

Mark 10

by John Nelson Darby

Man is inherently corrupt and cannot save himself, but God's gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is available to all.

Scripture: Mark 10:17

Topics: "Divine Grace", "Human Condition"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Mark 10, emphasizing the corruption of God's creation due to sin and the importance of recognizing the true state of man before God. He illustrates how the law, while necessary, reveals humanity's inability to achieve righteousness on their own, as seen in the encounter with the rich young ruler who, despite his outward morality, is ultimately unable to follow Christ due to his attachment to wealth. Darby highlights that true goodness is found only in God, and that salvation is impossible for man without divine intervention. The sermon concludes with the reminder that while following Christ may involve suffering and sacrifice, it leads to eternal life and the fulfillment of God's promises.

Transcript

We find some important principles in this chapter, which terminates the history of Christ's life. In the first three Gospels the account of the circumstances attending His death begins with the healing of the blind man near Jericho, which we find in verse 46 of this chapter. The first principle we find here is the corruption and ruin of that which God created down here; and in the relationships which He has established sin has entered and exercises its pernicious influence. The very law of Moses was obliged to permit things in the relationships of life down here, which are not according to the thoughts and the actual will of God, for the hardness of the heart of man.

But if God bears with men, incapable as they are to live up to the height of their relationships with Him, in things which are not according to His will and the perfection of the relationships which He has established, He does not condemn them, nor does He ever cease to recognise them as being that which He had established in the beginning. That which was established from the beginning by God Himself always holds good, and He maintains these relationships by His authority. Creation itself is good, but man has corrupted it; nevertheless God recognises that which He has made, and the relationships in which He has placed man, who is responsible in maintaining their obligations. It is true that God has brought in a power after the death of Christ which is not of this creation (that is, the Holy Spirit); and by means of this power, a man may live outside all the relationships of the old creation, if God calls him to this: but then he will respect the

relationships where they exist.

286 The Pharisees, drawing near, ask Jesus if it is permitted that a husband should put away his wife. The Lord takes the occasion to insist upon this truth, that that which God had established from the beginning of the creation was always valid in itself. Moses had allowed a man to put away his wife in the law; but this was only the patience of God with the hardness of man's heart; but it was not according to God's own heart and will. In the creation at the beginning God made that which was good - weak, but good. He allowed other things when He ordered provisionally the state of His people, of fallen man; but He had made things differently when He created them. God had united husband and wife, and man had no right to separate them. The bond is not to be broken.

Again they bring little children unto Him; and the disciples forbid those who bring them. But Jesus is displeased at this. Although the root of sin be found in the children, nevertheless they were the expression of simplicity, of confidence, and of the absence of the craftiness and of the corruption caused by the knowledge of the world, of the depravity of nature. They present to the heart the simplicity of uncorrupted nature, which has not learned the deceit of the world. And the Lord being a stranger in the world recognises in them that which His Father has created.

Now is there really any good in man? The remains of what God created are found in that which is purely creature; that which is beautiful and pleasant; that which comes from God's hand is often beautiful and should be recognised as coming from Him. Nature around us is beautiful; it is God who created it, although thorns and thistles be found in it. We find that which is lovely sometimes in a man's character and also even in the disposition of an animal. But it is a question of man's heart, of his will, of what he is toward God-and not of what is natural, the fruit of creation: there dwelleth in him no good thing. There is nothing for God; but all is against Him; and this was manifested in the rejection of Christ.

287 This is the lesson we learn in the account which follows of the young man who runs and kneels at Jesus' feet, asking Him, "Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He was amiable, well disposed, and ready to learn that which is good; he had witnessed the excellence of the life and works of Jesus, and his heart was touched at what he had seen. He had all the fine ardour of youth, he was not depraved by the habit of sin, for sin depraves the heart. Outwardly he had kept the law, and believed that Jesus could teach him the highest precepts of the law; for the Jews even believed that some commandments were of greater value than others.

The young man neither knew himself, nor the state in which man really was before God. He was under the law; and Jesus sets forth the law first as the rule of life, given by God as the measure of righteousness for the sons of Adam. The young man does not ask how he may be saved, but how he may inherit eternal life. The Lord does not speak of eternal life, but takes up the young man at the point where he places himself; the law said, "Do these things, and thou shalt live." The young man declares that he has kept all these things from his youth up: the Lord neither denies nor disputes it; and we read that He looked upon him, and loved him. We see here that which is amiable and loved of the Lord. But what is the true state of this young man? The Lord draws the veil, and man stands before God in his nakedness; and God stands before man in His holiness. Doing anything is out of the question: how to be saved is another thing.

Let us examine what the Lord says about the state of man. The young man addressed the Lord not as Son of God, but as a rabbi, that is, as a teacher in Israel: he calls Him "Good master." The Lord will not admit that man is good; not one righteous man can be found amongst men - no, not one. He says, "Why

callest thou me good? No one is good except one: that is God." Certainly Christ was good, but He was God, although He made Himself man in His perfect love. He was always God, and God became man without ceasing to be, or being able to cease being, God; only He had hidden His divinity in human nature (at least His glory) in order to come nigh unto us; for by faith divine power and love are more clearly manifested than ever. But here the young man comes as to a human teacher, a rabbi; and the Lord answers him in the same manner as he asks; but He establishes this important principle, that no one amongst the sons of fallen Adam is good; it is a humiliating truth, but one of immense weight. We cannot now find a man who is good by nature; we have seen that certain qualities remain of the first creation; but that which God had created good and declared to be good has been corrupted by the fall. Man goes in quest of his own pleasures, of his own interests, and not of God and His glory; he may seek these things honestly or dishonestly in the quagmire of sin, but he always seeks to satisfy his own will; he has lost God, and looks after himself.

288 Then the Lord, after having presented to him the commandments of the law, in which a man has life whilst he keeps them, adds in an exhortation the commandment which made Paul feel what the law produced, in the state in which man was - in death. "One thing thou lackest," says the Lord: "Go, sell that thou hast, and come and follow me." Here we see the lust of the heart exposed, the young man's true state laid bare by the Lord's powerful but simple word, which knows and tries the heart. The fine flowers of the wild tree are worth nothing; the fruits are those of a heart alienated from God: the sap is the sap of a bad tree. The love of riches ruled this young man's heart, interesting as it was as to his natural disposition: the base desire of gold lay at the bottom of his heart; it was the mainspring of his will, the true measure of his moral state. If he goes away grieved and leaves the Lord, it is because he prefers money to God manifested in love and grace.

How solemn a thing it is to find oneself in the presence of Him who searcheth the heart! But the thing that governs the heart, its motive is the true measure of man's moral state, and not the qualities which he possesses by birth, however pleasing these may be. Good qualities are to be found even in animals; they are to be esteemed, but they do not at all reveal the moral state of the heart. A man who has a hard and perverse nature, who tries to control his bad disposition by grace, and to be amiable to others and pleasing to God, is more moral and better before Him than a man who, amiable naturally, seeks to enjoy himself with others in a pleasant way, but without conscience before God; that is, without thinking of Him; loved by men, but displeasing to the God whom he forgets. That which gives moral character to a man is the object of his heart; and it is this the Lord shews here in so powerful a manner, that it touches to the quick the pride of the human heart.

289 But then the Lord goes father; the disciples, who thought that men could do something to gain eternal life, like all the Pharisees of every age, and that man ought to gain heaven for himself, although they recognised the need of God's help, were astonished. What! a rich man of a very good disposition, who had kept the law, and who only sought to know what was the most excellent commandment from their Master in order to perform it - could such an one be far from the kingdom of God? Could it be extremely difficult for such an one to enter into it? If we do not understand that we are lost already, that we need to be saved, that it is a question of the state of the heart, that all hearts are naturally at a distance from God, and that they seek an object, the object of their own desire far from Him, that they do not wish Him to be present, because the conscience feels that His presence would hinder the heart in following this object; if we do not learn this truth by grace, we are altogether blind.

At the moment at which we have arrived in this passage, it was too late to keep concealed from man (at least from the disciples) the true state of his heart. This state had been manifested; man had been unwilling to receive the Son of God. Thus it had been proved that with the best natural disposition, man, even whilst preserving outward morality, preferred to follow the object of his desire, rather than the God of love present upon earth, or a master whom he had recognised as having the highest knowledge of the will of God. Man was lost; he had shewn this fact in rejecting the Son of God; and he must learn it, and that with all his most excellent qualities he cannot save himself. "Who then can be saved?" The Lord does not hide the truth: "With men it is impossible." Solemn words, pronounced by the Lord, pronounced by Him who came to save us. He knew that man could not save himself, that he could not emerge from the state into which he had fallen, without the help of God. With men it is impossible; but then God comes in His boundless love to save us, not to conceal our state, and the need of this free salvation.

290 We must know our state; it is not a thing to be lightly esteemed that the glorious Son of God should have made Himself of no reputation, and have died upon the cross: the only means of redeeming and saving lost man. We must know ourselves, and know that we are condemned, in our hearts, in order to be able to understand that Christ has borne this condemnation in our place, and that He has accomplished the work of our salvation, according to God's glory: let the state of condemnation and sin be proved; and let the love, the perfect righteousness, and the holiness of a God who cannot tolerate the sight of sin (however patient He may be) be brought out clearly and glorified. "With men it is impossible . . . with God all things are possible." By the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by this work alone, a work which the angels desire to look into, all this can be done; salvation is obtained by faith - by faith, because all is accomplished. To God be the praise! The Lord is glorified as man in heaven, because this work has been done, and because God has recognised its perfection; it is on this account that He has placed Christ at His right hand, because everything has been done. God is satisfied, glorified, in the work of Christ.

With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. But what an immense grace which shews us what we are and what God is! "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Think of this, brethren. This means that we must expect a cross in this world. Be ready to receive the Lord's words, to take up the cross, in order to have the true knowledge of yourselves; that is, that you are lost in sin, that salvation is purely of grace, impossible for man; but that the work of salvation is perfect and complete, and the righteousness of God is upon all men who believe in Him who has accomplished it. In no part of scripture is the fundamental truth of the need of God's salvation and of man's state more clearly stated.

Now the Lord adds His teaching about the path of the cross, and the promises which accompany it: let us look at these. It is easy to see how much this story resembles that of the apostle Paul; only grace had changed everything in him. As to the righteousness which is by law, he was blameless; but when the spirituality of the law had operated in his heart, lust was discovered. Then he found out that in him, that is, in his flesh, there dwelt no good thing. But being convinced of sin, God revealed His Son in him, and then he understood that what was impossible with man was possible with God; God had done for him that which he could not do himself (that is, to gain a righteousness according to the law); and this sin in the flesh is found to be condemned in the cross of Christ, and a sacrifice for sin accomplished by Him. Instead of finding himself to be lost in this state of sin, he becomes a new man.

291 But the young man remains in his former state, and abandons the Lord in order to keep his riches; whilst in Paul's case the things which he counted gain he counted but loss for Christ. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." See here the difference

between the effect of grace and human nature. There was wisdom to be found in Paul; and, notice, he did not only count all things as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ from the outset, when first Christ was revealed in him, but he continued, whilst walking in communion with Him, to count all things as dung for Him.

Now follow the promises made to those who have walked thus, and the path itself, as the Lord Himself represents it. Peter suggests that they had left all in order to follow Him, as He had proposed to the young men: what should they have? The Lord declares in His answer that no man who had left house, or brethren, or sisters, etc., for His sake and the gospel's, but should receive an hundredfold such in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting. They should enjoy much more than the wretched things of this life, but with persecutions; and thus they have the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; not of riches, perhaps, but the true enjoyment of all that is in the world according to God's will, and as gifts from God; but they will have to do with the opposition of a world that does not know God. But those who were the first in Judaism shall be the last amongst Christians.

The Lord now sets Himself in the way going up to Jerusalem. The heart of the disciples was full of presentiments of the danger which awaited them in this city. They followed the Lord in fear and trembling, because the flesh fears the malice of a world, which, if it cannot do anything against God, can persecute those who serve Him down here. Here again we see the difference of the effect of grace in Paul, who, having given up everything for the love of Christ, rejoices in the thought of the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, knowing and wishing to know the power of His resurrection. This the disciples did not know, and the flesh can never understand. But the Lord does not wish to hide the truth; He wishes the disciples to understand the place He was just going to take, and which they would have to take. He begins to tell them the things that should happen to Him, and what should be the lot of the Son of man. He should be given into the hands of the priests, condemned, and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, who would treat Him with the greatest ignominy, and would put Him to death; but the third day He would rise again. Thus ends the story of the Son of man amongst men. His own people were the first to condemn Him; and the Gentiles, by their indifference, were ready to complete the terrible act of the Saviour's rejection in this world. The people of God (the Jews) joined with sinful man to cast out the Son of God, come down here in grace. It was important for the disciples to know what should be their Master's end. The Son of man must die. This is the teaching, the foundation, of all blessing; but it was a foundation which destroyed all the hopes and all the expectations of the disciples; which shewed also that man was bad, and God infinitely good.

292 Now these thoughts of the disciples manifest themselves at once, and are put in contrast with that which the Saviour solemnly announces. Indeed the disciples seemed to be impenetrable to the truth up to the last; by grace they loved the Saviour, they rejoiced in the thought that Jesus possessed the words of eternal life (for even the Pharisees' system spoke of eternal life). Now all this was not enough to drive away thoughts of a kingdom which they believed would be established upon earth, nor a carnal desire of a high position close to the Lord's person in this kingdom. The Lord could not find a single person who could understand Him, who could enter into the thoughts of His heart, and could be touched by His sufferings; or could comprehend what He was explaining to His disciples about His death at Jerusalem, when He had led them by themselves apart.

293 James and John ask to sit, one at His right hand, and the other at His left, in His glory. There was faith in this, for they believed that He would reign; but the desire of the flesh was always at work. But the answer of the Lord, who is always full of goodness for His own, turns the fleshly question into an occasion

for instruction for His disciples. He was not the only one who was to bear the cross. He alone could accomplish redemption by the offering of Himself: the Son of God who gave Himself in His love to be the Lamb of God. But as to the path, it was necessary that the disciples should enter into the same path in which He was going, if they wished to be with Him. Here the Lord shews His deep humility and submission to the place He had taken. He had made Himself of no reputation; and He accepts this place with a willing heart, not insensible to the humiliation and the sufferings of the cross, but accepting everything from the hand of His Father, and submitting to all that should be found upon this path.

"To sit at my right hand and my left is not for me to give, but for those for whom it is prepared." He does not possess the right of preferment in His kingdom. He leaves to the Father the right of choosing, and gives the special glory appointed to special work to those for whom it is prepared, and whom grace has prepared for this glory. His portion is the cross; and the cross can give the glory, if any one will follow Him as His disciple: this is now the lesson which His people must learn. He was subject to His Father, and received from His hand all that was prepared for Him according to His will; and if the disciples wished to follow Him, they must take up the cross which was in this path, and which is always in it. Besides, to follow the Lord Jesus, the disciple must humble himself like the Lord; not to be like the great of this world, which makes itself great apart from God, but to be the servant of all in love, as the blessed Saviour was, although by right the Lord of all. Love is the most powerful of all things, and loves to minister, not to be ministered to. It is thus that God manifested Himself, in the Man Jesus, in this path: it is our duty to follow Him. He who is smallest in his own eyes is the greatest.

294 Here ends the history of the Saviour's life upon earth: the account of the events attending His death begins. He presents Himself again, and for the last time, at Jerusalem both as Son of David, the object of the promises made to Israel, and also in order to be received by His people, and by the beloved city: but in fact to be rejected, and put to death. Up to this time (v. 45) He spoke of "the Son of man who had come to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." But now He presents Himself in the only relationship in which He could be with His people according to the prophecies.

He enters by Jericho, the cursed city, but He enters it according to the grace which surpasses the curse; indeed He was going to bear it Himself. The Son of David comes in grace, with divine power, able to accomplish all things, but in humility and lowliness. He answers, therefore, to this name of Son of David, shewing forth His power in grace in healing the blind man. The crowd accompanying Him does not wish Him to be disturbed, but He stops and listens to the needs of His people in His grace. He orders Bartimaeus to be brought, who runs to Him with joy. His felt needs make him run to Christ, who is just the One to meet his needs, and to apply an effective remedy.

The blind man was a speaking picture of the dark state of the Jews; but in that which took place we see the Lord's work in producing by His grace the feeling of need in the heart of a Jew at that time. No doubt it is true for every time, but especially in this case, of the Jews in their state at that moment. The crowd, when Bartimaeus asked what the noise was, said to him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. This was a name which did not convey any idea to the Jews; Nazareth was rather a name with which reproach was connected. But there was faith to be found in the blind man's heart, according to the place that Jesus took with regard to His people: the man says, "Son of David." He recognises the truth that Jesus of Nazareth had the right to that title. Jesus responds to his faith, and heals the blind man. He receives his sight, and follows Jesus in the way.

This is a touching picture of Israel's position, and of the work which was going on in the midst of this people. The Son of God, the Son of David according to the flesh, the fulfilment of the promises was come in grace, and was able to heal Israel. There, in the place where the Son of David was recognised, the power which He brought with Him, and which was in Him, took away blindness. Israel was totally blind; but divine power was present to heal; and if there was faith enough to recognise the Son of David in Jesus, the blindness vanished. It is beautiful to see grace enter there where the curse had fallen; but it is grace which works there where Jesus is recognised as Son of David; grace which opened the eyes of the blind man, from henceforth made His disciple.

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