

# **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**HAVING IT ALL**

**Mark 10:17-31**

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**Analysis by Steven E. Albertin**

17As 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?" 18Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You 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.'" 20He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." 21Jesus, 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." 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them 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." 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" 27Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things

are possible.”

28Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29Jesus 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, 30who 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. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Having It All?**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *“Not Enough Stuff”*

A man comes to Jesus who seems to “have it all.” This guy is a modern day version of Bill Gates and Billy Graham combined. He has lots of stuff and lots of money, thoroughly blessed by God. He also seems to be leading an impeccably moral life. Even Jesus recognizes this when he questions the fellow on his ability to follow the Ten Commandments. (Note that Jesus only questions him about his ability to keep the Second Table of the Commandments, 4-10, which are focused only on his relationship to other people. Jesus will turn his attention to the First Table of the Commandments, 1-3, which are focused on his relationship to God later.) It is amazing that Jesus doesn’t even challenge the fellow’s claim to have kept all the Second Table commandments. This guy is really good!

But Jesus knows that this fellow has a deeper problem. That problem is exposed by the fact that this guy who seems to “have it all” still is anxious. Even though in the eyes of the world he is admired as if he was another Bill Gates (all that power!) or Billy Graham (all that moral and spiritual influence), he

knows that something is still missing. That anxiety is betrayed by his anxious question: "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" Despite his amazing track-record, his heart is still restless. His successes still leave him wanting. His anxious question is based on the moralistic assumption that he "must do something" to be acceptable to God, i.e., "inherit eternal life." There is no better person to come to for an answer to this important question than this "good teacher" who seems to have an inside connection to God.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : "Not Enough Faith"**

Jesus knows that this fellow, who seems to "have it all," still "lack(s) one thing": faith in God. Jesus exposes that lack of faith by applying the First Table of the Commandments which are focused on his relationship to God. Jesus exposes his idolatry: that he is trusting his possessions more than he is trusting God. He is clinging to his misguided belief that by following the law and its commands he could win God's approval and inherit eternal life. "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me." This command is not simply a demand for poverty. It was Jesus' way of exposing the god to which this fellow's heart was truly clinging: his possessions and his morality.

The fellow is shocked and walks away disappointed and grieving. The disciples were equally shocked and faithless. Even more, they realized that it is impossible to ever have enough faith. It is impossible to keep the law enough to inherit eternal life. It is impossible to truly follow Jesus without giving up all and dying.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : "Not Enough Life"**

Of course, that is exactly the point of Jesus' conversation with this fellow. The fellow thought he could do enough to inherit

eternal life. However, it is impossible to have enough faith in God. It is impossible to do enough to inherit eternal life. As long as we cling to this lie, we are doomed to die.

It almost looks as if Jesus is piling on when he speaks that memorable aphorism: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God." Of course, it is impossible for that huge animal to ever hope to fit through the eye of a needle. Likewise, it is impossible for someone who is rich to inherit the kingdom. No wonder the stunned disciples questioned whether it was possible for anyone to ever be saved!

Some may attempt to blunt the devastating criticism of Jesus' words. They assure themselves that they are not rich and therefore these words need not apply to them. But some time ago a wise old pastor reminded me, "Whoever has enough to be afraid to lose it . . . is a rich man." Oops! That includes everyone I know, including myself. We are all stuck in eye of the needle. There is no way any of us are ever going to make it through alive. The harder we try to squeeze through, the more painful it becomes. We are slowly strangling ourselves to death. No wonder the fellow walked away grieving. No wonder the disciples were astounded. They thought they had it all, but in the final analysis and the last judgment, they have nothing.

We fall to our knees all too much aware of our desperate situation. Stripped of our pretensions, all we can do is cry out for mercy. Once we thought we had it all, but now realize just the opposite. We have nothing. "We are beggars," Luther spoke on his death-bed. When we recognize that fact about ourselves, Jesus has us exactly where he wants us. For then we are finally ready to receive what only He can give. Then we can finally have it all.

## PROGNOSIS: “Having It All!”

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *“Getting a Life”*

And having it all is exactly what Jesus wants to give us. Even before Jesus ever started to lower the hammer on this fellow’s faithless life, we are assured that Jesus loved him (v. 21). This grieving fellow walked away from Jesus. The disciples were astounded, shocked, and ready to throw in the towel. They too were about to walk away from Jesus, thinking, This discipleship stuff is impossible!

Why bother then? Because Jesus did not walk away from them . . . or us! Bound and determined to give us a life, he walks to Jerusalem and his suffering and death. On that Friday afternoon, it sure looked like he suffered a fate just like the fate all humanity must suffer. Just like us, he got stuck in the eye of the needle (the demands of God’s law) and died. However, he did not stay stuck. He was raised from the dead. He passed through the eye of the needle. What had been impossible for us was possible for Jesus. Jesus got a life . . . and promises the same life to us.

### **Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *“Getting Enough Faith”*

What had been impossible—having enough faith to keep the First Table of the Law—is now possible. Jesus invites us to follow him . . . and promises that his fate will be ours. We GET TO trust his promise. We are not disappointed. He will lead us through the eye of the needle and we receive eternal life, the comfort and assurance that only God can give. It is not a matter of “what MUST I DO to inherit eternal life” but what God has DONE FOR US in Jesus. Discipleship is not a matter of behaving a certain way, selling all we own and giving the money to the poor or any other work, but simply faith,—trusting that Jesus’ death and resurrection wins us entrance into the kingdom of God. When

we trust this promise, we find ourselves trusting God and keeping the First Table of the Law. And we haven't even been trying!

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *"More than Enough"***

Disciples are rich in God and rich in faith. These kinds of riches one does not have to be afraid to lose . . . unlike the riches of this world. The riches of the world can be eaten by moths or destroyed by rust; therefore, we have good reason to fear losing them. But faith in the promises of God convinces us that we will always have more than enough to sustain us in this world as God's beloved children and inheritors of the kingdom.

Therefore we GET TO be generous and gracious with our lives, pouring ourselves out and giving ourselves away to those in need. Such generosity is not a condition of being a disciple but a consequence of being a disciple. Through Christ we have passed through the eye of the needle. We have died to our riches. We are alive to God. We no longer need to cling to our wealth or our goodness. We trust the One who has led us through death in the eye of the needle. We have already died to our sinful nature. We have nothing to lose. We already have it all in Christ. Therefore, as stewards of all that God has given us, we can use all that we have in service to our neighbor and in our care for the world.