

Mark 10:17-31^{v vi}

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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 greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

^v **About Mark 10:17-31**

Mark's account of the rich man centers on the difficulties of responding to the call to discipleship. This event illustrates Mark's parable of the sower, in particular those who hear God's word "but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing" (Mark 4:18). The focus is on God first. Thus Jesus rejects the word "good" for himself and redirects the man's attention to God, the source of absolute goodness.

The man's question reveals that he knows of his need for something more than a basic obedience to the commandments. Jesus' response focuses on the root issue for the man's conversion-his attachment to things. Jesus does not condemn material possessions, but urges detachment, freedom from "things" that allows for a more radical attachment to God.

Like many in Jesus' world, the disciples believed that religious duties were easier for the wealthy than for the poor, and that God sent prosperity to the righteous and poverty to the wicked. Jesus' teaching transcends these human limitations. He declares that eternal life comes to every human, rich or poor, only as God's gift.

^{vi} **Reflection and Response**

In today's gospel, Jesus' baffles his disciples as he destroys their presumption that the rich would receive the same preferential treatment in heaven as they would anywhere else. It takes a pointed barb to puncture their assumptions. Translating Jesus' impossible image into contemporary terms might be like saying that it would be harder for the wealthy to enter the kingdom than for Bill Gates to get through the night deposit slot at the neighborhood bank.

Jesus looks at his bewildered audience, then offers them good news. Of course it is impossible for human beings to overturn the established order, he says. But for God, the impossible is possible. Grace can penetrate even our mixed-up social injustices, and human beings can do astoundingly selfless things. When our efforts are joined with God's, we receive a surprising divine power, past our understanding. "For God all things are possible" thus translates "for us all things are possible."

Is there more, just beyond the margins? The final word on the wealthy man is not yet in. Did he wander sadly for the rest of his life, or did he ever exchange his possessions for a greater good? We'll never know. But Mark is a gospel filled with second chances. Jesus gives us the same opportunity he gave the wealthy man. When we feel his gaze on us, will we follow his dream?