

# There's No Self-Rely In Team

Mark 10:17-22    March 18, 2026

If you were a college football coach in 1982, you wanted Marcus Dupree on your team. He was the "best player on the field."<sup>1</sup> He broke Herschel Walker's high school record for most touchdowns. Some said that he was ready for the NFL at age 18.

Naturally, big name universities did all they could to get him. During the final month of recruiting, Marcus' high school coach was receiving 100 phone calls a *day* from scouts. One school offered him an oil well. Another \$250,000 a year.<sup>2</sup> That's 1980's dollars.

Marcus verbally committed to Texas, but at the 11th hour, signed with Oklahoma. He had a great freshman season. But it didn't last. His sophomore year revealed his utter lack of discipline. He was often late, missed events, packed on the pounds. Not what you want in a running back.

He suddenly announced he was transferring to Southern Mississippi. He assumed he could play wherever he wanted. But *he* wasn't the one making the rules. The NCAA told him he would have to sit out the rest of his sophomore season *and* his junior season. So he quit college altogether.<sup>3</sup>

Our text shows us a power player who came to Jesus ready to be recruited for the Kingdom. He had promise and prestige, wealth and position and influence. If they could get *this* guy on the team, well, who knows what kind of yardage they could gain! He would be their star player.

We can only imagine the shock when Jesus let the guy go. The astonishment was compounded when Jesus used the case study of this individual to then teach *all* His disciples just how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God and how dangerous it is to have earthly wealth.

Jesus' interaction with this man and then with the disciples afterward are one unit, but we're going to take this scene in two parts. Tonight, we want to take a look at the case study which establishes the principle. And then, next time we're in Mark, we'll apply the case study to ourselves as disciples. Both parts challenge our assumptions, so we want to take this text seriously and listen carefully.

**Mark 10:17 - <sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

We know this guy as "the Rich Young Ruler." My Bible even calls him that in the heading, despite the fact that Mark neither describes him as young or a ruler. So where does that name come from?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus\\_Dupree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Dupree)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.espn.com/video/clip/\\_/id/13727576](https://www.espn.com/video/clip/_/id/13727576)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/01/sports/marcus-dupree-quits-college-future-unclear-dupree-is-leaving.html>

Well, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell this story. All say he has many possessions. It probably referred to owning many estates.<sup>4</sup> In Matthew we're told he's young - a word meaning a man under forty.<sup>5</sup> And finally, in Luke we're told he's a ruler. This could mean he was a magistrate or official. Jairus is called the "ruler" of the synagogue in Luke 8. Nicodemus is called a ruler of the Jews in John 3. It's also a term for other civil authorities. So, taken together, this fellow is a rich, young ruler.

His entrance on the scene looks *really* good. He hears that Jesus is headed out of town and he literally *runs* to find Him and, when he does, he bows at Jesus' feet. It wasn't customary to kneel to a rabbi.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, he had real respect for Jesus. Thus far, this guy's interview is going really well!

But image isn't everything. The rich young ruler's heart problems start to show as soon as he opens his mouth. The first problem can be diagnosed by the title he gives Jesus. He calls Him "Good teacher." That's not a *bad* name, but it's totally insufficient. What *didn't* he call Jesus? He didn't call Him *Lord*, as the Centurion had. He didn't call him *Master*, as Simon had. He didn't call Him *Son of David*, as the Canaanite woman had. He didn't call Him a prophet or Messiah or the Son of Man. He's "Good Teacher."

You see, the Rich Young Ruler really only thinks he needs a *teacher*, not a *Savior*. He thought *himself* to be good enough to be drafted into heaven. He's looking for recognition not redemption. He wants Jesus to give him a grade, not emancipation.

He heard that this rabbi from Nazareth had a novel and provocative way of applying God's Law - that Jesus had a way of understanding and explaining and applying God's Law unlike anything anyone had ever heard. And so, the rich young ruler comes to speak with Jesus because he wants to make sure he's got all his bases covered - all his boxes checked.

And that's the *second* problem we can see in the man's question. He did not come asking the Lord to *save* him. He said, "What do *I* do to merit a place in the Kingdom?"

But understand: *None* of us are justified by works. You cannot perform your way into heaven. We can *only* be justified by faith alone through grace alone. Read Romans 4. Read Galatians 2. It is only through the blood of Christ, shed for us. There *is* nothing we can *do* to inherit eternal life the way this young man is talking about. Kingdom access is only, *always* a gift received by faith.

**Mark 10:18 - <sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone.**

Jesus is *not* denying His deity. He wants to cut through the man's reasoning, his self-righteousness, his merit-based ideas for salvation and get to the truth. As a student of the Torah, this man *should* agree that only God is good. So Jesus holds his philosophy to the fire. "Are you calling *Me* God?"

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<sup>4</sup> James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

<sup>5</sup> James Strong *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*

<sup>6</sup> Clifton Allen *Matthew-Mark*

Remember what the theme of this *whole* book is: Who do we say that Jesus is? Because *if* Jesus is God, this is no longer a question of *interpretation*, but a matter of *revelation*.

*If* Jesus is God, then *anything* He asks of us *must* be right and it *must* be done. If you were on the street and a stranger came up to you and said, "I need you to go in that building," we probably wouldn't obey immediately. At very least, we'd be skeptical. We'd ask questions. We'd decide whether we agree. But if we recognize that person as having *authority*, our response changes. If a policeman walks up to us and says the same thing, we might still have questions, but we'd probably submit to their authority. If our boss walked up to us and said it, we'd also probably up and go. If our loving and caring father asked us, we'd go *without* question. Who is speaking to us?

If Jesus is *God*, then His words are not only interesting, they are authoritative. And *if* Jesus is God and *if* God is good - which He is - then the things He commands us are not only essential, they are also *good*, because *He* is good. All His commands are good. All His ways are good.

We understand this philosophically, but we need to apply it functionally. Jesus gives us commands. He lays serious requirements on us. He gives us boundaries and demands we not cross the lines He has drawn. In our humanity, we don't always agree with Him. We're convinced it would be *fine* if we crossed some of those lines. But Who do we say that Jesus is? *If He is God*, then not only *must* we believe His word and obey it, but we can be sure His directions and mandates are *good*.

**Mark 10:19-20 - <sup>19</sup> 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."  
<sup>20</sup> He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth."**

The man was totally confident in his *self-righteousness*. He says, "I've been perfect since before my Bar-Mitzvah!" Of course, he can only evaluate using his own standard. He's his own judge.

He was *interested* in Jesus, but obviously he had not done much *listening* to Jesus. Because one of the things Jesus revealed was that heaven's standard for keeping these commands is *much* higher than our own. If you've hated someone in your heart, you're guilty of murder. If you looked lustfully at a woman, you've already committed adultery.<sup>7</sup> Now, God doesn't tell us that so that we say, "Well, what are you gonna do?" He says it to reveal just how ruined by sin we are and just how holy *He* is. That there is *none* righteous, no not one. Not us, not the rich young ruler, no one.

Meanwhile, this guy essentially says he *has* no sin. Listen, if we say we have no sin, we're liars. This guy thinks he's proved that God owes him a place in the Kingdom. But that's *never* how it works.

**Mark 10:21-22 - <sup>21</sup> Looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come,**

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:21-30

**follow me.”<sup>22</sup> But he was dismayed by this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.**

Jesus *truly* loved this guy - *even though the guy didn't love Jesus back!* Here's the man, thinking that he is his own savior. He didn't come in worship. He didn't come with affection. He didn't come with humility. Respect, yes, but mingled with the respect was total self-dependence. And *even still*, the Lord opened the door to the Kingdom to this man. He gave him the answer he sought!

Jesus really loved him. He really wanted the rich young ruler to walk through the Door, into the Kingdom and become a disciple.

After all, *where* did this man find Jesus? Jesus is on a journey to pay the price for *this man's* sin, even though the man thought he could pay it himself, or that he didn't owe any debt at all! Jesus was trying to *elevate* this man. In Matthew, He says, "If you want to be *perfect*, go do these things."<sup>8</sup>

What did Jesus tell him to do? We focus on the financial, but let's not forget the following. Go and give, come and follow. It wasn't *only* about emptying his bank account. He needed to become a *disciple* from that day forward. Spirituality is *never* about box-checking. It's about following in faith.

When the man got his answer, what happened? He was dismayed. It's a term used in Matthew for a storm forming in the sky.<sup>9</sup> After hearing this command, the man gets up from his kneeling, because despite what it *looked* like, he wasn't *really* bowing in obedience to a King. He wanted validation.

Jesus gave him an amazing revelation: All those things he had were in reality a *lack*. Jesus said, "You *lack* this. You're *missing* the freedom of not being possessed by your possessions."

Now, this is where things usually get either overly bland or overly spicy. On the bland side, teachers and commentators rush to tell us all that this is *not* a universal command. That it was *only* for this guy. The following verses undercut that idea. And this man is a living, breathing proof of what Jesus taught back in Mark 4 in the parable of the soils - how the deceitfulness of wealth will choke out the word and make a life unfruitful. He is a case study of spiritual truths that apply to us. The call of Christ *is* demanding. We *must* sacrifice. We *must* forsake all other idols and surrender to the Lord.

On the spicy side, those teachers who are a little more enamored with asceticism will rush to say that *obviously* this is a demand for every Christian to empty their savings and give it all away. That penniless Christianity *is* in and of itself, *better* Christianity.

The problem with that is not only the rest of the Bible, but even the rest of this story. Next time we'll see that it's not just hard for a *rich* person to get into heaven, it's hard for *anyone* to get into heaven. But also consider the rest of the Bible: We see righteous rich. We see ungodly poor. Peter would later tell Ananias and Sapphira that they did not have to sell their land and give it to the

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew 19:21

<sup>9</sup> Archibald Robertson *Word Pictures In The New Testament*

church, but that the money was theirs to do with as they pleased.<sup>10</sup> One commentator deftly notes: “If possessions are evil in and of themselves, why would they be given to the poor?”<sup>11</sup>

But that does *not* mean we’re off the hook. One scholar writes, “That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus Himself said plainly, “You cannot serve both God and money.”<sup>13</sup>

The reality is, it’s *very* easy to be the rich young ruler in American Christianity. Statistically speaking, we are *not* a wonderfully sacrificial people. Our whole culture is set up for selfishness, not sacrifice.

The next time we’re in Mark, we will navigate how to apply the case study to ourselves. We *will* find that wealth *is* an obstacle to living faith. Why? Because it is so *helpful*. Because it is so *luxurious*. Because it *seems* to open earthly doors to us and solve earthly problems for us and give us security and fills our lives with so many other things. But *that’s* the problem. It entices us to rely on *it* rather than on the Lord. It naturally starts to possess us, rather than the other way around. The rich young ruler is a real, living, breathing case study of how wealth is, by its nature, deceitful and naturally chokes out the growth of spiritual fruit if we’re not careful. That *doesn’t* mean Christians can’t be affluent. But we should be keenly aware of the dangers, take them seriously, and respond accordingly because of how strongly Jesus warns His disciples in the very next passage. We shouldn’t assume that we’re *not* the rich young ruler in the story.

Remember: Discipleship means that Jesus Christ is not just a good Teacher. He is your Master. And He is the Master of *all* your life. You see, the Rich Young Ruler was willing to indulge *some* of Jesus’ teachings, but he would not open his bank book to Him. He was not interested in becoming a *disciple*. He assumed his works and his wealth were enough for him to be *deputized* as a “good” man - as a dignified prince in the Kingdom. But we see his lack. We see the failure to surrender. He may have bowed his knee, but his heart would not confess, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” We must do both. A heart that understands Who Jesus is and a life submitted to Him, *even when* He asks something difficult of us. Jesus *will* ask hard things of you. If you’ve never done something hard for the Lord, it might not be because He hasn’t asked, but because you’ve turned away from that command.

Marcus Dupree has been called, “The best that never was.”<sup>14</sup> Think of what the rich young ruler missed out on. What *could* have been his life. Sure, he went home to his estates. I’m sure they were nice, though none of us would want to live there today. It wasn’t about *doing* things to be part of God’s powerful work. It was about *following* the Lord, knowing He must *save* us from our sin, from our weakness, from our misunderstanding of the truth. The road is narrow, but the door is open. We can go forward, overjoyed, lacking nothing thanks to all the Lord does for us. He *demand*s obedience, but what He offers is altogether good. If we take the road with Him, He leads us through the Door into the greatness and glory of His eternal Kingdom. Come and follow.

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 5:4

<sup>11</sup> Robert Utley *The Gospel According To Peter: Mark And I & II Peter*

<sup>12</sup> R. H. Gundry *Matthew*

<sup>13</sup> Luke 16:13

<sup>14</sup> <https://msfame.com/inductees/marcus-dupree/>