

## **“The Road to Nowhere”**

**Mark 2:13-17**

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Did you see the article in the newspaper a few days ago titled, “The Road to Nowhere?” I found it interesting and intriguing.

In Bryson City, North Carolina, nestled in the foothills of the Smokies, there actually is a road that leads to nowhere. It was started in 1943 when the Tennessee Valley Authority bought 55,000 acres to construct the massive Fontana Dam. A lake was needed in this region to supply wartime power to the nearby Alcoa aluminum plant. The plant produced aluminum for bombers during WWII.

To compensate for the loss of about half its population and land, the citizens of Swain County were promised a road along the lake’s north shore, from Bryson City to Deals Gap, near the dam. A local newspaper declared this road would make Bryson City the “tourist center of Eastern America.”

As you can imagine from the title of the article, only six miles of the road were built and construction stopped. The road abruptly ends in front of a grove of trees. This is why the citizens of Bryson City refer to it as the “road that leads to nowhere.”

After reading this article, my mind started wandering. **What would it feel like to get on this road, unaware it abruptly stops on a hillside in front of a forest, and drive all the way to the end?** Would you be frustrated, confused, disappointed or even angry? At whom would you be upset? Would you feel like you wasted your time as you backtracked to the starting point to head in a new direction?

**As I thought of these questions, I wondered how many people are on the road to nowhere.** This is different than someone on the road of destruction like a terrorist, an addict or someone out of control of his or her life. Those that are on the road to nowhere are just that. All they are doing is to no avail. There is no long term and worthwhile purpose to it. Nothing they do excites them and fulfills them. It is not that what they are doing is bad, it is just meaningless.

And there is something inside of us that rebels at meaninglessness. We don’t like it because we are not supposed to like it. We were not created to drift or float through life with no purpose or direction. As a matter of fact, the very opposite is true. We were created by a loving God to partner with Him to take care of the world and make it a wonderful place to live. He created us enough like Himself to do this, and when we don’t join Him in this noble endeavor, we feel miserably empty.

**Could you possibly be on this road now, the road to nowhere?** Are you, as one person described it years ago, “Sewing with threadless needles?” Are you going through the motions of life with no larger sense of purpose and direction than survival?

**I wonder if this is how Matthew felt.** What compelled him to follow Jesus that day beside the Sea of Galilee when Jesus approached him and merely said, “Follow me.”

Perhaps no disciple gave up more than Matthew to follow Jesus. Other disciples gave up a business to which they could return if this venture failed, but not Matthew. Once he walked away from this position as a tax collector for the government, and a lucrative job it was, there was no turning back. His job would not be waiting for him if he decided he had made a mistake and wanted to return.

**So, what motivated him to walk away from financial security to follow Jesus?** Maybe he felt like he was on the road to nowhere. He was busy but unfulfilled, rich but empty, surrounded by people but lonely, working everyday but bored.

**Have you ever felt this way?** Maybe you are on the road to nowhere but have not come to the grove of trees yet. In your heart, though, you know it is right around the corner and one

day, you will be staring at a dead end with no place to go. You really will be at the end of your road.

**What do you do?** Do you continue traveling down this road deceiving yourself into thinking that this path really will lead somewhere? Do you tell yourself you have gone too far to head in another direction? Do you give in to complacency and apathy?

You can, but you don't have to. I believe there is another option you need to consider. Why not do what Matthew did? When Jesus approached him on his road that was leading nowhere and offered him a chance of a lifetime, he took it. He immediately got up and followed Jesus. He gave him his heart and offered him everything he had, time, talents, resources, influence, potential, past, present and future. He got off the road to nowhere and headed in a new direction. You can, too.

Now, look at the scripture. **What is the next scene in Marks' gospel?** Jesus is sitting in Matthew's home with some of Matthew's friends, social and religious outcasts. He's introducing them to the man that got him off the road to nowhere, no doubt hoping the same would happen to them, to the chagrin of the religious leaders. What a scene this must have been. I wish I could have been there.

And what irony there is in the criticism of the Pharisees. "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Mark 2:16. They were too blind to understand the answer to their own question. What was obvious to Jesus was hidden from them, by their own choosing. That's the way it is on the road to nowhere, though. The reasons people are on this road is because they have quit listening and learning, caring and helping, giving and receiving.

**What do you think Matthew would tell us today if he were here?** I'll speculate. I think he would tell us that the road to nowhere is not a good road to be on and we don't have to stay on it. The same Jesus that rescued him will do the same for us. By following him, we can get on another road, one that will provide direction, meaning and purpose. And when we come to the end of this road, we'll not be met by an impenetrable grove of trees but a bridge across which he will carry us and place us in the arms of God.

I am now going to ask you the most important question in this sermon. **Will you accept Jesus' invitation to follow him?** Will you partner with him to make the world a better place as Matthew did?

Each morning, will you offer God everything you have to be used that day to advance His kingdom? Will you look for people along your daily journey that need food, shelter, medical care, encouragement, guidance, faith, hope and love and help them? Will you speak up for the voiceless and be an advocate for the powerless? Will you pursue liberty and justice for all?

Will you be the best ambassador for Christ that you can be? Will you be a good role model? Will you introduce your friends to Jesus as Matthew did? Will you work to strengthen his church?

If you will, let Jesus know it right now and share your decision with us so that we may celebrate with you and pray for you. And by the way, pack your bags because you are going on a journey that will not disappoint you because there is no dead end.