

Mark 10:17—30
November 11, 2018

The most famous American writer of the 19thth century, maybe of all time was Samuel Johnson. We all know him as Mark Twain. Those of you who are Hemmingway enthusiasts, I see you, I didn't say the best writer, I said the most famous American writer.

Twain was famous for his wit and witticism. He seemed to be continually ready to offer some memorable quip.

He wasn't just snarky—he also had a keen ability to communicate a lot in a few words—and make them memorable.

Some of his most memorable.

- “It is not the size of the dog in the fight, it is the size of the fight of the dog.”
- “It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”
- “My mother had a great deal of trouble with me, but I think she enjoyed it.”
- “The report of my death was an exaggeration.”

“The difference between the *almost right* word and the *right* word is really a large matter. [It is] the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

The almost right word and the right word can be very similar—like lightning and lightning bug—but in fact be very different.

In other words, there is power in precision when you use the right word at the right time. When you say what you mean you are more likely to be understood.

The same is true when it comes to questions. There is power in the *right* question that is not present in the *almost right* question.

Today we join Jesus and his disciples and we are going to take our place among the crowd. We are going to ask two questions

The almost right question
The right question

And in between Jesus is going to *announce* something that we must not miss.

The Almost Right Question
An Announcement
The Right Question

We are going to take it in three parts.

We think we have so much to offer—here is what we are going to see today—Mankind has nothing to offer Jesus and everything to gain from Jesus.

PROP: Nothing to offer all to gain.

Lets again come close to this Jesus and take our place among the crowd and listen.

And as we hear, we will get to know him better. And as we get to know him, we will see how worthwhile it is to follow him.

1. *The Almost Right Question (Mark 10:18-22)*

“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?” ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ 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.’ ” ²⁰ And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

PRAY

This has to be one of the more befuddling interchanges in all of our travels with Jesus through Mark.

A young man with a lot of money that in other passages is called a ruler (means synagogue ruler)—comes up to Jesus—and asks what seems to be a perfectly rational question,

Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Seems like a perfectly fine question to ask this wandering Galilean teacher. He had been teaching on entering the kingdom of God and inheriting eternal life—so ‘what must I do to inherit this eternal life’ seems logical.

Jesus does not say—

Good question!

Instead he says,

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

What?

By any measure that is a strange response. This man bowed before Jesus and Jesus pops off with—why do you call me good?

What is so wrong with calling Jesus good? Is Jesus saying he is not good? No.

He is asking the man why he called Jesus good. They used the word “good” differently than we do. When someone asks my kids how they are doing they will invariably—despite all grammar rules—say, “good.”

Good means okay. Good means something normal and not spectacular. Fine.

“Good” in that day was only applied to God. Only God could be called good. They got that from Exodus 33,

“Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” [19] And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. [20] But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” [21] And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, [22] and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” Exodus 33:18–22

No one was good like God. So to call someone good, was to grant them something of a god-like quality. The reason Jesus asks—why do you call me good? Is because he wants to see if this man understands that Jesus has a special connection to God.

We know he does—he is the Good Shepherd—but this man seems to be flattering Jesus.

Jesus probes further—he says—you know what the commandments say:

Don’t murder anyone, even your enemy.
Don’t commit adultery with another man’s wife.
Don’t steal something that doesn’t belong to you.
Don’t lie about others anyone else.
Don’t cheat in your business dealings.
Take care of your parents.

And before Jesus could even ask a question, this rich young ruler said,

“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

I’ve done all that you have said. But yet, this man is still on his knees before Jesus asking if he has done enough to earn eternal life.

Look at Jesus’ response,

²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him....”

He does not reproach him. This young man was not like the Pharisees puffed up and offended at Jesus. This man was genuinely asking. He was seeking. Jesus does not say—you haven’t done those things—Jesus looked at him and loved him.

And then says the most loving thing he could have said,

“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.

With that, Jesus put his finger on the man’s god, his many possessions. Does this mean that to really follow Jesus and to be a faithful follower that you have to sell all you have and give to the poor?

No.

What does it mean?

The young man asked the almost right question—he asked—what must 'I' do to inherit eternal life. He came to Jesus focused on himself. This young man thought he had the ability to gain entrance into the kingdom of God and inherit eternal life—he just needed to know the secret.

What he does not know is that he needs something much more than just a secret or a roadmap.

You see, humanity from all times, places cultures and nations have universally assumed that entrance into the kingdom of God is a result of certain actions.

What must I do?

But that is the almost right question.

And when Jesus answered this man, you must give up all that you think makes you, you. You need a complete identity change. You are going to need a complete orientation and redefine who you are. You think you are a rich, young, moral ruler.

Instead you need to be my follower.

The rich man could not see himself as anything other than a rich man. Because you see, if he sold all had he would have been saying with his actions that Jesus is enough of a treasure.

But he couldn't. Not yet.

The man who asked the *almost* right question put his head down, disheartened and walked away.

All eyes had to be on Jesus now. He had just sent away a potentially influential and significant follower.

All eyes were on Jesus after the man who asked the almost right question away—

So he makes

2. *An Announcement (Mark 10:23-25)*

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

As the rich man walked away Jesus looked around and pronounced—It is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.

They were amazed.

What? They were befuddled. At this point they must have been shaking their heads in amazement. They, the closest followers of Jesus had not the least idea of how to inherit eternal life or enter the kingdom of God.

They would have said to the rich young ruler, join us. You are perfect. You are moral. You are influential. You are high class.

But we have seen that the disciples throughout Mark are not very good at identifying people fit for the kingdom of God.

- They stop a man casting out demons because he wasn't in their group.
- They shoo away children because Jesus had more important things to do.

And they would have welcomed this man.

Again we see that they don't know what Jesus is doing or what he is about.

What seemed amazing became astonishing in verse 24,

“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

There are all sorts of clever ways that people try and explain away the camel through the eye of needle. Some say—the word for camel and rope is very similar in Hebrew.

That's no good. It is still impossible to thread rope through the eye of a needle.

Others say that there was a short tunnel that led into Jerusalem called the eye of the needle. To get a camel through you had to get the camel to walk on its knees.

Hard, but possible. No.

What is the idea here?

We might even modernize this a bit by saying—

It is easier for an aircraft carrier to go through that door. Or It is easier for a Ford F-150 to fit in your pocket than for a rich person to get into the kingdom of heaven.

What is the point?

It is impossible to gain access to the kingdom of God and further it is really hard for the wealthy. People who have more than they need do not often see their need for Christ.

Money numbs and anesthetizes to real, spiritual need. Money gives illusion of power, authority, control and security. When you have all that you could ever need you aren't going to need Jesus.

But that is not quite true—right? This man came to Jesus and asked what he could do? He must have had the sense that even though he had more than he needed he was lacking something he couldn't put his finger on.

Jesus essentially told him that he needed a complete identity overhaul.

But the disciples realized that Jesus was saying something bigger than just describing the difficulty for rich people to enter the kingdom.

They pick it up right away.

We've heard:

The Almost Right Question
An Announcement

And finally—

3. The Right Question (Mark 10:26-31)

²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Did you hear the question?

‘Then who can be saved?’ The disciples for all their hard-headedness understood that Jesus was saying no one can enter the kingdom on their own.

They were exceedingly astonished. They were bothered, agitated and otherwise panicked. And finally they asked the right question.

If this man can’t enter the kingdom—then who can?

Exactly.

That is the point that Jesus has been looking to get to the whole time. He is saying—you salvation is about you—you think you can save yourself.

You cannot.

Remember who is saved? Those that are like children—helpless like children are the ones who can be saved.

The young ruler represents the best of humanity’s ability.

He lived a general life of obedience.
He was moral and fair in the community.
He was a man of his word.
He was above reproach.
He was respected.

And yet he could not enter.

What does this tell us?

- Our best is not good enough.

The good deeds of this man—as good as they were did not suffice. He was comparing himself with others but in the kingdom of God—you must compare yourself with God.

God is good.

To be in his kingdom you must be entirely good.

Good in action.

Good in deed.

Good in thought.

Good in speech.

Good in motive.

Good, good, good, good.

But no one is good, not even when they do many good things like this rich young ruler.

As we saw last week we must become like children to enter the kingdom of God. Helpless and willing to receive.

- Salvation is impossible without Jesus.

“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

With man it is impossible—but not with God.

That is a summary of why Jesus came to earth.

No man could possibly reach to God. Impossible.
No man could enter the kingdom of God. Impossible.
No man could inherit eternal life. Impossible

But God become man to make the impossible possible.

While it is true that no man could reach to God—God could and would reach to man.

While it is true that no man could enter the kingdom of God—God could enter the kingdom of man.

While it is true that no man could inherit eternal life—God could grant eternal life through his crucified son.

What is impossible for us—is possible for in God.

The rich young ruler was unwilling to change his identity and give up all he had and therefore change who he was.

I'm sure that as he walked away the man was muttering to himself—how could that man really ask me to give up all of my money and possessions to follow him.

He has no idea what he is asking.

Doesn't he?

The rich young ruler who came to see Jesus that day did not realize that he was bowing before Jesus who was himself a rich, young ruler.

There are two rich young rulers in this story.

One came from Palestine—the other came from heaven.

One ruled over a synagogue—one ruled over the universe.

One was born into wealth—one was not born and had all wealth.

One had a great many possessions he refused to give up—one had a great many possessions and gave them all up.

One refused poverty—one embraced poverty.

One claimed to entirely obedient—one WAS completely obedient.

One wanted to save himself but could not—one gave his life to save others.

As the man walked away—he was the one who had no idea what the rich young ruler before him gave up. Jesus made himself nothing so that we might have everything.

Jesus walked away from heaven and equality with God to become a man. Born to die and died to live again. The one who had everything made himself nothing.

And he did it freely.

So when we see this passage we are reminded that we have nothing to offer and all to gain in Jesus.

Of course, Peter asks what everyone is thinking. We don't have very much but what about us? We left everything.

What about us?

We've given up all we have to follow you—what about us?

*“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,
30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*

Jesus knows very well that they have given up all they had to follow him.

And he promises you will not lack.

Think about it this way—how many people have been kicked out of their home because of their testimony of Christ to be welcomed into 100 more?

How many have been rejected by family—only to gain an entirely new family?

We've nothing to offer and all to gain.

What can we say?

We've nothing to offer and all to gain. None of us have a standing before God alone, but because a rich young ruler died and rose in our place we can inherit eternal life.

Beware—if you are not a follower of Jesus. I hope you are asking the right question and not the almost right question.

- Money and possessions can make us ask the almost right question and not the right question.

Not only that, the pursuit of money and possessions can blind you to the fact that you need Jesus. When you have all you think you need or when you think you will eventually earn all that you think you need you will be blind to your need in Jesus.

To follow Jesus means giving up our every claim of goodness—because we have none—and gaining all in Christ.

Don't let your money or the pursuit of your money make you hesitant to undergo an identity change.

It is good that you—

- Haven't murdered anyone
- Haven't cheated on your spouse
- Haven't stolen anything big
- Don't generally lie

- Don't generally cheat others
- Care about your parents

Those things are good but not good enough. You still need to hear the voice of Jesus—give up all and follow me.

You might be aware of all you are giving up—but you are gaining much, much more. You gain Christ and so you gain all—

“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Money and possessions can blind unbelievers to our need of Jesus—there is a numbing that can set in with Christians as well.

Even if we have asked the right question—we can forget all that we have is given us in Christ.

That we have inherited eternal life is an impossible miracle.

- We are his because he has made it so.
- We have eternal life because he has given it to us.
- We have hope because he has given it to us.
- We have a future because he has forgiven our good deeds.

- We have a future because he has forgiven our bad deeds too.

It can be so very easy to forget how amazing grace is. We throw the word grace around like water and use it without thinking much about what it means.

What does it mean that we have been given grace from Jesus?

It means we are the recipients of an impossible miracle. Grace is not some mystical heavenly stuff— grace is an impossible miracle from God through Christ for us.

It is no wonder John Newton wrote,

*Amazing Grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
T'was blind but now I see
T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear
And Grace, my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed
Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come.
T'was grace that brought us safe thus far
And grace will lead us home,
And grace will lead us home*

- Make sure you think about yourself rightly.

If you are here and a follower of Jesus, you are because of an impossible miracle. Each one of us were sinners but Jesus has welcomed us each to follow him.

It is an impossible miracle come true.

PRAY

