

One Thing You Lack

Mark 10:13-31

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I am sure you have left home on occasion and remembered that you forgot something. Just a few weeks ago, after the big storm that swept through La Harpe, I was going to Macomb to pick up Debbie from the train station. I was not quite halfway there, and I realized I didn't have my wallet (I was driving without a license or money). I turned around to retrieve it and prayed the train would be a few minutes late and then patiently (or maybe impatiently) weaved through the traffic tie-ups due to the storm, hoping I would beat the train. I did.

I suspect you have packed for vacation and thought, "I feel like I am forgetting something," only to learn at your destination what that was. We are going to see two examples of people who lacked something essential in importance. The first example is the disciples. If the chronology of Mark is correct, just one chapter back, Jesus told them to stop trying to be the King of the Hill and instead serve and humble themselves like a child. And the second example is a man who took his religion seriously but found out that the one thing he forgot was the very thing that stood between him and eternal life. Let's dig in.

¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴ When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶ Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

Let the Children Come to Me

Jesus was a busy guy. People wanted a part of Him everywhere he went. We must think that Jesus was still in a crowd when some parents wanted the blessing of Jesus for their children. It is a natural thing to want. What blessing could be more meaningful than this one?

The disciples should have been more open to this request but were busy protecting Jesus. They were well-intentioned but wrong! Just three weeks ago, we looked at Jesus' rebuke to the disciples for jockeying for position. We read,

³⁶ Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me." (Mark 9:36-37)

Did you get that? "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me." said Jesus. And the disciples turned the children away! Let's apply this to us with a simple caution:

We can be so busy doing ministry that we forget what it is God called us to do. When I first started here as Pastor, I would come to work every day with my task list. I was focused I had them numbered 1,2,3 in importance and hoped to get all the #1's for the day done and maybe some of the 2's. The more pressed I felt about time, it felt like the more people would stop in to sit and chat (no real agenda, they just wanted to chat). Occasionally someone would say, "Are you busy?" I'll be honest, I felt a little snarky back then and wanted to say, "Of course not, I only work one day a week and the rest of the time I just wait here for people like you to come and keep me company!" I resented people stopping in to visit me because it kept me from doing my job! Then it felt like the Lord slapped me on the side of the head and said, "Hey, Mr. Efficient . . . visiting with people IS your job!" It was a truly revolutionary insight.

Now I come to the office planning to get nothing done on my to-do list, hoping to have significant conversations with as many people as possible.

It is easy to lose sight of what we should be doing. This happens all the time,

- Pastor's become popular and are asked to speak nationwide and have no time for their congregations. They are so busy trying to save other "sheep" that their own sheep die from lack of attention.
- We can be so good at trying to witness to people and defend the truth of God that we come at those who see things differently from us like a bulldozer instead of talking to people with gentleness and respect. Our tactics deny the very gospel we are trying to proclaim!
- A teacher can be so intent on "getting through the material" that they forget the idea is to teach actual people who don't always learn according to the dictates of the lesson plan.
- We can become so intent on "leading worship" that we forget to consider who we are trying to lead, and where we are supposed to be leading them.
- We can form ministries we want in the church without considering what those we serve would most benefit from.
- We can be so intent on leading our children in the Lord that we become harsh in the name of disciplining our children. By the same token, we can be so intent on making them theologically astute, that we bind them up in rules and doctrines and never get around to introducing them to the wonderful and loving person and grace of Jesus.

Do you get the idea?

We need to be more like children. Jesus took the children and blessed them, saying, "For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. ¹⁵I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." I pointed out some of the notable characteristics of children and how they dealt with others a few weeks ago. But let's think a little about what it means to receive the Kingdom of God like a child.

There is an innocence about the faith of a child. They don't have to get all their questions answered before they will believe. They are naturally trusting. They take the Word of Christ to heart without asking for proofs (even on issues related to their own forgiveness). Their questions come from a desire to learn and understand, not to challenge or sidestep the truthfulness of the Lord. The faith of a child is simple. Their prayers are not weighted down with lofty words (that may be designed to impress those listening than really talking to the Lord). Their prayers are simple and to the point. There is a genuineness about their faith that is beautiful and loved by God. We could learn something from them.

This doesn't mean we should never ask questions about matters of faith. Of course, we should! We want to be wise, not gullible. However, the skeptic should not be our default position. Our desire should always be to trust the One who has been so kind and gracious to us. The goal should be to discern and trust what He actually says.

The One Thing Lacking

¹⁷ As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. ¹⁹ But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

²¹ Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

The Man Desired the Right Thing. By everything we read here, this man was sincere. He spoke to Jesus with honor. R.C. Sproul observes,

Those who held the office of rabbi in the Jewish community were regarded as distinguished and honorable men. It was the custom of the Jews that whenever a father, the patriarch of his family, entered a room, his children would stand out of respect for him. However, so great was the Jewish respect for the office of rabbi, if a man who was a rabbi entered a room, even his father would stand out of respect for him because of his elevated office. This cultural attitude explains the great respect with which the rich young ruler came to Jesus." (Sproul p. 472 St. Andrews Commentary, Mark)

This man is asking a question that, unfortunately, many people never think to ask. They either believe there is no life beyond the grave or the only requirement for Heaven is to die. That is sadly one of the most common views of how to get to Heaven. Listen to many people talk . . . even the most rebelliously sinful might say, "Someday, when I get to Heaven . . ." That is a

foolish assumption and can lead to eternal damnation.” This rich man understood spending eternity with the Father was not automatic.

The Man Had an Inflated View of his Worthiness. Jesus took the man to the Law. He did this not because He believed the man could earn salvation by the Law, He did it to show the man that law-keeping was not enough. The first thing Jesus did was ask the man, “Why do you call me good? Only God is truly good.”

This man was operating from an assumption many people have: good people get to Heaven. This man saw Jesus as being a level or more above him . . . though it is apparent the man thought of himself as a “basically good” person. He wanted to know what he still lacked. Jesus wanted him to consider his words and recognize who Jesus really was. The man only saw another “good man” like himself.

It is interesting that Jesus takes the man to the latter half of the Ten Commandments. These are the horizontal commandments . . . how we treat each other. The young ruler told Jesus He had kept all these commands since he was young. And I am sure he believed he had done so.

This man looked at the Law with narrow literalism and missed what God was trying to say. Since He was a good Jew, he had likely followed the strict rules of the Pharisees. This man had never killed anyone, never cheated on his spouse, never stolen from anyone, or lied about them in court. He had tried to be an honest man and was a good boy and made his parents proud. He seems to have really believed he had a pretty good shot at earning heaven.

There are many people just like this man. We could go as far as to say, *MOST* people are like this man. Jesus, however, expanded our understanding of these Laws. God was not merely interested in technical obedience, it was about an integrity of the soul.

- The command not to kill was meant to teach us to respect each other and not to be angry with others or treat them abusively. Jesus said we have violated the command if we are even angry with our brother or if we hate someone.
- The command about adultery is intended to teach us not to even lust for someone other than our own spouse. I believe it is also saying our spouse should not be seen as merely an object for sex. That makes people only an object to be exploited.
- Jesus said marriage was intended to last forever and a divorce (unless provoked by the sinful actions of the other partner) was a violation of that law.
- The man likely believed that the making of vows showed how seriously he took the commands of God. Jesus says, having to swear an oath indicates that we are not trustworthy all the rest of the time.
- Jesus said that we should not only limit the revenge we take (the Jewish Law of an eye for an eye) but we should be willing to give to someone who asks something of us. We are to trust God for vengeance.
- Jesus says the Law teaches us to love our neighbors. Jesus said it is God’s intention for us to love even our enemies. We are to love as He loves us.

This is a problem rampant in the world. Everyone believes they are “good enough” and that they “beat the curve” and therefore will make it to Heaven. Two problems: there is no curve! and no one is as good as they think.

Jesus, however, tells the rich man the only thing left for Him to do is “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

People have been confused by this. They think Jesus is condemning riches. I don’t believe that is what he is doing. He is applying the first 4 commandments of the 10 commandments summarized by “You should love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” In other words, the Lord is to be our first and highest affection. Jesus wanted the man to see that He had broken this commandment because He was unwilling to give up his wealth if that is what he needed to do to be saved. His life was likely consumed with making money (as opposed to being holy). His God was, if you will, making money. His security was in His riches rather than in the Lord. His first allegiance was to the bottom line and profit margin, not the Lord.

Of course, that command is much more extensive than just money. It was money for this man, but it may be something else for you and me. In fact, EVERY act of obedience is supposed to be done out of love for the Lord. You can do the right thing for the wrong reasons and be adding to your sin debt.

The Difficulty of Riches

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” ²⁴ This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. ²⁵ In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

²⁶ The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked.

²⁷ Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.”

²⁸ Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said.

²⁹ “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, ³⁰ will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. ³¹ But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

After the Rich Ruler departed, Jesus dropped a bomb on them . . . “It is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. It is actually easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

There have been lots of attempted explanations for “the eye of a needle” to soften the blow a little for us affluent Americans. “Around the ninth century, a legend developed that Jesus was talking about an obscure point of entry to the walled city of Jerusalem, a small “gate” called the Eye of the Needle. It was supposedly a small opening in the wall. If a merchant was leading a camel and wished to enter the city through the Eye of the Needle, he had to force the camel to bend its knees. Then, in that awkward position, with much pushing and shoving, the camel could just squeeze through. But there is no such mention of such a gate until long after the time of Jesus, so the story is questionable. So it is best to understand this the way we would initially understand it . . . as a needle with which you might sew something. It was meant to be an exaggeration.

The disciples are flabbergasted! The Jewish mentality (which is taught in many American circles) is that riches are a sign of God’s blessing! So, if rich people (those blessed by God) can’t be saved, how can anyone be saved?

That is a really good question! No one can be saved by what they do or give. We all need the grace of God and that includes the rich. What is impossible with men is possible with God! However, before anyone can be saved, they must see the bankrupt nature of their soul. Apart from Christ, no one can be justified (or made right with God) apart from Jesus. We must give up all our idols and put our trust and confidence in Christ alone.

There are many wealthy people in the Bible. Abraham, David, Solomon, Job, among many others. It is not the money that is the problem . . . it is the reliance on money for our security and comfort that is the problem.

In this passage Jesus told the disciples that you can’t outgive God. Whatever we give up or sacrifice for Him will be returned one hundred times. Jesus is not promising for every dollar you give that you are going to get 100 times that in return. What is given back to us is sometimes is purpose, meaning, changed lives, the opportunity to be part of building the Kingdom of God and the “Well Done!” of our Lord and Master. If you understand the value of any one of those things you know that they are worth far more than anything we could give to the Lord. In the last book of the Bible God makes this challenge: “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” (Mal. 3.10) In essence the Lord is saying, “I dare you to try to outgive me!”

We cannot judge things by the world’s standards. The world’s values are skewed. Jesus tells us to count on this . . . many of us who were last in the eyes of the world will be first in the eyes of God. Those who were ridiculed because of their faithfulness will hear “Well Done!” before all of Heaven! Those who were dismissed as a crazy Christian will be honored as a child of the living God. There is no honor higher . . . in this world, or the next!

God can and will save anyone . . . but first you have to let go of what you are holding in your hands for security so you can use both hands to take hold of Him.