

The 100 Percent Rule *Mark 10:17-31* | 10/14/2018

Google by all accounts is one of the most creative companies around and also one of the most fun to work for. The multinational company is also well-known for employee benefits such as pool tables and bowling alleys, free food and gym memberships. It even employs a chief happiness officer whose sole job is to keep employees happy and maintain productivity.

Freedom is also something for which Google is famous. Enshrined in the management ethos at Google is the concept of the *20 percent rule*. They encourage employees, in addition to their regular projects, to spend 20 percent of their time working on what they think will most benefit Google. This empowers them to be more creative and innovative. Many of their most significant advances have happened in this manner.

All of this is relevant because in today's gospel reading, a would-be disciple — identified only as a rich man — approaches Jesus, whom he believes to be the Chief Happiness Officer of the kingdom of God. All he wants is to know what he must do to have eternal life.

He's interviewing for a job. He has an impressive resume.

Jesus looks at this guy and likes him — a lot. In fact, the text says Jesus *loved* him. Jesus would love to have him — let's call him Eli — join the team. And why not? Jesus would be smart to add this discipleship candidate to the team. He's young. He's reverential (he knelt before Jesus). A background check reveals that he has no rap sheet and is an upstanding citizen. He follows the Law of Moses, so he's religiously observant. And — best of all — he's a potential investor, a man with standing in the community and financial resources to fund Jesus' mission for a long time!

So, Jesus gives Eli the good news: the job is his. All he has to do is cough up 100 percent of his possessions and give them to the poor — not 10 percent or 20 percent, but 100 percent. After Eli has disposed of his possessions, he can then, and only then, return and follow Jesus. The Jesus team will then be known as the Thirteen instead of the Twelve. The job is his.

But Eli, alas, is “shocked.” He apparently was unaware of what it takes to be a disciple. He didn't get the memo about picking up the cross and denying himself. He wasn't prepared to pay the price. He's genuinely disappointed. But he can't do it. He turns away and we never hear of Eli again.

What Eli discovered is that to be a disciple or follower of Jesus, 10 percent doesn't cut it. Nor does 20 percent. Jesus demands 100 percent of *everything, everywhere, all of the time*.

Six things jump off the biblical page:

1. Eli wants to inherit eternal life.
2. Jesus gets a little touchy about being called “good.” Why?
3. “Entering” the kingdom of God is all about *what we put first in our lives*.
4. Jesus says it is difficult for the wealthy to get into the kingdom of God.
5. Jesus doesn't really explain this comment, but only says that “for God all things are possible.”
6. Jesus says that “many” who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Let's take a closer look at these six statements.

First, Eli — who in Luke is called a “ruler” (18:18) and in Matthew is called “young” (19:20) — *wants to inherit eternal life*. This is a good thing. How can it be a bad thing? But Eli is not sure what he needs to “do” to ensure that eternal life will someday be his.

The text seems to give us a positive image of Eli. He runs up to Jesus. He's eager and excited. He kneels before Jesus right there in the road, in public, in broad daylight. He's bold, self-assured, reverential and respectful.

He must have been encouraged when Jesus began to rattle off portions of what is known as the second table of the Ten Commandments, which pertain to one's relationship to one's neighbors. "Yes! I got this!" He tells Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth" (v. 20).

But Jesus knows that there's an insurmountable obstacle which has such a strong hold on this young man that he'll not be able to commit 100 percent to Jesus and follow him.

Second, *Jesus gets a little touchy about being called "good."* Why? Jesus might have been trying to dampen this young man's enthusiasm. "Hold on for a second! Don't call me good." And citing Jewish tradition which reserves the title of "good" for God alone, he reminds Eli that eternal life is all about God.

Third, "entering" the kingdom of God is all about *what we put first*. For the rich man, *his attachment to his possessions* got in the way of his putting God first. Jesus' command zeroed in on Eli's source of well-being. His most important sense of self came from the status, power and security his affluence afforded him. Eli is exposed. He is an idol worshiper and his idol is wealth. He cannot give it up.

Fourth, Jesus says *it is difficult for the wealthy to get into the kingdom of God*. Jesus' suggestion that Eli impoverish himself also flies in the face of the common understanding that possessing wealth was a sign of divine favor. Jesus says it is no such thing. Rather, it only acts as an impediment. Jesus' command not only shocks the questioner, but it stuns his disciples who cling to the normative standards of first-century Judaism.

But note that although Jesus says it is hard for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God, he does not say it is impossible. It's difficult not because there's anything inherently wicked about being rich, but because the *love of riches* so often makes it difficult to part with riches. It's hard to separate some rich people from their wealth.

Fifth, *Jesus doesn't really explain this comment*, but only says that "for God all things are possible." Actually, *it's mindboggling that anyone is allowed into the kingdom of God!* It's only by the love, grace and mercy of God! Jesus' final words reveal that rich and poor who genuinely seek the kingdom should be confident: "For God all things are possible."

Finally, *Jesus says that "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first"* (v. 31). Peter boasts that he and the other disciples had left everything and followed Jesus. Jesus reminds his disciples — in the face of Peter's boast — that a little humility goes a long way.

The quest for eternal life is found only in discipleship with Jesus. This young man's failure to follow through on Jesus' final demand reveals that his confessed observance of the Law was governed more by possessions and position than by a true thirst for righteousness.

When Eli learned about the 100% rule, his heart sank — for it was in his heart that he treasured all that he had accumulated. His shock and sadness are not a judgment of his worth in the kingdom to come; they simply reveal his inability to accept the call of Christ that is before him. He has missed the opportunity to be a true blessing in the here and now by hoarding his possessions for the future.

The 100% rule applies to us. God demands all of us. Not 10%. Not 20%. 100%. Only then can we be true followers of Jesus.

Pastor Keith