What Are You Holding Too Tightly?

Pastor Jason Epperson on the Rich Young Ruler, Grace, Generosity, and a New Beginning

Pastor Jason Epperson | Monday, October 19, 2026 | Host: Mark Burns

Program Summary

Pastor Jason Epperson continues his teaching through Mark 10 with Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. The man kneels before Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, but Jason points out that salvation cannot be earned, bought, or secured by religious performance. Jesus looks at the man and loves him, then exposes the possession he holds too tightly: his wealth. Jason compares Jesus to a good physician who lovingly touches the painful spot that needs healing. The issue is not wealth itself but anything—money, approval, comfort, addictions, achievements, or even religion—that becomes more important than following Jesus. Through the image of a camel passing through the eye of a needle, Jason emphasizes that salvation is impossible through human effort but possible with God. Stories of people finding forgiveness and a fresh start reinforce the message of grace. His invitation is simple: release what you cling to, come to Jesus for salvation, and live generously with the life He has given you.

Key Takeaways

• Eternal life is a gift from God, not something I can earn by keeping rules or doing good works.

• The rich young ruler was physically near Jesus but still asked what he himself needed to accomplish.

• Jesus looked at the man and loved him before identifying the obstacle in his heart.

• God's loving correction may touch the very attachment I least want to surrender.

• For this man the obstacle was wealth; for others it may be approval, comfort, addiction, control, or religious achievement.

• Generosity is a response to grace and freedom, not a way to purchase salvation.

• The command to follow Jesus is more than adding religion to an otherwise unchanged life.

• Human effort cannot achieve salvation: what is impossible with people is possible with God.

• Jesus offers forgiveness and a new beginning to people carrying shame and regret.

• Holding possessions, status, or relationships too tightly can create a spiritual crisis.

• The call to follow Jesus includes caring for others with time, money, and practical love.

• Jesus' invitation is not merely to do more, but to surrender and trust Him.

Scripture References

• Mark 10:17–31

• Mark 10:21

• Mark 10:27

• Matthew 5:21–30

• Philippians 3:4–9

• Ephesians 2:8–10

• Matthew 11:28–30

• Exodus 20:3–4

• Luke 12:15–21

Quote of the Day

“Anything in your world you hold on too tightly to, besides Jesus, is a crisis waiting to happen.” — Pastor Jason Epperson

Broadcast Notes

Mark opens with Mark 10:27 and introduces Jason’s question about what people may be holding too tightly. Jason describes the rich young ruler kneeling before Jesus and asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. The man claims to have kept the commandments; Jason contrasts outward compliance with Jesus’ teaching about the heart and Paul’s willingness to count former achievements as loss for Christ. He emphasizes Mark 10:21: Jesus looked at the man and loved him. Like a physician identifying a dangerous condition, Jesus points to the man’s wealth and invites him to give to the poor and follow. Jason applies the principle to destructive attachments, approval-seeking, and comfort, carefully noting that the question is not simply how much money someone possesses but what has captured the heart. The man walks away sorrowful. Jason then explains the camel and needle image as an illustration of impossibility and repeats Jesus’ promise that what is impossible with people is possible with God. Personal pastoral stories of forgiveness and “do-overs” emphasize repentance and grace. A childhood story about the video game Contra illustrates a fresh start; it is an analogy, not a claim that repentance removes all earthly consequences. Jason closes by urging listeners to live generously, surrender whatever has become the centerpiece, and ask Jesus for salvation. Mark concludes with the invitation to trust in grace rather than trying to earn salvation.

❤■ Practical Applications

• Ask Jesus to show me what I am holding more tightly than I hold to Him.

• Name one achievement or religious habit I have been tempted to trust as proof of my worth before God.

• Read Mark 10:21 slowly and notice that Jesus’ hard truth came from love.

• Examine whether my possessions serve people or whether my life is organized around protecting possessions.

• Choose a concrete act of generosity with time, attention, or resources.

• If correction exposes a painful spot, ask what healing God may be inviting rather than immediately becoming defensive.

• Bring an area of shame or regret to Jesus and receive His invitation to repent and begin again.

• Offer grace to someone whose past mistakes have made them feel disqualified.

• Ask whether my comfort is preventing me from serving someone in need.

• Pray “Jesus, save me” rather than treating faith as a performance review.

Today's Challenge

For seven days, begin by asking, “Jesus, what am I holding too tightly?” Write down one attachment that competes for first place in your heart. Read Mark 10:17–27 and pray for the courage to loosen your grip. Then take one tangible step—give generously, seek help, confess a sin, make an apology, or serve someone—without trying to earn God’s acceptance. Thank Him for grace that makes a new beginning possible.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that what I cannot accomplish through my own effort is possible with You. I confess that I sometimes approach You asking what more I must do instead of humbly asking Jesus to save and lead me. Search my heart and show me what I am holding too tightly—money, comfort, recognition, approval, habits, control, or even my own record of good works. Thank You that Jesus looks at me with love and tells me the truth I need. Give me courage to release whatever keeps me from following Him freely. Where I carry shame, teach me to repent and receive Your forgiveness rather than hide. Make me generous with my time, resources, and love for others. Help me remember that salvation is Your gift, not my achievement. Jesus, I need You. Teach me to trust You, follow You, and live the life You created me to live. In Your name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Pastor Jason Epperson serves at CU Church and regularly teaches through the Gospel of Mark with vivid illustrations, personal stories, and practical applications. His messages invite listeners to trust Jesus rather than rely on religious performance, and to live with generosity, repentance, and grace.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. With decades in Christian radio and ministry, he brings Scripture, testimony, and conversations to listeners with a desire to educate, edify, and evangelize.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.

It's so good to see you. We hope that it's clear. Everyone loves you.

We're glad you're here. Reading from Mark 10, verse 27. Jesus said, With man this is impossible, but not with God.

All things are possible with God. Mark 10, verse 27. O magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name.

Together it's Monday, October 19th, 2026. And welcome to Mark & Friends. Today, Pastor Jason Epperson of CU Church asks a searching question.

What am I holding so tightly that it may be keeping me from fully following Jesus? Here's Pastor Jason. To be a part of the kingdom of God, it's not something you earn. It's something you trust in God and he gives you.

And I don't want you to miss that because today as we get into this passage, it's the backdrop of the passage. So it starts this way and it says this, And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So this man comes up to him. We know later in the passage, this man has a lot of wealth.

He's a prominent person. All the disciples would have known who he was. And so as this man comes up to him, he falls on his knees and he does these things.

The first thing is he falls on his knees and he's right in front of Jesus. And he calls him good teacher. We're going to get to that.

In this passage, the rabbis or teachers were never called good. Good was reserved for only a statement about God. So good literally in this translation means like sinless one.

So this guy is coming to Jesus and saying, Hey, good teacher or sinless one. So we don't know exactly why he's saying it, but that's what he's saying. And he falls on his knees and the question he asks is a question that all of us ask at some point.

How am I saved? How am I a part of the kingdom of God? So he falls on his face. Hear me say this. This guy has never been closer to salvation in his life than right now.

I mean, imagine. He literally is at the feet. He has fallen at the feet of the one who hung the stars in the sky.

The one that created the universe. The one that spoke life into motion. The one that parted a red sea.

The one that like y'all like he's right there with him. And this is the question. Hey, what do I need to do? That's the first question.

And it's the biggest question I'm going to ask today. Today's you come into contact with Jesus. Why don't you just look at him? Just be with them.

Just tell him thank you for what he's done. Because this man is right in front of the creator of the universe. And he wants to hold up a mirror and say, what do I need to do? And he's not alone in that.

You don't have to nod your head. You don't have to blink your eyes and don't nudge him. But I get why he asks it.

Are you with me? And so the passage goes on. And Jesus says this to him. He says, and Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? In some ways he's like, do you know who I am? Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

Like Jesus is saying, you called me good. No one's good except God alone. And if you knew I was God, why are you asking what you need to do versus just asking me for help? Like if he would have fell on his face and said, Lord, save me, that's a different statement than, Lord, what do you need from me? Lord, what do you need from me? Because the disciples right now is a rich young man whose prominent in the community comes running up to Jesus.

Their first thought is, oh, we need a guy like this. Like this guy? Yo, we need that brother on our team. And then Jesus says these words to him.

And so Jesus said to him, why do you call me good? No one's good except God alone. Then he says this, do not murder, do not, like he says, he's giving him the answer. He's saying, well, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.

So Jesus says, hey, are you doing these things? These would all be called, don't miss this, this is like in Jewish, like the rabbis write that these would all be called second table commandments. And this is really what it means, they're commandments that are outwardly facing. Like if you know someone that follows these commandments, you'd say, that's a good dude.

That person's really kind. And so all the questions Jesus asks are those. And then this guy looks at Jesus, and this is his statement to Jesus.

He says, and he said to him, teacher, all of these I've kept from my youth. Jesus, I'm good. How could he say that? You know how he could say this? He obviously didn't hear Jesus talk about a year earlier when Jesus gave this sermon on the mount in Matthew 5. Because in Matthew 5, when Jesus gave this sermon on the mount, what did he say? He said, if you have hate in your heart, you're guilty of murder.

If you have lust in your eyes, you're guilty of adultery. Basically what Jesus said is, all of us, all of us, all of us are found what? Guilty. And so when we fall at the feet of Jesus, what we say is, Lord, save me.

Now, what do you need from me? Another way to talk about this same moment is, remember the apostle Paul. Remember he used to be Saul? He describes himself in Philippians chapter 3, if you want to look at it later. In Philippians 3, Paul describes himself as when he was Jewish, he was blameless.

What that really means is, as a Jewish dude, I followed all the commandments as well as anyone could possibly follow them. In Philippians 3, he says, I was blameless. Basically he said, y'all, I was the man.

But I forsake it all. I count it all as, the word he uses is rubbish. Actually, we use rubbish, but it's like the most, literally in the Hebrew, I can't say the word, or you dull this, leave.

But the word that Paul uses here is the most direct term to describe trash. Are you tracking now? It's a vulgar term of like, I count my life as whatever that is. For the sake of knowing Christ.

He basically says this, my whole life, I fell on my knees in front of God and I said, God, what do you need from me today? Versus saying, God, I need you to save me because I am a wreck. It goes on and says these words then. And so Jesus looks at him and says these words.

And Jesus looked at him and he loved him. I underline that in my Bible. If you have your Bibles, like, underlining loved him, but I want you to hear me say this right now.

He loves us. And when someone loves you and you ask them a question, do you want them to say what you want to hear or do you want them to say what you need to hear? So Jesus loved him and in the process of loving him, he says these words. And he said to him, you lack one thing.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you'll have a treasure in heaven and come follow me. What? How did we get from there to here, Jesus? This is what Jesus is saying. He says I'm going to love you enough to tell you the truth.

And here's the truth. Like, I'm going to read it again. And Jesus looking at him, loved him, and said, you lack one thing.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you'll have a treasure in heaven. Come follow me. Have you ever been to the doctor and something's wrong and you don't know what's wrong and then all of a sudden you get this scan and they pull this scan up and they're like, it's right there.

And at first you're like, but then you're like, well, get that out of me. And if you get that out of me, I'm going to be okay. If I get that out of you, you're going to have a life that's more fulfilling than you've ever had.

A doctor loves us enough to touch the spot, to take the spot out that's crippling us. Jesus, as the good physician right here, looks at this guy and it could have been something else. For this guy, it was money.

And he said, hey, here's the deal. Here's the spot. When he touched the spot, the guy's like, ow.

But he says, I love you enough to tell you that. Here's another way to look at it. Jesus just could have went on.

But Jesus loved this man enough to basically say this, hey bro, I have created you for more than this. Did you catch that? Like, I have created you for more than showing up randomly to the synagogue on Saturdays. I've created you more than throwing a little couple bucks in an offering plate.

I've created you more for gathering as much stuff as you possibly can and being the most comfortable as you possibly can and gathering all these things and yet still being unfulfilled. I've created you for more than this. I've created you for more in this world than just being wealthy.

I've created you, literally, I've created you to love, to serve, to go, to be. I've created you in your life to be a part of this thing called the kingdom of God and I love you too much for you to store up gold and treasures on this earth when someday you're going to get to heaven and you're going to walk on pavement of the cool stuff you had on earth. Like, I just love you too much.

That's what he's saying. Let me give a different conversation that's going to make more sense to all of us. Someone in your life is an alcoholic and they can't put the bottle down.

And you're constantly just trying to encourage them, trying to love them and you're watching them destroy their life through alcohol. And eventually they say, man, my life is a mess, what do I need to do? And you look at them and you touch the spot. You say, hey, I think if you get rid of alcohol you're going to find more fulfillment in this world than you've had.

Nod your heads. Let's do another one. Hey, my marriage is a mess and I'm struggling in this or my singleness is a mess and the truth is every time I look at a woman I kind of try to think what I can get from her versus what I can give to her.

And then you look at this guy and say, well what's going on in your world? And then you ask the question, hey are you addicted to pornography? And their eyes get kind of big and they start to sweat because you touch the spot. And you say, well bro, if you like stop looking at this and stop doing this, then guess what? God's going to set you free. You can actually look at women and you can see them as designed by God versus objectified by man.

Because I want to make you well. And all of us should be like, well you should get off your phone and get off the computer. You should put the bottle down.

Or it's someone that's addicted to heroin or it's someone that's walking down the street and constantly finds all their approval from everyone else's thoughts and opinions and they're running themselves ragged trying to please everybody. And you can just say, hey wait a second, you're incredible but you can't please everyone and in trying to please everyone you're killing yourself. You touch the spot.

Does that make sense? You touch those spots. All of us totally get that. There's another spot that culturally we don't like to be touched and the spot is the comfort we get from our money.

It's an uncomfortable spot. But the truth is, hear me say this, God loves me enough to say, Jason, live your life being generous versus live your life being greedy. This isn't about how much money you have.

It's really not. I know some really greedy poor people and I know some really generous wealthy people. What he's saying is, what do you care the most about? What he's saying is this, hey you followed all those other commandments, the second table commandments, remember fellas I talked about that? The outwardly facing? But there's two commandments, bro, you're kind of missing.

And it's the first and the second. No other gods before me. Oh.

Don't worship any other thing as an idol. The passage then goes on and says this, and come and follow me. Don't miss this.

Like guys, God's statement of hey bro, here's what you need to let go of is followed by this statement. Hey, you need to let go of this, but bro, join this posse. Like the truth is, they don't know this yet, but this 12th brother, he's going to ditch.

It's called Judas. We're going to need another one. It could be you.

Imagine your life having the purpose of your life be one of the creators, the beginning of this movement. Or you could afford another room on your house. It goes on and says these words, disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

He said no to a revolutionary lifestyle, because all he wanted was an add-on ingredient called Jesus. Does that make sense when I said that? I hope that's not too harsh. Actually, if that's too harsh, eh? Because that's what Jesus is saying.

It goes on and says this, and Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how difficult will it be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God? And the disciples were amazed at his words. Why were the disciples so shocked by this? This is why. In Jewish culture, the belief was that if you have money, God's blessing you, and if you don't, he ain't.

So their thought process was, if you're wealthy, you must have it all together, and if you're poor, then you don't, and if you did what God wanted you to do, you'd have money. So they were shocked at this statement. And Jesus is just saying here, what we're catching is one dude who's holding too tightly to his money, but this principle goes with anything.

Like, all of us have those spots. Just nod your heads, I got more than one. And this is just the one that we picked today.

But this dude rejects Jesus. I just need to make this one encouraging statement to all of us in the room. If you feel rejected by someone that asks you for help, not someone you want to give help to that doesn't want your help, those are differences.

You should all smile right now. Because some people actually don't want your opinions even if they're true. So just love them until they ask.

But this person asks for it, and Jesus gives it, and Jesus is about to set this brother free and put him on a pathway that's like, bah! Like that moment. And he does this to Jesus. I'm out.

There's lots of times that people will ask, hey Jason, what do you think? And I tell them what I think, and they walk away, and what I said is rejected. But you know what my job as a pastor is? It's actually not to find success in your acceptance. It's for me to be faithful and just tell them the truth.

But it doesn't mean sometimes I don't look in the mirror too and say, Lord, what do I got to do a little different? Because I'm human too, right? He goes on and says this, and Jesus said to them, children, how difficult is it to enter the kingdom of God? How difficult is it to enter the kingdom of God? It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, well then who can be saved? This is the

picture. It's like, Evan, come here, put your Bible down.

Evan's going to come up here. Evan is not that big. He's taller than me, but Evan, come back.

Okay? And so the question is, if I had a needle on this stage, I was going to bring one of my old linemen up here, but they're hurting today. And so you're the second best. And so I've got a needle here in my hand.

I guess I don't, but you wouldn't be able to see it if I did. But I want to tell you the truth. There's no needle in my hand.

But if there was a needle in my hand, you couldn't even see it. What are the chances of Evan going through the needle? It's what? Impossible! Okay, Evan, go back and sit down. Pull your Bible back out.

Thank you, Evan. But I've got to make this point. It's impossible! Jesus making this statement is saying if you think, don't miss this, don't miss this, don't miss this.

If you think you can earn, you can buy, you can do something in this world to inherit the kingdom of God, if you think you can earn this, you got no shot. That's the next verse. Don't miss it.

This is what he says. Jesus looked at them and he said, with a man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible with God. I remember hundreds of conversations.

I'm going to tell you like three today. It's a young gal who was hurt as a child, abused as a child, then found her identity only in her body. So she just tried to find love in that way because it's the only way she'd ever been expressed love.

And you fast forward and guy after guy after guy and marriage after marriage after marriage and she found herself in a place where she was on the streets, she got into some help, and I remember the conversation with this gal and when she heard that there was a God who would forgive her, but there was also a God that would help her forgive those who hurt her, I remember her, she just looked at me like, I don't know. Then I remember she came up after a service and we're standing by a cross and we're talking in this moment by a cross and she starts asking questions and she kept saying, well I did this, I did this, and I was like, yeah, and if you repent, he'll forgive you. What do you mean repent? Well if you say, God, I don't want to do this again, I'm sorry, I love you, then he forgives you.

And then she said these words, she says, you're telling me, you're telling me, I get a do-over? I was like, yeah, girl. We all get do-overs. It's a guy that his whole life just gathered as much stuff as he could and he rationalized how hard he worked and what he did because he was trying to provide for people, but the reality was he found his identity in what he did, he found his identity in how much he had, he found his identity in all the pats on the back that everyone else gave him, and he reached a spot in life when he looked around and he didn't really know anybody, except for the people he was sending money to that were in his family, and he just snapped.

He's like, this isn't what I signed up for. He's like, man, I've screwed all this up. His wife finds out that he's been cheating multiple times, his kids find out, it's just a mess.

And I remember sitting with him and I said, well have you tried just saying sorry? His eyes well up and I said, well, I'm not sure what your wife and kids will do, but I know the creator of the universe is wanting and asking and waiting to pour out his love and forgiveness on you. Bro, you get a do-over. That do-over started with this idea of, I was wrong, you are right, I want to follow you.

It was a young man, dude went to a conference with us, and he had such a hard gig. I mean hard life. And he had things done to him, and he did things to other people, and he just thought, I'm gonna be nice to everybody, but the truth is I could never belong if people really knew who I was.

And I'll never forget the night a preacher preached a sermon that had a backpack on, and the preacher the whole time is like, all of the sins you have are in this backpack, and God wants to take your backpack, and people were dropping backpacks by a cross. And this kid just sat there and just cried, and after the service he said, you're telling me I can be forgiven. And we're like, yes! Hey family, all of us have a spot right now that the Holy Spirit is touching, and you're holding onto too tightly.

And it's standing in the way of you truly living the life you've been created to live. Like literally some of you in this room have chased after religion your whole life, you've done everything right, but the truth is you're still missing something, and what that

something is is you're chasing religion, and you're trying to do good things, but that's really no different than chasing worldly things and trying to do whatever you want. If you're not in this with Jesus, there's not wholeness, fulfillment, and a do-over.

And this is what Jesus is saying to all of us in this room today, whether you have a lot or you have a little, He's saying this, come to me all who are weary and laden, and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy. The burden is light, and I love you.

I loved you in your darkest moment, and I will love you in your brightest moment. I love you, and this is what you need to do. Love me back.

That's what's happening here. Another way to illustrate it is my favorite video game of all time. It's called Contra.

It was a game I played as a kid. It's Nintendo, and when you play it the first time, you're playing Contra, and it's on the base level Nintendo, and for those of you who are acting like you don't know what it is and you're my age, you do. And I played this game all the time, and you'd only have three lives, and if you made it to the waterfall level, hear me say this, you were really good at Contra, but there's five more levels after the waterfall.

Like, I didn't know anyone, no one could beat this game with, you couldn't beat this game with three lives. Then all of a sudden, there was this rumor out there, and you bought a magazine that was before the internet. And they said, hey, there's this code in Contra, and it's up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, B, A, select, start.

And when you push that, oh, you're surprised I know the code? And when you put that in, you get 30 lives! And then guess what? When you die 30 times, it gives you 30 more! And you die again, it gives you 30 more! And this is what the game is based in then. If you keep playing the game, you win! No matter how bad you are at it. Some of us today need to ask the creator of the universe for a do-over.

And keep playing. And walk away from what we're holding onto so he can set us free. Like, you are choosing, we are choosing in this room to when we follow the world and its desires to live in the shadows, to live in darkness, to live in non-fulfillment with moments of momentary satisfaction because what Satan has done is he's taken the beauty of God's kingdom and he's like, polluted it enough where there's moments of blessing, there's moments of happy followed by turmoil.

But what God does is, if you do this in my timing, and if you do this with me, you can have all those blessings and all those unbelievable things if you just follow me. Listen to me, there's not sacrifice in following me, there's blessing, not just in heaven right now. Guys, this kingdom is not just about heaven.

Yes, the things you're gathering on this earth will eventually be the pavement that you walk on. Think about it. But family, like, when I hear the news, my thought is, how can we help change that? How can we help fix that? The thousands of people in our city that know there actually is some Christians that actually care about them now.

Or, I could just be a little more comfortable. And what Jesus has said to me in my life, what he says to my kids, as all kids, if we don't have that, we can give this. Anything in this world that becomes about itself, you or your family or a church, no longer represents the kingdom or the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our purpose is to live a life of generosity, whether it's with your time, your money, your life. The passage ends in, it says this, but many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. Family, today I don't know where we're at, but I know in my life I have some hurdles that need to be removed.

I have some things in my life that I hold on too tightly to. If you remember this phrase, I say it quite a bit, anything in your world you hold on too tightly to, besides Jesus, is a crisis waiting to happen. And in this passage, the person was holding on too tightly to what? Money.

And it was a crisis waiting to happen. So this is what we gotta do. Doesn't mean we still can't enjoy those things, but those things can't be our centerpiece.

When we fall at the feet of Jesus, it's not, Jesus, what can I do? It's, Jesus, save me. Jesus, save me. Oh, listening friend, I know I've cried out those words before.

How about you? What a wonderful reminder that we cannot earn our salvation, but we can come to Jesus, surrender what we're holding too tightly, and trust in His grace. You've been hearing a message by Pastor Jason Epperson of CU Church. If

you'd like to hear it again, read the transcript or find additional resources to help you grow in your walk with Jesus, visit GreatNewsRadio.org or WLUJ.org and click on the Mark & Friends tab.

Thanks for listening. Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family. This is Mark Burns with the Ministry of Great News Media.

God bless you and have a great day and night.