

April 28, 2019

## Mark 10:17-31

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Gospel of Mark is thought to be the earliest, first written account of the life of Jesus. It's the simplest in terms of language and vocabulary, pointing not to a lack of education, but to a lesser level of theological reflection that that we see in John's gospel, which was most likely written years later after much more time for theological reflection, church development, and philosophical interpretation of the words of Jesus.

to inherit *eternal* life: This image is related to Old Testament and Jewish texts in which Abraham and his descendants are promised the land of Canaan as an inheritance (Genesis 15:7; Exodus 32:13; Joshua 13:7). In some later traditions, this promise is broadened into one inheriting the whole earth (Siriach 44:21, Jubilees 22:14| Romans 4:13) partly because of the Greek [ge] and Hebrew [ertez] words which both can mean either "land" or "earth." But the disappointment of such hopes on the worldly level led to their transposition into an eschatological key and the frequent substitution of "eternal life" and related phrases for an earthly inheritance. (notes from *Mark*, by Joel Marcus)

*You shall not defraud*: Jesus quotes the second table of the Decalogue, which governs relations among human beings (commandments 6-10 according to the usual count). Jesus then tacks on a reference to the fifth commandment so that the order of the commandments cited in our passage is 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 5. The verbs in Mark's rendering of the the Decalogue (10 Commandments) basically follows that of the LXX (The Septuagint - The Old Testament in Greek). The one striking exception is the 10th commandment where Mark writes "Do not Defraud" [ΑΠΟΨΤΕΡΕΙΝ] instead of "You shall not covet". The paraphrase is in line with the interpretation of the 10th commandment in certain Jewish traditions, in which it forgives not only craving for others' possessions but also usurping them. This makes the 10th commandment similar in meaning to the 8th ("You shall not steal"), but the latter may have originally referred to kidnapping rather than robbery in general. Why does Mark rephrase this commandment rather than render it literally? The basic meaning of ΑΠΟΨΤΕΡΕΙΝ is "to take away illegitimately"; the word is often used in contexts suggestive of social oppression, especially keeping back a hireling's wages (see for example Deuteronomy 24:4; Malachi 3:5). This and similar types of exploitation frequently characterized the landed aristocracy in first-century Palestine, and our passage may wish to link the wealthy man with this group and their practices. (notes from *Mark*, Joel Marcus, The Anchor Bible Series. pp. 721-22)

*loved him*: This verb is frequently used for a father's love of his son in Genesis. See for example Genesis 22:2; 25:28; 37:3; 44:20

<sup>17</sup> As [Jesus] 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.”

<sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of **the good news**, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come *eternal* life. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

#### QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What shimmers in your attention as you hear this reading?**
- **What keeps the man from joining the community of those walking with Jesus – when he so obviously wants to be part of what they’re doing?**
- **With whom do you identify in the story? How?**
- **Is Jesus saying that faith is impossible or that such a radical step of trust is possible for human beings? How are the disciples different than the unnamed man?**
- **What invitation for living and acting do you hear in this text today?**

*sell what you own, and give the money to the poor:* In Luke 19:8 it is considered to be a sign of extraordinary piety when a rich man repents and gives away half of his goods. Jesus’ call to the man in our story to give away everything, then, goes beyond what is elsewhere expected of penitents. This more radical demand may have something to do with the man’s prior mistreatment of or apathy toward the poor.

**HE WAS SHOCKED AND WENT AWAY GRIEVING:** the word translated as “shocked” also means “indignant”. The root verb from which it comes means “to hate” and can have an implication not only of sorrow, as in “his countenance fell”; but also of resentment such as in Daniel 2:12 – “Because of this the king Nebuchadnezzar] flew into a **violent rage** and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.”

**Possessions:** the Greek word used here “Ktemata” can mean possessions in general, but often connotes landed property in particular, see for example Acts 5:1 & 3. If Mark’s comment pointed towards “properties”, describing the reluctant to follow man as “one who had great estates” ...then the nuance is that Jesus asks a landowner to stop exploiting his workers and instead to become their benefactor. An invitation he refuses to undertake.

**wealth:** χρήματα (chrēmata) in Greek from the word χρήμα meaning “a thing that one uses or needs” – it thus can be land, money, objects....conveying the idea of riches or wealth.

**THE KINGDOM OF GOD:** the word Kingdom (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΑ) in Greek means kingdom, empire, sovereignty, authority, rule – it can be physical, geographical, spiritual, or a combination of all of those dynamics.

for a camel to go through the eye of a needle: The “Eye of the Needle” has been claimed to be a gate in Jerusalem, which opened after the main gate was closed at night. A camel could only pass through this smaller gate if it was stooped and had its baggage removed. This story has been put forth since at least the 15th century, and possibly as far back as the 9th century. However, there is no widely accepted evidence for the existence of such a gate. It’s more likely that this is a metaphor for a very narrow opening - insisting upon the impossibility of the act by human power or knowledge.

**saved:** σωθῆναι (sōthēnai) in Greek – which means to be saved, to be made well, to be delivered (from illness or trouble).