

The Gospel of Mark - Chapter Ten

III. Mark 8:27-16:8 - Testing Jesus' Authority in Suffering (continues)

III.a Mark 8:27-10:52 - Journey to Jerusalem (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Ten

Jesus had left Galilee for the last time before his crucifixion and was heading toward Jerusalem. When he arrived in the region of Judæa he was apprehended by some Pharisees who wanted to trap him by posing a question related to divorce and the law. Jesus simply spoke of the reason why Moses had included such a law and that God's original intention was for a man and woman to be together for life. Therefore, once again he thwarted their attempts to trap him into saying something they could hold against him.

People brought their children to be blessed by Jesus but the disciples tried to hinder them. Jesus taught them that children were a key part of the Kingdom. In fact, he stated that the Kingdom actually belonged to such as these, indicating it was their innocence and childlike faith that was required by all disciples, who needed to trust God in the same way that children trust those who care for them.

A rich young man then came to Jesus. He was obviously a devout Jew and wanted to know how he could enter the Kingdom of God. When Jesus told him that he would have to give his wealth away to the poor in order to follow Jesus, he became disillusioned and left without repenting. Jesus then went on to teach his disciples how hard it is for the wealthy to give up some of their privileges in order to help others, for the trappings of his life actually hinders them from doing so.

The disciples were perplexed by this for they considered wealth to be a blessing from God. If the rich, who gave alms and supported the poor, could not get into heaven then who could? Jesus alluded to the fact that it was only through the grace and power of God that anyone could be saved. There were

clear eternal blessing for those who became impoverished to the sake of Christ and the Gospel message he proclaimed to them.

When Jesus was alone with the twelve apostles, he took the opportunity to tell them for the third time that he would be taken by the Jewish leaders and then handed over to the Romans, who would mistreat him and then kill him. However, he would rise from death on the third day.

There was a request made that James and John would have the privilege of being seated next to Jesus when he finally came in his glory. They may have meant when he had established himself as king in the new kingdom of Israel, or when he was finally in his true Kingdom. Either way, Jesus pointed out that it was for the Father to decide who would have such a privilege. He showed them that they should have the mind to suffer for him rather than reign with him, although he did acknowledge that they would be worthy of suffering with him.

Their request displeased the other ten apostles so Jesus called them all to him and taught again on the great reversal. Those who wish to lead in the church are to do so from the perspective of a servant, for the last shall be first and the first, last.

When Jesus came to Jericho he encountered at least one blind beggar. When the beggar realised it was Jesus, he called out to the Son of David to help him. The crowd tried to put him off but he cried out all the more. Jesus called the man across to him, asked him what he wanted, and when the man declared he had faith to be healed, Jesus restored his sight. He immediately became a disciple and started to follow Jesus toward Jerusalem.

III.a.vii Mark 10:1-52 - Instruction on discipleship: divorce, wealth, humility

Jesus continued instruction in the context of controversy with his opponents and discussions with his disciples, dealing first with the topic of divorce. His encounter with the rich young man then reveals that worldly wealth can be a barrier to finding entrance into the Kingdom of God.

The third prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection (vv.33-34) is followed by instruction on humility, culminating in Jesus' affirmation of his own substitutionary atonement (v.45). Finally, Jesus healed blind Bartimæus near to the famous old town of Jericho.

III.a.vii.1 Mark 10:1-12 - Divorce

Jesus was on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem for the last time. When he came in to Judæa, he was met by some Pharisees who tried to trap him into contradicting the Law of Moses on the issue of divorce. Once again, Jesus taught the correct interpretation of the Mosaic Law without falling into their trap.

¹ Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judæa and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

Mark 10:1

Jesus then left that place. Jesus was last recorded to be in Capernaum. He then set out on his final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem: <<*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem*>> (Luke 9:51). He returned to the area northeast of Jericho, probably where his ministry unofficially began: <<*This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising*>> (John 1:28), and: <<*At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan*>> (Mark 1:9).

Went into the region of Judæa and across the Jordan. It was not unusual for Jews travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem to take the longer route east of the Jordan River to avoid Samaria. It is known that Jesus did intend travelling through Samaria but was rejected: <<*And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem*>> (Luke 9:52-53). This verse indeed indicates that at some point he had crossed over to the east. Whether he had travelled through Samaria, crossed to the east of the Jordan and then entered Judæa from that direction, or crossed from the northern Samaria/Galilee border and travelled through the Decapolis is not entirely clear.

He continued to focus his ministry on teaching, as was his custom, he taught them, although Matthew records that he also healed them: <<*When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judæa to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there*>> (Matthew 19:1-2).

Again crowds of people came to him. Although this is the first time that it is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus worked in this region, he still had such a widespread reputation that drew the people to him, as much for the teaching in those days as for the healing that drew the crowds earlier on in his ministry.

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Mark 10:2

Once again, Jesus’ Pharisaic opponents sought to test him: <<*The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven*>> (Mark 8:11), and: <<*Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Cæsar or not? Should we pay or shouldn’t we?” But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. “Why are you trying to trap me?” he asked. “Bring me a denarius and let me look at it”>> (Mark 12:13-15). This time they tested him with a question concerning the legality of divorce. They hoped to expose him as an opponent of the Law of Moses, a serious charge that could be levelled against him.*

The religious leaders tried to get Jesus to incriminate himself through misinterpreting the law that even they could not agree on. There was a significant debate between Pharisaical parties on the correct interpretation of Moses' divorce regulations, as noted from this excerpt from the Mishnah, Gittin 9.10: 'The school of Shammai says: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her'. And the school of Hillel says: 'He may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him'. Rabbi Akiba says, 'He may divorce her even if he found another fairer than she'. There is a document on the website dealing with many of the issues surrounding marriage found in the bible.

³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

Mark 10:3-4

What did Moses command you? Moses permitted a man shows that this aspect of the law was man-made and not from God, as Jesus explained (v.5). Paul also makes it clear when the teaching is from him and not from God: <<*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her*>> (1 Corinthians 7:12).

A certificate of divorce refers to the provisions about divorce in: <<*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance*>> (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Send her away. Under Jewish law the woman would have had no rights. She would either have to rely on her father or perhaps a brother accepting her back into their home, or she would need to find another husband, otherwise her future would be bleak indeed.

God used the language of divorce to demonstrate just how obnoxious his people had become in their adultery toward him: <<*This is what the Lord says: "Where is your mother's certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away*>> (Isaiah 50:1), and again: <<*"If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers – would you now return to me?" declares the Lord*>> (Jeremiah 3:1).

⁵ “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. ⁶ “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’

Mark 10:5-6

Because your hearts were hard. Jesus knew that a man should have compassion on the wife he had taken to be his wife, for he literally had power of life and death over her, should he choose to send her away as previously noted. This is despite their equality in the sight of God: <<*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*>> (Genesis 1:27). The Jews had a history of hard heartedness, something the psalmist warns them not to repeat: <<*Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness*>> (Psalm 95:8), a call later repeated by the writer to the Hebrews: <<*As has just been said: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion”*>> (Hebrews 3:15).

Jesus emphasised that marriage, as a permanent relationship between a man and a woman, goes back to God’s purpose at the beginning of creation: <<*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh*>> (Genesis 2:24).

Made them male and female emphasises that Jesus accepts marriage between opposite sexes but not same sex unions. The bible clearly teaches against homosexuality, for it is a sin. Just like all other sin, it is dealt with through the Cross. It is for each individual sinner to come before the Cross of Christ to reconcile their past, present and future sins, through continual repentance with the clear intention not to continue in that sin, even though many people do continue to sin in so many ways. The blood of Christ does not give free reign to do so however: <<*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?*>> (Romans 6:1-3).

⁷ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Mark 10:7-9

No longer two, but one flesh also describes the relationship between Christ and those who follow him, even though the consummation does not come until the end of the age.

Jesus quoted from the creation account, noting how close the bond should then be between two very special people in God’s eyes. God is clearly passionate on the sanctity of marriage between two people of the opposite sex, as already noted. Jesus then charged that it is not for anyone to come between such unions, i.e. let no one separate for it is God, who has joined together such people.

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.”

Mark 10:10-11

In the house. Again, Jesus gave his disciples further instruction in private: <<*When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables*>> (Mark 4:10), and: <<*They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”*>> (Mark 9:33).

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another. Here and in: <<*Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery*>> (Luke 16:18), Jesus did not include the phrase: <<*except for sexual immorality*>> as in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. The most likely reason is that there was no dispute or disagreement among Jews, or in Greek or Roman culture, that adultery was a legitimate ground for divorce, and Jesus was not addressing that issue here. The disputes here were over the many other causes or often excuses for divorce, so Jesus gave a blanket statement about all the other causes without explicitly specifying what everyone already agreed was true.

Commits adultery against her would have been a statement that would have caused a lot of surprise and anxiety, for divorce and remarriage was common in those days, just as it is today. Jesus’ statement still holds true for God has said: <<*You shall not commit adultery*>> (Exodus 20:14), therefore to do so is a sin, but thankfully, through the sacrificial act of Christ and the grace of God, such people can seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Some believe that living under the grace of God through Christ is an easy option, which is not strictly true for Jesus’ teaching took the already high standards of God and raised the bar even higher. For Jesus has taught that: <<*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell*>> (Matthew 5:21-22), and similarly: <<*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven*>> (Matthew 5:43-45a).

¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

Mark 10:12

And if she divorces her husband is the only time in the Gospels, where it is assumed that a woman also had the right to initiate a divorce, which was a right upheld by Roman law but was not in the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote on the issue:

<<To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife>> (1 Corinthians 7:10-11), which clearly states that the wife should not separate from, Greek *chōrizō*, a believing husband and that the husband should not divorce, a believing wife, using the Greek word *aphiēmi*, which literally means send away - a term commonly used for divorce. Roman law permitted either a husband or a wife to initiate a divorce with no stated cause required. The Jewish law only applied while both the husband and wife were alive: **<<So then, if she has sexual relations with another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man>>** (Romans 7:3).

III.a.vii.2 Mark 10:13-16 - The Little Children and Jesus

Children were often marginalised in that era, at least until they were old and strong enough to contribute to the work of the household. As part of the great reversal that Jesus was teaching, he showed that he had genuine love for children in just the same way as he did for adults. In fact, he went on to teach that all disciples should have similar childlike qualities in their faith in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

Mark 10:13-15

People were bringing little children to Jesus. There is no indication that these children were sick or spirit possessed, or that they were of an age to be taught by a Rabbi. It would seem that their parents or guardians simply wanted the blessing of Jesus upon them, perhaps having some idea that this would not just be a blessing for life but that it may have had a long term impact on their very souls.

Rebuked them. The disciples consider children to be an annoying distraction. Jesus reacted emphatically for, to Jesus, children are as important as adults, and equally worthy of love.

He was indignant. Jesus often showed his emotions when people were doing the wrong thing, especially when it was stopping people from coming to him, or even people doubting he would cure them: **<<A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed>>** (Mark 1:40-42). It is hardly surprising that Jesus reacted this way as it was only a matter of weeks since he had specifically taught the Twelve on this subject: **<<He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name**

welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me”>> (Mark 9:36-37).

Let the little children come to me. Jesus’ attitude toward children contrasted significantly with that of other religious leaders in Judaism. In most ancient cultures, children were regarded as a burden until they were physically strong enough to contribute to the family.

For the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Many commentators and scholars believe that children do not belong automatically to the Kingdom but must come to Jesus and receive him the same as adults.

My own opinion is that babies and young children are automatically covered by the promise of eternal life until they have the capability to make that decision for themselves. If, at that stage, they do not then come to Jesus, they will be lost to the Kingdom. This concept of salvation would apply also to adults with a learning disability who never achieve the reasoning capacity to make such a decision for themselves.

Anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. This indicates that all people need to have an absolute trust in God, just as a young child would have in its parent to provide all its needs. Trust and faith in God are compulsory requirements if a person wishes to be considered for entry into the Kingdom. It also indicates that disciples are to receive the Kingdom into their hearts; it is not a place to go to after death.

¹⁶ **And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.**

Mark 10:16

He took the children in his arms. Such an action by a Rabbi would have been seen as outrageous. However, it would serve as an excellent learning opportunity for his disciples and any other witnesses to see the stark contrast in humility and acceptance that the Gospel message was bringing into a society and indeed a world that had lost its soul. This occasion fulfils yet another prophecy: <<*He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young*>> (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus himself was welcomed into his Father’s house in a similar manner: <<*Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel”>> (Luke 2:28-32). It was a task that the great Moses found a burden and yet in which the Christ delights: <<*Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?>> (Numbers 11:12). Christ bore the crushing burden of humanities sin in order to carry them into the Father’s presence**

If people were to bring their children, or indeed themselves, to Christ in a correct manner, he will take them up, not only in the arms of his power and

providence, but also in the arms of his pity and grace, as he did for his people long ago: <<Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine>> (Ezekiel 16:8).

Placed his hands on them and blessed them. This is an accepted way of blessing people, although it should not be forgotten that people can and should still bring their children before God for his blessing, which does not require the physical but spiritual touch of Jesus upon them. This is indicated by the prophet: <<For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants>> (Isaiah 44:3). This is often symbolically undertaken in the modern era through either infant baptism or dedication, depending on different church traditions.

III.a.vii.3 Mark 10:17-31 - The Rich and the Kingdom of God

Contrary to childlike trust (vv.13-16), the rich young man relied on his possessions (v.22), and his self-righteousness (v.20), to inherit eternal life. The accounts of this incident in Matthew 19:16-22 and Luke 18:18-23, are supplementary rather than contradictory as some have claimed.

Jesus taught that the wealthy are actually disadvantaged in this life for their wealth can become their god, making it very difficult to give up some of their luxurious life-style trappings in order to do the things that God expects his people to do during this life; those who fail to live like Jesus do so at the cost of their eternal soul.

¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Mark 10:17

A man ran up. Comparative accounts provide more information about the man: <<Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’” “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”>> (Matthew 19:16-20), and: <<A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”>> (Luke 18:18); these verses thus indicate he was a young ruler, thereby having influence and wealth.

Fell on his knees before him. This action may have been out of reverence although more likely respect for Jesus’ status as a Rabbi, i.e. good teacher, showing also the man’s sense of humility. On other occasions, falling to one’s knees seems to have been more to do with the desperation of the situation requiring Jesus immediate intervention, such as the synagogue ruler whose

daughter was dying: <<Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet>> (Mark 5:22), and: <<In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet>> (Mark 7:25).

Bowing the knee to Christ is something all will do one day: <<It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God’”>> (Romans 14:11), and again: <<Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father>> (Philippians 2:9-11).

What must I do to inherit eternal life? If by ruler, Luke means a religious leader then the man would not have been a Sadducee as they did not believe in life after death, but adopted more of a humanist understanding to life.

¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good – except God alone.

Mark 10:18

Why do you call me good? In asking this question, Jesus assumed the perspective of the rich young man. No one is completely good except God alone; therefore, it was not proper for the young man to address Jesus as ‘good Teacher’ in v.17 until he was also ready to acknowledge that Jesus is God: <<The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name>> (Zechariah 14:9).

There are those, of course, who look for good in the world as noted and answered by King David: <<There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!”>> (Psalm 4:6), with his son Solomon searching for that same goodness through mere worldly provision: <<I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly – my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives>> (Ecclesiastes 2:3). The answer to true goodness became clear two thousand years ago and remains just as clear today!

One of the remarkable facts about the Christian faith is that God came to make the way to eternal life and then he also proclaimed the way to it. Christ taught what eternal life was and then how to attain it. He did so in great detail but summarised it so simply: <<Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”>> (John 14:6).

¹⁹ 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, honour your father and mother.’”

Mark 10:19

You know the commandments. Jesus initially seemed to agree with the young man's framework, which was essentially, 'do well, and you will inherit the Kingdom'; a misguided sentiment held in modern society that all good people get to heaven. However, Jesus was about to show the man just how far short he fell of keeping the most important commandment (v.21).

You shall not defraud probably combines the eighth: <<*You shall not steal*>> (Exodus 20:15), and ninth: <<*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour*>> (Exodus 20:16), commandments. It is a translation of the Greek *me apostereses*, which literally means 'be content with what is your own and do not contend to increase it by the diminution of others'. It is a rule of accepted justice for a person not to advance or enrich himself by doing wrong or injury to any other.

²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Mark 10:20

All these I have kept. The rich man answered Jesus' challenge (v.19) in the affirmative, which is similar to that of Paul, prior to his conversion: <<*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless*>> (Philippians 3:4b-6). The man no doubt believed what he was saying for it is often difficult for men to determine the carnal from the spiritual: <<*Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin*>> (Romans 7:9-14), for although: <<*My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me*>> (1 Corinthians 4:4).

From a human perspective, his answer was plausible. However, once the righteousness of God sheds light on the human condition: <<*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished – he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the*>>

one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus>> (Romans 3:21-26), and: <<But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead>> (Philippians 3:7-11), human righteousness is seen to be no more than a thin cover-up for mankind's basic hostility toward God: <<Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour>> (Colossians 1:21).

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

Mark 10:21

Jesus, loved him. Jesus spoke lovingly into the man's heart, with a message that offered true hope, incomparable to the mere worldly wealth of this man. It must have brought this emotion to the fore to find this young man at least trying to live by the law and still seeking to find the way into heaven. Yet Jesus must also have known that the outcome, on this occasion at least, would be a sad one.

One thing you lack. The man had replaced direct trust in God and its reward, i.e. treasure in heaven, with earthly riches. He thus failed the first commandment: <<*You shall have no other gods before me*>> (Exodus 20:3). This does not mean that every disciple of Christ must sell everything that he has; rather, the heart must be focused on God, and every possession yielded to God, with the result that possessions will be handled as a form of stewardship, and not right of ownership or possession, which for many requires a fundamental change of mindset: <<*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will*>> (Romans 12:2). There are those who did give much of what they had to establish the early church and particularly to meet the needs of the poor: <<*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need*>> (Acts 4:33-35).

Jesus had taught on the issues surrounding treasure in heaven early on in his ministry: <<*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*>> (Matthew 6:19-21). It remains as true today as ever.

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

Mark 10:22

He went away sad. The man's true state had been laid bare, but still he did not repent for he could not give up what he had and relied on so heavily. Once again, it shows that Jesus will not detain anyone against their will. He held out an open hand to the man and had it rejected, for the short term price of giving up earthly possessions was deemed to be too high for him.

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Mark 10:23

How hard it is. Material possessions can be a dangerous instrument for reinforcing self-sufficiency and independence from God. This is supported in various Scriptures: <<"Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!">> (Psalm 52:7), <<Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful>> (Mark 4:18-19), and Paul writes: <<Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction>> (1 Timothy 6:9).

Jesus was not teaching against wealth creation nor being wealthy per se. He wants everyone to understand that what they have has been given to them by God and they should be looking for the best way to honour God with what they have been given. It is not having wealth that is the problem it is placing so much trust in it and reliance on it that becomes the barrier for so many: <<If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security', if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendour, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high>> (Job 31:24-28).

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"

Mark 10:24

The disciples were amazed for two key reasons, firstly because at least some of them had possessions, such as Peter, who was a fisherman who owned his own boat and would have been considered middle class. Secondly, the wealthy were held in high regard in Jerusalem for most of them would have given generously to the poor and into the temple offering. Their thinking must have been 'if such people as these cannot please God, what chance is there for the rest of us?' which is a purely human attitude of course. Seeing their amazement, Jesus repeated himself.

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Mark 10:25



The camel is the largest land animal in Palestine and the eye of the needle is the smallest opening found in the home. Jesus painted a picture of something impossible in order to illustrate that even the seemingly impossible is possible with God. There is no evidence for the popular interpretation that there was a gate in Jerusalem called ‘the eye of the needle’, which camels had to

stoop to their knees in order to enter. Anyway, such an interpretation would miss the point, unless the analogy was intended to be that a rich man would have to unburden his load before stooping to enter via the narrow gate. What Jesus is implying though is that it is not merely difficult for the wealthy, or anyone else for that matter, to be saved; without God’s grace it is impossible.

Anyone who trusts in riches, as an idolatrous replacement for God, cannot **enter the Kingdom of God**; his life’s disposition is diametrically opposed to submitting to the will of God, for: <<*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money*>> (Matthew 6:24).

The hyperbole of a large **camel** having to fit through the small **eye of a needle** stresses that such a thing is humanly impossible, although the reader should take note of v.27.

26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Mark 10:26

Who then can be saved? Since riches were supposedly a sign of God’s favour then, as already noted, Jesus’ listeners must have wondered, ‘if a rich man, who freely offer alms and sacrifices could not be saved, who could be?’

27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Mark 10:27

All things are possible with God. How often do people forget that God created everything that is visible and invisible? He not only creates but he sustains all things. Therefore, there is nothing that is beyond his capability. Jesus will again acknowledge that all things are possible for the Father as he prayed fervently and

passionately in the Garden: <<“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will”>> (Mark 14:36).

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

Mark 10:28

Then Peter spoke up. It was often left to Peter to be the spokesman for the group: <<“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah”>> (Mark 8:29), <<“Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you”>> (Luke 8:45), and: <<“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God”>> (John 6:67-69).

This is a role Peter continued after the ascension of Jesus: <<In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus>> (Acts 1:15-16), and on the Day of Pentecost: <<Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say>> (Acts 2:14).

We have left everything to follow you! It is doubtful that Peter was complaining. He just stated the fact, which was indicated by: <<So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him>> (Luke 5:11).

²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life.

Mark 10:29-30

The person who has left home, land, i.e. fields, or family, that is, brothers or sisters or mother or father or children for Jesus’ sake and for the Gospel can expect in this life, i.e. in this present age, to enjoy fellowship with other disciples and to find a welcome in the houses and lands of other believers.

However, in this present age, these blessings will also be mixed with persecutions: <<Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed

of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels">> (Mark 8:34-38).

The future, in the age to come, will yield an even better reward: eternal life, far better even than the promise to receive a hundred times as much in this present age. By answering in this way, Jesus assured the disciples that they have answered the call and are blessed.

Home heads each of the lists with field always coming at the end. This was deliberate for the home represents a place of comfort and security in this life, whereas field is symbolic for the place of provision, for growing food or grazing livestock. God provides all the earthly needs and all their heavenly needs as well.

Along with persecutions. Out of the three accounts in the Synoptic Gospels, Mark is the only one to record that Jesus also promised trials and tribulation to accompany the rewards of a Kingdom life here on earth. Even so, the rewards that are ultimately promised far exceed any suffering in this life, and do not come anywhere near to comparing with the suffering Christ endured to make it all a reality for so many others: *<<Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds>> (John 12:24).*

In the comprehensive list, Mark does not mention wife, although it is known that Peter at least was married. Luke however does: *<<"Truly I tell you," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life">> (Luke 18:29-30).* Jesus is not encouraging the disciples to abandon familial responsibilities. However, sometimes family members turn against a believer, or there may be times of temporary separation due to Christian ministry. Whatever someone has to sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom will be repaid many times more by God.

³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Mark 10:31

The context suggests that it is an inconspicuous, obedient disciple, perhaps with little recognition in this life, that is, will be last, who will receive the greatest honour, the last first. Jesus introduced this great reversal into the world that turned everything on its head. This was not at all what anyone expected.

III.a.vii.4 Mark 10:32-34 - Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

Once again, Jesus informed his apostles that he would be taken by the Jewish leaders and handed over to the Roman authorities, who would abuse him terribly before putting him to death. However, he would rise from death on the third day.

³² They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

Mark 10:32

On their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way provides the image of a king of old riding at the head of his army into battle: <<***Who should not fear you, King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise leaders of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you***>> (Jeremiah 10:7). Jesus was just such a courageous leader, although his battle was a very different one for he knew his own fate that awaited him and that it was a price that had to be paid if victory was ever to be achieved.

Jesus was aware of his impending death: <<***He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again***>> (Mark 8:31), and: <<***They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise”***>> (Mark 9:31), which was prophesied in Isaiah 53:1-12, which is available on the website.

Nevertheless, he proceeded resolutely toward Jerusalem, like the servant of the Lord: <<***Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame***>> (Isaiah 50:7), who set his face like a flint, a verse that perhaps guided Luke’s thinking when he described the start of Jesus’ journey: <<***When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem***>> (Luke 9:51 ESV).

The Twelve were astonished to see Jesus’ solemn determination in light of what he had already told them about his forthcoming suffering and death. In addition to the Twelve, others followed along, but Mark says that they were afraid. This fear might have arisen from their belief that Jesus was a political messiah; if so, they might be facing fierce battles in Jerusalem, as in the earlier Maccabæan revolt. It was more likely that the larger group of followers saw Jesus’ sober, deliberate progress toward Jerusalem, and had heard from the Twelve something of his predictions of suffering, and thus concluded that by following Jesus they might face a similar fate.

³³ **“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,**

Mark 10:33

We are going up to Jerusalem. The city was built in mountainous terrain and therefore people always went up to Jerusalem and came down from there.

Will be delivered has a ring of certainty to it. Jesus spoke of a double deliverance: God would hand him over to the Jewish leaders, who in turn, must hand him over to the Gentiles, that is, the Roman authorities.

³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

Mark 10:34

The details of mistreatment were well known to Jews living under Roman occupation. The part they failed to comprehend was that he will rise three days later, for they did not know about individual resurrection, although they knew of the general resurrection at the end of the age: <<*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*>> (Daniel 12:2).

III.a.vii.5 Mark 10:35-45 - The Request of James and John

Each of Jesus’ three major predictions of his death and resurrection was followed by instruction in discipleship. Just as Jesus walked the path of surrender, so should his disciples. The request for prominent positions in glory, made by two of his closer disciples, again showed their own self-centredness, similar to that of their discussions about greatness: <<*And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest*>> (Mark 9:33-34).

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

³⁶ “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

³⁷ They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

Mark 10:35-37

We want you to do for us whatever we ask. This may seem like an outrageous request for disciples to make to their Lord, even knowing now that Jesus would later promise them: <<*And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son*>> (John 14:13).

What do you want me to do for you? Either Jesus was operating purely in his human nature or he knew what they were going to ask and wanted them to pose the question for themselves before giving his response.

James and John belonged to Jesus’ inner circle, along with Peter and sometimes Andrew. If Jesus was going to die and be raised in Jerusalem, they may have thought this journey was their last opportunity to put in a request for future assignments. They falsely envisioned special places of honour, one to sit at your right hand and the other at your left, when Jesus, as a strictly political messiah, would rule in Jerusalem on the throne of David, in your glory, which Matthew refers to as his Kingdom. However, their experience of the transfiguration, along with their idea of a battle in Jerusalem, may have given rise to the idea that they might die and subsequently be taken to heaven for faithfully supporting their Messiah. Either way, their request seems to have a ring of self-importance and

desire for reward beyond that which should be suspected for just doing what was expected of them. However, Jesus would indeed grant them special favour: <<*You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*>> (Luke 22:28-30).

Matthew recounts this incident slightly differently, in that it was the mother of these two men who approached Jesus with the request: <<*Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered*>> (Matthew 20:20-22), which shows that John and James were with their mother at the time of the request. Mark focuses on the sons themselves and reports her request as their words. Two solutions to this apparent inconsistency are possible:

1. Based on the principle that an agent of a person counts as the person himself, Mark may be reporting the mother's words as the words of James and John, who had wanted her to ask this on their behalf.
2. Matthew and Mark may be reporting different aspects of a longer conversation, in which the mother first asked Jesus the question and then Jesus asked the brothers if that was actually what they wanted. In either case, the plural 'you' in Matthew shows that Jesus was speaking directly to James and John, as well as to their mother.

³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?"

Mark 10:38

You don't know what you are asking. This is a problem for all disciples. They may believe they know what they want and need, although they rarely do. Within a few weeks, Jesus would say to his apostles: <<*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you*>> (John 15:7). However, it is certain that he did not intend them to ask for personal prominent positions as these two did here. The words of the apostle Paul would be applicable in this situation, and to many more, for all disciples to contemplate: <<*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen*>> (Ephesians 3:20-21). Most disciples would do well to emulate their Christ and simply pray: <<*may your will be done*>> (Matthew 26:42c).

There would indeed be a future time of glory: <<*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels*>> (Mark 8:38), and: <<*At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in*

clouds with great power and glory>> (Mark 13:26), although the path there would be through severe, divine judgment for Jesus.

The cup that he was to drink was the cup of God's wrath that would be poured out on him, bearing God's wrath in the place of sinful mankind: <<*"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will"*>> (Mark 14:36), <<*Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger*>> (Isaiah 51:17), <<*This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again*>> (Isaiah 51:22), and: <<*This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it*>> (Jeremiah 25:15). Therefore, he would be brought to shame so that he could die for the sake of and in the place of, i.e. as a substitute for, his people: <<*You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it is your turn! Drink and let your nakedness be exposed! The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory*>> (Habakkuk 2:16).

Note that the cup given to Jesus is from the Father, and hence Jesus is prepared to drink it. In addition to the physical suffering of the Cross, Jesus suffered the agony of bearing God's wrath, which was poured out on him as a substitutionary sacrifice, in payment for all the sins of mankind: past, present and future.

His baptism was his suffering and death, which would pour over him like a flood: <<*Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves*>> (Psalm 88:7), <<*You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me*>> (Jonah 2:3), and: <<*But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!*>> (Luke 12:50).

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with,

Mark 10:39

We can. James was the first apostle martyred shortly after Jesus' death, when Herod Antipas had him beheaded simply to please the Jews: <<*It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword*>> (Acts 12:1-2). Although John lived to die a natural death in old age, he was imprisoned, beaten and exiled for the sake of the Gospel: <<*I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*>> (Revelation 1:9), thus he too was able to be baptised into Jesus' baptism.

The disciples understood Jesus' question: <<*Can you drink the cup I drink*>> (v.38b), to mean that they would need to fight alongside Jesus, and they bravely answered we can. Jesus, however, taught them that they too would undergo a form of suffering: you will drink, you will be baptised. Since only Jesus would bear the divine judgment in a substitutionary way (v.45), the disciples' suffering would be for their own purification and ultimately for God's glory: <<*But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*>> (1 Peter 4:13).

⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

Mark 10:40

Is not for me to grant. Although Jesus is fully God, yet there appear to be differences of authority within the Trinity: <<*The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands*>> (John 3:35), indicating supreme authority for the Father in the counsels of the Trinity, and a delegated authority over the whole created universe for the Son, as is indicated also in many other NT passages. Yet at the same time, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each fully and simultaneously God in the unity of a single divine being. Throughout Scripture, the Son is always subject to the authority and direction of the Father, who will ultimately determine who exactly receives such positions of honour as those requested by John and James. Jesus both defers authority to his heavenly Father and implies that he will himself be exalted.

⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

Mark 10:41

The ten indicates the other apostles, who became indignant with James and John, perhaps on account of their own ambition and jealousy (vv.42-45), or because these two went to Jesus behind their backs with such a request.

⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Mark 10:42

The disciples were to be marked by humility of service, not by wanting to lord it over those for whom they are responsible. Jesus did not deny all use of human authority: <<*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*>> (Matthew 16:19), and: <<*Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*>> (Matthew 18:18), but, at the same time, exposed its oppressive misuse.

⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

Mark 10:43-44

Must be your servant. Leadership among God's people should be characterised by serving the people and acting for their best interests, not by assuming that the people are there to serve the leaders. These principles apply not only to leadership in the church but also in all relationships, e.g. in civil government: <<*For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer*>> (Romans 13:4). They are not to be like the kings: <<*He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plough his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day." But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles"*>> (1 Samuel 8:11-20).

Must be slave of all. For most people, the word slave conjures up the image of the slaves that were very much a part of European and North American culture until a hundred years or so ago. Such slaves were treated appallingly, especially as so many of their owners considered themselves to be Christians. In Jesus' day, there were indeed slaves that were treated that way. Here though it most likely means the type of slave that was in bond to a master for a period of time, either to pay off a debt or because they could not afford to keep themselves. Others came to slavery through captivity during war. Many of these slaves were more like servants. God wants his followers to willingly be submissive to him but not slaves in the sense that they are there to be abused in any way or that lack freedom in life.

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

Not come to be served, but to serve. The messianic rule of God is inaugurated by the greatest example of service: Jesus' death as a substitutionary atonement, i.e. a ransom for many, a death so brutal that he would not even be recognisable as a human being: <<*Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his*

appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness - so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand>> (Isaiah 52:14-15), <<By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors>> (Isaiah 53:8-12), <<"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them>> (Mark 14:24), <<He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification>> (Romans 4:25), <<For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures>> (1 Corinthians 15:3), and: <<Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders>> (Revelation 5:6a). This payment was offered by the future ruler, i.e. the Son of Man: <<In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:13-14), and: <<But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven">> (Mark 14:61-62).

This quality of humility and love for others, flowing from the infinite love of God for his people, will also characterise Christ's eternal rule. The ransom of Christ's life was paid to God the Father, who accepted it as just payment for the sins of many, that is, of all who would be saved.

III.a.vii.6 Mark 10:46-52 - Blind Bartimæus Receives His Sight

Both Mark 8:22-26 and 10:46-52 narrate the healing of a blind man. These two stories serve as literary bookends surrounding the three major predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection (Mark 8:31, 9:30-32 and 10:32-34), as well as the major instructions on discipleship that followed each prediction. The disciples' blindness regarding the true mission of Jesus was thus also being emphasised, but as Jesus taught them, he was gradually healing their spiritual blindness as well.

The healing here of at least one blind man on the outskirts of Jericho once again demonstrated both Jesus' miraculous power and also his compassion for those in need and who have faith to call on him for help.

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimæus (which means “son of Timæus”), was sitting by the roadside begging.

Mark 10:46

The old Jericho near the pilgrimage path to Jerusalem may no longer have been populated at the time of Jesus. The newer, Herodian Jericho was situated southeast of the pilgrimage path, serving as a meeting place for pilgrims. To reach this new Jericho from the pilgrimage road, one had to travel the same road there and back. This might explain the slight differences between Mark's account and those of: <<As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him>> (Matthew 20:29), and: <<As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging>> (Luke 18:35). For Luke was probably referring to the old Jericho and thus the healing occurred when Jesus headed back to the pilgrimage road from the new Jericho, i.e. were leaving the city.

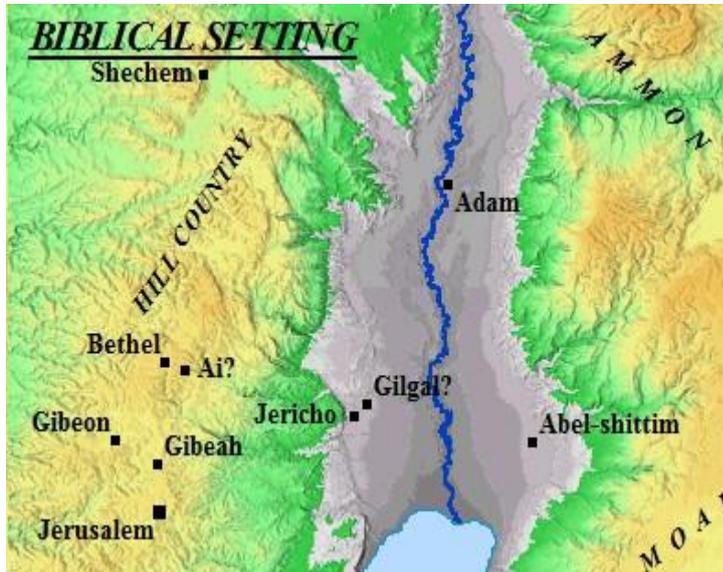
In my own opinion, arguments about whether the healing account took place going into or coming out of Jericho, or whether there was one blind man or two, must never be allowed to detract from the amazing miracle itself and all the issues that raises, especially the compassion of Jesus!

This was not the old Jericho that was destroyed by Joshua when the Hebrews first entered the Promised Land. After its destruction it is recorded that it should never be rebuilt: <<At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: “At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates”>> (Joshua 6:26). However, it was rebuilt about 500 years later: <<In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun>> (1 Kings 16:34). The gift of such detailed prophecy over such a long time period is quite astounding and can only be from God.

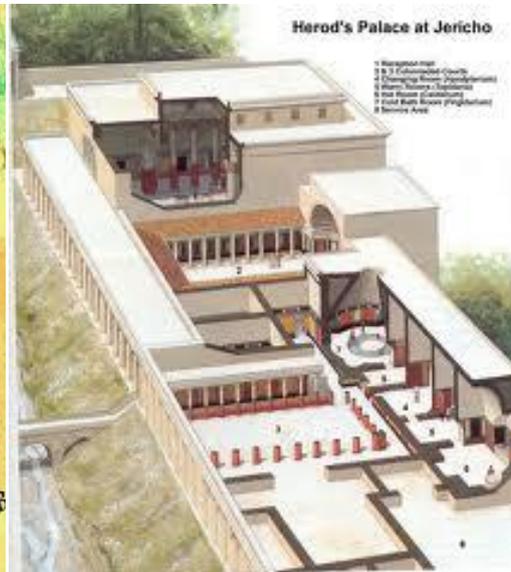
As previously stated, the route of the Jericho road is near the pilgrimage path to Jerusalem and is still visible today. It included long stretches of rocky terrain that made it a useful base of operations for robbers. The road descended about 3,200 feet or 975m from Jerusalem to Jericho along this 18 mile or 29km route.

Jericho, in this period, was quite different from the OT city and located about one mile or 1.6 km to the south of it. The city was built around a huge palace complex, first built by the Hasmonæans in the 2nd Century BC, which Herod the Great expanded after he obtained Jericho from Cæsar Augustus. He proceeded to build aqueducts, a fortress, a monumental winter palace and a hippodrome

in the vicinity of the more ancient town. Excavations have revealed much of the Herodian palace structures; they were built in stages by expanding on the previous Hasmonæan palace. One striking feature of the palace site is its huge pools, in one of which Herod the Great probably had his own son drowned. Jericho boasted a tropical climate and excellent access to water for agriculture.



The map shows Jericho in relation to Jerusalem



Herod's palace in Jericho

Bartimæus means Son of Timæus, where Timæus is Greek for honour. At least one commentator says that it refers to him being the son of a blind man, making the plight worse as his father would have been a beggar before him, and likely the carrier of some hereditary condition. The commentator then goes on to say that the grace of Christ not only goes to those who are born blind but was borne for those that are blind. It is a nice analogy but perhaps stretching the meaning of the name a little.

Sitting by the roadside begging. Pilgrims tended to be generous as they were commanded by God to be so: *<<However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you>>* (Deuteronomy 15:4), which continues and states: *<<If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tight-fisted toward them>>* (Deuteronomy 15:7). However, Jesus did acknowledge that: *<<You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me>>* (John 12:8). As this was the main route for pilgrims to travel up to Jerusalem from the northeast, it was an ideal place to beg, as pilgrims would tend to be generous as they went to the temple to pray or attend a festival, and would no doubt be in a positive frame of mind as they went. On their return journey, having been refreshed by their visit and returning home in hope, they would no doubt still feel generous and thankful to God for their own situation, perhaps donating to the beggar a second time.

Living in a country, where there is no welfare state, often the only way for a disabled person to survive was to beg, relying on the good nature of their neighbours and fellow citizens: <<One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money>> (Acts 3:1-3).

⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Mark 10:47

Jesus would later identify the cry of the blind man, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me, as an expression of faith (v.52).

In a complimentary account it states: <<As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”>> (Matthew 20:29-30), where Mark and Luke both record only one. This does not mean that Matthew was in error, just that Luke and Mark focus on just one of them. For there to be two, there had to be at least one!

Son of David was a messianic acclamation: <<While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”’ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight>> (Mark 12:35-37). However, it was always known that the Messiah would come from the line of David, who was the son of Jesse: <<A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit>> (Isaiah 11:1), and: <<In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious>> (Isaiah 11:10).

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Mark 10:48

Many rebuked him. Given the popularity of Jesus, a socially insignificant blind man was considered an interruption to the festivities and the importance of what Jesus would no doubt be teaching the crowd as they walked together toward Jerusalem. Therefore, neither the crowd nor probably the disciples would have wanted any distractions.

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”

Mark 10:49

Call him. When Jesus calls it is a wise person that responds and answers that call. Sadly, there are too few who even stand still long enough to even hear the call.

Another lesson here is that Jesus stopped. Remaining still, even for a short time, can sometimes make all the difference: <<*He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”>> (Psalm 46:10).*

The attitude of some in the crowd changed from rebuke (v.48) to encouragement, cheer up! On your feet!, as soon as Jesus paid attention to Bartimæus. Although Jesus himself was facing suffering and death in Jerusalem, he still gave consideration to the marginalised in society, having compassion on those who call to him for help (vv.43-45).

⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

Mark 10:50-51

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet. Once called, Bartimæus was not going to miss out on the chance of being healed by the Messiah. He cast aside his outer cloak lest it hinder his progress to Christ: <<*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us>> (Hebrews 12:1).* Once a person is called by Christ and know what they should do, they are to do it immediately, like the Prodigal Son when he knew he had to return to his father: <<*I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father>> (Luke 15:18-20a),* or like Levi when called to follow Jesus: <<*As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphæus sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him>> (Mark 2:14).*

What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked the obvious question in order to give the blind man the opportunity to express his trust, faith and hope in Jesus.

I want to see. No doubt Bartimæus was only looking to have his physical sight restored, but Jesus always does so much more and probably gave him spiritual insight to realise what he must now do.

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Mark 10:52

Go. Jesus did not touch the man, he did not pray or say anything over the man's affliction. He simply dismissed the man, who was immediately healed. The immediacy of Jesus healing power has been noted on several occasions, such as: <<*Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed*>> (Mark 1:42), <<*Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering*>> (Mark 5:29), and: <<*Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God*>> (Luke 5:25).

Your faith has healed you would suggest both physical and spiritual healing, for Greek *sōzō* can mean either heal or save. He not only had his sight restored, he also received salvation from sin. This healing is similar in many respects to the woman who had suffered menstrual bleeding for twelve years, had given up hope in her doctors but had faith in Jesus: <<*He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering"*>> (Mark 5:34). That his physical healing occurred again fulfilled one of the many prophecies about the Messiah: <<*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped*>> (Isaiah 35:5), which can be applied both literally and spiritually as well. Matthew Henry wrote: 'In coming to Christ for help and healing, we should have an eye to him as the promised Messiah, the Trustee of mercy and grace'.

And followed Jesus along the road. Bartimæus joined Jesus and the other pilgrims on their final journey to Jerusalem, indicating that he had become one of Jesus' disciples. Jesus had said go but Bartimæus choose to follow instead.