

Mark 10:17-27

Pentecost 21; October 10 & 11, 2021

I think that sometimes he has gotten a bad reputation. You would be proud to call him a brother. If you were the father of this son, you would be proud at what he all had accomplished in his young life. If he asked your daughter for a date, you would be okay with her dating him. What more could you ask from him? He was morally upright. He lived and breathed the 10 commandments. He was polite and respectful. You had never heard a hurtful word come out of his mouth. He was intelligent. He was hard working. He had already amassed a significant amount of wealth. Yet, even though he had done that, you never got the feeling that he thought any less of you if you did not have as much as he had. He was most likely only about 30 years old. Yet, he had been given the responsibility of being the ruler of the synagogue. He was given a position of some serious authority in the local synagogue. They would not just give that position to just anyone. For this position to be given to him at such a young age, it shows just how much people respected him. Some people have wanted to paint this man as being stuck up, of being arrogant. Yet, he wasn't.

Mark tells us: **“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?”** His question was real, it was genuine. Unlike the Pharisees who had approached Jesus to test him (as we heard last week), this man really was searching for the answer to that question. He runs up to Jesus and throws himself down on his knees and asks him that question: **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Even though he had a great reputation, even though he had worked hard, even though he tried to do the right thing in every aspect of his life, there was still something missing. He couldn't quite put his finger on it. He had heard that Jesus might have the answer. Maybe there was something that he still hadn't done to feel confident that he would have eternal life. He wants to know what that “something” was. Everything that he had done in his life until this point had been a result of what he had done. Why should this question be any different? *Tell me what I must do! How can I be right with God?*

He had done the best that he could do. Yet this is Jesus' answer to his question: **“What must I do.”** Jesus' answer is simple – perfection. **‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’** This man in our text is not trying to be arrogant. He is not bragging. He had done the best he could and really believes the answer he gives. **“Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.”** He looked at his life and he thought that he was a pretty good person. I think we look at ourselves and think that we are pretty good people. Most of us have not murdered someone, or stolen from someone, or intentionally commit adultery. If we compare ourselves to others, we come up with the same conclusion that we are pretty good people. We are at least close to where God wants us to be.

Jesus wanted this man to see that being “almost” or “close” isn't good enough when it comes to our salvation. So, Jesus gives him a test. Mark writes: **“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.”** The reason that Jesus asks him to do this is simple. Jesus could look into this man's heart, and he could see where his priorities were. For him, it was his wealth. For each of us, it might be something else. Maybe it might be our possessions. Or it might be our investments. Or our reputations among others. Or our career; our status; our leisure; a hobby; and that list could go on and on. And these are all good things just like all the things this man had done. Yet, they became a greater priority than Jesus. Even though there is nothing wrong with wealth or the many other blessings that God may give us, there was something that he loved just a little more than God. For him, this was just a little too much. **“At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”** He was asking the right question, but the answer that Jesus gave him wasn't the answer he was looking for. He wanted to be in control of his salvation, he couldn't just let Jesus do it all.

Of all the reactions that people had toward Jesus' message, it is not usually described as sadness. It was far more typical for people who encountered Jesus to be filled with hope, to leave everything and follow him. Of people would be angry, and wanted to pick up stones to kill him. People usually responded with the extremes. Marveling or mocking. Rejoicing or rejecting. Astonishment or anger. But why sadness?

Mark tells us why. He was sad because he had a lot of stuff. His refusal to let go of the things he held dear showed that he never had (and never would have) the salvation he was so much seeking. He was looking for the wrong thing. He was

asking the right question, but he was looking for the wrong answer. He wanted to be in control of his salvation, he couldn't just let Jesus do it all. Our human minds think that everything we get is by our doing. Here Jesus says that our salvation is not obtained by our doing but by Jesus' doing. The solution for obtaining salvation was right there in front of his eyes. He just couldn't believe it. Instead of being filled with hope, he walked away with sadness. The disciples caught what Jesus was trying to teach. They exclaimed to Jesus: **"Who then can be saved?"** Jesus gave them their answer: **"Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."**

Jesus wanted this man to see that even though the world might think of him as a *good* man, it wasn't good enough when it came to eternal life. But Jesus was and is for us. As Jesus is teaching these words, he is on the way to die on the cross. The death he was soon going to die on the cross would remove the *almost* from salvation. Jesus would do the impossible. He would make this world right with God again. He is there to comfort you with that same thought. May you and I find comfort that we have a Savior who forgives all our weaknesses. He does the impossible. He saves us when we can't save ourselves. It is Jesus who does make everything good for us. Amen.