

Mark 10 (HC service – 20 mins)

How do you get eternal life? – or how good do you have to be?

Reading by

Mark 10:13-31

The Empire State Building has about 100 floors. Let's imagine the whole world lived there. But we don't just get to choose which floor we live on, the floor we live on depends on how good we are. And we can move floors over time. Do something good – we make a hard working friend a cup of tea without them asking we might move up a floor or two. But if we do something bad, maybe we lose our temper, or park inconveniently we perhaps move down. So life is like a funny version of snakes and ladders. We move up and down over time not on the random throw of a die, but dependent on how good we are. So at any point we're going to have people living on all floors of the Empire State Building. Maybe we'll have Charity workers higher floors, and murderers and drug dealers on the bottom floors.

So Lee Westwood in the golfing world near the top of the pile, a good role model, talented successful golfer, he is in a plush apartment, on floor 78, The Beckhams have a suite on 66, Jonathan Ross moved down a few floors booted out of BBC booted down to 40, President Mubarak well he's gone missing we think he might be hiding in a pokey flat somewhere on floor 22 with Osama Bin Ladin. Then you and me? Maybe floor 60, higher.

There we have it all mapped out. All we have to decide is the cut off point. What is God's pass park. What floor of the moral empire state building do we have to be on to qualify for heaven?

This is our theme from Mark's gospel this morning. How do you get eternal life. Or how good do you have to be?

Let's think about the 2 extremes God is totally good, he is holy, he is perfect. You might assume his pass mark is 100%. We have to qualify by living on the roof of ESB. When we look we see – that nobody is there. And there is no one in penthouse suite on top floor either. Noone can work themselves up to the top floor because they carry with them a history that lacks perfection. So there is God's eternal party in heaven, but nobody gets past the bouncers. Doesn't seem to make much sense does it.

So let's try considering the other extreme. We know God is love, if so loving he must let everybody into heaven. If he loves us all, his pass mark must be 0%. He must let everybody in. That doesn't seem to make sense either. What about all those murderers and fraudsters on the bottom floors. what about Mubarak, amd Nazi war criminals who have died in prison. (have they died and gone to heaven?) Surely God can't pretend these henous crimes don't matter. Surely there has to be justice. Doesn't there. The 0% pass mark doesn't work either.

So what is the passmark?

If God exists, if he created everything, then it is God's call to determine how good we have to be to get to heaven. And I think he does tell us.

Mark 10:13-34.

Interesting this rich young man seems to be asking this exact question. V.17

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Which is basically the same things as saying “How can I get to heaven” “how good do I have to be”? And as the dialogue goes on between Jesus and this guy we find that this man is pretty good.

Jesus lists 6 out of the 10 commandments and he insists he has kept all of them since he was a boy. But that’s not good enough for Jesus. Jesus tells him to go and sell everything he has v.21 and this man goes away sad.

But what has money got to do with it. Surely Jesus is not being so crass as to say if you are generous, if you giving away lots of money you’ll make it, as if you can buy your way to the top floor? And you’re right. Of course he’s not saying that. He’s not saying be generous with your money and you’ll get to heaven. If he had been saying that wouldn’t I have turned to this passage for our giving Sunday?

No

Look again at v.19.

Jesus lists the Commandments.

But not all of them. Just the last six. And in response the man says. I’ve kept all of these. Jesus doesn’t list the first 4 – the ones about Loving God most of all. Because this man could not have kept THEM. He didn’t love God most of all did he. He obviously loved his wealth more than he loved God – and he went away sad.

I don’t think there are any of us here who think that making money is what life is all about.

But perhaps you think that life is all about having a happy family.

Or doing well at work.

Or having lots of friends

Or just making sure you feel fulfilled and happy.

The point is that whatever we think that life is all about – whatever that one thing is for us. Or combination of them. Then that is what Jesus would have put the finger on for us. Had we taken the place of this rich young man. In this conversation, with Jesus.

OK you've tried to be good, says Jesus. But what about this.

This story is not about attacking the rich. It is about being good, even being very good. And this is apparently not enough. We may not have committed murder or adultery but which one of us has put God first throughout our lives.

An honest assessment of ourselves is that we fall far short of God's perfection. And so we confess our sins when we come together. We know we are not good enough for heaven.

Exactly the point Jesus made in v.18.

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And in Jesus day people would have thought the rich, they were the people most likely to go to heaven. They would have thought they're rich because God was pleased with them and had blessed them (maybe apart from the tax collectors). And they would have thought that someone like this man, really good, really polite, really nice, and leader, respected, and really rich is every mother in law's ideal son in law. If he can't get to heaven then who can.

And that is exactly the question the disciples go on to ask.

The look at Jesus with mouths open, I reckon, in-credulously.

v.26-27

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Who can get to heaven if good upright rich people can't – ask the disciples – and Jesus answer !with man it is impossible". Just as it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

It is an absurd picture and that is what is it meant to be. Ridiculous. It is impossible.

We seem to have answered our question. What is God's pass mark? Well it is 100% perfection. That is what God requires and none of us meet his standard. We can't get ourselves to heaven and that is the biggest problem every single one of us faces. Getting you or me into heaven is something that God has to do for us.

But how. And that is why we have Mark's gospel. We have God's solution.

Just beyond our reading v.45
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However much or however little we think that our lives are worth. God thinks we are precious enough to send his one and only son to earth do die for us on the cross.

God wants us in heaven. He really does want us in heaven. But the key thing is he has to do the getting us there. And he does that by sending Jesus to die for us as the ransom for our life. Giving his life as a ransom for many on the cross.

We can't get ourselves to heaven but he can get us there. Death is what each of us deserves but Jesus paid that price on the cross, on that cross he was paying the price that each of us deserve.

□ so on your way to the shops a meteor struck you down and you met God at the entrance to heaven and he asked you this. Why should I let you into my heaven.

I wonder how you answered that question?

Some people go down the moral route so they say “God you should let me into heaven because I’m a good person. I don’t steal. I don’t lie. I give to charity, I’m not a murderer, I am nice to people at work, I care for my family. There are lots of people worse than me. - So that is going down the moral route.

Others go down the religious route. So they say you should let me into heaven because I’m religious. I go to church. I’ve been baptised, confirmed, I pray and read the bible, I’m so holy I even come out on a cold morning in the middle of a busy weekend. God you should let me into heaven.

None of these things will get you or I into heaven. When it comes to being right with God – being moral or religious is of absolutely no use at all.

All of our lives, we are used to working hard to get anything that matters to us. And we presume the same applies to getting to heaven.

Certainly does to this young man.

v.17

Good teacher he asked. What must I do to inherit eternal life.

What must I do.

Now look at v.15, 2 verses above in comparison and see what Jesus says there.

v.15
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Do you see the difference between v15 and v17. In v17 the rich man is asking – what must I do. in v.15 Jesus says “you must receive”. Jesus says you cannot be good enough for heaven – no one can. You must receive the Kingdom of God as a free gift. God is a good and gracious God who loved to give his children good gifts and the gift of heaven is the greatest of all. And all we have to do is receive it.

So back to that question – if God should ask you “why should I let you into heaven?” The right answer is something like this. God you should let me into heaven because of what Jesus has done for me. He took my place and paid my price. I know I deserve to pay for my own sin eternally, but he took that for me on the cross.

I want to leave us with this thought this morning.

When Jesus turns to the man v21 and says “go sell everything you have and give to the poor” I’m expecting him to say then go follow God. Doesn’t. Jesus says “then come follow me”. Follow me.

We that is what Jesus says to each of us this morning.

Come follow me.

Divest yourself of all that captures your soul. All that makes you rich in your own eyes. Leave it behind. Let the children come to me – those who offer no riches of their own. Come and follow me.

And Jesus never expects his followers to do something he hasn’t done himself. He knows what it is to be rich and popular, adored by the crowd, treated as someone special. Then what did he do? He stretched out his arms and became a nobody, a disgrace, executed,

shamed, nothing. So he could put the kingdom into you'r and my empty hands.

That is the one who says come follow me. What does it profit someone to gain the whole world and lose his soul? My Children How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of god. With man this is impossible, but not with God all things are possible with god. Let the children come to me, and he took them in his arms and blessed them.