

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

**Mark 10:1–52**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Jesus is now leaving Galilee. He's within months of His approaching death. He is headed in the walk from Galilee to Jerusalem which would take Him through the Eastern side of the Jordan River. Luke 9:51, which is a parallel passage to Mark 10:1–2, indicates that at this particular moment, "He set His face to go to Jerusalem." That phrase "set His face" means nothing at this point could deter Him. He was not in question as to what He should do. Others did not understand what He was doing. Their faces would like to turn in other directions, but He was headed for Jerusalem.

As His death approaches, Jesus is doing the things He's always done. That's the thing I like about Jesus. He doesn't panic in crises. "As was is custom," Mark 10:1 says, "he taught" (NIV). It's a great thing to know that when we go through trouble and adversity in life, we need some customs, we need some habits, some traditions that we always can appeal to. The moment when death approaches or adversity strikes, the custom of prayer, the custom of strength from the Scripture, the custom of gathering ourselves together in the presence of other believers, the customs which bring life.

As Jesus heads toward Jerusalem, there is no panicky undertaking to move His ministry in directions it had not already been going. Being with Jesus is like being at a constant press conference. Through the first ten chapters of the Gospel of Mark, there are fifty-two occasions when either questions are asked of Jesus or Jesus asked questions. Interestingly enough, on those fifty-two occasions, Jesus dominates thirty-one of them by asking the questions and twenty-one times others ask Him questions. Of course, His disciples asked Him questions, religious leaders

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

asked Him questions and demons asked Him questions. But more than being questioned, He is questioning.

It's helpful, in reading the Gospel, to not only recognize that we all have our questions about God; it's helpful to recognize that God has His questions about us. There are questions the Lord is asking us. Really, there are questions directed in two ways with disciples. One is directed to their intelligence, their minds. He says on occasion, "Why don't you understand what I am teaching?" But not everything is happening on the level of the mind, because we're emotional people as well. So Jesus comes and directs questions to our emotions. "Why are you afraid?" He says. "Have you no faith?"

Jesus is revealing God as, not that far-off, distant, unapproachable person; but as one who can be questioned. I think in the beauty of the community life of Christians we need to understand this about the Lord. Part of our worship as Christians is not just gathering together and hearing a message from time to time. But our real growth also takes place as we sit down and reason and talk and question and have answers.

In Mark 10, we see three key issues which are our questions about life seen in the Gospels, seen in Mark 10, and questions which we ourselves have. They're very much related to life. The question of how to have a home, a happy home; the question of eternal life, how to have it; the question of human significance also. The question that James and John raise when they come to Him and say, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left" (Mark 10:37).

#### **I. First, the question of the home.**

The Pharisees come to Jesus, and the burning question this time on their lips is, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (Mark 10:2, NIV). The Pharisees indicate throughout the Gospels a negative bent of life. They're always asking why something is being done rather than why

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

something good should be done. They say to Jesus, in Mark 2, “Why do You eat with sinners?”

Inferring that He shouldn't. They say in Mark 2, “Why do Your disciples pluck grain on the

Sabbath?” Inferring that they shouldn't. They say in Mark 7, “Why do Your disciples eat with

unwashed hands?” Inferring that they shouldn't.

Now their negativity comes out once more. They say, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his

wife?” No wonderful, positive question such as, “How can a man better love his wife?” Only,

how can he get rid of her? Alas and alack! We see a fundamental problem emerging with the

Pharisees. We might have guessed it with their pompousness, with their religiosity, with their

long, flowing robes, with the negativity, with their hard requirement on others. But now it comes

out that at the bottom of their experience they're bankrupt. They're bankrupt in their relationship

to God and they're certainly bankrupt in their home. They who know how to tell other people to

be religious, they who know every Scripture there is to know and all the dictums of the law

within their own marriages... and they're failures. Within their own hearts, they're cold as stone.

If ever there's a lesson of religious legalism, it has to arise from seeing, once more, the picture of

the Pharisees as drawn in the Gospel. They come to Jesus asking Him, to test Him, “Is it lawful

for a man to divorce his wife?”

There are reasons why they are putting Him to the test at this moment. For one thing, Jesus was

now in the area of Herod again. John the Baptist had publicly exposed Herod's adultery and his

putting away his wife and marrying another. And John had been beheaded for his witness. So

perhaps the Pharisees are trying to get Jesus to walk into that trap.

There's also the fact that the Pharisaism which exists at this time, in this century, was divided

into two schools of thought regarding marriage: the more liberal school of thought and a more

strict school of thought. Some of the liberal Pharisees were, interestingly enough, orthodox in

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

every area but sexual relationship and human relationships. They thought that a person had grounds for divorce, particularly the man, if his wife put too much salt in his food, if she criticized his relatives in public, if she went out into the street with her head uncovered. One rabbi even said he could find cause for divorcing his wife if he found another woman who was more attractive.

So Jesus is being addressed with the situation, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Of course, the New Testament witness says “no.” Jesus in Matthew 19 talks about the accepted situation where adultery was involved. But even then, reconciliation should first be tried.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7, talked about the situation in which an unbelieving partner absolutely refuses to live with a believer. In that case, there is an exception. But the rule is, “No, it is not lawful for a man to divorce his wife.” We should understand, of course, that Jesus takes people where He finds them. If there are individuals here in this audience that, before they came to Christ, had had bad marital experiences and remarriage, and now have found Christ; and maybe they have remarried more than once or twice, they should understand that Jesus accepts them completely where they’re at. Forgiveness of sins means that the old has really passed away, that in Christ, all has become new, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17. God does not hold our trespasses against us but, as if they never were, He makes a new person, totally innocent in His eyes. Jesus didn’t say to the woman of Samaria, “Go back and find your first husband, and when you’ve found him and started living with him again, I’ll give you the gospel.” He simply shared with her the good news and took her where she was at.

But those things, being understood, we need to look at Jesus’ view of marriage. Jesus asked the Pharisees, “‘What did Moses command you?’ ... They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce’” (Mark 10:3-4, NIV). Of course, Jesus is taking them back to the Old

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

Testament period when, after having come out of the Red Sea and seeing the mighty acts of God, their home life began to crumble. It's one thing to see God at work in great events but it's another thing to see the miracles which He can do in the home. The people of Moses' day simply began to swap wives and do it very casually, so Moses needed to impose a law regulating that kind of thing so a certificate of divorce was given. But Jesus indicates that this was simply because of the hardness of hearts.

There are several kinds of marriages to live with.

**A.** One kind of marriage is an eye-for-an-eye marriage where you do this for me and I'll do this for you. You go shopping with me and I'll go to the mother-in-law's with you. We gauge how we respond in marriage by what the other person does for us. That's not 100 percent giving.

That's a fifty-fifty marriage. And fifty-fifty marriages can never really work.

**B.** Then there's another kind of marriage like loving-mercy marriage. "I have pity on you and I married you. Aren't you glad to be living with such a wonderful person like me?" I've seen marriages like that.

**C.** That leads into third kind of marriage, an ego-centered kind of marriage where, of course, one person feels they are a prized possession and the marriage exists to revolve around their personality and to fulfill their needs. As one Hollywood star who "loved the simple things of life, and proved it by marrying five of them." Ego-centered.

But Jesus' view of marriage is that it is permanent. We must not simply see the quantity of marriage as being permanent but He meant there to be a quality within the home—love, a lilt, life. Jesus said the cause for divorce is hardness of heart. He doesn't say it's incompatibility. He doesn't say it's because people have differences or different psychological backgrounds. He doesn't say it's because one comes from a home with a bad background. The other comes the

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

same way. They had no life patterns. I realize that all of these are counseling reasons why, on the exterior, marriages sometimes have trouble. But there's a more fundamental reason: hardness of heart, callousness, lack of tenderness, lack of newness, lack of intimacy.

We make this a habit with our children. It's sort of reinforcing to them that they're wanted and they need to know that they're wanted. We ride along and say, "Georgie? Evangeline? If Mommy and Daddy only had one boy and one girl in all the world, if they could choose as their boy and girl, who would they choose?" They'd get a big grin and Georgie would say, "Evangeline and me!" These children know that, above all the children in the world, they're wanted. I hope we feel that same way when they're teenagers!

Softness, a tender touch, an ability within the home to look at the person you're married to and say, "Above and beyond any person in the world, I would rather live with you than with anyone else." Softness, tenderness.

Jesus said that, from the beginning, this is the way God designed it. He said that in the beginning, God made them male and female, which is the Lord's way of saying that in Eden it was impossible for Eve to go looking for somebody other than Adam. She would have found no one else. Divorce and remarriage was impossible. Same thing with Adam. From the beginning, God intended it to be that way. Within the marriage as well, you're not to still be shopping once you've made your choice. So many people feel that, if they can just get the right partner, their life will be happy; and the solution to the marriage problem is by changing partners. Jesus doesn't say that. He says the solution to the marriage problem is to change yourself. It's not the changing of partners that brings the happiness and joy. It is the change within. It is the growth within that is needed.

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

The disciples, unfortunately at this point in their experience, still identify more with the Pharisees than they do with Jesus. They are troubled at His answers. Jesus again lays it on the line with them.

Then an event occurs that Matthew, Mark and Luke describe. After this question on divorce, we get a picture of children coming to Jesus. The disciples of course are too busy with the big things to care about the little kids. But the children are coming. I think there's something very fitting and picturesque in this for us to see. That following Jesus' great teaching on the stability and love that is to exist within the home, that the immediate consequence of that is that children can be blessed. On this occasion, Jesus is seen taking the children up in His arms, the only time in the Gospel that that description is used of Jesus. He took children up in His arms. He laid His hands on them and He blessed them.

There is a word in the original language which Mark is using for the word "blessed." It's the only time that word is used in all the New Testament. It's more than the average blessing, more than the "God bless you" kind of thing. It conveys fervency of spirit. It is as if Jesus ran His hand along the top of the heads of kids that were coming and gently brushed their cheeks with His hands. With a heart full of love and words of praise, blessed the children, knowing that if He didn't, who would? And knowing also that if He did, we might have that same kind of feeling as well. Marriage ought to bless the children.

Jesus, in the Gospel, points us to the happy home life so that the gospel of Jesus Christ becomes far more than a passport to heaven. It becomes the key to unlocking happiness on earth.

**II. Another question which Jesus is asked here, in the Gospel of Mark, is the question of eternal life.**

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

We not only as humans want to know how to have a happy life; we want to know how it is to have eternal life, to live forever, to have a quality life that exists forever.

We see a young man, I think Luke calls him rich and Matthew calls him young (it might be vice versa), but altogether, the composite picture, the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus. He says, “Good teacher...what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17, NIV). Jesus makes him think, first of all. He responds to him by saying, “Why do you call me good?...No one is good—except God alone” (verse 11, NIV). It was Jesus’ way of saying to the young man, “Have you really thought about the terminology you’re employing? Have you really thought what it is to be good? Do you really know that that’s a term reserved for God? Do you understand that when you use that of Me, you’re using that of God?”

Jesus wasn’t trying to get the man not to call Him good. He was trying to get the man to recognize the true meaning of goodness and to think upon Jesus as something more than a teacher, but as God.

Then Jesus responds to this man, “You know the commandments: Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony...” Jesus’ love individualizes people (verse 19, NIV). He doesn’t say to him, when the man comes and asks, “Good teacher what must I do to have eternal life?” He doesn’t say, “John 3:16—God so loved the world.” He didn’t say, “Romans 10:8–9—‘If you believe in your heart and confess with your lips you will be saved.’” He didn’t go through the four spiritual laws. All of these are helpful means for leading persons to Christ but the Lord saw what the need was of each individual person and applied to that need His insights. He saw that this man’s problem was: What he had was keeping him from what he needed. Evidently, this man—this young man who had inherited wealth—had been the kind of person who would not harm anyone but neither was his life marked by incidences of helping

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

people. So Jesus quoted to him six commandments from the second part of the Ten Commandments.

As you may know, the Ten Commandments are really divided into two categories. The first four commandments are relating to God and the last six, to man. Jesus said to this person, “Your real problem is with man. All your life you’ve existed with negatives—Do not do this, do not do that... But what have you ever done, what positive actions have you ever taken?” Jesus lays one on him. “Sell all you have! Give all you have to the poor. You’ll have riches in heaven. Then come, follow Me.”

We’re, at this point, tempted to say, “Wait a minute, Lord. What is this You’re asking?” We’re tempted to identify with this young man on this occasion...maybe more than with Jesus. Of course, we know that it can be pointed out to everyone who has wealth that Jesus does not say the same thing in the Gospels or even in the Book of Acts. But there are times when Jesus lays a different requirement down. The Early Church was characterized by persons who were able to use their resources for the Lord, and others who were called to give everything away and follow Christ. There are different patterns and we should be sensitive to that.

But Jesus laid His hand on the one thing which was keeping this young man from God. The thing that was keeping this young man from God was that he was focusing on what he had to give up rather than what he had to give. He had a lot to give to the world as a potential eyewitness of Jesus Christ. He could have given to the world what Saul of Tarsus gave. He had the intellectual background. He had the wealth. He had the force of life and thought. He could have been used to give the world Jesus. But he focused on what he had to give up.

If someone were to come to me today and say, “If you were to deny Jesus Christ I’ll give you a hundred million dollars.” I can honestly say, and without saying it from a superiority or

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

Pharisaical point of view, it would be untenable. The offer would be turned down. I wouldn't have to think five minutes. I wouldn't have to think thirty seconds about it; because, to have Jesus Christ is worth more than anything in the world. To deny Him for the sake of something else doesn't make sense at all.

This young man didn't understand that point of view, however. Because once you have something it's different than being confronted with a choice. He had it. He'd gotten used to it. Now it was difficult to give it up. But Jesus was saying, "When you give it up, then I'm going to give you something." He promises to give this man eternal life. "You wanted to know how to have eternal life, then give yourself away freely, as the Son of Man is giving himself away freely. Give yourself freely and go your way. Follow Me."

"He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Mark 10:22, NIV). How unlike him is the disciple that's seen in the parable in Matthew 13:44 who was a farmer. One day, as he was farming, he found a great treasure hidden in the field and he didn't own the field. So he went and sold everything he had with joy in order that he might have that which he had found, which is a symbol of the kingdom of God or the life with Jesus Christ. He, with joy, gave up everything in order that he might have something. This young man went away sorrowful. Jesus says, as His disciples are amazed at the toughness of the conditions which they themselves by and large had already met. Jesus says it's harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Then the disciples recognized, "Who then can be saved?" That's the point, Jesus said. "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (verses 26-27, NIV).

What does Jesus mean here, the camel going through the eye of the needle? There have been persons who have tried to explain this phrase away by saying for example that the word for

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

“camel” is very close in spelling to the word for “rope” in the original language. Jesus was talking about the rope going through the eye of the needle. And that the needle was a tent needle. The point of the story is it is: impossible. Another view that’s been advanced is that there is a small gate in the city wall where camels got down on all fours at night, after the main gates were closed, and crawled in the city, and they could make it.

But I would take Jesus literally at this point. He was saying it’s impossible for a camel to go through the eye of the needle. It is impossible for any man to get in the kingdom of God on his own. That’s why Jesus came. If we could do it on our own, if we didn’t need Jesus Christ, if we didn’t need His life for us, why the bother of the cross? Why should the Son of God be put to death if we could do it on our own? Why not save Him all that trouble? But Jesus responds with beautiful positive words. “With God, all things are possible.” That is, from your vantage point, it’s not possible. From Mine, it is. And the answer is our need for eternal life.

### **III. Then, of course, there’s the need for human significance.**

The disciples, James and John, wanted to crowd out Peter on this occasion—he had too much prominence. They come to Jesus and say, “We want you to do for us whatever we ask” (Mark 10:35, NIV). Like a kid coming to his parents. You know there’s something going on when they ask this. You know you’d be crazy if you grant that request.

So here they are requesting, *carte blanche*, “Lord, do!” Of course, the Lord can’t do that with us and He couldn’t do it with them. He had to know what they wanted specifically. What they wanted was a place of significance, a place where their worth would be recognized and owned for centuries on end and into eternity. They wanted to sit at His left and His right hand. And their mother, according to one of the other Gospels, was in on it, pushing her boys ahead, helping them succeed as mothers often do.

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

Jesus doesn't put them down in their need for human significance. He doesn't tell them flat out they can't sit at His right and His left. He tells them that's for His Father to decide. But He doesn't flat turn them down. I think that's significant. He instead answers them in a way of speech, by indicting that "if you can drink the cup." "Can you drink the cup I drink? Or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (verse 38, NIV). Which is His way of saying, "You want to be close to Me for all eternity? Then follow the way that I'm going. The way to closeness is to embrace the kind of life and death that I am embracing. To drink the cup, to be baptized with the baptism." If you want to be close to the Lord, then follow Him when you are falsely accused, in responding by returning good for evil. If you want to follow the Lord, allow yourself to suffer for His name, to be ridiculed, to take abuse from the non-Christian world, to be laughed out of school or your office or apartment, to be maligned for the faith, to suffer injustice, to do all of that like Christ, who we see in Mark 10:32–34 indicates for the third time in the Gospel of Mark that He is heading for the cross. He knows it. He has embraced that way willingly, voluntarily.

Now the disciples respond, "We can" (verse 39, NIV). They didn't realize that, in a way, they would. James would drink the cup by becoming the first of the disciples to lose his life for the sake of the gospel, Acts 12. John would drink the cup through long life as we see him in the Book of Revelation, still alive at the end of the century. One drinks the cup of suffering and identification with Christ through early martyrdom; the other drinks it through longevity of life. But Jesus responds to our need for human significance by saying, "If you want life to be significant, then be like the Son of Man who exists to serve, who exists to help, you do not exist to rule."

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

Then Jesus comes down into Jericho. He's on the last leg of His trip to Jerusalem. In Mark 11, we find Him in Jerusalem. As He's on the way out of the city, a beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, who is blind, cries out that he might be healed. This is one of the few miracles in all of the Gospels in which the person healed is known by his proper name: Bartimaeus. Maybe the reason why he's known here by his name is that he later became a prominent member of the Christian community. Blind Bartimaeus is calling. And Jesus says to him, in 10:51, "What do you want me to do for you?" (NIV). That's kind of an incredible question. "What do you want Me to do for you?" As if Jesus didn't already know. But He wanted the man to specify what he perceived as his greatest need. The man said, "My greatest need is to have sight." Jesus agreed with him and granted him healing.

I had a situation in my own family where my sister had very poor eyesight, wore very thick lenses, and was instantly healed by the Lord. So I know that the Lord today exercises that same authority. I'm also left with the mystery of why I wear glasses. And why it is when I take these off you are a sea of blur and color and I cannot even distinguish the faces of the persons sitting in the front row. I've had to ask myself why did the Lord allow this and my sister received healing. The only thing I can figure out is what Paul said in respect to his thorn in the flesh: that he asked the Lord to remove it and the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you. Be thou perfected in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12). The only thing I can figure out is that, through wearing these glasses, God's pointed me in a direction of life I wouldn't have gone without them. Instead of being an outdoor person, I became an indoor person. Instead of being a physical contact person, I became a person who had maybe a closer affinity with persons and books and ideas. Maybe without this in my life, God would have had me go another direction all together. But with this

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

He reined me in. I don't know. But I know that whatever my request is, it must agree with the Lord's desire for me.

We see in the Gospel of Mark, in chapter 10, desires which the Lord so much wants to fulfill. He wants to fulfill your desire for a happy home. He can't do this where there is rebellion. If you're in a home situation where one person is particularly rebellious toward the Lord, the Lord wants to answer that prayer, but because of the freedom which He has given that individual, He will not knock that person down and force him to submit. But the Lord can work through you. If the Lord isn't changing your partner, He can be changing you.

The Lord always seeks to grant the desire for eternal life; whosoever will, let him come. So if you want eternal life, it's yours for the asking and for the committing. If you want human significance, then follow Jesus. See great human significance.

In Mark 10:23, after the rich young ruler had gone away, it is said by Mark, "Jesus looked around and said to His disciples..." (NIV). Jesus looked around. I'm fascinated by that phrase in the Gospel of Mark that has occurred before. The words "looked around" mean the ability to singly let one's gaze fall individually, in a rotating fashion, on everyone who is listening. It involves time for this to take place and stillness.

In Mark 3 (in the first paragraph), Jesus looked around in anger in the synagogue at the persons who dared Him to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath. At the end of Mark 3, He looked around, when His mother and His brothers were on the outside, at everybody who was listening to Him and said, "Whoever does the will of My Father is My mother and My brother." Here again, He is seen looking around, searching eyeball-to-eyeball. Who will be His disciples, who will follow Him, who will know the way to eternal life?

## **SO MANY QUESTIONS**

### **Mark 10:1–52**

Jesus looks around again today. He looks directly at each of us in this room. He knows each of us directly. He looks at us. He says to us, “What do you want? Are your needs consistent with what you really must have? What do you want?” What He wants for you, you can have. He always wants eternal life for you. You can always have that. He always wants you to know how to respond to crises and situations in life and to be full of joy in the Holy Spirit. He wants you to have that as well. He looks around at each of us today.

### **Closing Prayer**

For this hour, Father, we're grateful. We think of Isaiah's words referenced in Mark, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news, the good tidings of peace.” We say that of this portion of the gospel today. How beautiful it is, for it ministers such peace to us. I ask, Father, once more, as we bow our heads in prayer for individual lives in here today, who You know have needed these words from the gospel, whose hearts have needed to be healed, whose questions have needed to be answered, whose deepest desires have needed to be met. We're thankful that You're always sufficient for every one of our needs. There's never an energy crisis with You. You have more than enough. We bring ourselves to You today. We place ourselves before You once more. We ask You to do Your will in us, as it is done in heaven. Grant today that, rather than fleeing the cross in life, fleeing the difficult situation, we may instead take up the cross and responsibilities and follow You wheresoever You go.