of God’s blessing. In that culture you “counted your blessings,” the more you counted, the more blessed you are by God. Wealth is a gift from God, isn’t it? The book of Ecclesiastes implies such. Wealth comes from the generous hand of God, and therefore there is nothing inherently “evil” or “bad” about wealth. The Old Testament is full of the notion that if you play by God’s rules, you will prosper.

But what happens when wealth falls from the good hand of a generous God into the hands of sinful men, that’s when the trouble begins. Ambrose Bierce, American Journalist and literary critic called money, **“The god of the world’s leading religion.”** Voltaire commented, **“When it comes to the question of money, everyone has the same religion.”** The real problem with wealth or money is that we do get religious about it, and we deal in the realm of idolatry and that’s why it is difficult, if not impossible, for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God. Poet Frederick Saunders, sums it up this way: **“Mammon is the largest slave-holder in the world”**.

Think about wealth for just a moment. What is it exactly? You can try to measure it, but it’s like trying to count calories in food, the numbers just keep changing on you. Your house, if you have one, was probably worth more five years ago than it is today. Your retirement accounts, if you have one, is most likely worth a lot less today than it was a couple of years ago. A slice of bread still has about the same number of calories it did ten years ago, assuming the same recipe and size. But does a dollar have the same purchasing power it did years ago just because it says one dollar on it?

The preacher of Ecclesiastes calls it a chasing after nothing, vanity, emptiness, meaningless. ***“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*** That writer ought to know. The preacher of Ecclesiastes is Solomon, the richest man in the world at his time. Probably the richest man ever. He was the envy of all the rulers around him. The Queen of Sheba paid a personal visit to see Solomon’s wealth. That’s how legendary he was He could buy anything, do anything, go anywhere. He had gardens, houses, Egyptian horses, a harem of over 900 wives and concubines. But even so he writes this kind of real time report: ***there is nothing out there. The world of wealth is empty, meaningless and addictive.*** He ought to know, he’s lived it.

They say that idols always wind up consuming their communicants, and Mammon, the money-god, is no exception. All that hard-earned wealth, all the accumulated riches stacked up for the future, winds up bringing misery and ruin. Hard earned riches are lost in one bad investment or one poor business deal or one drop in the economy. We have probably heard our share of riches to rags stories over the past year or two. Stories of where corruption was driven by greed, stories of savings and investments lost or stolen by men with no morals. The great irony of wealth is that it promises peace, stability, and security, but in the end it delivers none of the above. Ecclesiastes says at least the laborer sleeps well at night, exhausted from his labors. Not so the rich man. Though his belly is full, his stomach is churning with anxiety as he watches his wealth erode.

We bring nothing into this world from our mother’s womb; we take nothing out of this world. The wealth that promises us happiness and security instead causes us anxiety, sickness, and anger. Truly false gods consume their communicants. And the greatest danger of all is that in attempting to cling to everything we have and accumulate even more, we do not fit through the narrow door of the kingdom. ***“It’s easier to thread a camel through the eye of a needle than it is to squeeze a rich man into the kingdom”.*** This idea leaves the disciples utterly dumbfounded. And it should leave us just as dumbfounded if not somewhat shaken when we realize that most of us here today would qualify under Jesus’ definition of being “rich.” It may not seem that way to us, but we are rich compared to most people living in the world today and certainly at the time of Jesus.

Now does this mean that we need to divest ourselves of every asset, give away all our possessions, and live in monastery in abject poverty in order to be saved? Some in the past have thought that. Peter seemed to think that. He started to say to Jesus, ***“Hey, look. We’ve got it right. We’ve left everything and followed you.”*** Jesus’ reply redirects Peter’s focus. ***“Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”***

What He says is, “Peter, you think you’ve left everything and now have nothing, and you couldn’t be more wrong. Already now, in fellowship with Me, you have a hundred-fold more than what you left behind, even now in this life. You are a member of a vast body, my Body, and joined to me you are joined to all who have ever believed in Me, and you have more brothers and sisters and mothers and aunts and uncles and nephews and nieces than you can possibly imagine.

But hear this, and don’t miss it: In this life it all comes with persecutions. The cross hangs over everything. It’s the narrow door through which you enter into eternal life. Your riches won’t save you, but neither will your poverty, because the problem is not with wealth but with sin which corrupts everything including your enjoyment of the good things which God has given you. He wants to bless you and give you joy, and you turn around and make it into some all-consuming idol that robs you of every last ounce of joy in your life.

Oh, and by the way, when it comes to book keeping and the kingdom of God, ***“the first will be last, and the last will be first.”*** So everything you learned from the world of money you can forget when it comes to dealing with God. There are no transactions in the kingdom, only pure grace a gift. The losers wind up the winners, the winners come in last and the currency of the kingdom is not earned by our hard work, merits, and achievements but by Christ’s perfect life, death, and resurrection. He was rich, the eternal Son of the Father, yet for our sakes, He became poor, a beggar on a cross with no place even to lay His head. It isn’t our poverty that saves us but Christ’s poverty, for in His poverty we become rich. He takes on the poverty of our sin, our covetousness, our idolatry; and we receive the richness of His righteousness, His holiness, His peace. He did the impossible thing, the thing only God can do – He saved us.

That’s where Jesus wants our attention. Not on our wallets, not on our bank accounts, not on our assets or our stuff but on Him, on His kingdom and His righteousness. ***“Seek first the kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things you worry about – clothing, shoes, food, drink, house, home, whatever – all these things will be added to you.***

What about our wealth? What do we do with it? Well, the preacher of Ecclesiastes would say, “Enjoy it while you’ve got it. Enjoy your work, enjoy your wealth. This is a gift from God.” The apostle Paul put it this way: ***“I have learned to be content in whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength”*** (Philippians 4:11-13).

With Christ in the center, wealth takes its proper place and perspective. Do you have plenty? Then rejoice, enjoy, share the joy with others. Are you in need? Then rejoice that your life is free from the clutter of wealth.

Faith holds things with an open hand. Not grasping tightly with a death grip, but loosely. Some things you must let go of at some point, other things you will never be able to hold on to. To be content is to have your heart at rest in Jesus, and through Him to receive all things as gift from the hand of God. That’s the “secret” of contentment that Paul learned. Hold everything with the open hand of faith; enjoy it while you have it, for you certainly can’t take it with you. Live and work and play as free men and women in Christ. Enjoy the food on your table, the wine in your glass, the work God has given you to do each day. These are His gifts to you. Hold them loosely and they won’t hold you. And each day sing a hymn of praise to the God who gives gifts to you His children and who secured your salvation with His life, that you may have everlasting joy.

Remember: the joy comes not from the gifts but from giver- the God who gave them to you. I close with these words of from the hymn Rock of Ages. ***Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.*** For in the cross we receive the greatest gift ever, the forgiveness of all our sin and life eternal in heaven. You have His word on it. In Jesus name, amen and amen.

***The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN!***