



QUESTIONS FOR JESUS

Studies in Mark

TOGETHER IN FAITH SERIES
Learner Session Guide

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Mark 10:17-31

Learner
Session
Guide

Focus Statement

“What must I do to be saved?”
The answer is nothing. You can’t *do* anything. God is the primary actor. It is God who saves. It is God who comes to us. It is God who has done all that needs to be done.

Key Verse

For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible. [Mark 10:27](#)

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Focus Image



Gather

Check-in

As you gather together for your second session, review some of the homework from Session 1 on marriage and divorce. What is one lingering concern that remains from last week’s study? What was one breakthrough concept?

Pray

Heavenly Father, we live in a world in which we are judged by our behavior and evaluated by how much we can do. The bar at times seems incredibly high, and we find ourselves falling short. Open our eyes and soften our hearts today that even if we were as “unproductive” as a little child, we would still be precious in your sight. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Focus Activity

Today’s session tries to counter the cultural propensity toward performance-based rewards. To get into that very natural mindset, brainstorm some other versions of the following examples:

- If you eat your broccoli, then you get dessert.
- If you work hard, then you will get a raise.
- Fill in the blanks: If you _____, then you will _____.

How does the Focus Image illustrate this mentality? What’s the problem with this scenario?



Notes

Open Scripture

Read Mark 10:17-31.

- How would you describe the man's heart in this text? Did it change after he heard Jesus' answer?
- Do you find Jesus' answer to the man's question surprising in any way?
- Consider why Jesus would say it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Describe your immediate reaction to these words—is it comfort, conviction, confusion?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context

In the Old Testament, the concept of heaven and hell was not fully developed. Thomas Cahill, in his book *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* (Doubleday, 1999), put it this way:

Israelite religion was about land and progeny, thank you all the same—not the unreal realms of the dead . . . it was also about good and evil actions, about justice to the poor, and fidelity to God. . . . One must love justice and mercy for their own sake—and for God's—not because one receives heavenly rewards for good behavior. (p. 44)

1. In the Old Testament, it can be seen how God blessed faithful individuals with physical rewards in this world.

- How do Genesis 12:1-4 and Psalm 128 illustrate this point?
- Read through the many ways that God blessed Job in 42:7-16. What stands out in this list? How closely do we connect the dots today between a person's earthly wealth and God's blessings?

As for the afterlife, there is mention in the Old Testament of a place called *Sheol*, a shadowy existence for everyone who dies but not necessarily a place of reward for faithfulness. While there are some glimpses of it, the belief in rewards and punishments after death did not emerge until later. By the time of the New Testament, salvation and damnation after this worldly existence were central themes for Jesus and his followers.

2. Read through 2 Samuel 12:15-23. David's child through his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba falls gravely ill. Despite David's prayers and fasting, the child dies. This is one of the first examples in the Bible that clearly refers to the concept of an afterlife. What strikes you as disturbing about this passage? What brings hope to you in this passage?

3. How do all these passages suggest the historical context out of which the man's question arises in Mark 10:17-22? What is it about verse 18 that begins to raise questions about the saving effects of good works and the blessings of wealth? In what ways does Paul in Titus 3:3-9 help us to better understand the role of Jesus in regard to our salvation?

Literary Context

We live in a conditional "if/then" world that quickly spills into our relationship with God. But it doesn't work that way. Sometimes God will push us to our breaking point as to what we can do, like this rich man selling all of his possessions, in order for him to come to say, "I can't but God can."

1. He takes awhile, but Jesus finally gets around to answering the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Do you see the answer?

- Read Mark 10:27. How does Ephesians 2:8-9 back up this answer?
- Describe a time in which you came to a breaking point and realized that you couldn't continue—you had reached the limits of your abilities and the problem was out of your control. How was that a "God moment?"

2. For some reason, the idea of being "saved" seems too easy to many people. It suggests a state of helplessness with which they are uncomfortable. It seems much more rational to adopt a "God helps those who help themselves" mentality. And yet how often do we find ourselves faced with situations that seem impossible to deal with? How do the following passages speak to our need for salvation?

- John 3:16-21
- Galatians 2:15-21
- Ephesians 2:1-7





Lutheran Context

A generation of seminarians attending Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota was taught Reformation Studies by Dr. Gerhard Forde. Each year as students wrestled with the message of God's absolute grace, the questions would inevitably be asked: But I have to do something, don't I? I at least have to accept, decide, or choose, don't I? I at least have to repent sincerely, trust completely, believe without doubt, don't I? To those questions, Dr. Forde would patiently and simply say, "No." As his students scratched their heads and raised their hands, he would then ask, "What more would you like to do than that which has already been done for you?" In the silence of the next moment, Dr. Forde waited until he had everyone's attention and probed, "So, what are you going to do now that you don't have to do anything?"

1. Which answer to the man's question, "How can I be saved?" is easier to hear: the evangelist's ABC answer of Accept, Believe, and Confess; or the stark, profound answer, "Nothing?" How does the first answer point to you? How does Dr. Forde's answer point to Jesus?

2. In 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Paul confesses his utter depravity before a righteous God. How does this passage from 1 Timothy support Jesus' answer in Mark 10:27? How does it move us away from an "if/then" mentality to a "because/therefore" life?

3. Historians debate whether or not it was Calvin or Luther who said, "We are saved by faith alone but not by a faith that is alone." What about Dr. Forde's question, "What are you going to do now that you don't have to do anything?" While our answer on the one hand is, "Nothing," how do these passages also move us to answer, "Everything"?

- James 2:14-17, 26
- 2 Peter 1:3-11