

## **You need only one thing**

Mark 10:17-31

October 11, 2009

*What must I do to receive eternal life?*

That was his question. It was not an academic question, not a theoretical question. He was not interested in discussing theology with Jesus. Neither did he come with some kind of ulterior motive, like others had, trying to trip Jesus up, trying to get Jesus to hang himself with his own words.

His question was personal, urgent. He ran -- ran -- to Jesus. He threw himself down, kneeling before Jesus. He addressed Jesus with the utmost respect: *Good Teacher! What must I do to receive eternal life?*

He wanted to know. He wanted eternal life.

Do you? Do you want eternal life? Are you as earnest as this man was in wanting to know what it takes to have it? To have eternal life: not just life after death, not just life that is indefinitely prolonged, but life that has substance, weight, quality, goodness. Wanting eternal life means wanting a life that matters, a life that means something, a life that is in tune/in sync/in harmony with God's life, life that isn't slowly losing steam, slowly burning out, but life that is blazing with energy, flooding over with delight, happy just to be ... just to be in this one moment, in this one eternally significant moment.

Do you want eternal life?

He did. But, for all his eagerness and for all his earnestness, he went away sad, filled with gloom. Because he didn't get an answer from Jesus? No, because he did.

Maybe he wasn't so earnest after all, because he could not do the one thing he needed to do to get what he said he wanted. He could not let go of what he had. So he went away sad -- not disappointed that he didn't get a good answer, not angry that he got a bad answer, not muttering to himself because he couldn't agree with the answer he got -- but sad. Sad because he knew Jesus was right, because he knew what he needed to do to receive eternal life, and he couldn't do it. He wouldn't do it.

*How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!*

Jesus' disciples were shocked, shocked because they had been bred to believe that wealth is a sign of God's favor, a sign of God's blessing. It is -- *all good gifts around us are sent from heaven above* -- and yet, wealth may also be a curse, if it keeps you from eternal life.

*What must I do to receive eternal life?*

How would you answer if someone came to you asking that question? Would you think, "Yes!"? Would you sit him down and walk him through the four spiritual laws? Would you outline for him in detail God's plan of salvation?

Or would you defer, telling him to go ask the pastor? Would you tell him that isn't a question you can answer for him, but a question he has to answer for himself in his own way?

Would you say, "I don't know," or would you say something about loving God with all your heart?

Consider what Jesus did when he was approached with that question. First, he bounced the question back to the man: *You already know what to do!* But when the man persisted, Jesus looked at him, looked into his eyes with love and said, *You need only one thing.*

For Jesus, it wasn't about staying on message. It wasn't about using this opening to proclaim the whole of the gospel he was called to proclaim. It was about this man, this one man and the one thing he needed. Jesus wanted to set him free. Jesus wanted him to have what he wanted -- eternal life -- so Jesus told him ... to let go.

But he couldn't. He wouldn't. He walked away sad ... and Jesus let him go!

*No, wait! Let me put it another way! Let me make things easier for you!  
What can I say to make you want to stay? What can I say to make you  
want to come with me?*

That's not how Jesus responded! This is Jesus, the evangelist: *You need only one thing.* Jesus identified the obstacle, pointed to the crux of the matter, spoke the truth, called him out, in love ... and let him go.

*Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it ... but the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard.*

So, my friends, shall we talk about how we do evangelism? Shall we talk about how we want to attract people to our church?

*What must I do to receive eternal life?*

What would Jesus say to you if you asked? (Are you asking? Do you want eternal life?)

What would Jesus say to you? Would he give you the same answer he gave this man? Maybe, but Jesus rarely gave the same answer twice. To one, he said: *You must be born again*. To another, he said, *Ask me for a drink*. To another, he said, *Who do you say that I am?*. To another, he said, *Go and sin no more*. To another, he said, *Go and sell all you have*.

What would he say to you? I think he would say: *You need only one thing ...*

And what would that one thing be? What is the one thing that is keeping you from being entirely earnest about eternal life? What is the one thing that keeps you from spreading your wings and taking off? What is the one thing that drags you down and overshadows you with gloom because you can't -- won't -- let go?

This I know, that if you ask, Jesus will look into your face, with love, and give you an answer ... a simple answer, but most likely a hard answer ... an answer that is well within your grasp, but will require much courage from you ... an answer you may not want to hear, but know is true ... an answer that will set you free!

Look at him! Listen to him! Don't walk away sad!