

“Why Do You Call Me Good”: A Markan Riddle

Brian Han Gregg
University of Sioux Falls, USA
brian.gregg@usiuouxfalls.edu

Abstract

“Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:17-18). Jesus’ initial interaction with the rich man has long been interpreted by scholars as a sign of Jesus’ humble deference to God. This article argues that Mark 10:17-18 was intended by the author to function as a riddle concerning Jesus’ identity, emphasizing his “oneness” with God and the authoritative nature of his commands. In fact, the first ten chapters of the Gospel of Mark have carefully prepared the reader to both recognize and understand the riddle. (*Keywords: Gospel of Mark, riddle, good, Christ’s oneness with God*)

I. Introduction

The Gospel of Mark is full of riddles. The obfuscating function of parables (Mark 4:11-13), Jairus’ dead (or alive?) daughter (Mark 5:35-43), the ambiguous naked young man (Mark 14:51-52), and the famous Messianic secret represent just a few of the more prominent examples. The Gospel of Mark even concludes with a final arresting riddle, with the women saying nothing to anyone concerning the angel’s proclamation.¹

One would be mistaken, however, to think that Mark simply celebrates mystery. Rather, each of Mark’s riddles seeks to engage his readers,² turning them from passive observers into active participants.³

¹ This is assuming that the earliest textual witnesses, those which conclude the Gospel in 16:8, accurately reflect the Gospel’s intended ending. It is, of course, possible that the original ending of Mark has been lost.

² Though I will use the term “reader” to designate Mark’s audience, it should be remembered that much of Mark’s original audience would not have read the Gospel at all. Rather, they would have been “auditors.”

³ The following is a short list of books which discuss this Markan propensity. David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, eds., *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999);

Much like the disciples, Mark's readers soon discover that they too are on a journey of discovering who Jesus is and what his message and ministry mean. The extended discussion of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-25), which is all about the importance of responding to Jesus' words, ends with precisely this message.

He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given to you. For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away" (Mark 4:21-25).

The intent of this article is to pose a question about the beginning of the dialogue between Jesus and the rich man in Mark 10:17-18. Is Jesus' response to the rich man's address another Markan riddle? If so, what is he trying to communicate to those "with ears to hear"?

II. Mark 10:17-18 as a Riddle

As he [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to him and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (Mark 10:17-18).

The man, who is identified only as εἷς in verse 17, greets Jesus in extravagant fashion.⁴ He runs to him, kneels before him, and addresses him as "Good teacher" (διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ). If the actions are unusual, the address is even more so. There are no attestations in Second Temple Judaism of referring to a teacher in this fashion.⁵ Two other characters

Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983); Donald H. Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Bas van Iersel, *Reading Mark* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1988); Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

⁴ The reader does not learn that he is wealthy until the end of the story (Mark 10:22).

⁵ The only parallel comes from the late *b. Ta'an.* 24b. "Good greetings to the good teacher from the good Lord, who from his bounty dispenses good to his people." It should be evident that this passage does not reflect normal practice since "good" is obviously the center of a wordplay. See Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus: Considered in Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909), 337.

have fallen on their knees before Jesus, the leper in Mark 1:40 and Jairus in Mark 5:22. In each case Jesus responded positively, interpreting the gesture as a sign of great respect and profound need. There is little to suggest that the motives of this man should be viewed any differently, especially given that the text will explicitly say that Jesus looked intently at him and loved him (ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτόν) in Mark 10:21.

Jesus proceeds to respond both to the man's address and his actual question, but it is the former that contains a potential riddle. "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (τί με λέγεις ἄγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός). Adela Collins's interpretation of Jesus' response reflects the general scholarly consensus concerning Jesus' query: "First, he distances himself from the address by asking, 'Why do you call me good?' Second, he explains why he refuses the characterization of himself as 'good' by stating, 'No one is good except one, (namely) God.'"⁶ The presumption is that Jesus has *objected* to being called good. Apparently, he deems it inappropriate in light of the singular goodness of God. Surely any respectable Jew would have agreed that God's "goodness" supersedes all other forms of "good." The point is nonetheless a rather odd one for Jesus to make, since "good" was regularly applied to all sorts of things besides God.⁷ Surely Jesus' interlocutor was using the word in this fashion. Why, then, does Jesus go out of his way to develop a contrast between himself and God? Exegetes have provided a range of interpretive options in answer to this question. Collins says that Jesus demonstrates "modesty and piety by not claiming for himself qualities or prerogatives that belong to God alone."⁸ William Lane argues that the "inquirer's idea of goodness was defined by human achievement. He undoubtedly regarded himself as 'good' in the sense that he was confident that he had fulfilled the commandments."⁹ Jesus' words serve as a correction of this attitude. There is no good apart from God—for the man, for Jesus, for anyone. According to R. T. France, Jesus is encouraging the man to "re-examine his idea of goodness."¹⁰ He also raises the possibility that Jesus suspects flattery in the address. Maloney simply states, "The issue is not who is good."¹¹ Whatever the nuance,

⁶ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 476.

⁷ See, e.g., Matt 7:11 (good gifts); 7:17 (good tree); 12:35 (good man and good things); 25:21 (good servant).

⁸ Collins, *Mark*, 477.

⁹ William Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 365.

¹⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 401-2.

¹¹ Francis J. Maloney, *The Gospel of Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002),

modern interpreters are nearly universally agreed that Jesus' intent was to "deflect acclamation from himself to God."¹²

There is, however, another viable interpretive option. Instead of understanding Jesus' response as an *objection* to the address, one which emphasizes the discontinuity between himself and God, one might understand it as a genuine question, posed by Jesus in order to highlight his "oneness" with God. To put it another way, nearly all interpreters place the emphasis on *me* in Jesus' question, "Why do you call *me* good?" If this is the point of emphasis, then the follow up statement provides the rationale for why "good" is an inappropriate term for Jesus, namely, because it is reserved for God alone. If, however, one places the emphasis on *why* in the same question, "Why do you call me good?," a different possibility emerges. According to this reading, Jesus ups the ante with the second statement, clarifying for both parties what the term "good" means in the current conversation. If no one is good but God alone, to call Jesus good is to equate him with God. In this capacity, the question and subsequent statement function together as a riddle. Behind both lurks the question of Jesus' identity. Who is this Jesus: prophet, healer, exorcist, miracle worker, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, or one with God? I do not intend to imply that Mark was thinking in classical Trinitarian terms. Rather, the riddle seeks to underscore the fundamental unity between Jesus and God, the Son and his Father. Properly understood, the riddle suggests that they are *one* (εἷς) and Jesus is indeed *good* (ἀγαθός).

III. What Audience Is in View?

Before we proceed, it is important to note that there are potentially three audiences in view. If one presumes the historicity of the account,

199. This conclusion seems to undercut the plain sense of the saying. If the issue is not (one way or another) about who is good, what alternative is there?

¹² R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 335. Others whose conclusions align with this assessment include (but are by no means limited to) Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Word 34B; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 96; Morna Hooker, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 241; Larry Hurtado, *Mark* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989), 164; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News according to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1970), 210-11; Jonathan A. Draper, "Go sell all that you have. . . (Mark 10:17-30)," *JTSA* 79 (1992): 63-69; Steve Barr, "The Eye of the Needle—Power and Money in the New Community: A Look at Mark 10:17-31," *ANR* 3 (1992): 31-44. The one exception to the rule appears to be Robert Gundry's commentary on Mark: Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 553.

the man who approached Jesus about eternal life is the first audience of relevance. The question is, after all, posed explicitly to him. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine that this man could have comprehended that Jesus was prompting him to contemplate Jesus' "oneness" with God. In other words, the riddle would inevitably have remained opaque to him. Jesus' disciples are also present in the story and they function as a second audience. Unlike the man, they are learning new and surprising things about Jesus all the time. They have even made progress within the narrative in their own ability to ascertain his true identity, confessing him as Messiah (Mark 8:29). Nor is their journey with Jesus complete. Further surprises lie in store for them as the narrative progresses. Perhaps, they will see the true intent of the riddle in time. It is the third audience, however, which is of greatest concern to the author of Mark. This audience includes all those who would see and hear the words of his gospel. Whatever one thinks of the *historical* interchange between Jesus and the rich man, it is this third audience which is principally in view as we pursue the *exegetical* intent of Mark 10:18. Would those who encountered his finely crafted narrative have eyes to see and ears to hear the implications of Jesus' provocative response? Would *they* draw the conclusion that Jesus and God function as one? It is for this audience in particular that the riddle has an important function, since the author of Mark seeks a response of faith to his presentation of the gospel.

IV. A Viable Interpretation?

This interpretation of Mark 10:18 is by no means novel. In stark contrast to the trend of modern scholarship, those exegetes in the early church who comment explicitly on this verse support this reading, including Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, and Ephrem the Syrian.¹³ It would appear that the motivation behind each of these interpretations, however, was the desire to avoid messy doctrinal implications, namely that Jesus is less than good (threatening doctrinal assertions of his sinlessness) and less than God (threatening doctrinal assertions about the nature of the Trinity). One of Mark's earliest interpreters, Matthew, seems to have altered his version of this interchange, softening the apparent contrast between Jesus and God in order to avoid potential misunderstandings.¹⁴

¹³ Origen, *On First Principles*, 1.2.13; Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 9.2; and Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*, JSSS 2.229-30. See Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., *Mark* (ACCS; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 139-41.

¹⁴ Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good" (Matt 19:16-17).

The question that remains is whether this second reading of Mark 10:18 represents a viable exegetical option. Is there evidence within the Gospel to indicate that Jesus' response to the rich man was indeed intended by the author of Mark to function as a riddle, a veiled encouragement to his audience to contemplate Jesus' "oneness" with God? As we have already seen in our survey of interpretations, modern exegetes have strongly resisted this idea. As France asserts,

Matthew's rephrasing of both question and answer is apparently designed to deflect the possible inference that Jesus is asserting that he is not (in the absolute sense) good and therefore is not God, but it may be questioned whether any original reader of Mark would naturally have seen any such implication here—still less that by drawing attention to the use of ἀγαθός for himself Jesus is in fact inviting the questioner to confess him as divine. That would be a monumental non sequitur.¹⁵

Though I would tend to agree with France's assessment of the rich man's ability to understand the riddle posed to him,¹⁶ I would argue that France (and others) should consider more carefully how the original readers of Mark would have understood Mark 10:18. In fact, Mark's original readers have been *prepared* by Mark's narrative to understand Jesus' response as a riddle about his relationship with God. Let us, then, turn to the evidence that the author of Mark intended 10:18 as a riddle about Jesus' identity.

V. Jesus' Identity in Mark

Mark's presentation of Jesus prior to chapter 10 has left the reader with much to contemplate in terms of Jesus' identity.¹⁷ At every turn the narrative seeks to establish Jesus' unique authority, power, vocation, and relationship with God. One way it does this is through the application of important titles to Jesus, including Messiah and Son of Man, both of which play an important role in the development of the narrative. It is, however, a third title, Son of God, which has special significance for our discussion because it, more than any other descriptor, focuses on Jesus' unique relationship with God, his Father. As the Markan story progresses it becomes increasingly clear that Jesus' Sonship is sugges-

¹⁵ France, *Gospel of Mark*, 402.

¹⁶ That the rich man did indeed fail to understand the riddle is obvious in the text, since he changes his address, calling Jesus simply "teacher" in Mark 10:20.

¹⁷ As Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 288, aptly notes, "The question of Jesus' true significance and identity pulses through the whole of Mark."

tive of something far greater than the idea of kingship present in the Messianic Psalms. Not only is it the title of choice in pivotal sections of the narrative, it is also the final confession offered at the foot of the cross (Mark 15:39). A brief survey of the term reveals its importance in the narrative. It is potentially the final title applied to Jesus in the title of the Gospel (Mark 1:1), indicating how Jesus is ultimately to be understood by the reader.¹⁸ It is used both times that God speaks from heaven in the Gospel (Mark 1:11; 9:7). In each case it is paired with the term “beloved” (ὁ ἀγαπητός). The demons recognize Jesus as God’s Son (Mark 3:11; 5:7). Jesus twice refers to himself as the Son, first in the parable of the wicked tenants where his own ministry and identity are specifically contrasted with that of the servants (who represent Israel’s prophets), and second in the mysterious apocalypse in Mark 13—“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). Both sayings highlight the distinctiveness of Jesus’ relationship with God. In fact, the intent of the entire collection of texts surveyed here is to indicate that Jesus’ relationship with God is fundamentally unique. As Son of the Father he is unlike anyone who has come before him.

What does it mean to be the Son of God? Mark makes it clear that Jesus speaks and acts with the power and authority of God himself.¹⁹ He announces the arrival of the kingdom (Mark 1:15; 4:1-34). He binds the strong man (Mark 1:13; 1:21-28; 3:27; 10:45). He commands creation (4:39; 6:41-44, 48; 8:4-9).²⁰ He constitutes a new people around himself, making for them a new covenant with his own body and blood (Mark 1:16-20; 2:13; 3:13-19, 34-35; 14:22-25). In the transfiguration the reader briefly encounters the glory of Jesus revealed. The purpose of the episode is to demonstrate his superiority even to the law (embodied

¹⁸ Textual critics are not agreed about the presence of υἱοῦ θεοῦ in the original manuscript of Mark, but it is present in three important early manuscripts, B, D and W. See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 62.

¹⁹ See Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 283-90; and Philip G. Davis, “Mark’s Christological Paradox,” *JSNT* 35 (1989): 3-18

²⁰ The episode of Jesus walking on water is particularly illuminating concerning the “oneness” of the Father and the Son. In the Old Testament, it is God alone who has the power to walk on the sea (Job 9:8; Ps 77:19; Isa 43:16; 51:9-10; Hab 3:15). Moreover, Mark’s comment that “Jesus intended to pass them by” seems to be an allusion to God passing before Moses in Exodus 34:6, at which point he reveals his divine character. It is not by mistake that Jesus’ first words to the fearful disciples waiting in the boat are “Take heart, it is I (ἐγὼ εἰμι),” echoing the divine name. Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 432, rightly concludes that “the overwhelming impact made by our narrative is an impression of Jesus’ divinity.”

in Moses) and the prophets (embodied in Elijah). "Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the beloved; listen to *him!*' Suddenly when they looked around they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus" (Mark 9:7-8).²¹

Mark 2:7, an Instructive Parallel

One might still argue that while Mark seeks to portray Jesus in the very highest of terms, and relies on his special relationship with the Father to underscore the uniqueness of his identity, ministry, and vocation, it is unreasonable to suggest that Mark implies a "oneness" between the Father and the Son in the manner suggested by our riddle in Mark 10:18. This objection is overturned by one critical passage which occurs prior to the episode with the rich man in the Markan narrative. In the healing of the paralytic we have a fascinating parallel to Jesus' answer to the rich man. After the four friends lower the paralyzed man through the roof, Jesus does the unexpected. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (Mark 2:5). Some of the scribes are scandalized by this proclamation. They say in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). The parallel between the scribes question and Jesus statement in Mark 10:18 is significant.²²

τίς δύναται ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός; (Mark 2:7)

οὐδεὶς ἀγαθός εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός. (Mark 10:18).

In the story of the paralytic, Jesus then proceeds to heal the man's physical ailment, saying, "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). Jesus rules out the possibility that he simply spoke on behalf of God (a divine passive to the effect of "God has forgiven your sins").²³ Rather, he explicitly reinforces the interpretation of the scribes, asserting that he does indeed act authoritatively to do that which only God can do.²⁴ Most significant

²¹ Emphasis added.

²² Among commentaries on Mark, it appears that Gundry alone has identified the significance of this parallel (Gundry, *Mark*, 553).

²³ See the helpful distinctions of France, *Gospel of Mark*, 125-129.

²⁴ Collins, *Mark*, 477, claims a contrast between the "accusations" of the scribes and the deference to God shown by Jesus in Mark 10:18: "This portrayal of him contrasts with the accusations of the scribes and the high priest and council elsewhere in Mark." In actual fact, we see here that Jesus goes out of his way to *affirm* the accusations of the scribes. He does the same in his trial—"Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, 'I am; and you will

for our discussion is that the passage reinforces the unique authority of Jesus in a manner which implicitly affirms his “oneness” (εἶς) with God. To the objection of the scribes about only “one” being capable of forgiving sin, Jesus has essentially responded, “Yes, and I have that power.”

Even this brief overview of significant passages demonstrates that Mark’s presentation of Jesus’ identity intentionally underscored his unique authority, power, vocation, and relationship with God. Moreover, we have seen that, on one occasion, the Markan narrative already encouraged the reader to contemplate the “oneness” of Jesus the Son and God the Father in terms which verbally echo Jesus’ statements in Mark 10:18. In light of the evidence from the Markan narrative, it would seem likely that Mark intends 10:18 as a provocative declaration of the “oneness” of Jesus and God. The alternative is that this is the one moment in which he undermines the momentum he has built up in the prior ten chapters by emphasizing an unbridgeable gulf between Jesus and God.

Jesus’ Authority in Mark 10:17-22

There is, however, further evidence within Mark 10:17-22 that Mark intended verse 18 as a riddle in the fashion I have described. First, one must remember the question under discussion. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17). There is no more fundamental question than this. Given what is at stake, it is not surprising to see Jesus turn to the commands of Torah, the authoritative guide for God’s people. He begins by invoking six of the Ten Commandments (with minor modification to one). The man replies that he has kept these since his youth. Apparently his obedience to these six has been sincere, for Jesus looks intently at him and loves him. Then Jesus does the unexpected, he moves *beyond* the Torah.²⁵ He takes it upon himself to tell the

see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62).

²⁵ This is by no means the first time in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus has claimed to have authority that supersedes the Torah. We have already noted the forgiveness extended by Jesus to the paralytic. Two other examples include Jesus’ debate with the Pharisees over Sabbath observance—“The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28)—and his comments on food laws—“Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ‘It is what comes out of a person that defiles’” (Mark 7:18-20).

man exactly what he must do in order to inherit eternal life.²⁶ The locus of authority has shifted from God's sacred word to his own person.²⁷

He tells the man that he lacks *one* thing. "Go, sell what you own, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Mark 10:21). ὑπάγε, πώλησον, δός, δεῦρο, ἀκολούθει—Jesus lists five imperatives all of which boil down to the last one. What must the man do? He must follow Jesus. This is the *one* thing which binds the commands together. In the rich man's case, following means that he must go, sell, give and then come and follow Jesus. The implications of Jesus' statement are astounding. First, he tells the man that he must let go of his idol, that is, money. More importantly, he makes it clear that the way to eternal life lies through him. "Follow me!" Obedience to God means following Jesus.²⁸ To be counted among God's eschatological people the man must first be counted among Jesus' band of disciples.²⁹ The man's response, then, relies in great measure on what he thinks of the one who has given him this unexpected answer. Is God uniquely at work in the person and ministry of Jesus? Does this Jesus speak with the very authority of God as he commands obedience to his own word and his own way? The answer lies in the riddle at the beginning of the

²⁶ Lane, *Gospel according to Mark*, 366, misses this shift in focus entirely: "Jesus does not accept as good any other will than the will of God revealed in the Law."

²⁷ Schweizer, *Good News According to Mark*, 210-11, who does not draw the same conclusion about the intent of Mark 10:18, nevertheless sums up the dynamic well: "In this story, as in the preceding one, Jesus acts in the place of God. With Jesus' call to discipleship eternal life comes to this man, and thus God himself comes to him. When the man says yes or no to Jesus, he is saying yes or no to God (see 8:38). In this story God encounters the man in Jesus and nowhere else." In the next sentence, however, Schweizer backs off the obvious implications of his statement when he says, "Nevertheless, this same Jesus always turns man's attention away from himself to the "only one who is good."

²⁸ Evans, *Mark*, 96, sees the focus on the commandments as proof that Jesus is shifting the focus back to God in Mark 10:18: "Jesus is not implying that he is somehow imperfect or less than good, but only that the focus must be on God. For it is God who has made a covenant with Israel that must be honored; it is God's commandments that must be obeyed." Ironically, as the exchange between Jesus and the rich man continues, it becomes quite clear that it is *Jesus'* commands that must be obeyed. Interestingly, it is also *Jesus* who will make a covenant with his followers in Mark 14:24.

²⁹ Hooker, *Gospel according to Mark*, 241, makes precisely the right observation about the "crucial test"—but seems to miss its significance: "It is appropriate, then, that he should point away from himself to the character and demands of God. Yet it is typical of Mark's presentation of the gospel that the crucial test of this man's obedience should be whether or not he is prepared to become a follower of Jesus."

dialogue. The response of the rich man is plain to see. He walks away grieved, unwilling to follow Jesus and his way. With his wealth at stake, the teacher does not seem so “good” after all.

VI. Conclusion

When the evidence is weighed, one finds compelling reasons to regard Mark 10:18 as a riddle about Jesus’ identity. As we have seen, the overall context of Mark points in this direction. The striking parallel in Mark 2:7 demonstrates that Mark had made such a suggestion already. Even the rest of the dialogue with the rich man provides evidence that this was Mark’s intent. Given Mark’s well established fondness for riddles, it seems likely that Mark 10:18 is yet another word for those with ears to hear.