Mark 10 26-27 They were even more astonished and said to one another, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For people, it is impossible, but not for God, because all things are possible for God.”

He came. He came seeking Jesus. He came with a question of great importance. He asks Jesus, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life.”**

What an interesting question. Here is this man, our text and Matthew call him a young man, but not too young because in Luke he is identified as “a ruler.” In that light, that might put the age of this young man at about mid to late twenties. That’s important to know, because it tells us things we can grasp about this young man.

This young man is obviously a Jewish person, born and raised in the religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now, religious wise I don’t think he is a Sadducee because his question is about eternal life. It is a well-known fact that the Sadducees have rejected the teaching of a heaven and eternal life, opting instead to believe that the life we have here and now is all that counts. So in all probability this young man is a Pharisee.

As a Pharisee his religious life is all about obedience and good works. Living the right life, doing those things that are God pleasing, and avoiding those things that are contrary to God. The Pharisees believe that this good and pleasing life, this obedience to God in accord with the Laws of God is what brings the favor of God to your life. It is clear that this young man, because of his response to Jesus believes, truly believes, that he has kept the Laws of God, that he has been holy and obedient to God ever since he was a very young age.

Now let me mention this. As a Pharisee, who viewed his life as one good work after another, this Pharisee believes that God loves him and that God rewards him. He is called a ruler in Luke, which means that already he is recognized as a person with leadership skills, people skills, and with spiritual skills. His leadership position identifies him as one favored by the people or at least the religious authorities. He has great wealth. It doesn’t matter if it is inherited wealth or wealth gained by hard work and skill. To this young man all that matters is that in his mind and his particular branch of theology, he has this wealth because he is so good and wonderful in life that the Lord God blesses him. Yep, his wealth is viewed as the reward of God for his exemplary life. The same with his leadership position. He has that from God as his reward for being such a good and faithful obeyer of God.

Yet here is this person asking Jesus the question: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Let’s take that question and its answers and consider all things under the theme: **THE PROBLEM WITH WORKS!**

You do realize that this young man coming to Jesus clearly demonstrates a problem with the idea of works saving us. According to this young man, he has had a life filled with good works, a life filled with rewards and blessings galore, a life that clearly shows he must be and is favored of God. And yet, something rings hollow. Something seems wrong. That’s the only reason for the question put forth to Jesus. There is a doubt. There is a thought, that just maybe my good works are not good enough to enter eternal life with God.

Now let’s be honest. Just how many works are needed to insure, absolutely, a position in the high and lofty, eternal kingdom of God? Answer: we don’t know. And when you look at the world of work righteousness, or self-righteousness, the horror of that lack of answer is quite evident. Think about this. Is the hat you wear or don’t wear the difference between heaven or hell? Could your eternal wellbeing be dependent on whether or not you use zippers, or cars or musical instruments? And if helping the poor is the key, then do you need to give all your money or just a percentage of money to be considered “right” before the Lord God? Do you see the problem? In the world of works, which work, how many works are truly required before you can count yourself in?

More food for thought I want you to contemplate that there is a religion out there that teaches that if you live a quiet life, sex free, marriage free, in constant prayer, cutting yourself off from the goods and wonders of the world, that religion gets you closer to God. There is also a religion out there that tells you that should you kill the enemies of your God then that is what will make you closer and quicker the dweller of eternal life. The list could go on and on with what people have determined to be the work to end all works that you might be guaranteed the reward of heaven and eternity. So which one do you think is right? Better yet, which one does God say is right?

That’s really what this young man was seeking isn’t it? Jesus, what is the one work, the one thing that I can do, the blessed work of all works that will positively grant me eternal life?” And why do you ask that question? Because deep down, in your very heart, you know something is terribly wrong with the idea that works will get you to heaven.

You have to love the mastery of Jesus. I will tell you that I don’t think we have the whole conversation on calling Jesus “good.” Matthew’s record indicates this was a much longer conversation. I would have like to have heard that conversation because I believe the point of it was the fact that in truth, you can’t rely on man to have the answer and that the only answer would be with God! Which then lead to the question from Jesus, **“What do the commandments have to say?”** In our record Jesus actually speaks to the issues of murder, adultery, stealing, giving false testimony, fraud and obedience to parents. What does all of this say to us?

The young ruler’s answer is: **“Teacher, I have kept all these since I was a child.”** His answer is wrong. We know his answer is wrong because if you are holy and perfect as he claims he is, then why is he here asking Jesus about the one big work, the one big thing to get him to heaven? The problem is, he doesn’t know he is wrong. He doesn’t grasp that God’s law was never meant to save. God’s law was meant to show us our sins and show us the desperate need we have for the Savior of God. He doesn’t know that because that is not what he has been taught. Yet deep down, he knows he has a problem.

Jesus directs him this way. **“One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** Do you see what Jesus has done? This young man, based on his outward life and his outward shallow grasp of God’s Law thinks he is holy and perfect. But Jesus has only addressed the second table of the law, those laws that deal with our relationship to our fellow people. Now Jesus turns to the first table, the one that speaks to how we regard God. The challenge is given: “Sell everything, give it to the poor, rid yourself of your earthly and material things and follow me.” Make no mistake, he will have the treasure of God because he follows Jesus, not because he sells and gives to the poor. The challenge is awesome. You, you young person, you make God and the things of God the most important thing!

The young man is going to walk away from Jesus, filled with grief and deeply sad. He had great wealth. The reason he is saddened and grieved is because he knew, knew that Jesus was right. The one great work he learned about. The simple thing was sell it all and give it away that He might follow Jesus. He won’t do that. It is clear by his demeanor he knows he should, but in truth, he walks away from Jesus and the invitation to eternal life and salvation. And I want you to remember that Scripture says just before Jesus gives this challenge: **“Jesus looked at him, and loved him.”**

Jesus loves this young man because he comes seeking the answer to eternal life, truly a person seeking the wisdom and joy of God and yet Jesus knew this young man would reject him. Jesus still loves him. That love of Jesus right now, is not going to change the fact that the young man walks away from Jesus and rejects the truth of Jesus. I will tell you that if the rejection of Jesus continues, then that young man will never see the wonder and joy of eternal life.

Now look at how Jesus continues to teach. **“How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! Children, how hard it is for those who trust in their riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”**

Wrestle with those words. Is the mere possession of riches something that will keep one out of the salvation of Jesus? No, Jesus makes it clear in his statement that the problem is **“trust in those riches.”** For the young man, it was trust that those riches were his proof that God favored him. It may have even been that the young man couldn’t fathom life without wealth and goods, without the best comforts and things of the world. In other words, he loved the world and the things of the world more than God.

I believe you and I must still wrestle with this fact of God and faith. You cannot serve two masters. Either God is your everything or he is not? And if God is not everything in your life, what of this world have you replaced God with? Money? Job? Sports? Love? Sex? Food? The list is pretty endless. Put God first is the message here. Put God first because he is the real treasure the true treasure. Seriously, where is God in your life? And I want you to grasp that this young man who walked away from Jesus, if he does not change his heart and attitude, that young man is going off to simply continue living hypocritically, thinking he is of God, thinking he is serving God, thinking he is really a good and strong believer in God but in truth, he has nothing! He has rejected God for the things of the world!

Please notice the text doesn’t end here. After Jesus speaks of the difficulty of faith in this world, the disciples, speaking among themselves conclude: **“Who then can be saved?”** They grasp the point of Jesus. They grasp our need and the necessity of the Savior Jesus and the simple wonder of “follow me.” But recognize that they rightly conclude that without Jesus, and all that Jesus is, and all that God’s Word reveals and says, then no one can be saved! No one! Or as Jesus simply asks in Mark 8:37 **“What can a man give in exchange for his soul?”** What price do you think you can declare as sufficient for your eternal life and soul?

Jesus gives us the answer. He says, **“For people, it is impossible, but not for God, because all things are possible for God.”** The answer is clear. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot do enough works or the right works or eliminate evil in our lives so that we can enter eternal life. It is impossible, impossible for us! But it is not impossible for God.

Do you know why? Because the plan of God at work right now in Jesus is the salvation of souls. The debt of sin that needed to be paid, that spiritual cost of disobedience and evil, Jesus right here in this text is working to take care of that. Because Jesus, God’s Son, will become our Savior. The Father and Son have worked out a plan whereby Jesus will take our place in the agonies of hell, Jesus will bear the wrath and anger of his Father against sin for every one of us. That’s what Jesus has come to do. What we could not. Jesus has come to save.

Don’t you grasp that such is what the Christian church is about. It is not about being this, doing that, living holy and perfect and showering upon God good works that He might reward us. It is about what Jesus has done for us. That Jesus took the weight of sin and carried it away. That Jesus suffered and died and rose again from the dead that eternal life and salvation could be proclaimed and exclaimed in our lives. Do you want to know the one thing you can do to enter eternal life? The answer is Jesus.

Hear the message of Jesus and forgiveness. See the wonder of Jesus on the cross just for you. Hear his cry, **“It is finished,”** and know that what he meant is that your sin, my sin, the sins of the entire world for all of time are paid for. Be filled with joy because the tomb of Jesus is empty. He rose from the dead! He came back to life just as foretold and promised in the Scriptures so you might know his work has become your work. His righteousness is your righteousness. His victory is your victory. God Son has paid your price for sin and God’s Son has opened wide for you and me the wonder and joys of eternal life.

Believe that! The Holy Spirit has called you to faith. Believe that Jesus is your Savior and heaven is your home. Trust absolutely and only in Jesus. Everything else about faith will follow. You will be a child of God. You will hold to the treasure of Jesus. You will hate sin and desire to live a life pleasing to God all because of Jesus. Because in Jesus we are saved. In Jesus eternal life is given by grace though faith.

Now, like the young man, you can walk away. Or like the disciples you can believe! Amen.