

**St. Bartholomew’s Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins - Curate

Scripture: Mark 10: 17-31

***Searching for Answers?***

A man asks God how long a million years was to Him. God replied, “It’s just like a single second of your time, my child.” So the man asked, “What about a million dollars?” The Lord replied, “To me, it’s just like a single penny.” The man thought for a moment and then said, “Well, Lord could I have one of your pennies?” The Lord God answered, “Certainly my child, just a second!”

The world certainly has an abundance of questions – but it is good reliable answers that are in short supply!

Today we discover God’s answer to the question of “What must I do to live forever?”

Now, I know, you’re sitting in church, so you probably have an idea what kind of answer will be given. But even if you think you know what’s coming, hang on, you just might be surprised! There may be some parts to the answer that you aren’t familiar with, and you never know - they just might explain why your life doesn’t “feel” like eternal life.

If you are personally seeking the answer to this question, wait until you hear what God’s answer is...

It’s all found in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, beginning with verses 17 and 18.

A man comes to Jesus looking for eternal life, and runs up to Him. If we look at the other Gospels, we will discover that this is quite a very wealthy man. Matthew, in his Gospel, tells us he is rather young, and Luke says he is a ruler. He is the very picture of success and achievement, a real go-getter – a first century yuppie. He is excited and earnest, too, showing great respect and sincerity.

**He has this question for Jesus, but *he thinks he already has the answer*.** His question is “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” He’s come to that place where he

- thinks,
- hopes,
- and dreams that there is something more to life than he has gotten or experienced so far.

**Jesus gave him an unexpected response by answering a question with another question.**

Jesus’ answer was “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone.*”

I really believe that Jesus wanted this young man to understand **what GOOD REALLY IS**—I believe He wanted to make the distinction to this young man that there is a difference between goodness and righteousness. You see, Jesus knew just how this young man was going to respond and He wanted him to understand that even though you may think you are doing good..., the question is:

- Are you righteous?
- Sanctified?
- Justified?
- Holy before God?

Jesus’ hope was that this young man would understand the difference between one’s own self-righteousness and what would truly make him righteous in the eyes of God.

The fact that Jesus goes on and **gives this young man the key** has tremendously huge implications... I mean huge! In the first place – if you are going to look for real life, for eternal life, you have got to look to the proper source.

**We often look to the wrong sources for life!**

How often are we like this man? We really want life, eternal life, but we don’t look for it in the right places: Remember that old hit song from 1980, sung by Johnny Lee, “**Lookin’ for love in all the wrong places?**” It sounds so familiar, doesn’t it?

- We think that a certain job or accomplishment is going to do it.

- We think that a certain level of education is going to do it: – whether it is a bachelors, masters, or doctorate!
- We might think that a certain relationship is going to do it.
- Maybe you’re sitting on the sofa watching that infomercial where some guy promises you the “keys to success” or “the life you’ve always wanted” and that will do it.

We are constantly surrounded by people running to so called ‘gurus’ looking for answers – and you know there’s an expert for everything, who has the perfect way for you to do... (What-ever!) Jesus serves notice right here that the only place you can find the key to life; real, eternal life, is from God himself. And the sad fact is that there are so many today literally like puppies chasing their tails, looking to sources other than God... in their everyday, daily lives.

If we want to find eternal life, we must first:

### **GO TO THE PROPER SOURCE**

Jesus says, in effect, you will never find what you are looking for if you keep looking in the wrong place. Jesus gives the answer that all good rabbis would give: *keep the Law!* Well, the man answers: “**All these I have kept**” “*I’ve done it – I’ve followed all of the religious rules to the ‘T’ – since my youth.*” However, he still has a sort of nagging in his soul, insecurity, a sense that the “performance of the ritual” of religion isn’t enough – and so he comes to Jesus.

Jesus invites this man to go beyond his religious observance. Jesus sees his honesty, and loves him by saying, “*You lack one thing*” – in other words - your religion isn’t enough, is it?

Jesus continues by telling him “*go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.*” Give up the stuff and go beyond your comfort zone!

He had done what he was told – he had conformed up to this point (“*all these I have kept*”), but still was missing peace, and assurance. He just didn’t get it - that external conformity and inner obedience were required. He thought the remedy was finding some other task to do.

Jesus simply tells him to give up the line of thinking that you can do something to get you to heaven. Give up thinking following the rules is enough.

### **JESUS INVITES THE MAN TO GAIN A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP**

After you get rid of your stuff, “*Come, follow me.*”

Jesus is telling this wealthy young man that what he lacks in his life is a personal devotion.

Jesus calls the man to **the self-sacrificing devotion which is the characteristic of every true follower of Jesus Christ!**

If this were a modern translation or even a screenplay you might interpret Jesus as telling the man “You’ve got the religion part down. What you are missing is me!” And so Jesus invites him to enter a personal relationship.

And what is his reaction? “**Wrong answer—Wrong answer Jesus**—I didn’t come here for you to tell me what I need to be doing, or what I should be doing—I came for you to tell me how well I’m doing since I keep the Commandments—I obey the law—I’m such a good citizen—I know I’m bound for Mt. Zion—and heaven is my home.” But we read that the young man went away sad and broken hearted because he was given an answer he didn’t expect, nor one that he wanted to hear.

**Jesus makes the very same invitation to each of us.**

Often, people turn this personal relationship back into nothing more than a religion or a ritual.

“A personal relationship with Jesus” becomes a religious buzz phrase to describe a new set of rules we’re following. “Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus” means have you signed up, prayed a prayer, attended a certain kind of church? It is far from personal.

Jesus says “*follow me!*” Enter into a relationship with me where you are known by me and I by you.

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Spend some time with Him, in His Word, and above all – listen to Him. When you hear Him tell you to do something – follow the directions that Mary told the servants at the Wedding Feast of Cana, in the Galilee – **John 2:5** "*Do whatever He tells you.*"

If we want real, eternal life, we must look for an inner devotion and obedience to a person – Jesus Christ. This personal relationship, this inner devotion has some startling results when we do whatever He tells you.

Jesus calls us to remove the obstacles to devotion in our lives; to remove anything in our lives that hinders all-out commitment to Him.

- It could be a relationship that detracts from your commitment.
- A possession or hobby or leisure activity.
- Pride, self-reliance.
- A crazy schedule,
- A focus on climbing the ladder of success.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, until you give it up, you won't have eternal-quality of life. Your life will continue to be void of peace, joy, mercy, and grace.

It was at En Geddi on Thursday June 24, 1999 – when I received my call from the Lord to the ordained ministry. I've got to be honest with you, the first fear that the enemy tried to flood into my mind was of this Gospel event – this young man – who was terrified to give it all up – and follow Jesus. My immediate thought was of how impossible this was all going to be. I was filled with questions – searching for answers. How in the world was I going to break it to my family, my boss, to Father Neil Lebhar? Then I find out I have to enter a process that is going to last years! Then I will have to sell my house and go to seminary for years! What are we going to live on? How am I going to pay for seminary? Boy was I flooded with questions – and fear. Well, what I forgot for that very brief moment – was who it was that called me, and if He wants it – He can move mountains, God can make the utterly impossible become not only possible, but a reality.

Jesus tells His disciples "*How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!*"

It's tough for rich people to get to heaven. Why? Doesn't God like rich people? Of course he does! But money, or the pursuit of it, is a snare, a diversion, a false source of security, a wedge in the relationship. This astounded the disciples, because wealth was seen as a blessing, a sign of God's favor. Jesus illustrates His message by telling them "*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.*" (**Mark 10:25**)

Now I've got to tell you I have heard some amazing messages on this through the years:

"Camel" is really "rope", so its possible, just difficult.

"Eye of the needle" refers to a gate in the Jerusalem wall that required a camel to walk on its knees.

We just don't want to believe it says what it says. Its a picture of utter impossibility! We still want to believe that somehow we can be rich, because deep down, hey, a lot of us have that desire.

So is Jesus saying that people with money can't get to heaven? Jesus' point is that no one, not even a rich man, can get to heaven, can have eternal life on his own. This goes back to the man wanting to know what to do.

When things seem utterly impossible – there is hope! With God, all things are possible! There is not one thing in your life that is out of God's grasp. Not one obstacle or mountain that seems so hard to climb that God cannot see you over it.

Are there obstacles in your life? Is there something that keeps you from the kind of devotion to Christ

that brings real life? Why is it that people can go to church, be "Christians," but they do not live any differently? We neglect this step, and pay for it!

**REMOVE ALL OBSTACLES:** If we want real, eternal life, we must remove all obstacles. We need to ask God to help us to rid ourselves of anything that gets in the way. We have got to leave some things behind.

Well, with all this talk about leaving things behind, Peter gets all excited – (**Mark 10:28**) "*Look, we have left everything and followed you.*" He in essence is asking Jesus "Aren't we special?"

Jesus says, relax, its impossible to give something up for Me without being rewarded. Following Christ may require that we give up something, relationships, or lifestyle, or things, but remember the rewards! If following Christ results in your separation or estrangement from your family, it will be balanced by the spiritual family that is yours as the body of Christ. Let me give you a few examples that are close to home – and I am sure some of you have your own to relate to:

Fr. Molison and Barbara were longtime members of St. Bartholomew's and he was called away to St. Stephen's. While there they gave and received love and made lifelong relationships, but I am sure they missed their home. Now, in retirement, the Lord has brought them back to St. Bartholomew's.

I know that part of the mountain that Marilyn, the kids and I felt was that we had to leave what we considered to be our church home, Church of the Redeemer in Jacksonville. It was there that we grew. It was there that we developed a love for our Jewish roots and went to Israel. It was from there that I went through the process and they helped to support us through seminary. We were faced with leaving that place for the unknown. We were blessed to be at a wonderful parish during seminary – Prince of Peace, but then what? Look where God has brought us – to St. Bartholomew's. He has restored us in an awesome place where we continue to grow. Praise be to God! Need I say more?

But Jesus cautions that persecutions can come with the blessings! The road of following Christ indeed has its rewards today, but might not always be easy. These persecutions can be flaming darts from the enemy: physical and spiritual, but trusting in Jesus will carry us through. Remember how impossible the camel and the eye of the needle sound? Nothing is impossible for God!

AND... devotion to Christ has it future rewards. In the end, the reward is everlasting life!

But the value system is different in God's kingdom...

As we pursue this eternal life, we must:

**REMEMBER THE REWARDS**

Remember that our sacrifice has a purpose!

We're not the first to ever have questions. We're not the first to ever want some answers. There have always been questions.

- Cain asked the question "Am I my brother's keeper?"
- Abraham asked the question "Can we find just 10 good men?"
- Moses asked the question "Whom shall I say has sent me?"
- Nicodemus asked Jesus—"How can a man be born again?"

Andre Crouch wrote these words in his song "Jesus is the answer for the world today—Above Him there's no other—Jesus is the way." Make your relationship with Christ your first priority – today!

Remember Jesus' words in **Matthew 6:33** "*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*" — seek God first and you'll get some answers; God knows the answer, God is the answer!