

Mark 10:17-22

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother."' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

"So, Here's the Deal"

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When you're in the fifth grade, and you take piano lessons, and you come home from school and it's a beautiful day, and absolutely you want to go out and play with your friends, and you go to your mom and you say, "Mom, it's so pretty out. Is there any way I could just go out and play with my friends?" And she says, "I know you really want to play with your friends, so here's the deal. I want you to practice at least 45 minutes on your piano, and then you can go outside and play."

Now, you're in college, you've worked all summer to earn your tuition, you've worked hard, but you come up short. So you meet with your mom and your dad and you say, "You know, I just don't have the money to go my first semester to school. Is there any way, is there *any* way that you could help me with my tuition?" And your dad says, "We appreciate how hard you have worked this summer to earn money for college. I'm sorry your scholarship didn't come through. That would have helped a lot. So here's the deal. If you keep your grades up, like making all As and Bs, then we will consider helping you."

Well, you're employed. You go in early to work, you stay late, you're a dedicated employee, but each year, there's always that week before Christmas when you meet with your family. It's a family reunion, the week before Christmas, and you go to your supervisor, you tell her, you say, "Look, this is something we do every year, and I will come in early, I'll stay late, is there any way that I can just go and be with my family on this reunion?" and she says. "That's a really tough time for us, so here's the deal. If you continue to come in early and stay late, and work as hard as you've been working, maybe I'll let you off that week."

You're a dedicated mom. You're a stay-at-home mom, you manage the household, you're great at what you do, you have two children in elementary school. You also belong to a women's book club, and the other night, three of the women got together, of which you were one of them, and you decided, "We're going to take a long weekend and go to Minneapolis, to the Mall of America." And you can hardly wait to go, and you go home and you present the idea to your husband, and he says, "Well, that weekend is really busy

for me. But here's the deal. I'll make it work if you will get a sitter for the kids on that Friday evening and if you will prepare some meals for us and put them in the refrigerator."

Why does life have to be so conditional? It's just full of conditions, conditions, conditions. I was in the fourth grade. The Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus came to our little old town of Great Bend, Kansas and I could hardly wait. I think they even had their own train. They parked clear down at the end of the town and they unloaded out of their box cars, and here came the elephants down the street, and here were the lions and the tigers in their cages, and the jugglers were coming along and the clowns, and they were walking the two miles to the fair grounds, and I thought, "What a great thing. The Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus is in our town."

After they had been there a couple of days I remember it was a Saturday morning, I rode my bicycle over there to the circus grounds, and I'm walking around, and a man came up to me and said, "What's your name, Sonny?" and I said, "My name's David," and he said, "Well, I'm Max, and I work for the circus." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah. Would you like to go to the circus free?" and I said, "Would I ever!" and he said, "Well, here's the deal. If you'll set chairs in the tent for the afternoon and evening performances, and I'll even let you water the elephants"--which was a childhood dream--"then tomorrow you can come to the circus free." And I said, "Good." And I worked and I worked and I went home that night, told my mom and dad about it. They even let me off church and Sunday school the next morning, it was Sunday, and I rode my bicycle back over to the grounds, and the circus was gone. It was gone. They packed up in the middle of the night and left. That performance that I was going to be at was no more. I'd worked so hard.

Is this what Jesus was all about? Do you think Jesus was about the business of offering people deals? Well, I think he might not have used the language, "Well, here's the deal..." but I do think he said, "Here are some choices." Yeah, here are some choices for you. Let's look at our Scripture. First of all keep in mind, Jesus has just been with a group of children, probably like what we had up here. Remember, he said the kingdom of God is like all these children. They're innocent, they're pure, they're fun, and he spent a lot of time with them, and now he's getting ready to go on a journey. Leave Judea, he's going on a journey. And all of a sudden, in the midst of going on the journey, a man comes up and kneels right in front of him and says, "Jesus, Jesus." I think that's kind of interesting. Haven't you had that happen to you, when you're just getting ready to walk out of the house and the phone rings? Or you get in your car, you're getting ready to go someplace and the neighbor comes over and bangs on the window and wants to talk?

I don't know whether he knelt there so he could stop Jesus from his journey, but he looks at him, and he says, "Jesus, what must I do to have eternal life?" Now, I think that's an interesting question. I also think the rest of the story is kind of interesting. First all, we've got a man who is genuine. This is not an adversarial conversation. This is a loving conversation between Jesus and a man who says, "I think I'm missing something, what can I do?" The second part of that, that makes it interesting to me, is the word "do." "What must I do?" Isn't that something? As though we have a heavenly bookkeeper just

checking them off. Everything we do for eternal life. So, Jesus looks at him and says, "You seem to be a pretty decent fellow. You've kept all the Commandments, haven't you?" He said, "Oh my goodness, I've kept those commandments since I was a child. I've kept all the social commandments, you know, the ones about adultery, and don't covet, and, you know, the ones about don't cheat and steal. I've kept all of those." And Jesus says, "Well, that's good."

Now, don't you think all of us fall in that same category? Most of us have kept our Commandments. I mean, we've broken some, but most of us have kept Commandments. Most of us aren't going around stealing. We don't steal, because it's wrong. And it's wrong because it's wrong. We don't have to get into some huge philosophical discussion about that. It's just wrong. And we don't cheat. Well, you can decide that for yourself. We all have our moments, but we try to stay away from cheating, because cheating is wrong because it's wrong. And we don't bully people and build ourselves up at their expense, because that's wrong. Why? Because it's wrong. And you know what? When we violate any of that, when we break any of those social Commandments, we all know it. And we feel it down in here. Because we don't sleep well at night, we don't eat well. We know about it, and it preys upon us.

Her name was Evelyn, Evelyn. Evelyn and I were in a small group together. Four days of training. We sat together, learning small group experiences, and the way you learned it was to be a part of it. And so we sat together for four days. But Evelyn didn't contribute very much. In fact, Evelyn knitted a lot. She would sit there and knit, she'd knit and knit and never say much. The third day, this was becoming so offensive to one of the people our group that he pulled of us aside, his name was Dean, and he said, "I'm going to open Evelyn up." Really? And he said, "I need your help." We said, "What do you want us to do?" He said, "Here's the deal...."

So we came back from our break, and we're all standing, and Dean says, "Evelyn, I'd like for you to leave the room, and I'd like for Cletus to leave the room..." because he was in our group, and well-liked, and contributed a lot. He said, "You two leave the room and then I will invite you in." So we all stood in a circle and in came Evelyn, and we hooked our arms and wouldn't let her in our group. We would not let her in. And she kind of tried to break through, and so she went over and stood against the wall. And then Cletus came in and we welcomed him. "Oh, come on in, good to see you." Welcomed him into the group. Evelyn got up to join the group. We locked our arms again, and then we all sat down. Dean said, "So, Evelyn, how do you feel about all that?" She said, "I don't feel good at all. It wasn't kind." She said, "I knit because I love to knit. I'm not trying to hide behind my knitting, and I'm absorbing a lot of what's going on here in group leadership, I'm just not as vocal as some of you." You know, I never said anything to Evelyn about that. We had another day, and it just kind of faded out.

I was sharing that experience with somebody years ago and I said, "Here's how I learned group stuff..." I started to talk about Evelyn and I started to cry. And the fellow looked at me and he said, "David, do you know where Evelyn is?" I said, "I think I do. I think I know where she is." That's all he said. So I wrote he and told her how sorry I was to have

been a part of that, and I wanted her to forgive me. To forgive me. Because you know what, folks? We missed it. Those of us that bought into that missed it. Dean really missed it. But we all missed what it means to love somebody just like they are. We missed it.

And so here's this man kneeling before Jesus, and he says, "What must I do?" And Jesus looks at him and he says, "You're a good man. You're a good man. You're a good person. I think you've just kind of fallen short a little bit, because you're worried too much about what's going to happen to you after you die, instead of thinking about what's going on for you right now." He said, "God's going to take care of your soul. Quit worrying about that. What you need to think about is what's happening right at this moment for you." And I suppose that if Jesus could have referred a book to him, he probably would have referred Gerald Jampolsky's book, which is called *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*. Because that man was scared. And in Jampolsky's book *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*, he says there are two basic emotions, love and fear, and if we learn to love, we'll be able to let go of our fears that we have. And he says we need to live in the present moment. He looked at that man and said, "You need to live in the moment, you need to take care of business now, quit worrying about the future so much." He said, "One of the ways you can let go of your fears is to give to other people. Give something. Go beyond yourself. Don't be so self-righteous, but give beyond you." And he said, "So here's the deal. Go and sell everything you have. Sell it, and give everything that you make on that to the poor. Give everything to the poor." And the man stood up and he went away sorrowfully, because he missed it. Just like we missed it with Evelyn. He missed it.

Someone has said, "The last thing I want to do is to hurt you. But I want you to know you're still on my list." And Jesus says to us, "Tear up your lists. Tear them up. Because when you love someone with an agape love, which is a love that expects nothing in return, you just give because you give to a human being, a God-created human being, and you expect nothing in return, you just give, and it's unconditional love, it's so unconditional. It's non-judgmental, and it's not just for the select few, it's for everybody. It's for everybody.

When Temple Grandin was here and talked about her autism, she said, "You know, I'm different, but I'm not less." Different, but not less. And when we love people unconditionally, they're not less to us. It's like loving that was spoken about in the Old Testament. When Isaiah said to those Israelites, "Here's the message God has for you. Listen to what God is saying. God says, 'I created you, I claimed you, I named you, you are mine. And when you walk through the waters, they will not overpower you. And when you walk through the flames, they will not consume you, because you are mine.'" And it's a love that has no strings attached. It's an unconditional love that becomes a wondrous love. A wondrous love, the kind we sang about in the chapel when Richard died my first year in seminary. He just had been shoveling snow and he came up the room and laid down in bed and he never woke up. And we gathered in the chapel, and the seminary singers gathered around, and we sang. We sang, "What wondrous love is this, oh my soul, oh my soul, what wondrous love is this, oh my soul." We'd just finished. We'd just finished writing our systematic theology, about how God lives in this world, and what God is in this world, and God means when God talks about love. We'd been

writing about this, and then we started to sing about it. And I realized then as I realize now, that we're all called. We're all called to bring about the unconditional love on this earth, as it is in heaven. And that's a quote. That's a quote from Jesus, who also looked at a man who was kneeling before him, and said, "You're a good man, but there's something that you're missing, and it's all about love. And may we not miss it. Amen.