

**“How Badly Do You Want It?”**  
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February 25, 2018

Mark 10:13-27

<sup>13</sup> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. <sup>14</sup> But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>15</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” <sup>16</sup> And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

<sup>17</sup> As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” <sup>20</sup> He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” <sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

<sup>23</sup> Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup> And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

Did you know that in Jesus’ time, children were considered possessions? They actually belonged to their fathers? Maybe you did; after all, women were possessions as well. Fathers decided whether their offspring would be accepted into the family. Even adult children were dependent upon their fathers for their status, their inheritance, and in many cases, even their lives.

Knowing the 1<sup>st</sup> century context helps. I have no doubt Jesus enjoyed the children’s company as a break from the stress of what he knew was waiting for him in Jerusalem. But from Jesus’ or Mark’s perspective, his comment was not about childlike innocence. He was explaining to his listeners that a disciple has to accept being radically dependent on God’s grace. Just like children of that time depended on their fathers for their wellbeing – we need to embrace being completely and profoundly dependent on God.

Jesus illustrated his point with some of the non-persons of his day. (Today, he might have referred to undocumented immigrants.) You know how it is for them, he was saying. This is how much you have to depend on God – for everything in your life.

In a nation founded on independence, willingly allow ourselves to be dependent with every fiber of our being – heart, soul, mind, and strength – is a radical idea. Of course, this doesn’t mean we expect God to supply our every need. I don’t set an empty plate on the table and wait for God to magically fill it so I can eat. I expect to buy the food and prepare it. I’ll have to wash my own laundry and write my own sermons. Yet, as long as we are open to God and the more we open ourselves to God’s intention, the more fully God will direct our days and the more completely we lean on God.

So... A man ran up to Jesus and threw himself on the ground in front of him. “Good teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?” This man was clearly swept up in emotion. So Jesus offered a reality check to help the man know what he was asking.

Probably he had been swept up by Jesus the rabbi. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, it was common for people to attach themselves to charismatic leaders. That can happen in churches today. Jesus was surely charismatic. He would have drawn the curious and the hopeful. Men would have come, hoping to join his entourage. But Jesus was secure enough in his relationship with God that he would have said, “It’s not about me.” He would have pointed to God.

We too can get swept up in one thing or another, sometimes it’s our children or our other affections. Sometimes it’s our jobs, hobbies or retirement plans. It could be our attitudes or assumptions or it could simply be our stuff. Anything can keep us from depending on God. Jesus

would have known this so he directed the conversation in a way that could help this person to see it as well. “You know the law... Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honor your father and mother.”

“But, I’ve always done this!”

Jesus loved this man, loved his passion, loved his eagerness and loved what he knew this man could be if only he’d... So he told him, You’re lacking only one thing.

This stopped the would-be follower short. Is it really only that he had a lot of stuff and he didn’t want to part with it? What if there’s more to it?

A few places throughout the church, there are copies of a little book called, *Three Simple Rules*. UM Bishop Rueben Job wrote it to help people understand and embrace part of our Methodist heritage. When the Methodist movement was getting started nearly 300 years ago, John Wesley wrote The General Rules to help people work in small groups on their walk with Christ. It’s three rules really. Stated briefly, they’re, Do no harm, Do good, and, Practice the disciplines that will keep drawing you closer to God.

This man had kept the commandments – all his life. He had “done no harm.” He was respectable in every sense of the word. People would have trusted him. I have a friend; I’ll call her Betty. We were talking once about how we live a Godly life and she said, “I’ve always tried to live by the 10 Commandments. I figured if I did that I was saved.”

Betty was a good person. But her understanding has two holes in it. One is that not doing wrong things isn’t enough. The other is that nothing we do on our own will ever guarantee us a place in paradise. Only by God’s grace does this ever happen. In love God chooses to welcome each of us. We cannot earn that love and we cannot work our way into God’s kin-dom.

Speaking of which, you may have noticed that I use the word kin-dom instead of kingdom. Let me explain. The bible was written mostly by men who saw things from their male-dominated perspective. Today we realize that while God has qualities we find in males, God is not male. Neither is God female. When God created us, as it’s described in Genesis, God created humankind male and female, in God’s image.

Kingdom language is patriarchal. Even more so, it comes with baggage about human rulers, colonization and oppression. I love that God is my Lord and I try to keep God at the center my life, but in an effort to include people for whom this language is a barrier, I use the word kin-dom. Kin is an old word for family. We are all sisters and brothers with Christ, all children of God, all kin.

Enough said. Getting back to our text, Jesus realized what this upright man hadn’t figured out, and his challenge gets to the heart of Christianity. Jesus appealed to him to take his practice a step further. He wanted to pull the man out of his comfortable, settled existence and into the adventure of truly following. For while respectability – not doing the wrong things – is good, it’s not enough. Not for him. Not for Betty. Not for any of us. Respectability is not discipleship. Discipleship is doing things for the right reasons.

On some level, we know this but we have such a difficult time living it. Why is that? I believe it comes down to trust, to our willingness to be dependent on God. Many people have observed that the most faith-filled folks they’ve met are ones who have almost nothing. We may look at them and feel badly for them. Their dishes are chipped. Their clothes are few and basic. They ride bicycles instead of drive. They can barely feed their families. That’s what we think. Yet some of these people are more generous and more joy-filled that we’ll ever be. They depend on God because they have to. We have so much we can count on in our lives that we can depend on God as much as we are comfortable with. We’re like the man in today’s text.

A chicken and a pig were walking past a rural church and saw a sign, “Eggs & Bacon Breakfast, March 4<sup>th</sup>.” The chicken said, oh, what a great idea. The pig replied, you would think so. For you, it’s involvement. I’d be committed.

The man who came to see Jesus wanted involvement, and in honesty that’s what some of us want as well. But Christ demands commitment. When we trust in ourselves, in our own power and our own possessions, we are not trusting God. To trust God we first need to surrender.

When I was discerning God’s call in my life, I had to practice this level of trusting. It was rather like stepping onto an invisible bridge. I had no idea what was out there. Nothing was clear. I knew I was safe where I was but I also knew I was being let to step out. But into what? I could see nothing ahead. Yet still I felt led to step out. It wasn’t pleasant, at least not at first, but I did

it. And each time I took a step something was there. I never fell flat. I never disappeared into space. I'm not saying it was easy. It wasn't. But God was with me each step of the way, guiding and supporting.

This is what God wants from each of us – total yielding to God's intent. Until we give ourselves up to God, we'll never have our real self. God knows this and wants us to be our best selves. It's not about building God up. It's about allowing God to build us up. Jesus was hoping for this when he challenged the man in our story. Instead he turned away, content to be respectable.

Don't you be content without surrendering yourself to God. Give yourself to God – again and again – trusting that God can do all things. Step out onto that invisible bridge, trusting that God will support and guide you. Trusting that there is more to you than you know and that God is eager to draw that out.

Amen.