

## **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 10:2-16

Mark turns to Jesus' words on divorce. Why did God allow a certificate of divorce if He hated divorce? In all probability the "hardness of heart" of some men toward their wives moved God to limit men's power over their spouses. Though the certificate of divorce may seem harsh compared to today's standards, it was a vast improvement for the Jewish women of Jesus' time. Bible commentator William Barclay's historical anecdotes add to our understanding: He says that the "indecent" cited in Deuteronomy 24:1 at first included adultery, period. By Jesus' time "indecent" included "if the wife spoiled a dish of food...if she talked to a strange man...if she spoke disrespectfully of her husband's relations in his hearing..." One rabbi even taught that the wife's indecency could include, "if a man found a woman who was fairer in his eyes than his wife was."

In verse 12 Jesus' refers to a woman divorcing her husband. This could be done, with difficulty. Jesus' words refer not to what should or should not be legal, but to God's moral standard. Marriage should never be ended except for the most serious circumstances. However, Jesus would never command a spouse to remain trapped in an abusive situation. Too many spouses may endure abuse because they think God wants them to—not so.

In verse 15 Jesus is speaking of an attitude of the heart in His words about entering the kingdom "as a child." A child accepts a father's loving direction (well, until those teenage years hit). A child trusts a parent to do what is right and to care for the family needs. A child believes that being with the parent guarantees safety. A child believes that God is perfect and loving. It is the "maturity" of adulthood that pulls us from God because in our "maturity" we grow jaded; self-dependent; untrusting; jealous of our status as lords of our lives. Contrary to the value system of so-called sophisticated adults, Jesus says that it is the heart that can see Him as a child sees Him that finds joy in the kingdom. May our hearts turn to Jesus, our Savior.

*Ask your pastor about starting a new Bible Study in your church.*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

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Mark 10:2-16

1. According to vs. 6-9 (see also Genesis 1:27 and 2:24) what was God's plan for marriage? Why is God's plan especially important to review in the context of many societal trends?
2. Why had God seemingly allowed a procedure for divorce in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 24:1)? How does God respond to divorce today?
3. Compare the three Gospel accounts of Jesus blessing little children (Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17). How are the accounts similar? What differences do you note?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. Has your family experienced divorce? How do you share God's grace with one another after divorce? How do you recommit all your relationships to Christ?
5. What does it mean to be "like a little child" (vs. 15)?
6. How does your family take children to the arms of Jesus? How does your congregation take children to the arms of Jesus? Are there any children in your community who are not yet in Jesus' arms? Who's bringing them to Jesus?

## **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 10:17-22

Beginning in verse seventeen, Jesus faces down the legalism of the time. The young man believed that he had done all of the things that Jesus listed. But, when Jesus challenged him to give up his wealth and truly follow Christ, the young man left. He could not give up his true treasure.

Today, we Christians take pride in our understanding of God's grace and our rejection of legalism. However we still find ourselves unwillingly giving up much of our worldly treasure—today more than ever. We are experiencing what, in America, is considered financial hardship. Depleted retirement accounts, jobs lost, and the inability to buy what we want and vacation where and when we please leave us almost in shock. We have discovered that the wealth and solid economy on which we were depending for so much wasn't so dependable after all.

Some want revenge; wanting to find the one person to blame; wanting to just plain run away. We look at the rich young man and chide him in our minds for walking away from Jesus in favor of his wealthy lifestyle, but what have our own reactions to financial disaster said about our own priorities? Do we still praise God for His presence in our lives? Do we still find ways to give to the work of His kingdom? Or, do we mourn our loss and forget Jesus' call to let Him worry about tomorrow as we seek His kingdom today?

God does have a plan for each of us, even though I, like you, sometimes wish He would let me in on it. He is still in control, and we must each decide if we are going to spend our days mourning our losses or praising our Lord. Are our priorities reflecting discipleship to Christ, or the rich young man's dependence on wealth for happiness?

*Get to know God through His Word this week!*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## **Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

Mark 10:17-22

1. How could the man claim that he had kept all the commandments of God (vs. 20)? Had he kept them? Can anyone keep them?
2. What does it say about Jesus when "Jesus looked at him and loved him (vs. 21)?"
3. What are the treasures of heaven (vs. 21)? Are those treasures yours?

### **For Family Reflection**

4. The man's wealth kept him from a relationship with God. What keeps you from a close relationship with God?
5. If someone asked you "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" what would you say?
6. Can you think of instances in your own life (or others) where wealth and possessions have distracted people from God and His church? How do we help people see what's really valuable?

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:23 – 31

Perhaps we have here a glimpse of the pervasive class system of Jesus' time. The idea that a rich man would find it nearly impossible to enter the kingdom of God astounded the disciples, who replied to Jesus, "Who then can be saved?" We should not be too quick to criticize their question.

The disciples had grown up with the Pharisees' teaching that one gained heaven by totally obeying every law, including those added to the original Law given by God in the Old Testament. Who could accomplish this better than a rich man? But Jesus assures them, "...all things are possible with God." It would be later that they would come to understand God's grace. Of course, the real tragedy of the young man was not his wealth, but his dependence upon it.

Mark tells us that after the young man left, Peter once again let his mouth do his thinking. His statement (vs.28) implied that since the disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus, there must be a special reward for them. Jesus' answer to Peter was not only a gentle chiding, but an assurance for every Christian who has unbelieving family members.

It can be lonely to follow Jesus away from the security of family, but these believers find a new family in their Christian brothers and sisters. For Christian Jews of Jesus' time and today, the need for a new and loving family is truly great, for they may be totally rejected by their families because of their Christianity. Some are even symbolically buried and mourned by their unbelieving relatives.

Most of us do not suffer the complete family rejection that some "Messianic Jews" do, but we can still mourn when our families refuse to take Jesus seriously as Savior and Son of God. Our world's attitude of, "Whatever you choose to be true is true for you, but that doesn't make it true for me" makes it more difficult than ever to talk to a loved one about Jesus. When that happens, it is a joy to know that Jesus has promised us peace. We can also rejoice in the truth that the Holy Spirit will not give up on His quest to reach the hearts of those we love.

*Jesus comforts us as we fellowship in God's Word with friends each week.*  
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:23 – 31

1. Explain the camel and "the eye of a needle" comparison (vs. 25). Use a study Bible, commentary or other reference to help you.
2. What's the answer to the disciples' question "Who then can be saved" (vs. 26)? Who is the only source of salvation?
3. Why are riches such a stumbling block to righteousness?

### For Family Reflection

4. Do you like to be last or first? Which position does Jesus suggest is the most honorable (vs. 31)? Why?
5. What have you left behind (vs. 29-30) to follow Jesus? What blessings does Jesus promise to those who follow Him?
6. It is wrong to be rich? How can those who are rich be a special blessing in the kingdom of God?

## Reformation Sunday

John 8:31-36

These verses, in which Jesus refers to His disciples as those who “abide” (or live) in His word, are appropriate for Reformation Sunday. Reformation leader Martin Luther did not start out as a disciple who abided in God’s word.

Luther spent his first years as a monk trying to cool God’s wrath that he was sure awaited him. He believed that if he could confess every sin and make atonement for every sin, then God would accept his work and admit him into heaven. Martin confessed to his supervisor, a priest named Staupitz, for hours every day. After confessing for several hours, Martin would leave, only to shortly return, having remembered a sin he failed to confess.

Martin drove Staupitz to distraction. His talks with Luther didn’t seem to help the young monk understand that his relationship with God was one built on grace and faith, not good works.

When Staupitz directed him to assume the Chair of Bible at Wittenberg College, so the story goes, Luther replied that if he were to do one more thing, he would surely die. Staupitz replied that if he died, God would have more for him to do in heaven. Was his advisor igniting Martin’s journey into Scripture? (Later Luther said, “If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I should have sunk in Hell.”)

As part of his duties as Bible Chair, Luther began a study of Romans. As he was reading the first chapter, he found the words, “The righteous shall live by faith.” Luther later wrote that he felt as though the gates of paradise were thrown open to him at that moment. He realized that he could not be good enough to soothe God’s anger against sin, but that he was still loved by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross. His sins were covered by God’s grace in Christ. Thus began Luther’s life of *abiding* in God’s Word.

*Are you abiding in God’s word and in God’s love?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Reformation Sunday

John 8:31-36

1. In the perception of the Jews what were the privileges of their family heritage? (see also vs. 39-41) Did their heritage warrant privileges in the kingdom of God?
2. Are we slaves (vs. 34)? Why?
3. Are we free (vs. 36)? Why? What is our position because of our freedom (vs. 35)?
4. Who is the source of truth? (see also John 14:6) Many in our society would suggest that truth is relative. Is it?

### For Family Reflection

5. How is Reformation Sunday a freedom celebration? Review the history of the Reformation. How was Martin Luther a freedom leader? From what was he seeking freedom?
6. Many people are still slaves to sinful desires, possessions, etc. With whom are you sharing the freedom through Jesus?