

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 10:17-22

Year B - Proper 23, Text: Mark 10:17-22
Part of Year B - Proper 23, Text: Mark 10:17-31

Editor's Note: The RCL pericope for Proper 23 (Mark 10:17-31) is divided into two separate pericopes in the LSB lectionary: Proper 23 (Mark 10:17-22) and Proper 24 (Mark 10:23-31).

Verse 10:17: A man runs up to Jesus, kneels before Him, and asks, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Matthew refers to the person as a young man (19:16–22); Luke as a ruler (18:18–23). The running and dropping to his knees are details not found elsewhere in the Gospels. The man’s form of address is unusual in Jewish circles, but his concern is not. The focus on eternal life dates back at least two centuries to Daniel 12:2 and 2 Maccabees 7:9, where the hope of unending life in a resurrected body is expressed.

Verse 10:18: Jesus objects to the title Good, even though the Jews did not hesitate to call creatures good. Jesus is obviously distinguishing Himself from His Father. Does Jesus do this to invite the man — and the disciples as well — to give thought to the possibility that a title appropriate to the absolutely Good (God) may also be applied to Him? John stresses that Jesus has come to seek His Father’s glory. The Father will indeed show forth His Son’s glory, but Jesus never does anything to seek His own glory. His concern is to point to His Father, not to Himself.

Verse 10:19: Jesus quotes the commandments for which He has already shown reverence. The order differs from that in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 in that the commandments to honor one’s parents and not to murder are reversed. The command not to defraud is a Mosaic command, but because it does not occur in the Decalogue, it is missing from some Markan manuscripts. In Mark 10, Jesus mentions only commands involving duties to fellow humans — not to God. However, of these, He includes all but those that refer to covetousness. (Note however: Luther refers to coveting as desiring to get our neighbor’s goods

by scheming or by pretending to have a right to them. This would mean that coveting is equivalent to defrauding.)

Verse 10:20: The man declares that, throughout his life, he has kept all the commandments that Jesus quotes.

Verse 10:21: Jesus looks upon the man lovingly. However, He proposes that the man should close the gap between Mosaic observance and life as His disciple by using his resources to serve his neighbor. To be without possessions in this life is not so much to be rich in the hereafter as to be rich in the here and now — by another accounting system. True riches are not what we acquire for ourselves but what we give of ourselves. We are to care and share in this life, knowing that we shall be well cared for in the life to come. Jesus invites the man to follow Him, not the principles proposed by the world around him. Discipleship is not about conforming to the Mosaic code, but embracing Jesus’ manner of life.

Verse 10:22: When the man hears Jesus’ words, he is shocked and goes away grieving. He has many possessions and cannot accept the idea of abandoning them in order to follow Jesus. This is the only case recorded in the Gospels where someone refuses a direct invitation from Jesus to follow Him.

Thus, Jesus’ words challenged this man’s entire theological, ethical, and soteriological (i.e., salvation) framework. Jesus’ goal was to stop this particular person from idolizing money, not to enjoin poverty as a beneficial lifestyle for all His followers.

