

# Big Questions

## Mark 10:17-31

### Introduction

Katharine McPhee was the runner-up on the fifth season of American Idol. She turned that second place finish into a major singing career. Her second album featured a hit single titled "Had It All."

- Mariah Carey has a song with lyrics that proclaim "I had it all, but I let it slip away."
- The lyrics in a song by the band Parachute say "We could have had it all."
- And a Justin Bieber song asks the woeful question "What if you had it all but had nobody to call?"

A quick google search this past week confirmed my suspicion. A lot of people are worried about getting it all, keeping it all, losing it all, managing it all, storing it all and protecting it all.

- In my search I found more than 20 different commercials promising that "you can have it all..." but only if you purchase Tide laundry detergent at Target while driving a Toyota.

In the Gospel text today we meet a man who has it all. We know him as "the rich young ruler," although this text in Mark doesn't use any of those adjectives to describe him. Think about it: rich, young and a ruler. He probably was really good looking too. And I'm sure he had perfect teeth. I also betting his kids were honor students and his dog never had accidents on the carpet. This guy truly had it all.

But in spite of having everything, deep down inside of him he knew something was missing. Everybody around him thought he had it all, but he knew better. He had questions, and he needed answers. So he did a really wise thing: He took his questions to Jesus.

This is week two of our sermon series titled "Kingdom Come." We are laser-focused on the coming Kingdom of Christ, which we will celebrate on Christ the King Sunday (November 21). In this series of sermons we are looking at the different ways the coming Kingdom of Christ differs from the kingdom of this world.

Here in this text we one very significant example of that difference: From the vantage point of the earthly kingdom this rich, young, ruler HAD IT ALL! But in the Kingdom of Christ, some significant was lacking in this rich, young ruler's life. Jesus makes that point directly in the context of the story. Did you hear it?

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. (Mark 10:21)

The man who had it all was lacking one very important thing... which now makes him "the man who almost had it all." In this text, the rich young ruler's search takes him to Jesus. Let's join him on his journey of discovery as we consider three essential questions:

## QUESTION #1: What can I do?

“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17)

This is both the first and the third question for today. I'm dividing it into two because that's what Jesus did. When the question is asked, Jesus responds to only the first half of the question, and He does so with the standard “to do” list that every Jew knew well:

“You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” (Mark 10:19)

All the shalls and shalt nots. The man who almost had it all knew that list well. Better yet, he has been keeping that list for along time:

“All these I have kept since I was a boy.” (Mark 10:21)

In other words, I have already done all I know to do but something is still missing. What more is there to do?

Now, you and I sitting here 2,000 years later hopefully understand that there is nothing else he can do, right? “Doing” doesn't bring us into favor with God.

The prophet Isaiah says it like this:

Our best efforts are like grease-stained rags. (Isaiah 64:6, The Message)

The Apostle Paul is clearer still:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

But this guy's mind is so focused doing! He is part of an earthly kingdom that believes “we get what we deserve” and “if we work hard enough, we can have it all.” So there has to be something to do! There is always something to do.

Jesus knows that is the mind of this man who almost has it all operates. It's what Jesus came to earth, to show us that eternal is the not result of anything we do. So since that is what he wants, Jesus gives him something else to do ... and now the question changes.

## QUESTION #2: What can I keep?

Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. (Mark 10:21)

The question switches from “what can I do?” to “what can I keep?” Suddenly, the text tells us, this man who almost had it all lost his desire to find the one thing that was lacking:

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:22)

This extra thing on the “To Do” list created a problem. You see, to for him to get it all he would have to give something up. And in the earthly kingdom that makes absolutely no sense. You never give something up; you always get more. And then you rent another storage unit, and get even more. That's the bumper sticker the earthly kingdom lives by, right?

He who dies with the most toys wins.

You don't take all you have and give it away. Because then you don't have it anymore. And how are you going to win, how are you going to be important, how are you going to maintain your status, if you don't have it all.

Oh, how different that is from the Kingdom of Christ! Jim Elliot was American missionary, and one of five missionaries killed as they tried to bring the good news of Jesus to the Auca tribe in Ecuador. He was not yet 30 years old when he was killed. But somewhere in those 30 years, he made a statement that I think best describes the Kingdom perspective:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. (Jim Elliott)

If you have it all, the bottom line is that one day you will lose it all. You can't take it with you. If your eyes are focused on the standards of the earthly kingdom, you will one day discover you have nothing in the Kingdom of Christ that is coming.

Which brings to question three.

### **QUESTION #3: How can I live forever?**

Here's the question again as first asked by this man who had almost everything:

What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17)

We know he can't DO anything. So how can this man who has almost everything get the one thing that he really wants? How can he live forever?

Let's put it like this: He needed the perspective of a different kingdom.

You see ... he was rich, and young and a ruler. And he had perfect teeth. And all those things matter when it comes to being at home in this earthly kingdom.

But in Christ's kingdom none of it matters. You might have everything he had, or you might not. It doesn't matter. In the kingdom that is coming, the only thing that matters is this:

I am sinner in need of a Savior.

My defining characteristic is not related to my age, my economic situation or my status in the community. In the kingdom that is to come, my defining characteristic is related my inability to do anything to change my standing before a holy God.

With all of his fine qualities, the young man was very superficial in his views of spiritual things. He certainly had a shallow view of salvation, for he thought that he could do *something* to earn or merit eternal life.

- This was a common belief in that day among the Jews (John 6:28).
- It is very common today. Most unsaved people think that God will one day add up their good works and their bad works; and if their good works exceed their bad works, they will get into heaven.

Behind this good-works approach to salvation is a superficial view of sin, man, the Bible, Jesus Christ, and salvation. Sin is rebellion against the holy God. It is not simply an action; it is an inward attitude that exalts man and defies God.

This man who had almost everything would never truly have it all until he changed his heart from an earthly minded heart to a kingdom mind one.

## **APPLICATION**

All is a little word. But it can be a troublesome word. "All" was keeping this rich, young ruler out of the Kingdom of Christ.

One of the great hymns of the church offers this suggestion:

All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.

Lyrics: Judson W. Van de Venter; Music: Winfield Scott Weeden  
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What are you doing with your all?

Amen.