

“One More Thing”

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Mark 10:17-27

¹⁷As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before [Jesus], 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.”

This past week, Google held a widely anticipated media event to show off their new technology products. Samsung is known for doing the same, and Amazon has gotten into the game. They all got the idea from Apple, and more specifically, from the late Steve Jobs. Steve began this new era of highly-produced staged spectacles to build, and then capitalize on, excitement about new products. Over the years, Steve developed a habit which the crowds came to expect. He introduced many of the products at his typical, deliberate pace, but held back the biggest item. He moved along as if the show were coming to an end, and then he said, “but there's just one more thing.” The crowd cheered even more loudly than before as Steve introduced the latest and greatest gadget. He repeated the formula at almost every product introduction, with the crowds almost salivating at what the “one more thing” would be. Just saying “one more thing” brought the crowds to their feet. <http://youtu.be/fylsLOe8CIY>

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus, too, held everyone's attention with his “one more thing” remark, but what *He* said definitely *did not* leave the crowds cheering. A young man ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him. Now, in Mark's Gospel, every time that someone comes up to Jesus and kneels, that person is seeking healing. This is a healing story. This man knows that there is *something* more to life, and he comes to Jesus seeking to be made whole. Jesus quizzes him about the commandments, and he says he has kept them since his youth. Now, this may come across as arrogant or boasting, but that is not the sense of the text. This is not one of the instances of someone trying to trick Jesus. This man is sincere, and Jesus treats him the same way. Mark tells us that Jesus looked at the man and “loved him.” Jesus truly felt for this man, who was genuinely trying to be who God created him to be. And Jesus loved that about him. Then he added “there's just one more thing” and the crowds didn't cheer, like they did Steve Jobs. Those gathered pushed in closer to hear what this *one more thing* was. If this man has been following the commandments

his whole life, what *more* is there? The “one more thing” was this: sell your belongings and give the proceeds to the poor, storing up treasure in heaven, then, follow me. This was not the “one more thing” any of them wanted to hear. And Mark tells us that this man, who we now find out “had many possessions,” was shocked and went away grieving.

And who can blame him, really? Now, we *have* done so, time and time again. This man is not the hero of the story. No one thinks about this story and says “I want to be more like *that guy*.” No, we shake our heads in pity, all the while hoping that Jesus won't ask such a thing of *us*. But Jesus isn't talking to *us*, we reassure ourselves. Stacey Simpson, a pastor in Georgia, writes that she remembers first encountering this text when she was 7 years old, reading the Bible in her bed after the rest of her family had gone to sleep. She got to verse 25, where Jesus tells the disciples how 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. She slammed the Bible shut, jumped out of bed, and went running down the hall. She woke her mother from a sound sleep and said “Mom, Jesus says that rich people don't go to heaven!” Her mother responded: “We are not rich. Go back to bed.”¹ Many of us likely have comforted ourselves with that knowledge – we aren't *rich*. We aren't the ones to whom Jesus is talking, and so we can just ignore this story and move along. The problem is that we really are rich. In any kind of comparison to the rest of the world, we *are* rich. Over 70% of the global population lives on less than \$10 a day, or \$3,650 a year.² Feeling a bit richer? Jesus isn't just talking to the super-rich. He's talking to the *rich*, and that's us. That woman who at age 7 was told by her mother, “we are not rich” says “I knew better. I knew I had all I needed plus plenty more.” That's most of us, isn't it?

¹ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2012-10/who-can-be-saved>

² <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/23/seven-in-ten-people-globally-live-on-10-or-less-per-day/>

It's interesting the words that Jesus chose. The young man says "what must I *do*" and Jesus responds "you *lack* one thing." This is a man who, it would seem, does not lack for anything. Like most of us, he has all he needs, plus plenty more. Why does Jesus say he *lacks* something? But Jesus turns the tables on the man and shocks him. He says that what the man lacks is that he *does not lack*. He comes to Jesus for healing – remember the kneeling posture – and Jesus offers to heal him. This is the same as when Jesus healed someone possessed by an evil spirit. This man is possessed...by his possessions, and Jesus offers him the healing that he needs. But he is shocked and grieved. He cannot imagine a devotion to God that would transcend his devotion to his possessions, and so he becomes the *only person* in Mark's gospel to refuse the healing that Jesus offers. He turns, drops his head, and goes away, still left longing for that "one more thing" that he needs.

It's tempting to try to tone down this text. Many have tried over the centuries. There's a story about a gate in the wall of Jerusalem called "the eye of the needle." This gate was supposedly so small that a camel would have to be unloaded and crouch down before it could go through the gate. The story went that it was then not *impossible* for the camel to go through, but rather, *very difficult*. And so the parallel then is that it is *very difficult* for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God, but not *impossible*. But there is no historical evidence for such a gate, and the story didn't appear until the 9th century. It was just someone's way of trying to make the story easier to handle. Others have noted that the original word for "camel" is very similar to the word for "rope" and so maybe Jesus really said "rope," not "camel," and if the rope is small enough, it could go through the eye of a needle. That doesn't appear to be the case, either. If you have any question about that, look a little more carefully at the passage from Mark that we read. After Jesus says this, Mark tells us that "they were greatly astounded" and they asked "then *who* can be saved?" Why

would they be so “astounded” if Jesus had just said it’s very difficult, but you can do it if you try hard enough? No, Jesus is really saying that it is *impossible*. There’s no reason to believe that Jesus didn’t mean just what he said.

And, difficult as it may seem, this was even harder for the disciples to hear than it is for us. In those days, most people thought that wealth was a sign of God's special blessing. If someone were wealthy, they were obviously in good standing with God. Even though the witness of the prophets stands against this, many still believed it. And many do today. Think of those who preach what is known as the Prosperity Gospel.

One temptation is to say that really Jesus was talking about this particular man only. This particular man had a difficulty with money and so Jesus told *him* and him only that he should divest himself of his possessions. He looks at each of us and tells us what we individually need to cut from our own lives. But then why would Jesus have gone on about rich people, why would he have spoken the bit about the camel and the needle in comparison to “a rich person?” Why wouldn't He have said “and you all have your vices. You all should cut those out.” No, he spoke specifically about money to the group of disciples, not just to the rich young man. So, why does Jesus have this focus on money?

I believe it is because of the power that we allow money to have over us. We treat money as an end, rather than a means. A popular financial advisor says of his radio show that “it’s about accumulating piles of cash.” Humans seem to never be able to get enough. Ask someone making \$50,000 how much money is enough, and they may say \$100,000. Someone making \$100,000 may say that they really need \$200,000. It is said that John D. Rockefeller, the wealthiest person in American history, was once asked “How much money is enough?” and he responded, “Just a little bit more.” Money is where our society puts its trust. We even refer to investments as *securities*.

We trust in our money. It *is* our security. And Jesus knows that. He knows that we relate to money in ways that we don't relate to anything else. And He knows that it is keeping some of us out of the kingdom of God. Jesus confronts us with a vision of life that is so contrary to our core understandings of wealth. He tells the man, not just “get rid of your stuff and follow me.” He tells the man that money is to be used for the sake of others. He tells the man to sell his stuff and *give the money to the poor!* In Jesus' day – and in ours – so much of our wealth is accumulated at the expense of others. Some want the lowest prices regardless of what sweatshop a child has to work in to produce them, as long as *the* price is low. Our culture buys cheap, disposable items without considering the impact on the planet and its inhabitants. Money has a particular way of blinding us to the truth all around us, to the way that our use of money harms others.

And so, we come to Jesus, on bended knee, seeking healing from our *affluenza*. He looks at us and *loves* us, and says “stop trusting in your possessions. Get rid of all that stuff that is between you and me, and trust in *me*.” He knows that our money, our possessions, get in between us and God. He knows that when we trust in what we have, we aren't trusting in God. We are just like this man who had many possessions, going away with our heads hung low. We are unwilling to surrender our whole selves to God.

Jesus is calling us to turn toward a simpler life, unencumbered by our stuff. We must turn *from* our possessions *toward* Him. We must not trust in our securities; we must trust in God. This is the call of Jesus to us. And yes, “there's one more thing.” The disciples said to Jesus, “Then who can be saved?” If the rich people (the ones we think particularly have God's favor) can't be saved, who can? The answer is that *none of us* can get into Heaven on our own. It doesn't work that way. The man was asking the wrong question. He said, “what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” And the answer is there is *nothing* that we can do. Getting all of those possessions out of the way, while it

is *part* of the process, won't do it alone. *Who can be saved?* Jesus answered the disciples – “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” It is only through God's grace that we can have eternal life in God's presence. It is only through God's mercy that we can possibly get to Heaven. It is not something we can earn. We have to rely on God. And that is the lesson that the wealthy young man did not want to learn. He was relying on his possessions, on his securities, and not on God's grace. Wealth has a funny way of doing that to people – it did then, and it does now. It gets in the way of trusting in God's everlasting grace. So, what can we rich folks *do* to inherit eternal life? Nothing. An inheritance is a gift, freely given, but you must have room in your life to accept the gift. When all of our stuff is in the way, we cannot accept God's gracious gift. So, let us allow ourselves to be healed of our affluenza so that we may make room for God's gift of eternal life. Does it seem impossible to remove those things which come between us and God? Then rely on God, because, for God, all things are possible. Amen.