

The Only Way to Salvation

"Follow Me on the Road" Series, February 22 & 23, 2025 | Mark 10:17-31

Rob O'Neal, Senior Pastor

Sometimes priorities compete.

In 1976, George Lucas started the first *Star Wars* film with an ambitious vision but a meager budget.

Lucas grew up watching science fiction and wanted to make his own space-opera, cowboy movie, coming-of-age, hero's journey movie.

The movie was ambitious including exotic, expensive locations and special effects that hadn't been invented yet. All of that cost money, which studios were not providing in abundance.

Lucas asked them for \$18 million; eventually they gave him \$11 million instead.

His big vision clashed with his limited budget and the realities of technology.

How many locations could they use? How many sets could they build? How would they portray battles in space? Every decision involved tradeoffs.¹

Do you ever struggle with competing priorities?

You want to get started in a career, but you have to go to school first.

You want to raise a family, but your career demands all your focus.

You want to buy a house, but your bills keep piling up.

You want to invest in your faith, but everything else keeps crying out for your time.

We've got priorities, but they frequently compete with one another.

In today's Scripture reading, a wealthy man faced a massive decision that tested his priorities.

He wanted eternal life, salvation, and the Kingdom of God.

He turned to Jesus to find out how to get what he wanted, but Jesus told him that what he wanted would cost him everything he had—his wealth, influence, security, and attachments.

He could have his old life or a new life, but not both. He had to choose which he valued more.

We learn about this man's choice, because we face the same dilemma.

Jesus calls us to set aside our personal priorities for Him.

Like the man in our Scripture reading today, we have personal priorities.

And like him, some of those priorities represent our old lives before Jesus, while others represent our new lives with Jesus.

And again, like the man in our Scripture reading today, we have to choose. We can't have both. So, our Scripture reading today gives us a chance to think about what we'll choose. What will you choose?

¹ <https://www.biography.com/movies-tv/george-lucas-star-wars-facts>

A man pursued eternal life but stumbled over his personal priorities.

A man ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him in Mark 10:17-21:

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.' " And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

The man asked an important question about eternal life.

Mark just calls him a man. Matthew adds that he was young. Luke tells us he was a ruler.

Put them together, and we frequently call this man the Rich Young Ruler.

He ran up to Jesus, knelt before Him, and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life.

His urgency in running is admirable. Kneeling is the right posture before Jesus. And asking what is required to obtain eternal life is the right, most important question in life.

Jesus redirected him to the Ten Commandments, "You know these commandments already."

The man confidently claimed that he had kept the Law since childhood.

His claim may sound audacious to us because we know we can't keep the Law completely.

Jesus showed us that the Law gets to the condition of the heart, the purity of our motives, and thoughts—standards no sinful human can fully keep.

However, in Jesus' day, people thought of the Law differently. They thought of the Law as something attainable, obligations that one could keep by living a basically moral life.

Paul said something similar when he described his life before becoming a Christian. In **Philippians 3:6** Paul wrote,

... as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

From the perspective of the first century, the Rich Young Ruler, like Paul, had kept the Law.

So, Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Jesus saw him clearly. What the man said was true; he really had tried to keep the Law to the best of his ability. There is no self-delusion here.

And to obey God is to express love to God.

Elsewhere, Jesus says that He and His Father will love the one who loves Him that way.

Naturally, Jesus loved this man. But there was more. Jesus told the man to go, sell everything he had, and follow Him.

But before we get to why Jesus said that and what the man did next, let's ask...

Can you imagine Jesus looking at you with love and inviting you to follow Him?

It's happening right here and right now. Jesus is looking at you with love, not because you're perfect, but because you long to obey Him and belong to Him. He loves that in you.

And Jesus is calling you, "Come, follow Me!" He's calling YOU to be His disciple. Not someone else. Not some other time. You. Now. That's the message in this passage today.

But let's be honest—our own competing priorities may be holding us back.

Wealth can be a personal priority that competes with the Kingdom of God.

The man walked away sorrowful in Mark 10:22-26:

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And 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?"

After the man walked away sorrowful, Jesus looked around at His own disciples.

He wondered if they would leave Him, too, because He knew He had upset their worldview.

He added that it is difficult for those with wealth to enter the Kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed at Jesus' words because people then believed that wealth was frequently a sign of God's blessing on the righteous. The wealthy were usually seen as better people. If they couldn't be saved, then who could?

Jesus clarified, "It's difficult for ANYONE to enter the Kingdom of God."

But for the wealthy, it's particularly tough. Jesus said something that's really quite funny—perhaps to break the tension. "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." Picture it! That's funny!

But what was Jesus teaching?

Jesus was teaching stewardship from the Kingdom perspective.

Wealthy people are not more favored by God than other people.

In fact, wealth can be hinderance to faith at times.

When we're wealthy, we're tempted to think of ourselves as self-sufficient. As satisfied.

When we're satisfied, it's tough to see our deep need for Jesus.

And we easily think of ourselves as owners of vast resources that make life good.

Instead, Jesus wants us to think of ourselves as stewards—regardless of how much we have.

Stewards view wealth as God's resources to be used for God's purposes.

As stewards, we don't think of wealth as our own resources to be used for our own purposes.

My mom taught me this lesson subtly every Sunday.

We attended church faithfully.

Every Sunday, before we left for church, I saw my mother come downstairs dressed for church and go to the cupboard next to the refrigerator.

She would grab her purse with the checkbook in it and our family's giving envelopes. She would write a check, put it in that week's envelope, and seal the envelope. Then she would put it in her purse or Bible to take it with us.

Watching my mother, I learned that giving is important.

We are stewards of the wealth God has entrusted to us, and we are to use it for His purposes.

What do your habits say about your priorities?

Do you have a habit of regular giving?

Does your budget reflect the idea that the wealth you have is God's and that He has entrusted it to you to use for His purposes?

What do your habits say about your priorities?

Jesus alone is the way to the Kingdom of God.

We sometimes THINK and ACT like we CAN or MUST save ourselves.

Sometimes we engage in works righteousness. We do lots of Bible study hoping God will notice us or avoid big sins like murder, hoping we will squeak through.

Other times, we self-righteously think we are so good that God owes people like us salvation.

At times, we even try to prove our value. If we can become successful, wealthy, well liked, or important enough—then God will love us.

We start to think about life the way a parent sometimes thinks about baby-proofing a home.

When little ones start crawling and walking, there are things you do.

You pad corners that little ones can hurt their heads on.

You cover electrical outlets that little fingers and toys can go into.

You block off stairs, so no one goes tumbling down them.

But sometimes baby proofing becomes something more, trying to control every outcome.

We think that doing everything right will prevent anything bad from ever happening.

Or if we do everything right, then we have somehow proven our worth.

We're never going to be good enough to prove our worth. Or earn God's favor. Or save ourselves. Life and eternity don't work that way.

However, Jesus plainly asserts in Mark 10:27 that we can't save ourselves:

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Let's be clear: salvation, life, and the Kingdom of God are nearly interchangeable terms.

To be saved is to receive life—new and eternal life.

To be saved is also to be brought into the Kingdom of God.

To be in the Kingdom of God, then, is to get new life and eternal life
Do you see how the terms salvation, life, and the Kingdom of God are very closely related?
And they all come from God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus reminds us that God alone can save.

We can't save ourselves. Jesus makes that abundantly clear.

But that doesn't mean we can't be saved. We can be saved because God saves us by grace through Jesus Christ.

We need salvation from sin, separation from God, eternal death, and bondage to the kingdoms of this world.

Jesus went to the cross to pay the price for our sin. Being fully human, He could take our place.

Being fully divine, He could bear the full weight of our sin and the Father's wrath against sin. When Jesus died, He paid the price for all of it in full.

Three days later, God raised Jesus Christ from the grave—victorious over sin, death, and evil. Only God can do that!

Now, Jesus offers us forgiveness; we can't forgive ourselves or get it any other way.

When we accept His forgiveness, we receive the Holy Spirit who fills us, makes us right with God, and gives us new life.

And in the end, God will resurrect us, and we will spend eternity with Him.

Only God can do that. Only through Jesus. God alone can save us.

Jesus calls us to leave our personal priorities behind for Him.

Peter posed a relatable dilemma, and Jesus responded in Mark 10:28-31:

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."

Jesus calls us to leave our personal priorities behind for Him, as His first disciples did.

Peter reminded Jesus that the disciples had indeed left behind everything to follow Him.

Peter and others left behind their fishing nets, their families, and their homes.

Matthew left behind his tax collecting booth.

Another Simon left behind his political activities.

And that's what this whole passage is really about. Yes, it's about wealth. Jesus is saying that wealth can be a personal priority that keeps us from Him. But it's not just about wealth. It's about all the personal priorities that keep us from Him.

It could be wealth. Or career. Or family. Or security. Or just plain love of a comfortable life.

Jesus is saying that we have to let go of all of these competing priorities. For Him.

It may seem overwhelming at first, but it's something God helps us to do.

And trading our old lives and our old priorities for Jesus and our new lives is worth doing.

Families rehabbing historic houses in Great Britain might understand what Jesus was demanding.

I recently watched all three seasons of the British show, "Restoration Home."

In it, families in the United Kingdom bought significant, historic homes that were falling into disrepair and renovated them to use as private homes.

Multiple families put all of their life savings into their projects.

Several people quit their jobs to do the construction themselves cheaply.

Each project involved months, if not years, of work and incredible personal sacrifice.

But at the end, almost all of them said it was worth it. And their reason was almost always the same, "But now I get to live in a castle."

It's like what Jesus said in the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price. The Kingdom of God, He said, is like a merchant searching for pearls. He finds a pearl of great value and goes, sells all he has, and buys the pearl. It's costly, but it's worth it.

What personal priorities are you clinging to that God wants you to leave behind today?

It could be money.

It could be a career that is keeping you away from him.

It could be a love or even an addiction that is one part palace and another part prison.

It could be your picture of a perfect family. Or security. Or just a comfortable life.

Is it time to leave those priorities behind?

In Jesus, we get everything back—and more.

Jesus says that in this life—in the Church—we get friends, family, and belonging.

We get new life now as we are shaped into the image of Jesus, and get to join God on mission, and see lives changed, and the Kingdom of God grow.

And in this life, Jesus promises, we will have everything we need. For today.

And in the life to come, in eternity, we will get eternal life, blessings beyond measure, a perfect world, and the presence of God Himself.

But first, Jesus wants us to come to Him.

Christianity is not all about leaving things behind.

Christianity is also about coming to things.

We are coming TO Jesus, personally.

That's what Jesus was saying, "Come, follow Me!"