

Mark 10: 17-23; “Good Teacher, What shall I Do?” Sermon # 83 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 13th, 2011, in the Morning Worship Service.

This is no doubt one of the most amazing incidents that has been recorded for us in the gospels. It is amazing because of the way the way that this rich young ruler came to the Lord Jesus with the question that he did; it is amazing because of the way that Jesus answered his question; and it is amazing because this man who came to Jesus so confidently and joyfully, ended up leaving in such sorrow, when he could have become eternally rich. This is the issue which I need to speak to you about this morning; the subject of what worldly riches will do to you, if you let them. They will deceive you and you will lose your soul. You will never really come to follow Jesus Christ; you will never inherit eternal life. The only remedy for the love of money is to come to see, and to know, and to have the eternal riches which can only come to a person through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This issue of the love of money is very important, not only in connection to your coming to know the Lord and having eternal life; but it is also very important to your becoming more of service to our Lord Jesus, if you have come to know Him. Jesus teaches us in another place that you cannot serve God and money. We want to try to apply the truths that we will learn this morning in very practical ways. Jesus makes it very clear to us here in this passage that it is hard to even enter the kingdom of God if you are trusting in earthly riches. So, there will be much for each of us to consider in regard to ourselves today. I am not going to try to deal with this whole passage in one sermon. There is too much here. Instead I will deliver the truth of verses 17-31 in three sermons. The first one will be on verses 17-23. The second one will be on verses 24-27. And the third one will be on verses 28-31. This morning I would like to speak you 1st, about the riches of God’s goodness. Then 2ndly, on the poverty of our obedience. And then 3rdly, on storing up true riches by faith in Christ’s word. Let us humble ourselves to receive this word whether we are rich or poor in an earthly sense.

1st – Let us talk of the riches of God’s goodness. (Verses 17-19)

This encounter with the rich young ruler took place, it says in verse 17, “as Jesus was going out on the road.” It took place in full view of the Apostles and other disciples that were with Jesus. It says that “one” came running up to Him, knelt down before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Matthew’s gospel also speaks of him as “one” who came to him. Luke’s gospel, however, adds that he was “a certain ruler”. None of the accounts say that he was young. I think that the phrase, “the rich young ruler” comes from his statement in verse 20, “All these things I have kept from my youth”, implying that he was not that far beyond the stage of youth. There are some young men who are able to be very successful in the world because they are wise in doing business. They go after knowledge and they attempt to learn everything necessary for them to do a thing

well; to be successful in what they desire to do and become in this life. This was one of those men. He did not come to Jesus as Nicodemus did. Nicodemus was also a ruler; he was a spiritual ruler of the Jews, but he came to Jesus by night; secretly, because he was not sure about Jesus' being the Son of God and he came to learn secretly because he was afraid of what might happen to him if some of the other rulers found out that he had gone to speak with Jesus. But he sensed that with all that he had learned about being a good Jew, that he was missing something in his experience of knowing God. This man that we are looking at this morning, had no ambitions to become a spiritual ruler of the Jews; rather he had striven to become a very successful young businessman. He came boldly; he came publicly; he came running to Jesus because he knew what he was seeking, and what he desired to find. What was he seeking? He was seeking to know what he should do to inherit eternal life; certainly the most worthy of questions to seek an answer for. This was his question, and he meant to obtain the answer. He was very decided and full of resolve. He was out to do what he could, to find and obtain eternal life. He had heard about Jesus; he had heard that he was a good man and a great teacher; a master teacher he believed Him to be; and so this man came to Jesus to ask Him the question of questions. He came with respect; he came with reverence; and he believed that because of the way that he had been raised, and because he was sincere about finding the answer to his question; that the Lord would indeed tell him exactly what he needed to do, that he might inherit eternal life.

No doubt this young man, according to way that evangelism is done and practiced in many evangelical churches in our land, would have been the prime candidate for immediate salvation and being brought into the church. A few simple questions would do. Do you want to know God and have eternal life? Then make your decision to follow Jesus. Who could ask for more; such a respectful young man; such holy aspirations in his words; such evident success at making money. You would think that the way that he approached and spoke to Jesus, that Jesus would have been elated to have such a man ask Him such a question. But Jesus knew that He was going to have to teach this young man from the ground up; that he had a need to be saved. And He did so, by asking him a question in return. He asked him, "Why do you call me good?" The Lord Jesus was not interested in compliments. He was interested in speaking the truth. The man is paying Jesus a respectful compliment, and yet Jesus was turning his compliment against him as though he had just done Him a great disservice by phrasing his question in this way. The young ruler probably reasoned this way; Wasn't Jesus a good man? Had he not heard that it was so, from the lips of many people whom he had talked to? But Jesus asks him, "Why do you call me good?" And then He follows it up with this amazing statement. "No one is good but One, that is God." This must have given the young man pause. If God is the only one who is good; does this mean that I am not good? He probably thought that being a good person was something that you do which is easily seen by other people. It is something that I do, because I have been taught to do what is

good and right, and I am careful and diligent to keep it up. It is obvious; is it not, he thought to himself?

But Jesus knew that this young man did not understand. He did not know what you and I should know, because we have been given a whole Bible. He did not as of yet, either objectively or subjectively know, what the Apostle Paul would write some years later in Romans Chapter 3, verses 10-12 – “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.” “They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.” This young man was profitable to himself. He was profitable in business to many other people. But he was unprofitable to God. And so Jesus must very deliberately lead him to this conclusion so that he might be saved. This is the conclusion that every man or woman must be brought to if they are ever going to be saved. The Lord Jesus was leading this young man to this tremendous revelation of truth; that no man is good by nature. The only One who is good is God. Let me ask you if you are a person who has come to know this truth? Let us think about this attribute of God for a few minutes. He is different from us. God is, in His essence, essentially good. We in our hearts are not good without God, and without grace. Sin entered the world through Adam, and because of that one sin, all men are not good in their nature from birth. In fact, in Ecclesiastes Chapter 7, verse 20, it says, “For there is not a just man on the earth who does good and does not sin.” Not only sinners are not good, but even just men are not good in the sense of always being able to do that which is good and right. There is not one; that is, except Jesus. When he walked on the earth He was perfectly good, and perfectly just. Jesus did not tell the rich young man that He was the only good man who had ever walked the earth; but instead He pointed him to God his Father, who is essentially good. If the young man would have known the truth; goodness personified was standing right in front of him. And Jesus will direct him to follow Him in just a moment. But first, he had to try to show this young man more about himself and the righteousness which the law requires.

Let me pause here and make application. Parents, do you delight to tell your children about the Lord’s great goodness; His perfect goodness? Do you declare to them that God is the only One who is perfect in righteousness? Do you declare to them that you yourself are not good consistently, like you would like to be? Do you tell them that it takes the grace of God to truly do one good thing? When you do tell them this, then it gives you the opportunity to point them to Christ who is your Savior. It is one of best ways that you can evangelize your young ones. If you are a Christian parent, your children need to know that any goodness they see in you has been worked into your life by the grace of God. Turn with me to Psalm 145, verse 3. “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable.” “One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.” “I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works.” “Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will

declare Your greatness.” “They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness.” “The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.” “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.” It is a part of God’s greatness that He is good. It is the out-working of His righteousness that He is good. It is the out-working of His goodness that His tender mercies are over all His works. The Lord Jesus, here, declares that God alone is good. No man has any goodness in Him apart from God. James Chapter 1, verse 17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

2ndly - I would like you all to see from this text, the poverty of our obedience. (Verses 19 and 20)

This is what the rich young ruler did not understand. He didn’t understand that God alone is good. He thought that He was good because He thought that he had kept the commandments of the Law. And so Jesus had to show him that he really was not as good as he thought that he was. Verse 19 – “You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother.” “And he answered and said to Him, ‘Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.’” The commandments that Jesus mentioned are all taken from the 2nd table of the law; commandments related to how we relate to other people. Jesus did not mention those first four that related to God Himself. He would test this young man on the ones that he thought that he was strongest in. He even added one, which was an amplification of the 8th commandment; He said, “Do not defraud.” This would especially apply to the way that the young man did business. (It could also be considered as relating to the 10th commandment, which I will mention in a moment) Now it should be very obvious that this young man sincerely believed that he had kept all of these commandments consistently from his youth. He never would have said so, if he didn’t believe it to be true. This shows us that there are many people who do not understand the spirituality of the law. They think of the law, not in terms of the thoughts and intents of their heart before God, but in terms of their outward behavior before other people. Many people who are like this are not aware that their first and greatest obedience is to love God above everything else, even everything that people might think or say about them or what is important in life. Jesus says in Luke 16: 15, “For that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God,”.

So when the rich young man said that he had kept all of these commandments, he was thinking of keeping them in terms of how other people viewed him as he kept them; indeed, how he saw himself as he kept them. I am pretty sure that although he did think about what God was requiring, that he didn’t think of it in terms of his obedience beginning in his heart. At the same time that he was keeping the

commandments outwardly; inwardly, he was still thinking in terms of his keeping as much of his money as he could, for himself. He may have even been giving tithes of all that he had, just so it would be seen by the people at the synagogue that he was a “giving” man. He had not committed adultery or fornication; this would have ruined his reputation. He had not murdered anyone; had not stolen anything from anyone. He had not lied to anyone or defrauded them in business. He was wise with a worldly wisdom, and he knew that you cannot build a good reputation or do well for yourself in business, if you act in such a stupid or irresponsible way. He saw this, and he did not want any part of it. He wanted to be looked up to in his community, and sincerely wanted to have the confidence of people around him in all of his business dealings and personal interactions with people. He was no doubt a model citizen. But you will notice that Jesus left out one commandment in the commandments that He listed, of God’s moral law. He had deliberately saved this one for last. This was the commandment that, unbeknownst to him, was undermining all of the sincerity of his obedience to God in relation to other men.

This was the commandment that Jesus would test His sincerity by. And let us not fool ourselves; it is often the commandment which God will test each of us by in relation to our really keeping all the commandments of God. It is the 10th commandment, “You shall not covet.” You shall not desire something which is your neighbors. You shall not desire what God has not intended to give you; greater wealth than what God would want you to have or to retain. I think that this is the outworking of this commandment. Your heart has to be sensitive to how much money and possessions that you keep for yourself; and how much you give and use in His service. Obedience to this commandment is surely a matter of one’s heart intent before God. Turn with me to Romans Chapter 7, and verse 7. The great Apostle Paul was tested in this same way. He says, “What shall we say then?” “Is the law sin?” “Certainly not!” “On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’” “But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.” You see, this is a sin which is often hidden from other people, and even not understood by ourselves. Jesus knew that this young man did not see this commandment clearly. He did not understand how covetous a man he really was.

There was a poverty in his obedience that he did not know anything about. He was a man who was very careful with his money. He always made wise investments and was careful to hold on to the profits, and he had learned to save and to build with his money. But as he was doing this, he did not realize that God wanted him to learn to be generous and give to the poor and give to God’s work and kingdom. But especially, God would have his heart be directed toward Himself first; trusting in Him first, and not in his money. You see, God had given him all of his abilities; God had given him all of his business savvy. God was the One who had allowed him to make all his money and have the position that he held in the community. God had

even helped him to obey his parents and comply with their wishes so that he knew that they approved of what he had done for himself. But there was this great problem in himself that he did not see or want to see. He thought that he could obtain eternal life in the same way that he made his riches. He would attempt to obtain it through his own wisdom and efforts and skills. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He was saying; Tell me Master Teacher what it is that I need to do, and I shall go about to do it so that I will inherit it. But finding eternal life does not come by self-effort. It comes by humble submission to the Word of God; believing that God will give what is good and needful. In fact it is impossible to find and obtain eternal life, coming at it in this way of self-effort and good works in men’s sight. Everything that he had lived for was about to be revealed for it what it was; extreme selfishness.

There was a poverty in his obedience, and he was blind to it. It was that He could not be rich toward God or truly generous to men. Now, I must ask everyone in this place this morning to search your heart and ask yourself if you have been blind in regard to this all-important aspect of your obedience unto God. Without this; all else is of no avail. God cannot approve of your works. God is looking for something more from you than your looking good in the eyes of other people. God is looking for something far more from you than your becoming a successful business man. God is looking for something far more than your outward obedience to His moral law; He is looking for you to give Him your heart so that He can save you from your sins, and then work changes in you by His grace in Christ so that you become a most generous, kind, loving, and thoughtful person. He wants you to become like His Son in whatever you will do with your life. And you know what the Lord Jesus was like. 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9 says, “For you know the grace of Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.”

And this is exactly what Jesus placed before the rich young man in this conversation. Verse 21 – “Then Jesus looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’” This is certainly not what the young man had expected or wanted to hear. If Jesus would have asked him if He wanted him to make a general commitment to Him, to listen to His teaching and to believe in Him; the young man would not have hesitated. If Jesus had asked him to give to His work and to help support His ministry; he would have readily complied. But Jesus was asking for him to give up, and give away, everything that he had worked so hard to build by his own wisdom and skill. He was asking him to give all of his possessions to the poor, and to take up his cross and follow Him. He could not do it.

But I want you to notice, here, our Lord’s look of love upon this man. This is mentioned to show us how great is the general love that the Father and the Son have for the human condition and predicament of not understanding themselves or the

depth of their depravity. Men are unable to keep the commandments of God perfectly and Jesus knew that this man's attempts fell far short of the perfect obedience required by God and the law. But Jesus did not disdain the sincere attempts that this man had put forth to keep the commandments of God. He loved him for it. Let us understand from this that sincerity is something that God loves very much in those who are seeking to know Him. Sincere obedience in the attempts to keep God's holy law are seen and they are approved of, by our God and our Christ. Parents, do you see and recognize; do you love and reward your children's attempts at sincere obedience to God's word? You really should. Yes, they are sinners; yes they need at times to be instructed; yes, at times they even need to be disciplined and corrected; but they also need to understand that you know when they are sincere; when they are really trying to understand and do God's will. Jesus recognized this in this young man, and this is why He gave Him this look of love.

3rdly – I would like to speak to you now on storing up true riches by faith in Christ's word. (Verses 22 and 23)

I hope that I have sufficiently proved to you that the only way that this young man would come to know that he was really poverty stricken in his obedience, and really wrong about his assessment of himself and his keeping God's law, was if Jesus tested him at this all important point of the 10th commandment. He was confronted with Jesus' asking him to give everything away to find eternal life. His response is found in verse 22. It says, "But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." He was grieved some of the translations say. This response made it very plain to Jesus, to the man himself, and to all of Jesus disciples who were looking on; what commandments this young man simply could not keep, because he didn't really want to keep them. Jesus knew that he would have to publicly declare himself, whether he would keep His commandment to him specifically, or not. The young man thought it too hard to sell whatever he had and give it to the poor. He found it too hard to believe, that the treasure in heaven that he would find in doing so, would be greater than the treasure that he had accumulated on the earth. He thought that the cross was something too hard to bear, if the only way to inherit eternal life was to pick it up in this way and follow Jesus. And, at first glance we must say, that it does appear to have been too much to have asked him. But really; was it?

Jesus was plainly setting before this young man the truth that there is something of far greater value; something which gives an eternal security; something which gives peace and hope in the midst of trials; something which would let him see and have the true riches which he so desperately needed. It was Christ Himself, and His grace. Turn with me to Proverbs 8: 12. This young man was wise, but his wisdom was a worldly wisdom. But listen to what it says here: "I wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion." "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." "Counsel is mine and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength." "By me kings

reign, and rulers decree justice.” “By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth.” “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.” “Riches and honor are with me, enduring riches and righteousness.” “My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver.” “I traverse the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice, that I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth, that I may fill their treasuries. Who is speaking here? Is it wisdom in the abstract? No, it is wisdom personified. It is Christ. Is He speaking about earthly wisdom and earthly riches? No! It is God’s wisdom, and spiritual riches; all of which are found in Christ. All the riches of wisdom and knowledge and all righteousness is found in Jesus Christ. This is why it says in verse 23 of our text, “Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, ‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God.’” The rich young ruler weighed it in his mind and made an instant calculation. I can’t do it. I will lose too much. And he didn’t understand how much he would really lose. What will it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his soul.” “Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” It is treasure in heaven that we should really seek. And how do we find it? We find this treasure by faith in Jesus Christ, and faith in His word. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the things that we truly need in this life) shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6: 31)

Let me close this sermon by having you turn with me to Psalm 49. Verse 5 – “Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?” “Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever—that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit.” “For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others.” “Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.” “Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.” “This is the way of the foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings.” “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling.” “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me.” “Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him.” “Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. (or the light of life)” “A man who is in honor yet does not understand is like the beasts that perish.” This rich young ruler did not understand. Let me ask you in closing; do you? Do you realize that the more that you give of yourself and your resources to God, that you have nothing to fear. He will give to you the true riches

and all you will truly need. The Lord God is a Sun and a Shield; the Lord gives grace and glory.” “No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” “How blessed is the man who trusts in Him.”