

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon title: The Superficial Seeker—Mark 10:17-31

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**INTRODUCTION:** The points of my message today are:

1. Hard Sayings – Verses 21-25
2. An Obvious Question – Verse 26
3. The Key – Verses 27
4. A Promise and a Warning – Verses 28-31

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 10: 17-22 <sup>17</sup> *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*

<sup>18</sup> *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”*

<sup>20</sup> *“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”*

<sup>21</sup> *Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

<sup>22</sup> *At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

**EXPLANATION:** In this passage we find a stellar young man who comes to Jesus in the last days of Jesus’ ministry, seeking to know how to gain eternal life. He is traditionally called “the rich young ruler.” Scholars believe he was a “ruler” in the sense that he was probably the head of a synagogue.

There were many commendable things about the young man:

- He must have had a respectable appearance; he was probably well-dressed, for those around recognized him as wealthy.
- He recognized Jesus as a teacher.
- He ran to Jesus and bowed before him, so he was humble and respectful.
- He was a spiritual man.
- He came to the right person for answers.
- He was a good man; he had followed the commandments all of his life.
- He realized he had a need. With all of his wealth and status, he still saw something missing in his life.

The disciples probably were thinking, *“Wow! Look at this guy! He has money, respectability, and he’s interested in joining up with our little rag-tag group. We could use somebody of influence among this group of fishermen and tax collectors.”*

**APPLICATION:** I confess, I’ve had those thoughts in years’ past when certain people have visited the church. *Wow, if that person would join our church, all our financial struggles would be over.* I no longer think this because I’ve learned it really doesn’t work this way.

If this guy had come into one of our services and come forward during the invitation, he probably would have been willing to pray the prayer and fill out a decision card. We would have probably signed him up right away to be a Sunday School teacher or deacon.

People come into our services; if they have a respectable appearance, are asking questions about Jesus, recognize they have a need, and are seemingly spiritual, perhaps sometimes we are not willing to ask the hard questions. And in avoiding those hard questions, do we really love them? Jesus asked the hard questions.

### **First, HARD SAYINGS – Verse 21-25**

All of Jesus’ words in the Scriptures were not warm fuzzies. He had some hard things to say along the way, not only in rebuke to the Pharisees but also to his disciples. Here we actually have two hard sayings: one to the young man in verse 21 and then one to the disciples in verses 23-25.

Jesus didn't rebuke the young man for claiming to have observed all of the commandments. Instead, verse 21 says Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus looked at this "nice," respectable, godly man and saw through all of those good works. He saw the man's need and loved him—loved him enough to say the hard things. Jesus tells the rich young ruler that in order to inherit eternal life, he is going to have to get rid of his wealth, sell it all, and give it to the poor.

Is Jesus preaching a gospel of good works here? Not at all; he is preaching a gospel of complete surrender. He knew what the young man was depending on to obtain eternal life. He was depending on his good works --- keeping the commandments and obtaining wealth. He was going to have to give all that up, surrender it all to Jesus, and follow him to obtain eternal life.

Sometimes people want God's best as long as it is packaged the way they perceive God's best. A woman went to marriage counseling, and the counselor asked if she wanted God's best for her marriage. She said, "I don't know what I want." And with this statement, the counselor said, "Then I can't really help you."

Jesus looked at this young man and loved him --- loved him enough to tell him the truth. If he wasn't willing to give it all up to follow Jesus, he couldn't be his disciple. He couldn't live with one foot in the world and one foot following Jesus. It just wouldn't work.

The young man went away sorrowful because he had great wealth. His wealth had become his cushion; his wealth had become his safety net. He could do good works for others because of his wealth, if he wanted to. He had not bargained on self-sacrifice and privation, persecution and possibly death. He was seeking counsel but not such a radical change to his whole lifestyle. If this man recanted and came back to Jesus, we don't know. We never hear about him anymore.

Jesus then has a hard saying for the disciples in verses 23-25 when he tells them how difficult it is for a wealthy man to enter the kingdom of God.

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 10: 23-25 <sup>23</sup> *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"* <sup>24</sup> *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"* <sup>25</sup> *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."*

They were astonished, for all their lives they'd been taught wealth was a sign of God's blessing. So here Jesus is telling them, it is almost impossible for a wealthy man to be saved. It's like a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle.

**EXPLANATION:** There have been all kinds of speculations as to what Jesus meant here ... a gate into Jerusalem by the name of *the eye of the needle* where a camel had to shed his load and kneel down to get through --- the analogy is obvious. The "camel" was actually a rope, and getting a large bulky rope through the eye of the needle would be impossible. However, the meaning is still that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

### **Second, AN OBVIOUS QUESTION**

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 10: 26 <sup>26</sup> *The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*

Shocked, the disciples had one question: Then who can be saved? They saw no way to eternal life for anyone then. If a wealthy man, who had kept all of the commandments, had no better chance to be saved than a camel trying to get through the eye of a needle, what chance does anyone have?

### **Third, THE KEY**

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 10: 27 <sup>27</sup> *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

Salvation is not a result of man's effort but of God's grace. We need God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We need a new birth (John 3). We need a heart transplant (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Only complete surrender to Jesus for the exchange of a new life can save us.

### **Fourth, A PROMISE AND A WARNING**

**SCRIPTURE:** Mark 10: 28-31 <sup>28</sup> *Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"* <sup>29</sup> *"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or*

*brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel* <sup>30</sup> *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 age to come eternal life.* <sup>31</sup> *But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

**EXPLANATION:** The Amplified Bible seems to have the most accurate translation of the Greek into English. Jesus interrupts Peter as he begins to wax eloquently about all the disciples have given up to follow him. He tells Peter basically that anything Peter thinks he has sacrificed for Jesus will be restored to him in this life ... kind of interesting ... and in the life to come. Basically, the promise is: God will take care of us, no matter what we have “sacrificed.” We have nothing to worry about. We don’t need to clamor to be the best or the first. In fact, we ought to be honored to be last, because though last in this life, in the kingdom we will be first.

**CONCLUSION:** As we close this morning, it might be well for us to think about what it really means to leave all we have and follow Jesus. God doesn’t call us to be “nice.” He doesn’t call us to be rich or successful. He calls us to a life of surrender, sacrifice, and denial. Sometimes to truly love people, we have to speak hard words. But they should always be with compassion. What is Jesus saying to you this morning? Respond accordingly. The altar is open.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
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