

## **Mission Impossible**

### **Mark 10:17-27**

#### **Intro Mission Impossible**

When I started dating Juhee, we often went out to the movies. Juhee told me that she liked romantic comedies over other genres, so I tried to find some movies of that category. But I began to realize that Juhee never said “it was a wonderful movie” after we had watched a romantic comedy. Rather, Juhee was most excited after watching action movies. I told Juhee that “you seem to like action movies over romantic comedies.” Of course, Juhee said ‘no’ at first, but as we counted which movies she liked, Juhee realized that she did prefer action movies. A husband has a sacred obligation to illuminate his other half to see herself better.

One of our favorite action movie series is Mission: Impossible. Have you heard of it? I bet you have watched at least one of them. Tom Cruise is the main actor in the movies. The basic plot of each movie is always similar. A bad guy threatens global security and a nice guy saves the world. To save the world, the main character, Ethan Hunt, has to break into impenetrable security facilities to get highly classified information. The mission seems impossible to carry out but Ethan always accomplishes his mission. Although we know it is a fictional story, we are thrilled watching Ethan Hunt overcome all challenges to accomplish his seemingly impossible missions. If the mission seemed to be easy and possible, the movie would not be very exciting would it?

#### **The Rich Young Man**

It doesn't seem as exciting as a “Mission Impossible” movie, but in today's scripture we encounter a man who is on an impossible mission. His mission was to obtain eternal life. Although the mission to obtain eternal life may not sound as exciting as saving the world from terrorist attacks, we cannot simply devalue this young man's effort because we are on the same mission. Right?

What is essential for successfully carrying out a difficult mission? Information. Information is key to a successful mission. So this young man ran up and knelt before Jesus who seemed to know God's kingdom better than anyone else. He asked, “Good teacher. What must I do to obtain eternal life?” This ambitious young man really wanted to earn eternal life. Does this mission to obtain eternal life sound like an easy mission or an impossible one? Some may think it difficult but certainly possible. And this young man must have been one of them. But can he really earn eternal life?

#### **Eternal Life**

Let me change the question. How many of you want to have eternal life? I also want to have eternal life. But what is it really? What is eternal life? When you think of eternal life, what first comes into your mind? (after life, living forever...)

We often confuse eternal life with immortality. When we think of eternal life, we often assume that eternal life equates with living forever like a Vampire or Frankenstein... of course, in much better shape and in much better form. However, eternal life is completely different from immortality. Immortality is about quantity while eternal life is about quality. Some explain the difference between eternity and immortality by using dinner as a metaphor. “Immortality is how long the dinner lasts. Eternal life is what is on the menu and who is with us at the table.” Quantity and quality are not interchangeable. Imagine you have to have dinner with your

capricious and bullying boss and it last for 5 hours. Do you want to be there simply because you will have a 5 hour-long dinner? No! Right? If you had a choice, you would rather have a short dinner with your best friend which would make you much happier.

‘Eternal life’ in Christian scripture does not indicate “living forever in an afterlife or immortality.” Rather, eternal life refers to a quality of life in the here and now as well as an afterlife. As we know, eternity is God’s nature and so eternal life means living a life with God. It means living a full life under God’s reign in which the radical love of Jesus Christ guides and shapes our lives.

### **Eternal life cannot be earned because it is free grace.**

However, the young man in the passage is more interested in his personal future than a life under God’s reign. So when he asked “What must I do to obtain eternal life?,” what he was actually asking was “what have I got to do to get me into heaven?” This young man believed that he could be good, do good deeds, and thereby get an entrance pass to heaven. He understood eternal life as a reward he could get for his good deeds. He probably assumed that he could earn some points for his good deeds and he could get eternal life if he reached a certain score.

Is it possible for a man to earn eternal life by his own efforts? Of course, the answer is ‘no.’ No one can obtain eternal life by doing good works because no one is good enough to deserve God’s kingdom. In fact, every entrance pass to eternal life is stamped as “free grace.” Eternal life is God’s gift and an invitation to a new life. We do not and cannot earn eternal life but we can only respond to God’s invitation to eternal life... and live a full life with God and with our neighbors.

What is a full life with God and others? It could mean healing, wholeness, peace, love and many other things. There is no single word that can describe the meaning of living a full life with God and our neighbors. But you can guess that it must be a good and joyful thing.

I think a good metaphor to describe a full life with God and our neighbors is dance, the great Conga Line dance. Are you familiar with the Conga Line? If you know what it is, you are probably a little older than me. The Conga Line dance is a line dance that was derived from a Cuban carnival dance. The Conga Line dance is like this. (The Mask) As you can see in this picture, the Conga Line is a dance in which people line up one behind the other, holding on to each other’s shoulders and snake around the dance floor. People move together, laugh together, and join in the line. God has initiated and invited everyone to join in the wonderful movement of life sharing dance. As we dance to bring wholeness and healing, peace and love in the world, we ourselves become whole, are healed and restored, and filled with joy and peace. This is what a full life with God and neighbors will look like. When this pandemic passes, I really want to do a Conga Line in the sanctuary! Do you want to dance with me?

### **Stewardship**

Because eternal life is about a full life with God and other people in the here and now, it relates to the question of money and stewardship. When this young man answered that he had kept all commandments since he was a boy, Jesus said, “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” (v 21) How did this young man react? “When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” This rich man expected to prosper and then become a benefactor for the poor. He wanted to give some portion of his money to the poor and in return, he wanted to earn gratitude from them and a good social reputation. He wanted to

enjoy the admired role of a benefactor. But Jesus demanded everything he had and this young man's impossible mission came to an end. When this disappointed young man left, Jesus said to his disciples, "It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom! It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

What do you think of Jesus' words? It's very challenging. Imagine... somehow Jesus Christ revealed himself to you in a dream and said "go, sell what you own and give it all to the church," how would you react? Your reaction might be similar to this rich young man. Sharing what we have is difficult. Sharing our lives with strangers is hard. Can we really share everything we have with the poor?

When I was first a local church pastor in Korea, I was also finishing my graduate school studies. I often went to school by train. Many homeless people sat around the station looking for help. Normally, there was one homeless man on my way to the subway. One day, I decided to help him so I gave him \$5 and that made me feel good. It made me feel as if I was a good person. But not far from him, another homeless man asked for help. So I gave him \$5 too. But that day when I turn the corner, there was another man. I began to wonder if I should keep helping them. Perhaps, I didn't want to abandon the good feeling of being a self-righteous person, so I helped him as well. But on the stairway, I saw another homeless man. Do you know what I did? I ignored him and hurried on my way. I saw my unsanctified self on that day. It is not easy to share what we have with people in need.

If someone gets rich, others will get poorer. Because we belong to one another, unshared wealth is always an offense to others. Christ calls us to share what he has granted to us. It sounds demanding but we need to remember that it is also an invitation to eternal life and the joyful dance with God and our neighbors. In fact, all we have belongs to God. The only way to share it is to practice it.

John Wesley said, "Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can." John Wesley also lived out what he preached. CHARLES WHITE, an assistant professor of Christian thought and history at Spring Arbor (Michigan) College, offers an interesting story about how John Wesley's rules on money were formed.<sup>1</sup>

We may not know that John Wesley experienced poverty when he was a child. His father, Samuel Wesley, had 9 children to support but he was a priest in one of England's lowest-paying parishes. So, John knew what it meant to be poor and hungry.

When he finished his graduate studies, John was selected to be faculty at Lincoln College at Oxford University and of course, his financial status dramatically changed. His position paid him at least thirty pounds a year, which was more than enough money for a single man to live on. John seems to have enjoyed his relative prosperity. He spent his money on playing cards, tobacco, and brandy. However, an incident changed his perspective on money.

While at Oxford, he had just finished buying some pictures for his room when one of the chambermaids came to his door. It was a cold winter day, and he noticed that she had nothing to protect her from the weather but a thin linen gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy a coat, but found that he had too little left.

Immediately the thought struck him that God was not pleased with the way he had spent his money. He asked himself, "Will thy Master say, "Well done, good and faithful steward?" You have adorned your walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1987/winter/8711027.html>

This was a wake-up call for John Wesley and this incident in 1731 led him to limit his expenses so that he would have more money to give to the poor.

John Wesley records that one year his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28 pounds, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still managed to live on 28 pounds, so he had 32 pounds to give to the poor. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds but his living expenses were still 28 pounds. In the fourth year, he received 120 pounds. As before, his expenses were 28 pounds, so his giving rose to 92 pounds. One year his income was a little over 1400 pounds but he lived on 30 pounds and gave away nearly 1400 pounds. Despite his increased income, John Wesley continued his practice of simple living and limiting his living expenses.

Wesley believed that with an increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of giving. Because John Wesley knew the joy of living eternal life... because he lived a full life with God, Wesley became a person who went through the eye of a needle.

I know that our church members are generous to the church and do your best with your offerings. I know that you also actively participate in other charity works. Continue to keep your good works and practice more generous giving to the church and to those in need. Then, you will realize that you are already living eternal life in Christ.

“Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” This is a joyful dance that will lead you through the eye of a needle to experience the joy of eternal life! Amen.