

## One Man, One Question, One Way Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus leaves the scene of the blessing of the children where He instructs His disciples in the priority of the kingdom of God for their lives, he is approached by a man with a question. There is a good deal about this man, whose story we find here in Mark 10 and also in Matt 19 and Luke 18, that we should take note of. Many people today are asking a similar question. They may not phrase it in terms of “eternal life.” They may not use religious terms that are familiar to us, or they may use familiar terms in unfamiliar but they are looking for a connection with God. They are seeking meaning, purpose, a reason for their lives. They have a sense of wonder. They know that there are greater, grander, more powerful forces in the universe than themselves. They are pursuing various spiritualities and rituals practices, developing their own religions even, in order to connect with the “divine” on their own terms.

### GEN Z AND THE SPRINGTIDE STUDY

A recent study from the Springtide Research Institute revealed the spiritual habits of Gen Z (13-25 year olds). “Springtide’s survey showed that 51% of its sample population, aged 13-25, engage in “tarot cards or fortune telling.” Of that percentage, 17% practice daily, 25% once a week, 27% once a month and 31% less than once a month.”

One 16 year old responded to the survey with this insight: ““Our generation has already been distancing ourselves from a lot of institutions. The main three Abrahamic religions leave little to our own interpretation of Scripture. With tarot and other similar practices, “we’re open to interpret what we want to think (for) ourselves and make our own guidelines when it comes to spirituality, which is why I think a lot of young people resonate with it.”

The executive director of the Springtide Institute made this observation: “Gen Z is very curious and engaged with the world around them. Increasingly, their interests in spiritual and religious concerns explore spaces outside of traditional institutional boundaries.”

This is called religious unbundling and it is simply “the unpacking, merging, and embracing of various elements from different religious and spiritual practices.” Another respondent is quoted at the end of the article. His words provide a summary of the cultural understanding of spirituality addressed in the article. This 21 year old man writes, “Whether (it’s) a stone in your pocket or a pendant in your hand, there is something that gives you energy from within. If you believe that and you put your faith in whatever it is, it will get you where you want to go.”

We called “religious unbundling” syncretism back in the day, the mixing of various religious practices into one another creating a personalized, religious spirituality based on the participants personal choices, habits, interests, and goals. The story of the man who came to Jesus reminds us there really is nothing new under the sun. **People are always looking for ways to connect with God on their own terms.** Let’s take a look at this man and see how this is true and why Jesus’ response to Him is as relevant today as it ever was.

## ONE MAN

### The Rich Young Ruler

Mark tells us the petitioner is a man, Matthew tells us he was young, Luke tells us he was a civic leader, a ruler, a judge. They all tell us he was extremely wealthy. But there is more to this rich young ruler that we can glean from the record.

### Other Evidence

#### Polite, Genuine, Authentic

We find first of all, that he is polite and respects recognized authority. This man, young, wealthy, and powerful comes to Jesus and kneels. He gets down on his hands and knees and bows his head before Jesus. This is not the position of arrogant authority but of vulnerable submission. Unlike the Pharisees that have come before, he is not here to pick a fight with Jesus. The posture he takes is one of student before teacher, supplicant before judge.

Not only does he approach Jesus with a physical posture of respect, he addresses Jesus in a most unusual manner, that probably speaks volumes to the esteem with which He held Jesus. The man addresses Jesus as “Good Teacher.” No where else in the book of Mark is the word “good” used of a person. This was not a typical greeting, and Jesus explores the young man’s motive in his response. Jesus asks, “Why do you call me good? There is none good but God.” The apostle Paul reflects on this same understanding when in Romans 3 he quotes Psalm 14:1-3,

**Romans 3:10-12 (ESV) <sup>10</sup> as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”**

It may be that Jesus is attempting to draw out an explanation from the young man, a confession of faith that if God is the only one that is good, and the man calls Jesus good, is he confessing that Jesus is God?

We never find out why the rich young ruler called Jesus “good,” but we do come away with the sense that his question and demeanor are genuine. He is not out to trap Jesus nor is he an antagonistic heckler out to make Jesus’ life more miserable. He is polite, curious, and respects recognized authority. He seems to really want from Jesus an answer to his question.

Let me add here another piece of evidence that this rich young ruler’s appearance and question are genuine. Jesus points him to God’s word, to the Law, to the ten commandments, and questions him about his compliance with the last six commandments. The young man replies that he has diligently observed these commandments from his youth, suggesting that he perceives himself as innocent of any law breaking relative to these commands.

Verse 21 tells us that Jesus looked at him. This “looking” was an intense scrutiny. Now, this young man is a ruler of the people, acquainted with “looking”. He is a judge, one who makes judicial decision, one who decides the moral value and appropriateness of human behavioral choices. This is a man who has become wealthy at a young age in a career that involves “looking” at people, scrutinizing them and the evidence they present in order to determine the

truth. And now, here he is, kneeling at the feet of Jesus being looked at, judged, scrutinized by the Son of God who will in this moment determine from the evidence presented the truth about the man.

When Jesus looks at a man, He sees that man with the eyes of God. He sees God's holiness and man's sinfulness. The Bible reveals that though humans look at outward appearances and make decisions based on what we see with physical eyes, God looks with spiritual eyes upon the inner man, the heart. God sees what is true in us and true of us. The Bible tells us that nothing is hidden from God. God sees both what is and what is possible. There are no mysteries in the scrutiny of God.

Jesus looks intently at the rich young ruler and loves him. Jesus' response is a clue to the man's heart. Jesus does not find an adversary but one easy to love. His response to the young man supports the conclusion of the rich young ruler's genuine authenticity.

### **Moral, Religious, Ambitious**

We also find out from this exchange with Jesus that the rich young ruler is a moral and religious man. He knows the ten commandments. He has observed the commandments. It is a little interesting to me that when Jesus names the commandments that focus on our treatment of people, the young man doesn't say something like, "Yes, Teacher, I have observed those commandments and the four about God as well." But, we do know that as a lifestyle practice, he has diligently observed and kept the commandments.

In our cultural terms, we would call this kind of person a good person. They don't lie, cheat, steal, sleep around. They haven't killed anyone or broken the law in any significant manner. They have kept to the religious tradition in which they were trained and have accomplished a measure of success in both the religious life, their social life, and their professional life. We might consider him as someone who has everything going for him, a real achiever, a rising star.

He also demonstrates a measure of valuable ambition. He seems to have everything anyone could want: wealth, youth, health, social status, religious integrity. He has all the trappings of God's blessings. He is living his best life now. He would certainly make a prosperity preacher proud. And yet, he wants more. Look at the question he asks Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

He wants eternal life. He wants to know what else he has to do to get it. He wants to know if he has left anything out. It appears that all his other efforts at success have been fruitful and he has achieved God's covenantal blessings, but he wants more. That is ambition, to have worked hard, gained everything you can gain from hard work and good luck, and yet want more. It is good ambition because what he wants is not more of this world, but more of the world to come, more of what comes to those who are fit for the kingdom of God. It is always a good ambition to want more of God and more of His kingdom.

So here we have a rich young ruler who is confident in his religious and moral integrity and is now expressing spiritual ambition to Jesus. He wants to know, in addition to all he has already

done in life, if there is anything more he needs to do to gain eternal life.

Can you hear the echo of our own culture in this man? “I’ve been good, look see how successful I am. I haven’t hurt anybody. Surely I’ll go to heaven just because I was born and I’ve been nice. I’m spiritual. I do spiritual things. What else is there? What else could I possibly need to do? Of course, God will let me in.”

### Lacking

Jesus looks at this rich, young ruler who seems to have it all and have done everything right, loves him and says to him, “You lack one thing.” Now, let me tell you something about this word “lack.” It’s not an odd word to translate into English, but the form of the word is a challenge. Typically the word is used the way we see it translated, “you lack something,” which means that in some way there is a deficiency in the person being addressed. You could say to a blind man, “You lack the ability to see.” We would understand that the deficiency resides in the person to whom we are speaking. If we said to a poor person, “You lack the funds to purchase this mansion,” we would understand they failed to have the resources necessary to accomplish the task, right?

But Jesus doesn’t use that form of the word. Instead, he uses a form that suggests not that the rich young ruler lacks something in himself, but that something the man relied on has failed him. The deficiency is not in the man’s character but in the effectiveness of his efforts. All his own personal efforts to keep the Law and gain God’s temporal and eternal blessing, in spite of his worldly success, have failed to gain for him the one thing that he truly wants, eternal life. If he truly wants eternal life there is something else, something utterly and completely different he must do, because everything he has done so far has failed him.

And let’s be clear. It is the nature of his efforts to fail him. The other day I decided to make a cake and frost it with a whipped cream frosting. I added one cup of heavy whipping cream and one half cup of powdered sugar to the mixing bowl. I added a couple tablespoons of lemon curd to the bowl along with the cream and sugar, and then, just for an added bang, I added a quarter teaspoon of straight lemon extract. The nature of that mixture was doomed to fail no matter how much effort I put into whipping it. The alcohol in the lemon extract was never going to let the cream set with only that amount of sugar.

All my efforts were doomed because it was the nature of my efforts to fail. All the rich young rulers efforts to gain eternal life through good works were doomed by nature to fail him. This is what Jesus points out.

**In order to gain eternal life, he must divest himself of the world and follow Jesus.** In order to gain eternal life, he must give up the notion that being good will get him into heaven. He has to abandon the fallacy that worldly wealth is a sign of spiritual success. He has to give it all up and put his faith in Jesus and become a totally reliant disciple utterly dependent on Jesus for everything, including eternal life. One man asks one question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” and finds out there is only one way: follow Jesus.

Jesus said to the rich, young, polite, respectful, moral, religious, ambitious, basically good in every way judge,

*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.”*

## COME, FOLLOW ME

### Follow Me

What does it mean to follow Jesus? For Peter and James and John it meant get out of the boat, leave everything behind, and give Jesus your undivided attention for the rest of your life. For Matthew it meant abandoning a lucrative career in tax collecting. For Paul it meant an utter change of heart and values and understanding of the world and his place in it. For the rich young ruler it meant a complete, unequivocal transformation of life and lifestyle. He spent his life living for what he could gain and now he faces living his life losing all in order to gain everything.

Following Jesus always means loss in order to gain. Jesus said,

**Luke 14:26-27 (ESV)** <sup>26</sup> *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”* <sup>27</sup> *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

And again he said,

**Luke 14:33 (ESV)** *So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*

And still again he said,

**Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV)** *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Jesus makes no request to be a part of your life. He insists on being all your life. The answer to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” is simple: follow Jesus.

But why? Why must we follow Jesus in order to gain eternal life? Why does Jesus set this stipulation before us?

**Jesus Christ, the God-man, fully God and fully man, the Son of God, God come in human form is God’s means of salvation, of peace with God for lost and sinful man.** The Bible tells us that every human being born on the planet sins by nature and by choice. Created to worship and love God, by nature we turn away from Him to our own self interest, our own self-reliance. Like the young person I mentioned earlier, we live our lives attempting “to interpret what we

want to think (for) ourselves and make our own guidelines when it comes to spirituality,” which is the classic definition of sin. When God our Creator sets forth the guidelines for relationship with Him and we dismiss Him in search of relationship on our terms instead of His, that is the nature of sin.

And with sin comes judgment, condemnation, justice, and punishment. The Bible is clear. Not only is every human a sinner in the eyes of God, we are all subject to His righteous judgment. The Bible declares that the soul that sins will die. Paul wrote that the wages of sin is death. And because we are sinners by nature and by choice, there is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We need someone perfect, someone sinless to accomplish the life before God we were created to live, and to take on himself the justice our sins deserve. We need a savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived without sin and offered Himself as the innocent substitute for us. Paul tells us He took our sins in His body and offered His body to death on the cross on our behalf. He suffered for us so that we might live in Him, now and forever. We must follow Jesus because there is no other way into eternal life than through Him, through His holy, perfect life and atoning, substitutionary death on the cross. He truly is as He says He is, “The way, the truth, and the life.”

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Give up everything and follow Jesus. One question, one way. But here is a more difficult question to answer: “How will you respond to Jesus’ call to leave all and follow Him?”

### **Disappointed, Disheartened, Distanced**

Mark tells us the rich young ruler departed his engagement with Jesus disheartened. He must have thought that given all he had gained in the world through his careful keeping of the Law that he was “in like Flynn.” It seems that even though his question was sincere, his expectation was flawed. Perhaps he expected Jesus to be impressed and affirming. That may very well have been the support he got from the Pharisees who likely surrounded him on a daily basis. But Jesus is given to telling us what we need to hear and not what we want to hear. Apparently this man was looking for the praise of men but heard the call of God . . . and his response was disappointment.

He was disheartened by God’s truth on the lips of Jesus and responded by putting distance between himself and Jesus. He went away sad for he was extremely wealthy. He was extremely self-reliant and self-satisfied and self-sustaining. He was successful at taking care of himself for himself. He would not surrender and follow Jesus. He went away. He went away.

### **The Call for Us**

How difficult it is, says Jesus, for the exceedingly wealthy to enter the kingdom. We will look more closely at Jesus’ response to the young man’s departure and the disciples response to Jesus next week, but I want to ask you to about your response to Jesus as we close this morning.

What are you trusting to get you into heaven when you die? Are you trusting your good works? They will fail you. Are you trusting your church attendance? By itself, it will leave you wanting. Are you trusting the offerings you make? You still lack something. Are you trusting your

personal efforts and thinking that the stuff of this world is evidence of your security in the next? You're headed for a let down.

Take a lesson from Jesus, **there is only one way into the kingdom of God and eternal life, and Jesus is the way.** Eternal life is not for everyone. It is only for those who follow Jesus, who put their faith in Him and entrust their lives to Him. All other efforts will let you down. All self-effort will fail you. Trusting in Christ and in Christ alone is the sole entry into the kingdom and eternal life. So put your faith in Him.