



# The Gospel of Mark

A Living Word Independent Bible Study



The Gospel of Mark  
Part 27  
Mark 10:1-31

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# Mark 10:1-31

(NIV)

## INTRODUCTION

Chapter 10 begins with another confrontation with the Pharisees.

This time, the issue is divorce.

But after this confrontation, Mark begins a section that includes three specific teachings of Jesus related to entry into the Kingdom of God:

- The reception and blessing of children in the Kingdom
- A dialogue with a rich man about eternal life
- Teaching to the disciples about the dangers of riches

As last time, all of this happens within the broader context of Jesus' continuing journey toward Jerusalem.

# Mark 10:1 (NIV)

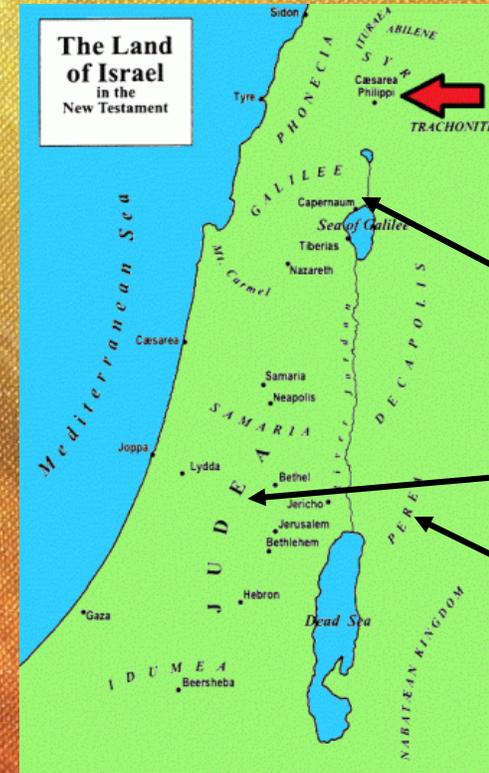
Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

“left that place”

They have been in Capernaum.

Now, they are entering into the region known as Perea.

10:1-31 is sometimes referred to as Jesus’ “Perean ministry”.



Capernaum

Judea

Perea

<https://meanderedwanderings.wordpress.com/2016/07/19/why-caesarea-philippi-mt-16-13-20/>

This was still Jewish territory, also under King Herod’s domain.

“he taught them”

This continues the teaching ministry of 9:35-50.

## Mark 10:2 (NIV)

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

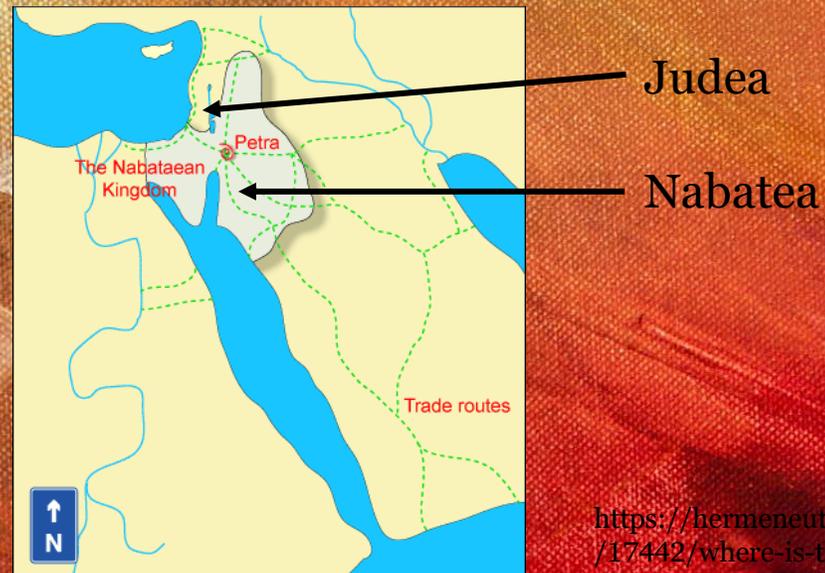
We need some context to really understand the confrontation about divorce. Divorce was a politically hot topic.

Both Herod and his current wife, Herodias, had divorced their spouses to marry each other. Herodias did this through the Roman courts, Herod, according to Jewish law.

Herod’s divorced former wife was the daughter of the King of the Nabateans.

Nabatea was a kingdom south of Judea, consisting of the Sinai peninsula and parts of modern Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

It was more independent from Rome than Judea at this time, but did eventually fall under full Roman rule as well.



## Mark 10:2 (NIV)

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

The divorce resulted in a war between Judea and Nabatea.

Roman intervention was the only thing that staved off the crisis.

The question to Jesus therefore is dangerous, and carries political overtones.

John the Baptist had openly condemned the divorce, and was executed as a result.

In Judaism at the time, men were viewed as owners of their wives – a woman was her husband’s property.

Marriage was viewed primarily as a legal contract.

Which leads to the question: Under what terms or conditions can this contract be broken?

## Mark 10:2 (NIV)

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

“Pharisees came and tested him”

Jesus is basically asked to choose sides in this political debate.

At the same time, they may be expecting, by this, to push him to get on Herod’s bad side by his response, just like John the Baptist had.

Or, they may be just trying to create division among Jesus’ followers, who likely held different opinions themselves.

“Is it lawful”

Notice what is NOT asked ... lawful to WHO?

Rome?

The Jews?

The intent of the question is not clear.

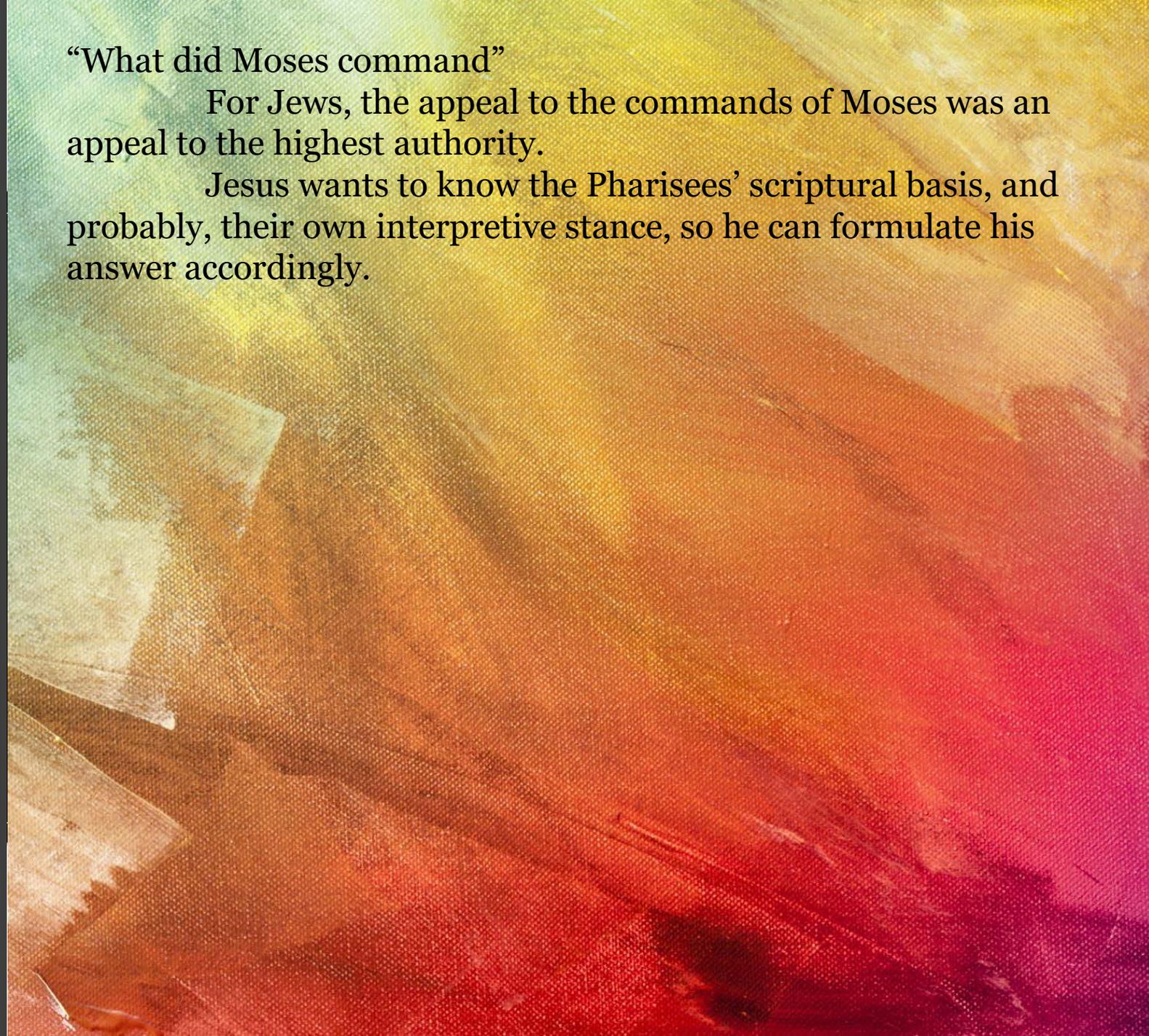
# Mark 10:3 (NIV)

“What did Moses command you?” he replied.

“What did Moses command”

For Jews, the appeal to the commands of Moses was an appeal to the highest authority.

Jesus wants to know the Pharisees’ scriptural basis, and probably, their own interpretive stance, so he can formulate his answer accordingly.



# Mark 10:4 (NIV)

They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

“Moses permitted a man ...”

Deuteronomy 24 is in view here:

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 – “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.”

On the basis of this passage, divorce is clearly permitted.

But note that the MAIN part of the passage is to prohibit an earlier dissolved marriage from being reconstituted!

The CONDITION for divorce here was “some indecency in her”.

The debate in Jesus’ day was – “WHAT indecency?”

The more conservative school of Shammai said, specifically, sexual misconduct or unfaithfulness.

The more liberal school of Hillel said, ANYTHING that disappoints a husband – even ruining dinner, or finding a more beautiful woman!

The Pharisees tended to line up with the school of Hillel.

Essenes, and probably John the Baptist, found this scandalous, because they held that ANY divorce was wrong.

Pharisees would ask THEM, “Under what basis do you set aside the Law of Moses to take this stance?”

## Mark 10:4 (NIV)

They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

“Moses permitted a man ...” (continued)

The language of Deuteronomy is actually ambiguous.

Consider that there is specific CAPITAL punishment for adultery in Leviticus:

Leviticus 20:10 – “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife – with the wife of his neighbor – both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.”

This makes a simple “divorce” for adultery very unlikely – the punishment was death.

So the point that needed interpretation was ... what IS “indecent” in Deuteronomy?

In this episode from Mark, the Pharisees boil all of this down into a simply “Yes, you can get a divorce from your wife”, without entering into the details.

But they ARE trying to draw out JESUS’ stance!

## Mark 10:5 (NIV)

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.

“because your hearts were hard”

Jesus sidesteps the choice as well!

He is challenging the assumption that just because something is PERMITTED, it is also consistent with the will of God.

Here is what the prophet Malachi said about the issue:

Malachi 2:16 – “I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

The use of “hard hearts” language implies that God permits it because of human sinfulness and an inability to live according to God’s will.

## Mark 10:6-8 (NIV)

“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one.”

“At the beginning of creation ...”

Jesus goes back further than Deuteronomy, to Genesis.

Genesis 1:27 – “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Genesis 2:24 – “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

What Moses allowed for the Israelites was not God’s ideal.

If the intention of the creation of male and female is for them to be united in “one flesh”, God’s will cannot be that that one flesh be destroyed (that is, divorced).

It is an undoing of the created order.

The union, the oneness, is not just a human contract, it is an act of God, making one out of two.

It reflects the oneness of God – and God has designed human beings to share in reflecting this oneness through marriage.

For Jesus, marriage is a miracle unifying a man and a woman.

## Mark 10:9 (NIV)

“Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

“What God has joined together ...”

Jesus says, the marriage SHOULD be indissoluble.

The creature (humans) should not be able to destroy the work of the Creator (God).

The question THEN becomes ... How DO men, or women, destroy the work of the Creator – the bond that GOD has made?

For Jesus, it is not just a legal matter – it is not just a matter of “getting a certificate of divorce”.

It is actions that we take in violation of God’s will.

Although Mark gives no exceptions, in the parallel in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus adds “except for sexual immorality” – in line with the Shammai school’s interpretation.

Even here, though, PERMISSION to divorce is not a COMMAND to divorce.

If there is true repentance and grace/forgiveness, reconciliation IS possible, and preferred.

We need to remember that the action of EITHER partner in the marriage can effectively destroy the bond, before ever reaching the legal stage of a “divorce certificate”.

“Let man not separate” is as much an injunction against married persons harming each other, and the marriage bond itself, through their actions, as it is about the legal divorce itself!

Men and women can separate the bond, destroying what God has created, long before the point of a “certificate of divorce”.

# Mark 10:10-12

(NIV)

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

“the disciples asked Jesus”

Apparently, the disciples want further, private instruction on this matter.

“adultery”

So ... if a man simply sends a woman away and marries another woman, the first marriage is not over in God’s eyes, and he commits adultery upon remarrying.

“she divorces her husband”

Interesting! A Jewish woman could NOT divorce her husband!

However, women COULD sue their husbands on some grounds, in the secular courts, and force them to grant them a divorce.

The fact of Herodias’ divorce of her husband gives evidence of this, and MAY be the reason for this specific addition.

# Mark 10:10-12

(NIV)

When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

## BOTTOM LINE:

Jesus does not want the discussion about divorce to begin with technical issues of exceptions, permissions, or conditions which allow it. He wants to emphasize God’s clear ideals:

What marriage IS, WHO has created it, and the expectation on each partner that they not act in ways that destroy it ... BUT ... sexual infidelity DOES destroy it!

The apostle Paul also determined that deep faith differences between new believers and unbelieving spouses could also give grounds for divorce:

1 Corinthians 7:12-15 – “To the rest I say (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ... But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances”

Jesus’ strictness was likely motivated by a desire to safeguard women and children in society – easy divorce put both of them at risk.

It is a powerful declaration of the value and worth of both women and children.

Jesus’ position is consistent with his overarching ethic of valuing and protecting the vulnerable.

He expects his followers to spare no effort to preserve the marriage, the bond, that is a creation of God.

## Mark 10:13 (NIV)

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

“People were bringing little children”

We’re not told who these people are – presumably, it is their parents.

“to have him touch them”

Probably hoping for some benefit or blessing.

Ancient people believed that touching a holy man conveyed a blessing (not necessarily the same belief in touch for the purpose of healing, but a related idea).

“disciples rebuked them”

Rather than just escort the children away, the disciples speak sharply to the parents.

As we have seen before, the word translated “rebuke” is a very severe word.

This rebuke probably reflects a cultural devaluation of children.

To be fair to the disciples, though, they may have thought they were protecting Jesus - viewing children as disruptive to, or distracting Jesus from, his purposes in teaching (thinking, “he has more important things to do”).

He will show them they are wrong about that!

# Mark 10:14 (NIV)

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

“indignant”

This is an unusual, emotionally charged response from Jesus.

Note the upcoming use of the same word, in 10:41 when the disciples are “indignant” at James and John for requesting the prime seats in the Kingdom, and in 14:4 when a woman pours expensive oil on Jesus’ head.

“Let the little children come to me”

Jesus projects a counter-cultural view of children by words and deeds.

“kingdom of God belongs to such as these”

Children have every right to approach Jesus and be blessed by him.

In fact, the kingdom **BELONGS** to “such as them” – there are children in the Kingdom of God!

## Mark 10:15 (NIV)

“I tell you the truth,  
anyone who will not  
receive the kingdom of  
God like a little child  
will never enter it.”

“receive the kingdom of God like a little child”

In other words, receive the Kingdom of God the way  
CHILDREN receive things!

This could imply “gratefully”, the way a child receives a  
gift.

Or, this could imply “obediently”, obeying its summons  
the same way children in that culture obeyed adults and did what  
they were told, without question.

To “receive the Kingdom” is to submit to the authority of  
God’s rule.

The “authority” adults presume clashes with God’s  
authority and must be surrendered.

And, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God until you are  
willing to make this surrender.

# Mark 10:16 (NIV)

And he took the children  
in his arms, put his  
hands on them and  
blessed them.

“took the children in his arms”

Jesus uses physical contact to express value.

Embracing, not just touching, them (which is all that was asked of him).

“blessed them”

This was common physical action for blessing children from ancient times – Jacob laid hands on and blessed Joseph’s sons:

Genesis 48:12-15 – “Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn. Then he blessed Joseph and said, ‘May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth.’”

The scene demonstrates the personal nature of relationship with Jesus.

The biblical view of prayer can be envisioned, in part, as crawling into the arms of Jesus for contact, blessing, and assurance of personal value!

## Mark 10:17 (NIV)

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?”

“a man ran up to him and fell on his knees”

This was a sign of submission.

It was a typical action before a holy man or a healer, but not typically before a simple teacher.

So, the man is giving Jesus a sign of great respect.

“Good teacher”

This is also a VERY unique designation.

“what must I do ...”

The man is most likely seriously seeking guidance from Jesus given his approach.

Remember Jesus’ teaching on the deficiencies of the teaching of the Pharisees and their traditions, in 7:1-13.

## Mark 10:18 (NIV)

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good – except God alone.”

“No one is good – except God alone”

In John’s Gospel, especially, Jesus presents himself as fully dependent upon his Father.

Jesus is stressing that the Father is the source of all things, including goodness – Jesus is good because his Father, the source of all good, is good.

He is NOT implying that he is somehow imperfect, or less than good, but that the focus must be on the Father.

Still, this text HAS puzzled biblical interpreters given Jesus’ self-understanding.

Remember that most scholars believe Mark was the first Gospel written, and that Matthew and Luke used it as a source in writing their own Gospels.

Note, then, that Matthew changes Jesus’ words to “why do you ask me about what is good”, while retaining “no one is good except God alone”.

Matthew 19:17 – “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good.”

This change removes the potentially problematic reading that Jesus does NOT see himself as “good” like the Father.

## Mark 10:19 (NIV)

“You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“You know the commandments”

Jesus perceives that the man IS educated and Torah-observant.

Five of the commandments listed are from the Ten Commandments.

But one – “do not defraud” – is not.

Perhaps, this is a reference to Exodus 21:10, which is related to divorce law, which Jesus has recently taken on:

Exodus 21:10 – “If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights.”

## Mark 10:20 (NIV)

“Teacher,” he declared,  
“all these I have kept  
since I was a boy.”

“all these I have kept”

The man says he has been obedient to Torah since his coming of age.

Jesus does not reject this claim.

The man IS a devout Jew, taking his faith seriously.

He seeks Jesus’ assurance that he will inherit eternal life.

Rabbinic teaching held that righteousness in keeping the law WOULD lead to eternal life – the man as earnestly done so, and wants Jesus’ assurance.

## Mark 10:21 (NIV)

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.”

“Jesus looked at him and loved him”

This suggests Jesus studied the man for a moment.

He may actually have hugged him, or taken him by the shoulders as a sign of affection – the word “loved” here suggests a physical, not merely an emotional, action.

Jesus seems to see the man as a sincere, earnest, seeker after God in the tradition of Judaism.

“One thing you lack”

But Jesus identifies one deficiency.

The words “Jesus loved him” force us to recognize that Jesus points out this fault, weakness, or sin as an act of love and grace.

“Go, ...”

Jesus gives specific instruction to sell off everything and give to the poor.

Some communities, like the one at Qumran, DID ask members to liquidate assets for the good of the community.

“Come, follow me”

This is the ultimate test of the man’s fidelity to God’s will. It is the very same language used in calling the disciples.

# Mark 10:22 (NIV)

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

“the man's face fell”

He is quite saddened.

“because he had great wealth”

The requirement hit the man hard.

The thought of poverty is frightening.

By selling everything, the man would become as vulnerable as the children in the previous passage.

The man must choose – wealth in this life, or wealth in heaven?

He wants both – Jesus suggests he cannot have both.

The man's problem is not wealth itself, but wealth as it outranks the call to follow and be with Jesus.

For Jesus, FULL obedience to the law includes an overarching compassion – making this an ethical issue for the man.

Does he TRULY love his neighbor – the essence of the Law – evidenced by a willingness to have compassion on the poor?

In nearly every story of those who choose NOT to follow Jesus, it is security of home, family and finances that stands in the way.

# Mark 10:23 (NIV)

Jesus looked around  
and said to his disciples,  
“How hard it is for the  
rich to enter the  
kingdom of God!”

“How hard it is”

This man’s failure prompts a teaching moment – because WEALTH is the primary competition to loyalty to God.

The core teaching here is that wealthy people will find it difficult to enter the kingdom of God.

But there is also great irony in this from a Jewish perspective.

Part of Kingdom hope included the ABOLITION of poverty, sickness, and hunger.

ALL would be wealthy, healthy, and well-fed!

And yet, too much of those things in THIS LIFE act as distraction, and deterrent, from a readiness to ENTER this kingdom!

This was engrained in Old Testament teaching:

Genesis 13 – Abraham was rich as a result of God’s blessing.

Deuteronomy 28 – Moses promises that obedience yields blessing.

Proverbs 3 and Malachi 3 – obedient tithing to God brings blessing.

All of this leads to today’s “prosperity gospel” – a concept we will look into in more detail later in the lesson.

# Mark 10:24 (NIV)

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”

“disciples were amazed”

They are shocked and incredulous at Jesus suggestion!  
After all, wealth is a sign of God’s blessing!  
How can such people be far from God?

“Jesus said again”

Their reaction forces Jesus to repeat himself.  
Although this time, he generalizes his comment.  
A few ancient manuscripts DO leave in “for the rich” the second time as well.  
But the implication is that it is difficult for ANYONE to enter the Kingdom.

## Mark 10:25 (NIV)

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

“easier for a camel ...”

For many years, this saying has been interpreted as referring to a narrow gate in Jerusalem's walls that was hard for a camel to pass through.

You might even be shown the so-called “Narrow Gate” on a Jerusalem pilgrimage tour.

But this legend is **NOT ACCURATE!**

The “Narrow Gate” was not even built until the Middle Ages.

The saying means a **LITERAL** camel through the **LITERAL** eye of a needle!

The whole **POINT** of the saying is its impossibility!

More on this in verse 27 ....

## Mark 10:26 (NIV)

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

“even more amazed”

Jesus has taken his teaching even further now ... not only is it “hard”, it is impossible!

“Who then can be saved?”

This comment grows out of an assumption that wealth is a sign of blessing and that disease and poverty are a sign of judgment.

Therefore, the blessed were surely righteous, and the “judged” were surely sinners.

The source of this theology can be found in Deuteronomy 30.

When the disciples speak of being “saved”, they are thinking of receiving God’s promises and blessings, including eternal life – “saved” out of their current life situation.

## Mark 10:27 (NIV)

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

“all things are possible with God”

HERE is the whole point!

Even the most blessed person CANNOT save themselves!

Only God can save!

This insight is the key to the whole episode.

The prerequisite for real conversion is embracing the fact that “I cannot save myself by my actions.”

This must sink in to each one of us!

The concept of nothing being too hard for God is, also, an Old Testament belief, going back as far as Sarah becoming pregnant in her old age:

Genesis 18:13-14 – “Then the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh and say, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.’”

Even rabbis in Jesus’ day understood that the FULL keeping of the Law required divine enablement.

The rich man’s problem was that he saw self-salvation as DIFFICULT, but POSSIBLE – while in truth it is utterly IMPOSSIBLE – like a camel going through the eye of a needle!

This teaching of Jesus is the FOUNDATION of Christian theology’s emphasis on salvation by God’s action alone!

# Mark 10:28 (NIV)

Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

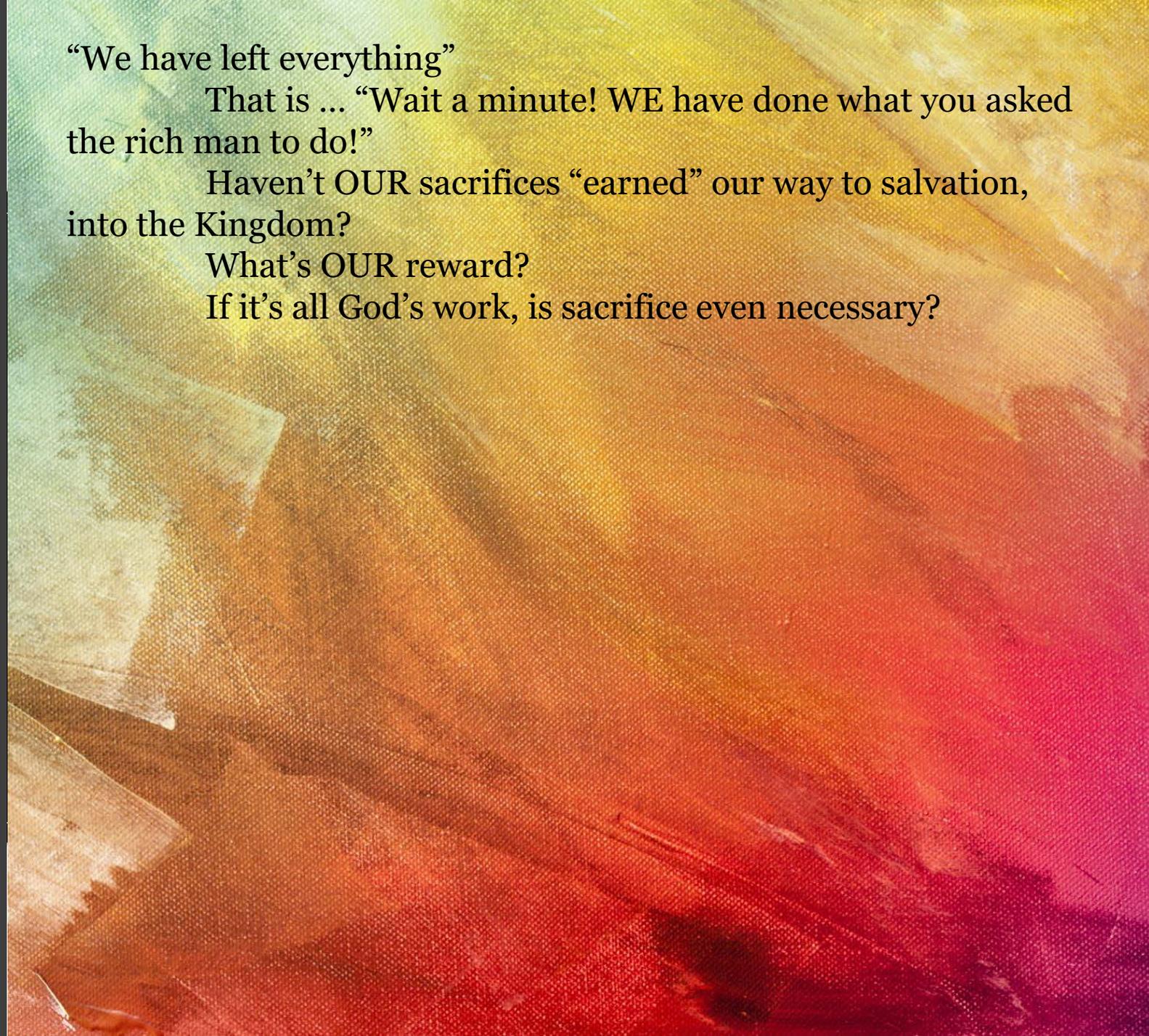
“We have left everything”

That is ... “Wait a minute! WE have done what you asked the rich man to do!”

Haven't OUR sacrifices “earned” our way to salvation, into the Kingdom?

What's OUR reward?

If it's all God's work, is sacrifice even necessary?



# Mark 10:29-30

(NIV)

“I tell you the truth,” 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 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

“no one ... will fail to receive”

The answer is YES!

Jesus assures the disciples that whatever they have given up will be paid back 100-fold, in this life!

In the form of relationships and homes.

But there will also be persecutions.

And ultimately, eternal life (which is what the rich man was seeking)!

They will receive these earthly blessings through the new community being established – through Christian hospitality.

The early church attempted to embody this ethic of communal blessing.

# Mark 10:29-31

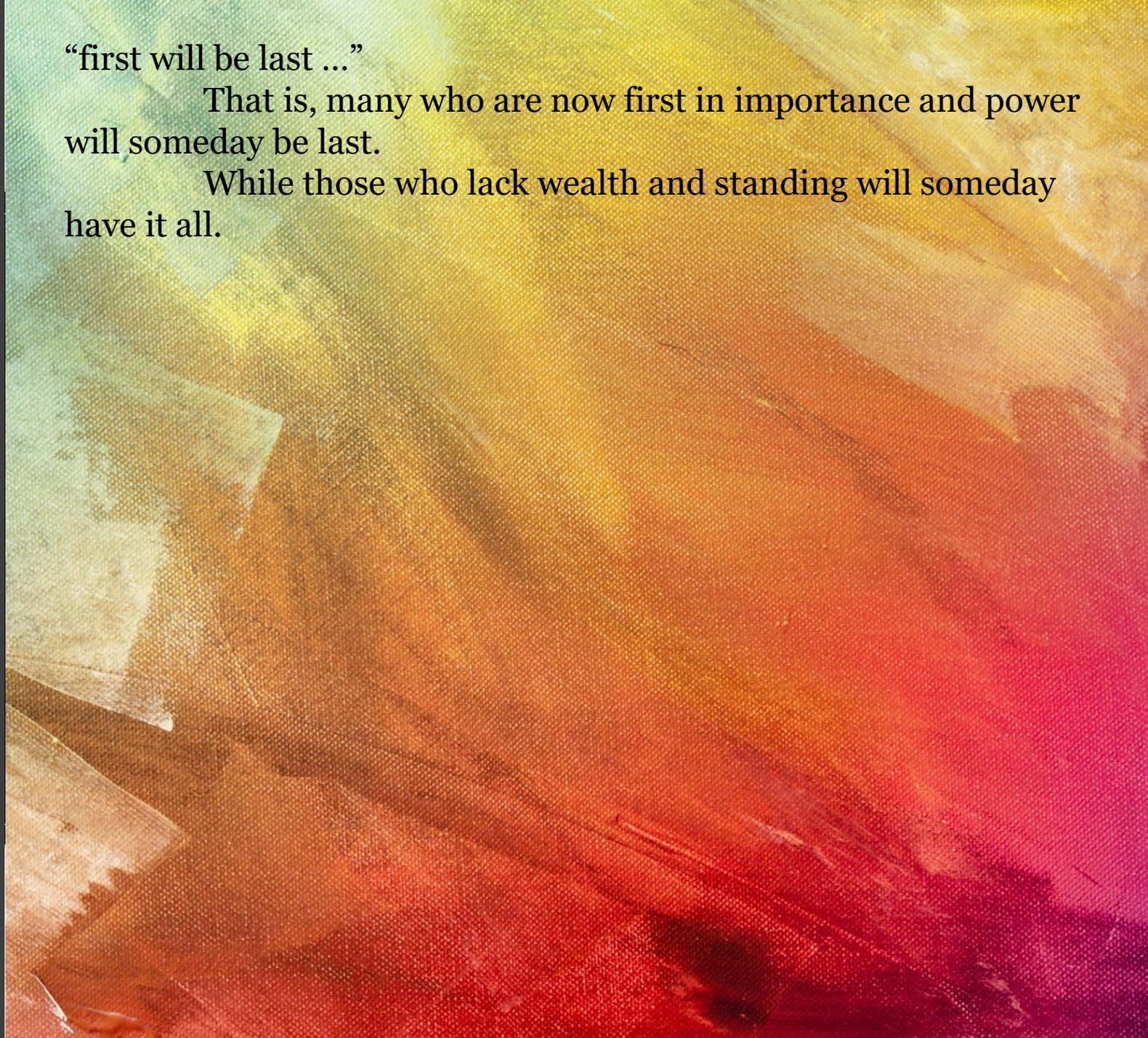
(NIV)

“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

“first will be last ...”

That is, many who are now first in importance and power will someday be last.

While those who lack wealth and standing will someday have it all.



# Mark 10:1-31

(NIV)

## SUMMARY

The totality of Scripture about wealth cannot be simply summarized.

For THIS man, wealth was a major impediment to willingness to follow Jesus.

Other New Testament people were wealthy AND in good standing with Jesus.

Luke shows women of means serving Jesus' financial needs without renouncing or surrendering wealth:

Luke 8:1-3 – “After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

Acts shows that selling off property was voluntary:

Acts 4:34-35 – “From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

# Mark 10:1-31

(NIV)

## SUMMARY

Jesus can issue specific warnings to specific people, and make them based on different specific needs.

NOTHING should be permitted to rival our loyalty to Jesus, or to follow where Jesus leads.

The Holy Spirit can point out to each of us where our resistance lies.

God IS able and willing to grant us material blessing.

But persecution is to be equally expected.

And, this blessing comes PRIMARILY through the bonds of Christian community – our greatest source of blessing.

These bonds are supposed to be a source of security for each of us.



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