

Right Question. Right Answer. Wrong Response.

The Gospel of Mark Part 2

Mark 10:17-27

“Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place.

Happy Father's Day to my fellow fathers gathered here in this wonderful assembly of the Lord and listening online. Father's Day is one of my favorite days of the year. For on this day every year, my wife and children give me one of the greatest gifts a father can receive. It's not flowers because they know I don't need them. It's not the gift of going to a fancy restaurant because they know that's not really my thing. Instead, it's the gift of being allowed to eat a tomato sandwich for lunch while simultaneously lying on couch and watching golf on television all the way until the evening without interruption. My father has the blessed gift of wisdom, one having been developed from over 70 years of living. But I've learned in my life not to go to him to seek affirmation for what I hope and want to be true. Because if what I hope and want to be true is not true, my father, in his wisdom, doesn't mind telling me that what I want to be true is, in fact, not true at all. When that happens, I have a decision to make. Will I (a) take my Father at His Word and realign my thinking in light of the truth? Or (b) will I reject it and look for affirmation of what I hope and want to be true from another source? We often approach our Father in heaven the same way, don't we? We believe something to be true and approach His throne looking for affirmation. When he points us to a particular section in the Word of God that tells us what we want to be true is, in fact, not true, we have a decision to make: (a) Will we believe and submit to the Word of God? Or will we (b) continue living by our own standards.

In the passage before us today, you are going to see a man who had a similar decision to make. He went to Jesus to seek his wisdom about an important question that was on his heart: “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.” What he hoped and wanted to be true is that eternal life comes via living out the 10 Commandments. But what he hoped to be true wasn't true at all. Consequently, Jesus gave him an answer he didn't like very much: “One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” As a result, this man, who we know from Matthew and Luke as the Rich Young Ruler, had a choice to make. Would he (a) believe Jesus and do what he asked of him? Or would he (b) reject Him and continue living in light of what he hoped and wanted to be true? He asked the right question. He got the right answers to his question. But sadly, and tragically, he responded to Jesus' answer in the wrong way. Right questions. Right answers. Wrong responses. I want to suggest to you this morning that our relationship with God often follows the same dangerous format. We ask the right questions to Jesus. We get the right answers from him. But because we don't like his answers, we reject them and go back to living by our own standards. Yes, church, the problem with the Rich Young Ruler and the People of God is not in asking the right question. It's in making the wrong response. To demonstrate what I mean; I point you Mark 10:17-27. You are going to see in this text what (1) the Rich Young Ruler got right (and what we often get right); (2) What he got wrong (and what we often get wrong); (3) What the disciples needed to learn from his example (and what we need to learn from his example); and (4) What we need to learn from God.

¹⁷As 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?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘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.’” ²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” ²¹Jesus 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.” ²²At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth. ²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It 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.” ²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

1. What the Rich Young Ruler Got Right

- **Maze Puzzles for Kids:** (1) When I was a child, I loved to do maze puzzles. The goal was to start at one end of the puzzle and draw a line to the other end without getting blocked out by a wall made from black lines and having to start all over. (2) I always seemed to start well. But I would inevitably hit the wall and be forced to start over once again. (2) The Rich Young Ruler got one thing right: he started well. He entered the maze desiring desperately to move his pencil to the finish line without hitting a black line.
- **Came to the Right Person (17)** — Mark tells us the man “ran up to him.” In Jesus' day, men didn't “run” up to anyone in public. Doing so would require the lifting of the tunic, thereby exposing one's legs. But this man did. It was a question on his heart, and he didn't mind being “shamed” in public from others to encounter Jesus.
- **Sought the Right Wisdom (17)** — Eternal life was on his mind. The phrase “eternal life” denotes the idea of “life in the world to come.” He wanted to be sure he was going to heaven when he died.
- **Received the Right Answers (18; 21)** — (1) In our Christian culture, if someone is desperate enough to encounter Jesus and ask about eternal life, we would immediately walk them through John 3:16 or lead them through the Sinner's Prayer. Jesus doesn't do that in his answers: (a) Why do you call me good? Jesus asked this because this man assumed he was good himself. Paul says, “there is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10). (b)

“Go sell everything you have and give to the poor.” Jesus’ response here is personal relative to what this man treasured. For this man, who valued his wealth above everything, the call was to surrender the wealth to follow Jesus. Jesus called him to replace earthly treasures for eternal ones.

- **App:** He entered the maze running to the finish. But the type of soil in his heart was thorny. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful (Mt 13:22)

2. What the Rich Young Ruler Got Wrong

- **Wrong Responses to Everyday Conversations:** (1) Have you ever responded to what someone says in the wrong way out of habit? I have and it is quite embarrassing. (2) You go to Walmart to buy a lawn chair. After you pay and just before you are on your way, the polite cashier says: “thank you for shopping at Walmart.” After which, you respond, “you too.” Then the cashier looks at you funny and you high tail it out of there. Why did the cashier look at you funny and why did you feel inclined to high tail it out of there. You responded in a wrong, embarrassing way. (3) When the Rich Young Ruler didn’t like Jesus’ answer, he responded in the wrong way and quickly exited stage left from the Bible never to be heard from again. Why? The text tells us what he got wrong.
- **Had the Wrong Assumptions about Himself (17)** – “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Do” means “accomplish, perform, or to carry out.” He thought it was possible in and of himself to make eternal life happen. This “doing” assumption is very important because it sets up everything that follows: (a) what he has already done (followed the commandments); (b) what Jesus tells him to do (sell everything); and the impossibility of doing something to inherit eternal life as a rich man according to Jesus (easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle).
- **That Led to the Wrong Evaluation of Himself (19-20)** – Jesus sets him up here. You get the sense that he’s very proud of his self-perceived moral goodness (all these I have kept since I was a boy). He thought he had kept the entirety of the Law and met the standard. Yet, Jesus has just told him “No one is good except God alone.”
- **That Led to the Wrong Response to Jesus’ Instructions (22)** – “Go sell...and follow me.” This man countenance changes, and he walks away because he’s not willing to respond in obedience to the answer he receives. The cost of discipleship was too high.
- **App** – The contrast in the text is the contrast in our hearts. He runs to Jesus to get his question answered. Then walks away sad and goes back to doing his own thing when he doesn’t like what he hears. Right question. Wrong response. The right response is to do what he says. The question for you is: If Jesus told you to sell everything/give everything away, would you?

3. What the Disciples Needed to Learn from His Example

- **Never Let an Opportunity to Teach Your Children Go to Waste:** (1) I’m convinced that one part of good parenting is never letting an opportunity to teach your children go to waste. (2) We live near the corner of 66th Ave. They are about to start driving. I don’t ever want them to turn left on 66th. We got behind a car a couple of days ago trying to turn left. For what seemed like 30 minutes later he was still trying to turn left. (3) My kids had done nothing wrong. They were quiet, which is rare. But I still made sure to tell them: “that’s why you don’t try to turn left on 66th Ave.” (4) The disciples played no part in the Rich Young Ruler narrative. But Jesus seized the opportunity and told them what they needed to learn from his story.
- **Lesson One: It’s Hard for the Rich to Enter the Kingdom (23):** Jesus seized the opportunity: “how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom.” That’s an emphatic statement in the language of the NT: “Oh, how, exceedingly, exceedingly hard.” What does Jesus mean? Entering the Kingdom requires full dependence on God and that is something that is especially difficult for those like all of us who have much in this world to do.
- **Lesson Two: It’s Really Really Really Hard for the Rich to Enter the Kingdom (24-25):** So important was this issue for Jesus that his address changes (children) as does his imagery (easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle). A camel was the largest animal in Israel. A needle was the smallest material thing they had. It’s meant by Jesus to show the impossibility of entering the kingdom by merit.
- **App:** While it’s hard, it’s not impossible. There were many wealthy people who supported Jesus in his ministry: Zacchaeus, Matthew, Barnabas, Lydia, Aquila and Priscilla, Gaius, and Philemon. The difference between these individuals and the Rich Young Ruler is that they treasured the Gospel more than their treasures. And it was demonstrated by their generosity. That’s the issue.

4. What We Need to Learn from God

- **With God, All Things Are Possible:** (1) If you search the Bible, you’ll learn very quickly that God makes the extraordinary and miraculous look rather ordinary. (2) In Numbers, he inspired a donkey to tell Balaam to stop whipping him. (3) In Joshua, he made the sun stand still. (4) In 1 Kings, he made sure through the ministry of Elijah that a widow had a never-ending jar of flour and a never-ending jar of oil. (5) In Matthew, he made the earth shake, rocks split apart, the tombs open, and caused the bodies of many godly men and women to be raised from the dead and appear to many people. (6) None of us have the capacity to perform these miracles. But with God, all things are possible. (7) It may be impossible for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom on their own merit, but it isn’t impossible for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom altogether. For with Jesus, all things are possible.
- **An Honest Question (26):** The disciples move away from the rich man and focus on mankind in general: “who then can be saved?” It’s their way of saying: Are any of us able to trust fully enough, to get low enough, to come humbly enough?
- **An Honest Answer (27):** Jesus’ answer is “no,” not by your effort. But God can. It’s not impossible for him.
- **App:** It is possible for God to give us new hearts and trust him fully. It is possible for him to take a heart that loves the world and the things of the world and change it to love the most important treasures of all: the treasures of heaven. Amen.