

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Where Do Your Priorities Lie?**

#### **Lesson: Mark 10:17-31**

*<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>[a]</sup>”*

*<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.*

*<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<sup>[b]</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>26</sup>The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”*

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

*<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.”*

One of my greatest joys these days is dropping off my son at school and then going for a peaceful hike with my wife in the park. During that time, we focus on each other and talk about various topics, such as what we've been thinking about lately and how we are feeling.

It feels like the first time in almost four years that we have had time alone together. Before our son could walk or talk, we would take him in a stroller and enjoy the beauty of nature. But, you know, once he started walking and talking, he became busy all the time. We constantly watched over him to make sure he didn't get hurt, and we ended up going to playgrounds with slides and swings instead of the places we liked. No matter how great a restaurant or location, with a young child, you often can't fully enjoy those moments because you're attending to their needs. Lately, we've been grateful for the time we have, even if it's just for a few hours, to be ourselves and not just parents.

I've always enjoyed hiking with my wife, but especially this past week when the changes in the colors of the trees became more noticeable. The trees were turning yellow, red, and orange, making the scenery even more beautiful. We looked at the sky, the lake, and felt the cool breeze, walking over fallen yellow leaves. It made me really happy. My wife loves taking photos, so when she finds a nice spot while hiking, she takes pictures with her camera. Do you know what sun glitter is? It's when the sunlight reflects off the lake, sparkling on the surface. Although every day may seem the same, the colors of the lake and the sky change slightly with the season and weather, and the sun glitter changes too, making each day feel new.

I prefer to fully experience moments in nature rather than take pictures, but lately, I've found myself taking photos with my phone. The beauty of the season, and the thought that I won't be able to see these scenes once the cold winter arrives, makes me want to capture them. When I'm in the perfect season, with perfect weather, at the perfect time of day, in the perfect place, and everything is so beautiful, I just want to stay in that moment forever. I wish that moment could last forever.

My favorite season is autumn. I love how the trees become colorful, and the temperature is neither too hot nor too cold, which seems to affect our mood and emotions as well. More than anything, fall always feels shorter compared to summer or winter, and its briefness, its transience, makes it even more appealing. It leaves me with the wish that autumn could last forever.

This past week, as I spent time in the beauty of this brief, fleeting autumn, I was struck by a longing for eternity. And with that thought in mind, I read the story of the rich young man in Mark 10.

After blessing the children, Jesus set out on His way, when a young man ran up, knelt before Him, and asked what he must do to inherit eternal life.

I've thought about why this young man was interested in eternal life and why he wanted it. From his question, we can infer a few things about his situation. I believe the young man, who desired eternal life, was likely very satisfied with his life. The Bible tells us that he was young and had great wealth, and from the way he spoke of eternal life as something to be inherited, he seemed familiar with the idea of inheritance. He had probably grown up in a wealthy family and was used to inheriting material wealth. He had kept the commandments since he was a boy, which suggests he was not from an ordinary family but from a wealthy and well-educated one. For someone who had much and was living a fulfilling life, his concern may have been that his life would one day come to an end. Hence, he understood eternal life as a way to continue enjoying his wealth and good life forever, and he asked Jesus what he must do to inherit it.

However, Jesus saw right through him and immediately knew what his true priorities were. Jesus told him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, promising that he would then have treasure in heaven. Then, Jesus invited him to come and follow Him.

The rich young man likely could not accept Jesus' answer. He desired eternal life because he wanted to enjoy everything he had forever, but the thought of giving it all away left him unable to find any meaning in eternal life. In other words, his priorities were with his possessions, not with eternal life.

It's understandable why the young man chose his wealth over eternal life. A few years ago, I participated in Clinical Pastoral Education, where we did an exercise called "Life Priorities Exercise." Each of us cut a piece of paper into twelve squares, and although I don't remember all the details of the questions, we were asked to write down three people most precious to us, three values we cherished most, and so on. Then, we were instructed to

gradually remove the less important priorities, narrowing them down to the most important ones. At first, it was easy to eliminate less important things, but when there were only two or three pieces of paper left, it became difficult because everything left was important.

This story invites us to reflect on our current life priorities. What are we placing as our top priority? And if God is not our highest priority, we are called to turn back and make Him our ultimate focus.

What is the highest priority in your life? If God were to ask you, as He asked the rich young man, what is more important in your life—your family, your career, money, or God—how would you respond?

In fact, the rich young man's question, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" was flawed. Normally, I'm not one to say something is right or wrong, but in this case, I can confidently say that his question was wrong. Eternal life is not something we can earn through our deeds or efforts, but something we receive only through the grace of God and faith in Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Sometimes I think of life as a play. When the play begins, the actors come on stage and perform their roles. But when the play ends, they change their costumes, remove their makeup, and return to their lives. In this world, we live according to the roles and purposes God has given us. The things we enjoy and value in this life have their meaning and importance, but when our time on this earth comes to an end, and we begin a new life as children of God, the only thing that will matter is God.

I hope we all can take the story of the rich young man in Mark 10 to heart. Everything we have in this life is not truly ours; they are gifts that God has temporarily entrusted to us. When the time comes, we will leave it all behind and return to God. Therefore, let us place our faith and trust in God alone, the Creator of life, and make Him our top priority. Amen.