

Untitled (41)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 October 2015

[0:00] This passage in Mark tells a familiar story.

! Most of us have heard or read it many times, including explanations of the famous easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle metaphor.

In fact, that metaphor and the dangers of riches are what we tend to concentrate on. Yet there's much more to this story. The tale begins as Jesus is setting out on a journey.

A young man runs up to him. Runs! He is clearly desperate to see Jesus and speak with him before the crowds that so often surround him make that impossible. Perhaps he's been following Jesus for a while, staying in the background, before he finally decides to approach him. He has reached a conclusion about who Jesus is that makes him think Jesus is capable of answering the question that burns in him.

So he runs and kneels before Jesus, addressing him as good teacher. Another translation is good master or good rabbi.

[1:21] However translated, this title is one that is given to a human being. We have no indication in this story that the young man has any idea who Jesus really is.

He does good things, so that makes him good. He teaches the people with authority, so as he is a teacher or a master or rabbi. Even those closest to Jesus, his disciples, couldn't believe in any sustained way that he really was God's son, more than merely human.

So how could this young man be expected to know? But he does know that Jesus is obviously wise, worthy of great respect, and may possibly know the answer to his question. So he asks, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now Jesus, of course, understands that the young man is approaching him as another human being, one who is wiser than most, capable of answering a question such as this, but still merely human.

But humans aren't good. And the first thing Jesus says addresses that point. Why do you call me good? Only God is good. If you think of me only as a human being, I can't possibly be good.

[2:52] And then he goes right on and answers the man's question. He says, you know the commandments, and proceeds to name some of them. In effect, he is saying that the answer is obvious.

It's given in the scriptures to all Jews. Follow the commandments. Jesus is almost saying to him, why are you bothering to ask me what you already know? And of course, the young man does know.

Teacher, he says, and note that this time he doesn't call Jesus good. Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. That is pretty much ever since he was old enough to understand what the commandments were. He's been doing what is supposed to save him, what is supposed to keep him in relationship with God. Yet he has no confidence that faithful following of the commandments will give him eternal life. He's been doing his duty all his life.

But somehow he knows it's not enough. We're told then that Jesus, looking at him, loved him. Here is a young man after his own heart. A man who realizes that there must be more than just following the commandments. Here is a heart longing for eternal life. He thinks in terms of doing, what can he do more than he already knows to do?

And Jesus, because he is God as well as man and can see to the depths of the human heart, answers the question in the way it's asked, giving the young man something to do, but also exposing the deepest attitudes of his heart. He says, there is one thing you lack. Go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. Do you feel the stab in your heart that that young man must have held?

[5:22] Oh, please, not that. Anything, ask me anything else, but not this one thing. Yet that is exactly what Jesus asks for. The one thing we are most unwilling to give up.

