

Encounters with Jesus

Week 6: Encounter with the Love of Jesus

Mark 10

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- February 18, 2024

Well, good morning, Grace. Good morning, indeed! I hope you're enjoying our series on encounters with Jesus. We're looking at different people having different types of encounters. It's been a revelation for me just listening to myself last week as Jesus had various encounters displaying His power and authority. I was up here thinking, *Wow*.

So, this week we're going to look at Jesus having an encounter with a man, and He will be demonstrating His great love. He will express His great love for this man in different ways. The man who is the lead character here is a man with no name. He's in three of the four biographies of Jesus, so he's important, but nobody knows what his name is.

He is described in different ways in the different gospels. He is known to be quite wealthy with many possessions. He is also young, probably in his thirties. He has a place of power—he's a ruler. So, he's youthful and powerful and wealthy. He has the nickname of "rich young ruler." Now I know it's pretty easy to envy the guy already and not like him. But you're going to like this person. If you knew this person, you would like him, because he's a dedicated Jew, he's trustworthy and kind to other people. I'm particularly drawn to this man because he is a seeker of truth. And he is showing great respect and humility towards Jesus. When he has this encounter with Jesus, he's going to run towards him and then get down and bow in front of him—both physical expressions of the humility in his heart.

And we're going to come away from this encounter with three major lessons. The passage literally says that Jesus is going to look upon him, and it says that Jesus loved him. And Jesus is going to see deep inside that he is afraid. He's going to look at him and love him and see that deep inside he's a prisoner. He's afraid and he's a prisoner.

Mark 10:17, 19-22

And as Jesus 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?”

¹⁹ “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.”

²⁰ And he said to Him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

²¹ 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.”

²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Let’s look at the story in Mark 10. It says, “And as Jesus was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt down before Him and asked Him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”

And Jesus says, “ ‘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 the man responded to Jesus, saying, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since 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 it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”

But he didn’t. “Disheartened by this saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” Jesus looked him and loved him and saw that deep in his soul, he was terrified. Jesus looked at him and saw him, and He could see inside him, that he was a prisoner, that he was afraid. He was afraid for his eternal life. Remember, he runs, kneels down, and asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

That’s a brilliant question. That’s superb—maybe the single best question anyone could ever ask. How can a mortal have an intimate relationship with a transcendent, holy God? How can I know that I can spend eternity with God? Great question. He’s basically asking, *Have I done enough? Am I in?* The man says, *Look, with the wealth that I have acquired and even the*

power, I have done no ill against my fellow man. I have acted justly, mercifully. I've been generous. I've never sinned against another human being.

And Jesus doesn't jump in and say, *You're a liar!* He says, *Oh, okay. Good.* But that's when Jesus sees what he's really saying, what he means. And that's why the man is living with doubt and is in fear. He's in fear for his soul, and he should be.

Merit-Based System of Salvation

There are two reasons why he has this kind of fear. Jesus is seeing in his life that he has a merit-based salvation model going on. The way he thinks he's going to have eternal life is by earning it. It's a merit-based system. And that merit-based system is terrifying for two reasons. It's a terrifying way to think about how you can have eternal life for two reasons.

The first one is that you can never know. You can never absolutely know. You can never be certain about something that matters more than anything else. You have to live your entire life with doubt. You have to wonder up until the very end. I mean, look at the story here. He's done all the commands that Jesus has asked—six commandments, and he's done them since his youth. Everyone seems to be in agreement with this. And his question is, *Is that enough? Did I make it? I'm not sure. Where's the thing? How can you know?* You can't know. With a merit salvation system, you can't know the fate of your eternal life. There's no way of being sure.

You've probably seen on TV these ads for your retirement and the amount of your retirement savings. They'll say, *Do you have your number?* There's a number floating around. I need—I don't know--\$1.2 million or something. And the point of that is, *Work with our investment company, because we'll help you hit that number so that you'll be safe. You have that finish line number and you'll know for certain that you're going to be okay in the last years of your life.*

There are no passages in the entire Bible that say, *If you get this far, you can know. Now you cannot be afraid. Now you can rest. Sleep tight.* There's no passage that says that. So, you can't know with a merit-based system of salvation.

Besides one of the reasons being that it causes terror in the human heart, another reason is that the very nature of spiritual growth keeps you from knowing. The nature of spiritual growth is that the holier you become, the more aware you are of your personal sins. When you're new in the merit moral system, you're mostly keeping track of the things that you actually do

right and wrong. As you progress, you're starting to ponder the motives. And that changes everything. Now you're aware of the evil and the flaws, the undermining things that you do, even the good things you do for bad reasons. In other words, the better you get, the more you doubt your own righteousness. The closer you get to the holy, transcendent God, the more you realize He's unapproachable. Or, like the saying goes, all saints know they're sinners, and most sinners think they're saints.

And so, the point of this is that this man cannot be certain, he is afraid. And the application for us is that if this man is afraid and doesn't know how to have eternal life—at least for me, maybe you—I can't keep up with this guy. I can't say, *Yeah, I've been keeping these commandments since my youth.* And if he's afraid, then I need to be very afraid.

Mark 10:23-27

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!”

²⁴ 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! ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to Him, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

Here's what Jesus says about the merit-based system of salvation. This is Jesus' comment towards his question and how he's living with this fear. Verse 23: “And Jesus looked around and He said to His disciples, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.’ And the disciples were amazed”—literally, “exceedingly astonished 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”—again, amazed—“and said to Him, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.’”

Listen to these words of Jesus. Are you exceedingly astonished? There is no way for a merit-based system of salvation to work—no way. Like one in a million, so I’ve got a chance? No. It’s a camel-through-the-eye-of-a-needle impossible. It won’t work because it can’t work. This morality merit salvation—Jesus is looking at us. He loves us. And He says, *You should be afraid if this is the way you think you’ll have eternal life. Because you can’t fix this. It’s impossible for you to fix this.*

Grace-Based System of Salvation

This is the very definition of the gospel. This is what it means to be a Christian. This is what it means to be saved. This is salvation. It’s coming to this realization that Jesus did everything because He had to do everything; because we can’t do anything. God is bringing salvation to us, and it’s a gift. It’s impossible for us to have eternal life; but with God all things are possible. This is how it’s made possible. It can’t be earned. It’s impossible.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Listen to the repetition of the nature of salvation—how it is a gift, it is grace. It’s not from works, it’s not from good works. Look how Paul writes the definition of saving, eternal life faith. He says, “For it is by grace”—that means ‘gift’—“you have been saved, through faith in Jesus. And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—it’s not from works, so that no one can be boasting about their good works.”

Salvation is a miracle, is the point. Salvation is an absolute miracle gift from God, intervening in our lives. That’s salvation. All things are possible if God gets in the story.

I think this is why G. K. Chesterton wrote that the prostitute is closer to salvation than the merit-based moral person, because the prostitute knows—*Oh, there’s no way I’m going*

to have eternal life. No way. Unless—well, all things are possible with God, unless it's a gift given to me by Jesus Christ. With His death and resurrection, I'm in. But she doesn't have hope for salvation in a merit system. She gave it away. That's why Chesterton said she's closer to it—because she understands the system.

So, the application is that this method of salvation that He's providing—if it's gift-based, if it's Jesus doing all the work—here's what you get with that. You get freedom. Because you don't have to be enslaved to make sure you get a perfect score. And you get certainty. And that certainty brings about all sorts of great God stories. You get to have a God story in your life.

If someone asks you, *So, you're saved, you have eternal life.*

Yes, I do. Absolutely.

Well, tell me about that.

Well, I spent a lot of my life trying to do all these commandments. I did them all since the day of my youth. And then I came to this realization that it's impossible to have eternal life with this merit-based system. So, I gave it up. I abandoned it. I (here's a word) repented of that model of salvation. And I just trusted in the gift of Jesus Christ. And there it is.

So, all the talk—So that ... so that—there's no talk about my good works. It's all the talk about Jesus ... Jesus ... Jesus—so that I'm not boasting about what I've done.

Let's talk about these two models of salvation, the merit-based one versus the grace-based one, about what it says about the love of God. “For God so loved the world ...” God is loving. He is all-loving. What do these two different models of salvation say about that love?

In the merit-based, morality salvation, it says this: You'll never know until it's too late. When do you find out that you made or you didn't make it? When you get to the pearly gates of heaven, and then Peter's working the gate, or whatever you want to have happen here? *Ohhhh, you missed it by two. Sorry.*

And you can't do anything about it. *Send me back. Let me go get those two little tokens.* No, it's too late.

What does this say about the love of God? For God so loves you, that He wants you to live the rest of your life in panic until the day you find out whether you made it or you didn't. That does not sound like a loving God to me.

And then we'll look at this other model, this miraculous gift of Jesus' death for the payment of my sins against the holiness of God. Jesus did everything. Now we can know for

certain, because it's the work of Jesus. Do I ever doubt that Jesus' work was the fulfillment, that it was enough? Yeah, I've seen that crucifixion in a few films. I think He paid it in full.

And so, what does that say about the nature of the love of God, that He would want us to live with certainty about His intimate relationship with us.

1 John 5:11, 13

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Look at these two sentences and look what they say about the nature of God's love and what He's giving us in this. In 1 John 5 it says, "And this is the testimony." And the way he's using this is like a testimony in law. You testify—the legal declaration. "God has given us"—it's a gift—"He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

He wants us to know. Eternal life is impossible if it's up to us. All things are possible with God. He's going to provide a miracle. And Jesus says, *I'm that miracle*. So, there's no more boasting about my good works. There's only boasting about God's great gift.

So, if you look at it legally, Bible salvation talks about adoption papers. Those are the legal declarations, not an employment contract. It's not merit; it's a gift. Jesus looks and He loves and He sees deep inside that this man is scared for his eternal fate. And He answers that question and is saying, *Abandon the model*.

Rich Young Ruler Is a Prisoner

And then He sees deep inside that he's a prisoner. He sees that the man is a prisoner of his own success. He's a prisoner of something that's good. God gave him this success. And the good thing has gone bad. Actually, every bad thing is a good thing that's gone bad. It's the nature of evil. But here what's happened is that the success that God has given him is now ruling his life. The success that God has given him is telling him how to live. And he's obeying it. It's a good thing that he liked, and then he loved, and then he loved too much.

This is a beautiful, descriptive visual of what's it like to have idol. This is idol worship. It serves you and then you serve it and then it kills you.

And you can see that in the writings of J. R. R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* series and *The Hobbit*. By the way, the greater the good, the greater the fall when it's corrupted. That's the nature of evil as well. And so, the greatest and strongest thing is this ring of power, the one ring that will rule them all. And then Schmiegel gets that ring, and he can't control it. It controls him. And what does he call it? "My precious." And he is transformed. He devolves into this thing, this Gollum. "My precious ..." He just does what he's told.

Jesus looks at this rich young ruler and sees deep inside that he's becoming Gollum. He can't let it go. Who's the only person who can endure carrying the ring? The one who can put it down. The one who can leave it behind. No one else qualifies. That's the point. He's seeing this rich young ruler and he's given his life over to it. It's become his "precious."

I want you to see a couple of things here, because I think sometimes people look at this passage and not like Jesus for it. And two things: one is that Jesus isn't saying anything that any other spiritual leader wouldn't say. This is what every spiritual leader would say to this man, seeing that he's corrupted by this idol worship. Because the definition of a spiritual leader is that they're spiritual. They say the spirit is more important and more valuable and needs to be cared for more than the body. And so, whether it's Greek stoics or Eastern mystics, Solomon or Confucius, in their proverbs they're going to say that the spirit is more important than the body. Don't be enslaved.

In a different way, Buddha or Socrates, Pascal, Kierkegaard—any one of these men would have seen this man and they would've looked down and loved him and said, "You are a slave. Give it all away and you'll be free." Jesus is saying what every spiritual leader would say.

Wealth makes a great slave. It makes a terrible master. And this man is being mastered by it. How do you know that? Because the man runs to Jesus, gets on his knees, and says, "How can I inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers the question, and he says no. This might be the single saddest story in the newer Testament: because he walks away from eternal life because he couldn't let it go. He had many possessions.

This is idolatry. Jesus asks him about the six commandments that have to deal with the ethics of relating to our fellow man. But when Jesus brings up the very first commandment, the greatest and the most loving commandment—"I am the Lord your God. You shall have no

other gods before me.”—he can’t let that go. He can’t submit to that one. Wealth and status have taken over—they’re idols, they’ve taken his place there. Something good has become the ultimate evil for him. He can’t put it down. It’s ruling the priorities of his life. It’s controlling his decisions that are being made. This is how you know when you’re doing it. It’s where you spend your time and who you choose to be your friends. It’s the thing that you meditate on and daydream about. And instead of daydreaming about the Lord, he’s daydreaming about how to keep and maintain his wealth.

A second observation—not just that Jesus is saying what any spiritual leader would say—is that I think Jesus would say this to anyone about any idol. It’s all about what is first and foremost in your life. What do you serve? The first commandment is a gift from God, because only God could endure worship. Any other thing that we “worship,” we serve, and then it destroys us.

So, you could tell the story ... it goes like this. Jesus was on His way to His next adventure and a young pop singer/actress runs to Him and bows down and kneels in front of Him and says, “Lord, what must I do to have eternal life?”

And the Lord says, “Well, how’s your life been?”

“I have not been compromised in any way to get the wealth and the fame that I have. I treat my fellow men with dignity and with honor, and I’m generous.”

And then Jesus looks at her and loves her and sees that she’s intoxicated by the fame. And so, He says to her, “There’s one thing you lack. Just leave the spotlight. Leave it behind, and then follow me. You’ll have eternal reward for that.”

She went away sorrowful, because she had great fame.

It’s easy to exaggerate the story, but I think Jesus would walk down the halls of a lot of high schools, grab a couple of sophomores, and say, “I know you’re popular, but you’re enslaved to the growing tuition payments that are going to bankrupt your soul. Cash out right now. Follow me and you’ll be free. Do not obey the windsock of popularity. It will kill you.”

But how many would walk away with sorrow because they’d rather be popular?

It comes up a lot, is the point. It’s universal, this rejection of things that matter too much.

I was at a conference years ago. It was a Christian counseling conference and they were training us in how to do what and where. And the speaker, the author, the keynote speaker,

was giving his talk at the end and told a story. The theme was how idols show up in our lives and are good things that become too important to us. And he referred to a mother who came to him and said, “I don’t know how to help my daughter. She has a compulsion. She’s worried to death about how she appears. She spends way too much time making sure every hair is in line, and she’s all made up. And then she goes to school, and she comes back and she loses sleep over it.”

And this writer/speaker looks at the mother and sees, *Hmmm ... I know where your daughter’s getting that.* And so, he says to her, “Here’s how you can help her. The next time you pick her up from school, just throw on a pair of sweats, put on a baseball cap, and on the way home go to the grocery store. And then that’ll be it. You’ll cure her. She’s going to see how much freedom you have from this compulsive need to be beautiful, and she’ll love that freedom.

The mom couldn’t do it. She couldn’t leave the house unless she was beautiful. And so, she went away from the counselor with great sorrow, for she was known for her great beauty. She could have cut the strings of that puppet master and shown her daughter how to dance. But she couldn’t.

See, every type of idol worship ends the same way. And Jesus is just trying to set this person free. Jesus looks at him and shows His love for him, and says, “Just liquidate all your assets. You’ll have treasures in heaven. And then, follow me.”

And to be clear, this is the only passage in the entire Bible where it says to liquidate everything, give everything away, because this is how desperate, I think, this man is. He’s enslaved.

I think, quite probably—it’s happened a couple of times in my life—sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn’t—but it could have gone like this. *Give everything away to the poor. Follow me. You’ll have treasures in heaven.*

And the man says, *Okay, great. Everything’s for sale.*

I can see Jesus saying, *Okay, you don’t have to now. Because now you know and I know that it doesn’t own you any longer. You own it. You can drop the ring, and so you can now carry the ring.*

This is what it means to be a true disciple. Now he would see that he has freedom. That’s what you get when you are worshiping the Lord your God. You get certainty in your salvation. You get freedom in the way you live your life. And now the things that you imagine

and dwell on are about the Lord. Jesus is saying, *Look, if you get rid of everything and all you have is me, you're going to love that. It will be more than enough.*

Mark 10:22

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

But that's not how the story ends. This is how it ends. It's a sorrowful story. "And he was disheartened by the saying, and he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." He was grieving. He suffered great loss. Because this man was known as the rich young ruler.

And if you take away rich, add calendars to young, and now lose status as a ruler, then who am I now?

You're a disciple of Jesus Christ, that's who.

Hmm... oh no.

Three big points of truth here are that the power of grace-based salvation gives us certainty; and that Jesus is here to heal us from our idol worship before it destroys our very souls and costs us eternity. And the third thing I want you to see in this powerful application and entire value is that surrendering to Jesus is never considered a sacrifice; it's an investment. It's not a sacrifice. It's an investment. In a way, it's saying that you don't pay the price for being in shape; you pay the price for being out of shape. You don't sacrifice for saving money for later. You're going to sacrifice later if you don't. You don't pay for being a lifelong learner; you pay for being a lifelong dummy.

And so, this story, like all the invitations in the Bible, from beginning to end, all of them—this one says it quite clearly. Jesus is saying that you'll never regret total surrender to Him in every part of your life. You're going to become like Christ in all of life. It's the very best thing that could ever happen to you. It's always better. It's always an upgrade. It's trading up.

Mark 10:28-31

Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left everything and followed You.”

²⁹ “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 ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

And this isn't just my opinion. This isn't just my experience. This is what He clearly says. Look what He says in verse 28: “Peter began to say to Him, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you.’” *I'm not feeling like a winner here.* And Jesus just says, “ ‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left’”—let's do an inventory—“ ‘home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields’”—guess what? You get some extra stuff: “ ‘along with persecutions—in this life and in the age to come, in eternal life. But who are first will be last, and the last first.’”

He's saying, *Trade up.* Any expense to serving the Lord with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind is not an expense; it's an investment. You're trading the temporal for the eternal. You're giving away something you can't keep to get something you can't lose. Choose wisely. He never begs anyone to follow Him. He just reasons with them and says, *This is the best that could ever happen.*

Let's rewrite this story. Just think in your imagination and let's rewrite this story with a person who has this intervention with Jesus and he sobers up. So, Jesus was on His way to the next village and a young man comes running up to Him and kneels down and says, “Lord Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

And He says, “Okay, well, here's the thing. You'll have to liquidate all your assets, give them to the poor, and then your treasures will be laid up in heaven.”

And the man says, “Wow. So I'd have to lose my governor's office and give away all my material possessions.”

And then Jesus says, “Hey, here's the thing. You know I have twelve disciples, for the twelve tribes of Israel? I want you on this team. I love your humility and your pursuit of

truth. One of these spots is going to be coming open pretty soon, okay? I'm just saying ...there's room on the bench ... not right now, but soon. You come and follow me. You won't regret it. It will cost you everything, it will cost you nothing."

And so, the man says, "I'm in. Sell away. Tell everybody to vacate their offices. I'm coming with Jesus."

You know what would be different if he said yes? You'd know his name. You would know his name. There are only four gospels. Three of them have this story. And nobody knows his name, because he's a nameless man that we don't need to know. But if he had said yes, your children across the parking lot would be memorizing the twelve disciples' names, and he'd be in that list. It cost him everything to hold on to the little things. He held onto the temporal and gave up the eternal. He was owned by the things that he lost instead of having the things that couldn't be taken from him. And that's why it's a sad story. It's a story that ends in great grief, because he had many possessions that wouldn't matter. He chose poorly.

God looks upon you and me and sees us and loves us and says, "The best thing you can do for your freedom, for your joy, for your life, is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and with all your might." The greatest gift was the greatest commandment. The best commandment is the first commandment. And God says, *You are welcome*. "I am the Lord your God. You will have no other gods before me. Do not make idols in any image. And then you'll be free."

The first application for us in this room as God looks upon us with love is to ask ourselves, Am I free? If you can't put it down, you don't own it. It owns you. Are you free? Love the Lord your God first, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

The second question for many people is, What's your system of salvation? Because if you have this merit system, it's impossible to have eternal life. I'm talking camel-through-the-eye-of-a-needle impossible. It can't work. It won't work, because you can't fix it. Or there's this gift from God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And with this we get certainty. With the other system we are terrorized about eternity. Which system are you using? Get certain. The love of God wants you to be certain.

So, let's close our time with a prayer, with these two great challenges—remembering that it doesn't cost; it's an investment. Trade up, everybody.

Lord Jesus, we are grateful for this conversation, not for this poor man's soul's sake, but all we can learn from that. I think there are men and women in the room who still think that they can earn their way to a good standing before You. They're in church today just to get right with You. They're going to come up short until they abandon the model, the system of salvation that's based on merit and good works. And they would receive the gift. All things are possible with God, and You who sent Your only Son loved us, that we might have eternal life, and that we might know that we have eternal life.

Lord, I would imagine that there are a lot of people that have something in front of You, something good that You gave them: a child, a marriage, just comfort. And it's a good thing, it's becoming a great thing, or it has become an ultimate thing, and now it stands in the way between their love for You and this thing. So, Lord, I'd ask that they would put that down today, they'd call it what it is, and confess their idol worship and surrender it to You; that they'd be willing to sell all their possessions and give it to the poor, whatever that possession is—their beauty, their fame, their reputation—whatever. If You give it back, thank You, God. If You don't, thank You, God. But Lord, I'd ask that You would clear out the clutter in our lives, that we might worship You and You alone. We are grateful for Your love that we're seeing in this encounter. You want us to live free with certainty about how to have eternal life. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.