

The Impossible Demand of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much, Elliot. Good morning, everybody. Y'all doing well? It's a good start to a service, man. We get to see some baptisms and, oh, God's been so good already.

Those of you who are new, so glad you got to join us today of all days and witness that. We are continuing in our Mark series, and if you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn to Mark chapter 10, verses 13.

This is my first sermon in about 13 weeks, and I kinda wondered coming in, am I gonna remember even how to do this? So I already got one underneath me, so, you know, the trial run has gone.

You guys hopefully get the better version of this. We'll find out. We'll find out. This passage that we're gonna read in Mark, it brings us to one of the most important questions of our lives.

To be a Christian, to follow Jesus, to enter God's kingdom, to inherit eternal life, and all of those are interchangeable terms. What is required of you and me?

[1 : 02] And the answer is this. According to this passage we're gonna read, this is what it reveals. Nothing and everything. And the gospel of Mark and the writer, he puts it and he shows us through having two subsequent stories next to each other.

And they kinda seem unrelated, but they reveal how this paradox of being saved, and it takes nothing and everything, how it works out in the kingdom of God. So let's lean in and see what the word of God has for us today.

It says this, And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant, and said to them, Let the little children come to me.

Do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God, like a child, shall not enter it.

And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands on them. And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[2 : 15] And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother. And he said to him, Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, You lack one thing.

Go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor. And you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me. Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

And Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples, How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were amazed at his words.

But Jesus said to them again, Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God. 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.

[3 : 28] And they were exceedingly astonished and said to him, Then who can be saved? Jesus looked at them and said, With man it is impossible, but not with God.

For all things are possible with God. Peter began to say to him, See, we have left everything and followed you. Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now and this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and the last first. This is God's word. Will you pray with me before we begin? So we come to you very humbly.

Holy Spirit, we ask you who were promised to be given to us to lead and guide us into all truth. We pray that you would so work on our hearts to see and open our eyes to the difficult but beautiful and rewarding call of Christ our Savior who loves us with a perfect love.

We pray this in your name. Amen. So thinking about what we just read in those two stories, what is the answer to the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

[5 : 03] Well, it is both obvious and seems simple enough to obtain but in reality it is difficult to fully comprehend and impossible to accomplish on our own and here is what seems so obvious and simple to attain to.

Jesus said we must become like children and if you're like me you're thinking sign me up for that, right? Man, kids they don't have any responsibility.

Their life is stress free. Like Jesus said you have to come like little children. He didn't say you have to come like middle schoolers or high schoolers. You know, you could just be little kids. The thing about kids is the kids have no need, little kids have no need to try and impress people.

They are happy to lie down in the grocery store kicking and screaming saying I want that candy. They are not worried about what other people are thinking about them in that moment.

Kids say stuff without any concern about how people might take it. They say stuff not really concerned about how it might harm their own reputation. So, there's a story in my family who's pretty famous.

[6 : 11] My mom was four years old. My grandma loved to tell it. It all got good laughs out of us all the time. So, she's four years old and my grandma had a friend Connie Jo who was over visiting and they're sitting there at the table sipping coffee, talking, having a good time and in walks my four year old precocious mom and she comes in and she looks at Connie Jo and she says, uh uh, no double chins in this house Connie Jo and marches out to go play in the backyard.

My grandma and her friend laughed their heads off. Right? Man, kids can get away with that and if an adult did that, man, people's feelings would have gotten hurt, right?

But not so with kids. There's this, there's this purity and naivety to kids that we so love and man, we wish we could step back into you but therein lies both the beauty and the problem. We don't stay naive little kids and actually we can't.

The more of life we live, the more we experience the pain of life and the hurts of life through things that happen to us. The difficulty of relationships, we discover that people aren't always safe and the world is full of hypocrisy and injustice and contradictions and the danger isn't just out there as we go through puberty, new energies and passions begin to awaken which aren't necessarily pure.

They have a dark side to them and as we go through adolescence and into adulthood we are compelled to find our place where we fit in our families and our schools and our circle of friends in the workplace, all those things and by the time we're 18, all of us are a cocktail of many things added along the way, shaken and stirred and mixed together and then we are poured out into the world to go make something of our life and so what do we do?

[8 : 06] We do our best to build a meaningful life we move from being naive little children to actually becoming much like the rich young ruler in this story or at least we look at him and we're like man that is the ideal.

If we are honest we look at him and he's like the poster child of success. He would be the dude on the front cover of Christianity today. He's got it all. Success, wealth, importance, position of power and it seems like he cares about living right and keeping God's commandments and he probably had killer abs to boot, right?

It's like a guy we would love to hate. No doubt he's highly praised by everybody around him but what does Jesus say?

Verse 17, and as he's setting out on this journey a man ran up to him and this young man ran up to him knelt before him and asked him good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said to him why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments do not murder do not commit adultery do not steal do not bear false witness do not defraud honor your father and mother and he said to him teacher all these I have kept from my youth and Jesus looked at him loved him and said to him you lack one thing go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

[9 : 37] Now there is a lot happening there and man the beginning of this and the interaction the interplay between this guy and Jesus is so fascinating. It actually gives us insight into who this guy

is and he seems to have very good manners.

He seems to know how to handle himself with important people and how to flatter them he begins by ascribing to Jesus he comes to him and kneels before Jesus right and then ascribes to him this honoring title of good teacher.

Okay so far so good but Jesus' response is it should surprise us it should disarm us and take us off guard because that's what Jesus' purpose was here.

He says in response to all that why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. What is Jesus doing here? Earlier in Mark Jesus asked his disciples who do you say that I am?

He just puts it to them who do you say that I am? He is doing something similar to this guy but in a less direct way. He's really saying to him do you think I'm just a good teacher or do you believe that I am more than that?

[10 : 45] Do you believe that I am the son of God? And we see exactly where the rich young ruler is at with this because the next time he addresses Jesus in verse 20 he drops the word good.

Jesus said only God can be good and so he says well I guess I can't call Jesus God or somebody might take it the wrong way so he drops it and he just calls him teacher.

Jesus sees through this young man's facade the rich young ruler he's a guy that knows how to maneuver himself even in the religious world in order to get what he wants.

He does all the right things says all the right things behaves the right way keeps all the commandments he's making all the good adjustments even with parrying a little bit in this conversation with Jesus he is like oh Jesus doesn't want to call him good I'm going to change it to teacher all that stuff he knows how to work the system to get what he wants and in this moment what he's asking what he's wanting is what do I need to do to get eternal life and every part of Jesus' interaction with this guy we have to see that it has a purpose he is cutting through all his pretense that he came with in order to get to the heart of the matter which is this we can do nothing to earn eternal life we have to receive it as helpless children I mean think about it think about the beginning that first story we read Jesus said let the little children come to me the little children didn't come with their resume like the rich young ruler did at all they didn't feel entitled to an audience with Jesus in fact they were so powerless that a few adults were easily able to keep them from Jesus they stood in their way they couldn't earn their way to show themselves worthy of an audience with Jesus they couldn't fight their way with their own strength to be with Jesus they needed someone to advocate for them and guess who that someone was it was Jesus who stepped in and who advocated for them he rebuked the disciples that stood in the way see the little children came with nothing and it is Jesus who removes all the barriers and brings them to himself now that is a good solid straightforward gospel truth to latch onto and we can walk out with that today and be like man that's gold and it is okay we don't come like the rich young ruler we come like a little child Jesus is our advocate he makes the way for himself good and break we're good to go but wait there's more let's consider this a little bit deeper what does it mean for you and me to come like a child and the answer is actually found in how Jesus talks to the rich young ruler and Jesus looking at him loved him and said to him you lack one thing go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me see the problem for the rich young ruler is the problem for you and me and it's this we are more like the rich young ruler than we care to acknowledge how is that you may be wondering well think about this he is known by what he has his affluence his title his lucrative position of power probably wore fancy clothes to portray and tell everybody that hey

[14 : 14] I'm just not another Joe I've got my life together and his reputation went before him people knew who he was they knew his life this man had built a life projecting success in all the ways that society in that day would give praise to and in those days a man like him would have been considered blessed by God because God was pleased with him in our own way we're no different we build our lives to project a version of ourselves to others that looks impressive or is at least acceptable so when Jesus says to this guy you lack one thing go and sell all that you have he is showing us what it means to become like a child and in one sense it means we come with nothing but in another sense it demands that we give up everything and why is that so important to Jesus why is this like man

Jesus can't you just cut us a break can't you make this a little bit easier why does he put this impossible demand on being a disciple well let me say this first Jesus isn't saying that you have to be materially impoverished to be my disciple I mean think about Abraham Abraham was blessed by

God he was considered a very wealthy man in his day Job was a righteous man considered righteous by God and was wealthy and went through a very troubling hard season of life but then God restored his wealth again Joseph of Arimathea who was Jesus was placed in his tomb he was a rich man Barnabas this guy had fields that he could just give away to bless others he was a rich man Lydia she was a rich lady a business woman of great renown where she lived she was a Jesus follower a Jesus lover Cornelius too and the list can go on and on see

Jesus isn't saying like thou shalt not have possessions he's saying it's not okay for possessions to have you that's that's what we need to realize here and this also wasn't a test to this rich young ruler that okay I'm just gonna have a little moment here are you open to being charitable to the poor yes Jesus loves the poor but what is happening here is Jesus is calling this young man to detach from all the things that he's built a false identity on and Jesus calls you and me to detach from everything we've used to build a false identity that one thing the rich young ruler lacked turned out to be everything he walked away sorrowful because he couldn't let go of what he had built his life upon and we don't even know this guy's name we just know all the trappings all the ways that he is presented we know he's rich we know he's young and we know he's in charge of stuff he rules some things we know him based on his wealth and status that's why it's so hard for him and I want to say to you and me let's honestly assess for ourselves are we really different to him

I think if we could step in and understand him and see him we could relate and it will open to us a great understanding of our own response to Jesus because Jesus tells us the same thing he is telling that young man today and you know what this isn't the first time that we see this kind of thing with a guy who's built a false identity for himself it actually is something that has happened since the fall of mankind it starts early on in the Bible story you don't have to get very far to find out the fallen human condition that has a need for attachment to things that bring protection and power and praise in the fourth chapter of Genesis the very beginning of the Bible we see this with the story of Cain and Abel Cain kills his brother God comes to him says hey what have you done instead of owning up to his sin it says that he Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod east of Eden and Nod is a Hebrew word that means wondering so God doesn't turn his back on Cain rather it was Cain he turns his back on God and leaves his presence to go and settle to go and abide in the land of wondering east of God's paradise

Cain detaches from the best thing he possibly had he turns his back on the presence of the Lord he turns on his back on a God who was full of love and mercy and forgiveness and grace and he chooses to settle in the land of instability and insecurity and what does he do he takes a wife he has a son then he builds a city for himself now so far that all looks like oh cool man Cain's just like he's not experiencing failure to launch he's actually growing up and he's being a responsible adult that's what we're supposed to do but what Cain is doing here by building a city is hiding his true self behind walls that look impressive and impenetrable this city is a picture it's symbolic it's figurative of the outward facade we all project to others the false version of ourselves in his book

[19:52] The Deeper Journey Robert Mulholland Jr. actually write about this episode and has very interesting insights for us he says this you see it was necessary for Cain to create for himself a structure that would provide a center of identity of meaning value and purpose to replace the center he lost when he pulled the roots of his being out of God and then he goes on to say this you find the amplification of the story in the account of Babel in Genesis 11 1-9 here from the east the place where Cain went the land of Nod east of Eden we see people build a city for themselves again and like Cain they are attempting to create for themselves a structure of life that will provide a center of identity see the rich young ruler just did what Cain and the people of Babel did it is the same thing we all do we build structures of trust and safety for ourselves to cope with and survive in this world that is east of Eden east of God's paradise and blessing east of the safe place that he originally designed we attach ourselves to them these false structures and we do that so we can feel safe and secure in a world that is anything but safe and secure we build them high and lofty our cities our walls so that they look impressive and they garner the praise of men and they protect us and because we built them we see them not only as belonging to us actually in fact what happens is they are us it's like putting on a muscle suit right

I watch Dude Perfect with my kids it's a fun little show and one recent episode they had this like strength challenge you know all the guys in there and one of the things they made it fun with the strength challenge they all had to throw on this fake muscle suit over their actual body so when you see them you're just like wow that looks impressive until you find out that it's all fake but that's what

we do we we put out this facade it's like putting on that muscle suit to hide who we really are and after a while it's all we know and we might even forget that we're wearing it we begin to believe the fake suit is who we actually really are this is how I saw it work out in my own life I grew up in a home that praised being right it valued success in business which was measured by your job title and your salary to win an argument and get the last word in was a virtue to have to say you're wrong or you're sorry was a weakness sarcasm to mask your anger or disappointment in somebody was an okay thing to do all this happened in a Christian home both of my parents loved Jesus deeply my mom until the day she died my dad still to this day and they raised us accordingly and when I left home

I began to build my life but no surprise I began to build it according to the pattern of which I was raised in I began to build that city I worked hard at my job harder than everyone else to show that I was better and to get promoted and it worked I got the job titles and the salaries that garnered the praise of men which I so deeply desired and I was told this is how you should be I also dedicated myself to learning not for the love of knowledge but so that I could win arguments that I could have an answer for everything to everyone so I could prove them wrong and myself right because when I'm right then you're wrong and I'm better than you that was according to the pattern I was raised in here is another part of that in the pursuit of being right and better and deserving of praise I had to suppress and hide my failures and weaknesses I couldn't look at them I couldn't name them I couldn't acknowledge them that was too scary and that's this is how I went about in my teens and my twenties building my city building my life but the higher it grew the more alone and the more false I felt my false self my late twenties was well established I had built a false persona that seemed to be fooling everyone around me and I had even succeeded in fooling myself and then in September 6 2015 in a living room in Franklin Tennessee with five other church planters like me Jesus used a wise old godly man to cut through all my pretense my eyes were opened to see that I've just been more in a fake muscle suit I don't even know who I really am and so begin a tough disorienting hard but necessary two year journey of God showing me every step of the way here's another layer of your false self let's strip it away here's another layer of your false self strip it away look and learn about your limitations and your weaknesses and don't be scared of them learn to rejoice in them because I made you that way that's the beginning of a tough journey it's the beginning of a necessary journey if you are willing to take it and it's tough and it's hard and it's disorienting for a while because when you've oriented your life around something false when you step into realizing it you start to wonder what in the heck is going on who am I really and you know what the answer to that is on the other side and God knows that answer because he can form you and fashion you and make you into the person according to his good and perfect will and that's my story and I'm saying it's not finished

I'm still walking that out with the Lord and it's good and it's beautiful and I'm surrendering to that every step of the way the Lord just recently taught me on sabbatical as I was praying to him Lord man I just want to be whatever you want me you want me to be and then he said good Jess well start taking your hand off the chisel like I've got this you don't have to help me you don't have to try to direct it because what I was doing is saying Lord I want I was saying with my mouth I want to be whatever you want me to be but can you make it more like that person can you make it look more like him or that or with that gift and he's saying son I know better than you just let it go trust me I got this what about you Jesus is here he wants to call every single one of us out of our false self he wants to cut through all our pretense he wants to get to the real you the you he sees and knows the beautiful workmanship that he knows is in there and he wants to get at he wants to get to the real you behind the pride in your possessions the house that you boast in the fancy car and nice clothes that portray a certain level of success behind the angry thoughts and outbursts behind every malignant word of gossip or slander behind the lust filled leering at another's body behind escaping into overindulgence in video games and narcotics or alcohol or movies shows books podcasts behind our overworking behind judgments and allegiances rooted in the political zeitgeist of the day behind seeking validation through my spouse my kids my job my career my possessions my wealth even my religious activity behind all those high walls and false projections there is a loving savior he wants to get at who we truly are we are little children

[28 : 16] Jesus says I have come to show you the father I have come to make a way to the father Jesus wants to show us that in the end we are little children and that is who we are and he sees we are little children and we're scared because we left home to see greatness for ourselves and instead found an inhospitable world that we've had to settle in the best we know how Jesus saw

that in the rich young ruler he sees it on you and look what he does in verse 21 it says Jesus looked at him man for me that's the most one of the most magical parts of this verse he knew that guy's heart and he doesn't give up on it he looks at him with love in his eyes and it says he loved him Jesus is looking at each one of us today look full in his face let his truth and his love pierce you let it begin to reveal to you some of those things that we've been talking about that false self that you need to let go of and walk away from and that's what he did to this guy he was calling out this young man to come out from all the young man come like a child and that's what he is saying to every single one of us today detach from all the things that are false and come to me

Jesus is saying to you and me you have to lose everything you've built your life on sorry everything you go to for security safety and confidence he's saying to us today let them all go all what does Jesus salvation require of us what does it cost us what does a life of deeper communion with him require of us and cost us nothing and everything and that seems impossible everything I said you may think Jesse I don't even know where to begin I don't even know how to make that first step! there's something stirring here but I don't know what to do we could be like Peter who said like or the disciples who heard all this and we're like gosh then who can be saved and Jesus answers you know what in verse 27 with man it is impossible but not with God with God all things all things are possible and when you and I are willing to let go of everything you know when a camel had to go through the eye of the needle that was just an entrance into the city in order to get into it because it was a small place it had to be unloaded it couldn't carry anything through the eye of that needle camels were pack animals back then merchants used it and loaded all their wares and their goods on there to sell in a place but all of that had to be taken off the camel all of it had to be stripped off so they could go through that small little gate to get inside we have no choice here Jesus is saying man it's easier for a camel than somebody that a rich man that is trying to hold on to everything it's easier for a camel to get through that place because it is impossible for me and you to enter the kingdom if we come on our own terms and holding on to all of our stuff we don't get to do that and if we let go of all those things guess what happens

Jesus said truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands that is a lot to lose can we just reckon with that that is some of the most painful stuff to lose if we lose them for my sake and for the gospel if we let him unpack us take all our possessions off all the things we think are of great value and importance we will not receive not we will not receive a hundredfold now will we sorry or who will not receive a hundredfold now and this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands everything that we lost God says you know what you're going to get it back with persecutions kind of throws that in there just in case you thought it was going to be all good all gravy no lumps no it's there's gonna be persecutions you're gonna receive all that back in the age to come eternal life but you know what you don't earn it for yourself you receive it who will not receive a hundredfold it's a gift the stuff we get back from

God after we walk away from all that's a little scary but you know what he's gonna give it back and he gives it back better than anything we can imagine now maybe you've heard all this you're open you're not really open to this still you're just like man that sounds too tough I'm just gonna keep on holding on I'm gonna stay in the status quo I just like where I'm at with Jesus and we're just on cruise control you can do that I don't say this a day is coming that you and I cannot avoid when all our false attachments will be forced to fall away in death everything will be shaken and everything will be revealed what is false will fall away and what is true will remain and Jesus calls us to live forward from this moment and there's two ways we can walk out of here today one we could be like the rich young ruler just keep the status quo leave with sadness not being any closer to

[34 : 23] Jesus or we could be like Peter who joyfully says look Lord we've left everything to follow you so here's the question that Jesus is saying to you today he's looking at every single one of our hearts he's looking at you in the face with love what is he calling you to come out of today what is he showing you that you need to detach from if you can stand with me and as the band comes up we're going to respond we're going to ask some questions some prompts if you need to reference them during this time of response and here's what I want to do I want to slow this moment down we often have this moment of examining our hearts and it's usually about 20 seconds but I really feel to honor this time we just need to extend that a little bit more okay we're going to go for a few more minutes and just 20 seconds because I just want to allow all of us unhurried time to respond to God right now I don't want you to feel rushed I want you to have time to stop and listen listen to what the

Holy Spirit has been saying and stirring up in you and respond to that however which way you want you know some of that we can get so anchored into like okay this is the end of the service I know what I'm supposed to do and just kind of like just kind of walk something out where we've been disciplined into and it's our normal but there's got to be room to open ourselves up to him who knows where we're at knows what we need knows the conversations that he's leading us into knows the probing questions that are going to get out the most important thing that he wants to take us into and just open yourself up to that it's going to be unhurried time quiet in a hurry time and some of you may feel like the response is you feel tears welling up and you just need to cry and that's okay maybe it's writing something down of things that are being revealed to you about yourself and that's okay do that maybe you just need to sit that is okay maybe you need to kneel that is okay maybe there is in this moment you just feel a strong urge that man I need to go to talk to somebody maybe it's to confess maybe it's to bring them in and feel like somebody's shouldering this burden that you're carrying with you and we're going to have people around the room to do that we have Elliot over here in the back we got

Freddie in the back there Otis and Naomi in the back here Haley will be off to the side it's an invitation this isn't a manipulation trying to may force something to happen we just got to be open to how the spirit may be working in all of our hearts and so we're going to take a few minutes to do that just close your eyes focus on him listen to him and respond heard