



Sermon Transcript March 4, 2018

Gospel of Mark: The Good News of Jesus Living Biblical Mark 10:13-52

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on March 4, 2018 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio version of this sermon can be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text:
Mark 10:13-52

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, ³ "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

³² And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

³⁵ And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” ³⁹ And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” ⁴¹ And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. ⁴² And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” ⁵² And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Introduction

There is a new sitcom on CBS called *Living Biblically*. The main character of the sitcom is a New York film critic by the name of Chip. He picked up a Bible at a local bookstore and he decided that he was going to try to live his life “100 percent by the Bible.” His wife is not that excited about her husband’s new found faith, consequently much of the show portrays the interaction of these two worldviews that collide against each other. This show is not designed to portray religion or Christians in a bad light. In fact, Patrick

Walsh, the creator of the show, sees *Living Biblically* as a platform to have respectful discussions about faith, which is a significant part of the lives of most people in the world.¹ That is a noble goal, considering the difficulty we tend to have in our culture when it comes to talking with someone who views things differently than we do.

But if you watch this sitcom, the question to ask is this: “Is this portrayal of living biblically, truly biblical?” In his quest to live by the Bible 100 percent, Chip describes his new found project as a quest to become a better person. He described his journey this way, “I found faith in something bigger than myself and it’s making me a better person.” Brett McCracken asks a good question. “Is this really what Christianity is about? What is yet to be seen is whether or not Chip will encounter Jesus, grace, the cross, and the true gospel, or whether it will continue exploring faith through the vague, but sadly pervasive lens of moralistic therapeutic deism.”²

Now that is a mouthful: moralistic therapeutic deism. What is that? It is reducing Christianity down to being good. Karen Jones says that moral therapeutic deism sounds good. “Producing happy moral people sounds like a worthy goal. But is this the kind of Christianity the Bible teaches?”³ I don’t think so. The message of the gospel is not, “behave and be baptized.” It is “repent and be baptized.” Jones contends that we unwittingly teach this to our kids “when we spend more time telling them what they need to do instead of telling them what Jesus Christ has already done.”⁴

Upon the death of Billy Graham, George W. Bush wrote a tribute to Graham in the *Wall Street Journal*. He was recounting Graham’s role in his journey to faith in Christ. He recounts a private walk the two of them shared. In the walk, Bush confessed to Graham that maybe he could be a better person if he started to read the Bible. That is an example of “moral therapeutic deism.” Graham’s response lovingly redirected President Bush to the heart of our faith. He said, “we should all strive to be better, but we’re all sinners who earn God’s love not through our good deeds, but through his grace.” Thinking back on that conversation, Bush wrote, “that was a profound concept, one I did not fully grasp that day. But Billy had planted a seed.”⁵ Any talk of “living biblically” that doesn’t start at the cross ceases to be biblical.

That is where we are going to start this morning. The cross of Jesus is at the core and center of our faith. We must understand the cross if we want to “live biblically.” Once we understand the cross, it informs how we begin our journey of faith and how we continue in our journey of faith.

The Cross: Substitutionary Atonement

We are in this section of the Gospel of Mark where Jesus is informing his disciples about his pending death on the cross. In our passage this morning, we come across the third time Jesus tells them about the cross. He told them about the cross in Mark 8. He told them about the cross in Mark 9. And now, in our passage this morning, Mark 10:32-24, once again, he tells them that *“the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”* In fact, of the three conversations Jesus had with his disciples about the cross, this is the conversation containing the most details.

I like how verse 32 sets the scene for this third conversation about the cross. It says, *“And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them.”* It is a picture of Jesus being resolute. He is setting the pace. He is dictating the direction of where they are going. It is reminiscent of what Isaiah the prophet said prophetically of Jesus, the “suffering servant.” In Isaiah 50:6-7 we hear hints of the cross when it says of this coming servant, *“I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard . . . I have set my face like a flint.”* That is an interesting expression, *“I have set my face like a flint.”* “Flint is a very hard type of sedimentary rock. When struck against steel, a flint edge produces sparks to start a fire. Setting your face like flint implies that you’re expecting some opposition, and to stand strong in the face of adversity. To set your face like flint means to regard these difficulties as worthwhile when you consider what they will lead you to.”⁶ Or as Luke 9:51 put it, *“Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”* I think this is why it says that the disciples *“were afraid.”* There was no turning back. To the cross he goes.

These three “crucial conversations” about the cross basically inform the disciples what is about to happen. The consistent outline of these three conversations is that Jesus is going to be handed over to the authorities, he will be killed and he will rise again on the third day. But it is not until we come to Mark 10 that we discover why Jesus had to go to the cross. Many consider Mark 10:45 to be the theme verse for the Gospel of Mark. If nothing else, it closes out the center portion of the book that completes the transition between the first half and the second half of the book. Through his miracles, the first half of the book demonstrates that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Peter got it and he confessed in Mark 8, *“You are the Christ.”* But the second half of the book is all about the cross. Once we get past Mark 10:45, we go full speed into that one week surrounding the events of the cross. Why? Why the cross? Jesus says, *“For even the Son of Man came*

not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This verse we find at the center of the Gospel of Mark is at the center of our faith. You can't even begin to comprehend what it means to "live biblically" if you don't understand what Jesus is saying here. "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" The fancy term for what this verse refers to is "substitutionary atonement." The simple understanding of what Jesus is saying here is found in Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:24, "*He himself bore our sins in his body on that tree.*" In other words, he took our place. He died in our place. It should have been me on that cross. It should have been you on that cross. But it was Jesus on that cross. "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

The word *ransom* carries with it the idea of a payment that is made. In the Old Testament, the word was used to describe compensation that was required to make amends for a personal injury or a crime that was committed. It was also used to describe the price that was required to set free a relative who was enslaved. In our context, when we think of the word *ransom*, we think of the price that is required to set free one who is wrongfully taken or kidnapped. And so Paul says of the death of Jesus on the cross in Ephesians 5:2, that "*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, [an] offering . . . to God.*" Our sin enslaves us and condemns us before God. The death of Jesus is the payment that sets us free from our sin and death.

There are two important implications that emerge from Mark 10:45. The first implication is that I need ransomed. Or to put it another way, I stand condemned in my sin. Jesus asks the question in Mark 8:37, "*What can a man give in exchange for his soul?*" Nothing! That is the answer to this question. That is why "moral therapeutic deism" is bankrupt. You don't read the Bible so that you can be a better person. Rather, the central message of the Bible is "Jesus Christ crucified for our sin." You read the Bible to discover how God rescues us and delivers us from our sin through Jesus Christ. You read the Bible to discover how Jesus took the punishment our sins deserve and how he rose from the dead, defeating sin and death forever. The premise that someone can "live by the Bible 100 percent" is a faulty premise if it is about becoming a good person. But "living by the Bible 100 percent" is not about "how good you are." Rather, "living by the Bible 100 percent" is about turning to the one who "lived by the Bible 100 percent" and therefore was able to atone for our sin by dying in our place. And that is the second implication of this verse. Jesus was able to be an offering for our sin because as Peter tells us in 1 Peter 2, "*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.*"

In his book *Basic Christianity*, John Stott recognizes, “This simple and wonderful account of the sinbearing of the Son of God is strangely unpopular today. The idea that Jesus should have born our sins and taken our penalty is said to be immoral or unworthy or unjust.”⁷ Some of the objection of this teaching comes with the view that it portrays Jesus wresting salvation for us from an angry God who is unwilling to save. But that is not true. The initiative for our salvation lies with God. Paul says that “*God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ.*” The Father sent the Son. The Son freely paid the price; it was not forced. Which brings us to his love. Jesus freely chose to rescue us from our sin at the cost of his life. That is the starting point for what it means to live biblically. It starts at the cross. It starts with Christ crucified, buried and risen again for the forgiveness of our sins. “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Living Biblically: A Starting Point

Now with the cross at the center of what it means to live biblically, we can consider what it means to start living biblically. The main character in the sitcom goes to a bookstore, picks up a Bible and begins his journey by trying to do all that it says. Basically, he begins his journey by trying to be a better person. But it begs the question, how do we begin this journey of faith if the cross is at the center of our faith? Mark gives us insight on how to begin by telling us of two encounters Jesus had right before he shares with us this third conversation about the cross.

First we find the disciples preventing a group of children from coming to Jesus. When Jesus sees how the disciples are treating these children he becomes indignant. Kent Hughes says that “Jesus was hot and his words have a clipped staccato ring to them, “*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.*”⁸ While the disciples may have been trying to protect Jesus from the demands of those around him, their dismissal of the children indicated what they thought of the children. They considered the children unimportant. But when Jesus rebuked them and said, “*for to such belongs the kingdom of God*”, he was affirming that the kingdom of God belongs to people who are considered unimportant. But to Jesus, they are important.

Think of how many of us came to faith as a child. Charles Spurgeon the great British preacher and evangelist of the 19th century put it this way. “I will say broadly that I have more confidence in the spiritual life of the children that I have received into this church than I have in the spiritual condition of the adults thus received. I will go even further than that, and say that I have usually found a clearer knowledge of the gospel and

a warmer love to Christ in the child-converts than in the man-converts. And I will even astonish you still more by saying that I have sometimes met with a deeper spiritual experience in children of ten or twelve than I have in certain persons of fifty or sixty.”⁹

That must have been the experience of Jesus as well, because he adds, *“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”* By nature, children display a helpless dependence on others. They are dependent on adults and they don’t know any other way. And that is how you enter the kingdom of God. You come to the cross with a helpless dependence on the one who died in your place.

Add to that the story that follows. It is the story of the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus with the question, *“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* Can you hear the “moral therapeutic deism” coming through his question? *“What must I do?”* He is trying to “live by the Bible 100 percent.” Jesus plays right into his way of thinking by telling him to keep the commandments and this man was proud to announce that he does not commit murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, defraud others . . . and he honors his parents. In other words, the law is making him into a better person.

But then Jesus turns to him and says a very hard thing, *“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”* The man left disheartened because he had many possessions. And so Jesus said, *“Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”*

What is Jesus saying here? He is not saying that we need to sell all we have if we want to enter the kingdom of God. But this man came to Jesus and thought he was good. In fact, when he called Jesus, *“Good Teacher”* Jesus responded by saying, *“Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”* Jesus had already seen into the self-righteous attitude of this man’s heart. And so by calling him to sell all that he had, he exposed the idol of this man’s heart. It is the challenge of wealth. It easily becomes the thing we trust and worship over God. So while this man was claiming to keep all the commandments, he was actually breaking the first and primary one by worshiping the idols of his heart, namely materialism. He was not as good as he thought he was.

And so the disciples are looking around and scratching their heads and asking, *“Then who can be saved?”* Here is this person who looks like “he lives by the Bible 100 percent” only to find that his heart is filled with idols. And so Jesus says, *“With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”* In other words, if you

are depending on yourself, you'll never enter the kingdom of God. And so once again, we find that entrance into the kingdom of God is found in helpless dependence upon Christ and the cross. Jesus says to the church in Revelation 3:17, "*You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'*" And that is how you enter the kingdom of God. You come to the cross confessing to be "*wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*" and with a helpless dependence on the one who died in your place. There is no living biblically apart from acknowledging your need for Jesus to die in your place for the forgiveness of sin.

The sitcom would really reflect the title if after trying hard to "live by the Bible 100 percent" Chip came to the end of himself and said, "*no one is righteous, no not one!*" Who then can be saved? Then turning in humble confession of his sin, he comes to the cross and cries out, "God have mercy on me a sinner." That is what it looks like to live biblically. That is actually what it looks like to live by the Bible 100 percent.

Living Biblically: A Way of Life

Perhaps you are scratching your head and wondering to yourself, "I thought following Jesus does make me into a better person." Or at least, there ought to be some difference in my life as a result of the influence of the Bible on my life. No doubt, that should be true. But the problem is when you put the cart before the horse. We are to imitate Jesus as we follow him. But John Piper reminds us that "Imitation is not salvation. But salvation brings imitation."¹⁰ And furthermore, what is that transformation Jesus does in our lives when we come to the cross and start following him.

It is interesting to pick up the conversation after Jesus tells his disciples for the third time that he was going to the cross. He just told his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be handed over to the authorities, treated shamefully and killed. And the next thing out of the disciples mouths came from James and John, asking for places of prominence in the kingdom of God. It sets in contrast, Jesus who came to serve and the disciples who were seeking honor. At the end of his response to them, Jesus says in Mark 10:43-45, "*But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" In other words, living biblically is a way of life that follows the example of Jesus by serving others like Jesus served us. Or like we said last week, "willingly being disadvantaged for the advantage of someone else."

David Brooks wrote the book *Road to Character*. It is a secular book. In it he says that rarely do we encounter what he calls “that good person.” But his contention was that occasionally we do. And do you know what he said you find when you find this “rare good person”? “They possess the self-effacing virtues of people who are inclined to be useful but don’t need to prove anything to the world: humility, restraint, reticence, temperance, respect, and soft self-discipline.”¹¹ Sounds like a modern version of the “fruit of the Spirit.” And then he says, “These are the people we are looking for.”

My contention is that for the Christian this is not where you start. Rather, this is the work that gets formed in you by the cross. Paul said it this way in Philippians 2, “*Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*” But where does that come from? Listen to what Paul says, “*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.*” And then he goes on to explain how Jesus humbled himself and went to the cross. That is just like our passage here. We are to be “*a slave of all.*” Why? “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

Living biblically is a life that is shaped by the cross. It is lived under the shadow of the cross. Without the cross, there is no “living biblically.” You must first recognize that Jesus died on the cross in your place. He died for your sin. Then you begin that journey by recognizing that you are helpless to do anything good that merits any standing before God. Your prayer is simply, “*God have mercy on me a sinner.*” And then as you continue your journey of “living biblically” it becomes more about “taking up your cross” and following Jesus and less about seeing faith as a “best life now” path to happiness.¹² In other words, living biblically is costly. You die to yourself. You disadvantage yourself for the advantage of others. You become a “*slave of all.*”

Joining Bartimaeus

When we began this section about the three conversations Jesus had with his disciples about the cross, we noted that this section began and ended with the healing of a blind man. This section began with that peculiar healing that Jesus did in stages. At first, the blind man didn’t see clearly when Jesus rubbed the saliva in his eyes. And so Jesus touched him a second time and then his sight was fully restored. I suggested that it was a picture of Jesus slowly opening their eyes to the cross.

The healing of Bartimaeus, at the end of this section, concludes with Bartimaeus following

Jesus on the way. That is the last verse of this chapter, “*And immediately he recovered his sight and followed [Jesus] on his way.*” And where was Jesus going? The next chapter we see him riding into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday. He was going to the cross and Bartimaeus was following him. Now that his eyes were open to Jesus, he was found following in the way of Jesus.

When you take the three conversations Jesus had about the cross and put them together, you discover what the road of following Jesus looks like. It is the road we are invited to walk on as we follow Jesus.

It is a road of suffering. Jesus says in Mark 8:34, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*” It is a road of prayer. Responding to the question of his disciples about the boy possessed by a demon in Mark 9:29, “*Teacher, why couldn’t we cast it out?*” Jesus said, “*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.*” It is a road of humble service. In Mark 10:43 Jesus says, “*Whoever would be great among you, must be your servant.*”

Willing to suffer. Humble dependent prayer. Be a servant. That is living biblically and it is shaped by the cross of Jesus. *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

¹Brett McCracken “New CBS Sitcom ‘Living Biblically’ Brings Faith to Primetime” www.thegospelcoalition.org February 26, 2018

²Ibid.

³Karen Jones “What is Moral Therapeutic Deism” www.lifeway.com December 18, 2014

⁴Ibid

⁵George W Bush “How Billy Graham Change My Life” www.wsj.com February 23, 2018

⁶Michael Gyarmathy “He Set His Face Like Flint” www.medium.com August 7, 2013

⁷John Stott *Basic Christianity 50th Anniversary Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008) Kindle Reader Location 1025

⁸R. Kent Hughes *Mark: Volume II Jesus, Servant and Savior* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989) 56-57

⁹Charles Spurgeon *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 32, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1974) p. 579 from the sermon, “Jesus and the Children”

¹⁰John Piper *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006) 92

¹¹David Brooks *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2015) Kindle Reader Location, 140

¹²McCracken

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Do you have a favorite television show? If so, what is it and what do you like about it? What values (good or bad) are communicated through this show?
2. What kind of situations do you find it difficult to take on the attitude of a servant? What do you find particularly challenging about those situations?
3. What is something you took from the sermon on Sunday?

Diving Into The Word

4. Read Mark 10:32-34, 45. If you were asked to explain the message of the cross, what would you say? How does Peter explain the cross in 1 Peter 2:21-25?
5. Read Mark 10:13-16 and 23-27. Using these passages, answer the question asked in verse 26, *“Then who can be saved?”*
6. Read Mark 10:43-45. How does the cross of Jesus shape our attitudes and actions? See also Philippians 2:3-8.
7. Based on the passages you looked at in Mark 10, how would you describe what it means to “live biblically”?

Taking It Home

8. Easter is a month away. What is one thing you would like do to keep your focus on Jesus and the cross this month?
9. Identify an area in your life where you need to grow in taking on the form of a servant. What is a specific thing you would like the group to pray for you in this situation?