

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“How to be Truly Free”
Mark 10:17-31
New City Church of LA
March 8, 2009
Speaker: Kevin Haah

I. Vision of New City

Welcome to New City. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church.

II. Introduction

Series called THE REAL JESUS.

The real Jesus is constantly telling us stuff that challenges us. If Jesus is not challenging us, we should examine if Jesus we've created is more a creation of our own culture or the real Jesus.

The first part of Mark: Who is he?

The second part of Mark: How do you follow him? Discipleship.

Today, we are going to talk about a key teaching of Jesus.

The stuff we cover today is at the heart of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It's the gospel.

Do you often feel like you want to change the direction of your life and you're trying but you can't? You want to be free but you can't? I want to talk to you about how to be truly free. The gospel can truly free you.

The gospel can save you and free you!

We often think of the gospel as the ABCs of Christianity. It's get out of jail for free card. We enter into the Kingdom of God through believing in Jesus, but after we become a Christian, it's all about the law. Dos and don'ts. No. The gospel is the A to Z of Christianity. It is the gospel that transforms you and frees you as a Christian.

Let's see how it work.

Read Mark 10:13-31

17As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

"Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

- It's very unusual for someone to call rabbi "good rabbi." He was definitely trying to flatter Jesus. He was kneeling and all.
- Apparently, this was a common question that rabbis asked their disciples when they wanted to teach them. And the answer to this question was not in dispute at all. All the rabbis said: obey the laws and avoid sin. He knew that.

18"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

- I think Jesus says this not because he doesn't believe that he is good, but because he wants to refocus this man to God. Jesus was always giving glory to the Father.
- Jesus gave him the answer that all rabbis gave.

19You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'[d]"

20"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

21Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

- This man was rich; we know he was moral. He wasn't killing people; he wasn't fooling around. He wasn't stealing, lying, or defrauding. He was honest in his business dealings; and he honored his parents. He was a decent man. He lived a moral life. Luke and Matthew's version of the story tell us that he was also young and powerful. So, we often refer to this man as young rich ruler. [He was probably good looking as well] In essence, he had it all. He had money, respect, power, and youth. I don't think we have anyone like him here. The guy does charity work, he's rich, he's honest, he's got good character, and he's an elder/leader at a church.
- Then, instead of saying: Good and faithful servant. Enter into my glory. Look everyone. Here's a model Christian. This is who you should be like. I mean the guy was close to perfect as we can imagine. Instead of saying that, he told the guy to sell everything

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is[e] to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

This passage tells us: (1) How We Are Saved; and (2) How to Be Truly Freed From Our Sins.

III. First, How to Be Saved.

A. It starts with the question that assumes that somehow we can save ourselves.

B. But, Jesus shows us that we can't save ourselves by showing us areas in our lives in which we keep our idols. He raises the standard to the level of perfection.

C. We can't do it.

D. But God can.

E. The passage right before this: Jesus said: “15I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” The only way to enter into the kingdom is through coming to God with nothing, acknowledging that we have nothing to offer and asking for his mercy.

Philippians 3:4-9

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:
5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

We are not saved by the law, but through faith in Christ.

IV. Second, How to be Truly Freed from our Sins of Self-Salvation

One of the first things we have to deal with in order to be freed from our sins is to define the sin, define the real problem in our lives. Is our real problem that we don't obey God's laws? For many of us it is.

What was the man's real problem? What is our real problem? There are stuff that looks like they are the problems, but often, we have to go one more step and see what the real problem is. The problem behind the problem.

This man was a decent sort of man. He lived by the rules. He was active in the synagogue. He was an honest businessman. He honored his parents. But what was his problem?

Why did Jesus tell him to sell everything and give to the poor and follow him? He didn't do that to everyone. I don't think he ever said it to anyone except him.

Remember Zaccheus, the tax collector? He decided to give away half of his money and Jesus approved of him. He rarely makes this demand on people. So why did he make it to this man?

His problem was that he was trying to save himself. He was trying to obtain righteousness through the law, and not by faith in God's gift and mercy. That's why Jesus gave him a standard that was impossible for him to meet. It dealt with him. What's the big deal? Well, it's a huge deal. If we don't see this as the root of sin, we are going to have a hard time defeating sin in our lives.

- What does it mean to try to attain righteousness through the law?
 - When we talk about righteousness, a lot of people these days sort of turn off their ears. They think it's kind of a thing that ancient people cared about. Who cares about being righteous now?
 - In fact, for most of us, that word has a negative connotation. Being righteous is equated with self-righteousness or a holier- than-thou attitude.
 - Generally, though, the word means being good.
 - But in the Bible, the term righteousness is in the context of a relationship; it means to be right with someone. It means to be accepted or approved by someone.

- And, we are all seeking acceptance and approval. We are all seeking some sort of validation. It's like a need that is deep inside of our hearts.
- In some ways, since the fall of Adam and Eve, everyone is born into the world, knowing that they are not acceptable, lovable, valuable, and they'd better find a way to make themselves so.
- Of course, family has a lot to do with the sense of how loudly this sense of unrighteousness rings in our ears as we grow up.
- And all of us try to attain that sense of validation by trying really hard. That's what he was doing. He was seeking validation by observing the law.

- Eugene Peterson in *The Message* calls it self-improvement or trying really hard to be good.
- We are all trying to save ourselves with things. We have to free ourselves from these self-salvation projects in order to be truly free!

Whether we are Christians or not, we all in one form or another still engage in self-salvation projects. Let me give you some examples.

- *Chariots of Fire* (1981): -the story about two Olympic sprinters: Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams. While Abrahams said that he had 10 seconds to prove the reason for his existence, Liddell raced with his head up, saying, “I feel God’s pleasure when I run.” Abrahams was trying to save himself through running and winning, while Liddell was already saved and was doing this simply because he felt God’s pleasure.
- *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006): Meryl Streep (Miranda) played the most powerful person in fashion business—her whole existence was validated by her career, and she was willing to do whatever it took to keep her job, including stabbing a friend in the back. Her career was her self-salvation project.
 - If you get your ultimate value as a person from being a successful career person, you are going to do whatever it takes, whether it is ethical or not, whether it destroys your marriage and your family life or not, or whether it is healthy for you or not. But if you get your ultimate value from God, that he loves you and thinks that you are beautiful, acceptable, valid, righteous, then your work is put into its proper perspective.
 - In many ways, when I was practicing law, I was engaged in a self-salvation project. I wanted to be successful so badly because, whether I admitted it or not, I was getting my ultimate value as a person from how smart I was, how successful I was. Success was so important to me that there were many times when I knew I was walking on the edge

- of the line: like being tempted to misrepresent facts, be manipulative, tempted to cross ethical boundaries, tempted to inflate billable hours.
- Why did I do all that? Because in many ways, I was engaged in a self-salvation project. I think I tried to say, No. Don't do that. It's wrong. But, the root of the problem that caused the temptation was a self-salvation project. I was trying to get my ultimate value from my career success, and not from God.
 - If your job is not a self-salvation project, even if you lose your job unfairly, you will still be able to go on. I am not saying that we should become robotic and not feel anything. It's okay to feel depressed after you get fired from your job or after they pass you up for a promotion.
 - But, if you see that you have this bitterness, a sense that you want revenge, or an unforgiving heart, you have to ask yourself whether your job has been a self-salvation project for you.
- For many of us, our self-salvation project is our relationships. Getting people to like you and approve of you. Getting someone to love you. Your total self-value is dependent on whether what others think of you. So, you become like a wave tossed back and forth without an anchor. The reality is that we do need someone to love us. We do need someone to say we are okay. You can't just live your life saying I don't need anyone to tell me I am okay. I am just going to internally generate it. But, that can be pretty pathetic as well. We do need someone outside of ourselves telling us we are okay; and the only one person can give us the approval, the righteousness. That's Jesus.
 - For some of us, our self-salvation project is in our families. Sometimes, mothers (especially stay at home mothers) can get all of their value and self-worth from being a good mother. I know being a good mother is a good thing, but watch out. Trying to follow the laws of the OT to be saved was also a good thing, but that didn't work. If your children rebel against you or you find that you are not as good as you thought you were as a mother, it's going to devastate you. We need to get our righteousness, our value and validation,

our worth and beauty from God. He says you are loved and more beautiful than we could believe.

- Even marriages. Singles trying to get married and dating people who they know are not good for them or are Christians.
- Even sex. Let's say you agree with the Bible and believe that sex outside of the context of marriage is wrong. But, why are you still engaged in it? Maybe it has to do with a self-salvation project to get her to fall for you physically (because you're such a man!) or a self-salvation project to receive affirmation and love and feel loved (because you're a beautiful woman). We need to make sex in our lives in line with the truth of the gospel. The gospel tells us that you are beautiful even though you are sinful, and you don't have to seek self-validation or approval through sex.
- For some of us, we try to save ourselves by trying to be really really good. The problem is that we have a hard time doing it with a pure motivation and from the heart. The only way to do it often is to create external rules that tell us that if we do XYZ, then we are good and righteous. That's what the Jewish Christians who were distorting the gospel were doing. If we don't get drunk, if we don't cuss, if we don't smoke, if we stay out of clubs. Whatever. If you don't do this list of bad things, you look down upon others who do and commit the sin of arrogance and if you do do the list, then you feel like you're a failure.
 - Jonathan Edwards: two reasons why people are virtuous. One, they do it out of fear (don't lie or you will face the consequences) or pride (you don't want to be like those liars). There is something inherently instable in this. You have restrained the heart but you have nurtured the sin. Fear and pride can bend the heart but it will snap back.
 - The other reason to be virtuous is the gospel. In order to have your heart transformed, you deepen your understand of what Jesus has done for you. The more you get to know God, more you realize his majesty and holiness, and the more you realize your sins and messiness, and the more you deepen your understanding of what Jesus has done for

you. Then, even when you sin, your instinct is not to go further away from God, but to get back into fellowship with Him. When you are convicted of sin in a gospel way, you will turn back into a relationship with him.

- Then, he will change your heart and transform your life.
- There are so many ways in which we seek self-salvation, we seek righteousness, we seek self-validation, acceptance, worth and value, in things other than God.
- I am not saying that we have to stop all the self-salvation projects to be saved. It is by grace alone. But even after we are saved, we need to apply the gospel to our self-salvation projects.
- The gospel frees us from all of these things that enslave us, and says to us, you are loved far more than you can imagine; you are so beautiful to me, you are so righteous. God sees the beauty of Jesus in us. He sees the righteousness of Jesus in us. This, despite the fact that we are ugly, we are needy, we are sinful, we are insecure, we are manipulative, we are weak, and we are messed up.
- You are far more wicked than you ever believed and you are far more accepted and loved than you ever hoped.
- That is the gospel.
- I pray that the old paradigm of self-salvation projects will be blown away and replaced with gospel salvation.