

The High Price of Following Jesus
Rev. Frank Allen
First Presbyterian Church, Kissimmee, Florida

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Mark 10:17-31

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20 He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard 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 someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

28 Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

BOLD FIRST STEPS

Taking a step into the future can be hard to do. Think about the first steps you have taken in life:

the first day at school, the first date, the first time you left home to attend school, the first real job, the first child.

The future cannot be known, and that unnerves us. Stepping out into the future always requires us to take a leap of faith.

But, the biggest leap of faith any of us will ever take is when we decide to follow Jesus.

The decision to follow Jesus does not come easy. Indeed, it requires us to do a high wire act without a safety net.

Take our lesson for today as an example. Jesus told the rich man, "Sell all you have, give it to the poor and come follow me."

Jesus didn't say sell ten percent. Jesus didn't say sell fifty percent. Jesus said sell everything and come follow me.

STICKER SHOCK

We talk about "sticker shock."

When we go to buy a car for example we can't believe that they're so expensive. I remember when you could buy a Volkswagen Beetle for under \$2,000.

But, no more. The cost of driving has gone way up. So has the cost of health care and the cost of a new home. Sticker shock.

But, the sticker shock we encounter in life is nothing compared to the sticker shock we receive when we decide to follow Jesus.

How much does Jesus require of us? Everything. That's the high price of following Jesus.

We shouldn't be surprised that Jesus would require so much. After all, Jesus told his disciples and anyone who would listen on more than one occasion that in order to follow him they would have to deny themselves and take up a cross. The cost of following Jesus is very high.

This story was apparently important to the early church. A version of this story is found in all three of the synoptic gospels with minor variations. In Matthew's gospel this man is described as young. In Luke he's described as a ruler. And in all three accounts the man is described as rich.

Combining the three gospel accounts we see that this man seems to have everything that the world values.

He has wealth.

He has power.

He has youth.

What more could he want?

SEEKING ETERNAL LIFE

He wants one more thing.

He wants to go to heaven when he dies.

He runs up to Jesus, kneels down and says,
"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

How would you answer that question?
If you want to go to heaven, what should you do?

If you want to go to heaven, you should be a righteous person. You should follow the ten commandments. Right?

That's what Jesus tells him. He says,

"You should have learned this in Sunday school. Don't kill. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie and cheat. Do right by your parents. Keep these basic commandments and you'll be on the way to eternal life."

The rich guy says, "I've followed all of these commandments all of my life."

Jesus looked at the man and saw that he was on the level. In fact the Bible tells us that Jesus “loved him.” He really was a good guy, and Jesus loved him.

TOUGH LOVE

But, out of “love” Jesus told him something that was hard to hear. Jesus said,

“There’s just one more thing that you need to do. Sell everything, and give the money to the poor. If you do this, you’ll have treasure in heaven, and then you can come follow me.”

This man comes to Jesus thinking that he has almost everything. He just needs one more thing, eternal life. If he can somehow get that, he will have it all.

But, Jesus reframes the question. The important question is not, “What can I do to inherit eternal life in the distant future?”

The important question is, “What do I need to leave behind so that I can follow Jesus here and now?”

God was in Christ. And so listening to him and following him is the only thing that will make an eternal difference in our lives.

We find heaven when we go on the road with Jesus. It is not so much a destination as it is a journey. And on this journey we have to travel light.

HEART SICK

In Mark’s gospel, the people who come to Jesus and kneel down are people who need to be healed. They have some demon or a dread disease. And often, as a part of the healing process, Jesus orders the person to go and do something.

This rich man was also sick. He was heart sick. Somewhere deep inside he knew that he didn’t have what he really needed. There was a spiritual void in his life that was eating away at him like a cancer.

On the outside he appeared to be righteous and successful.
But, on the inside he knew that something really important was missing.

That's why he ran to Jesus and got down on his knees.
He was desperate.
He needed to be healed. He needed a new life.

Jesus responded to the crying need in this man's life with compassion. Jesus loved him.

And because Jesus loved him, he told him the truth.
His many possessions had become a noose around his neck. He needed to get rid of those possessions so that he could be free to follow Jesus.

JUST A TOURIST

An American tourist in Jerusalem met up with a monk. The monk offered to show him around the monastery of which he was a part.

On their tour they came to the monk's room; the tourist noticed no TV or radio, only one change of clothes, a towel and a blanket. He asked, "How do you live so simply?"

The monk answered, "I noticed you have only enough things to fill a suitcase; why do you live so simply?"

To which the tourist replied, "But I'm just a tourist, I'm only traveling through."

The monk replied, "So am I, so am I."

Our possessions, our wealth, our stuff can be obstacles between us and God. When we pack for a trip with Jesus we need to remember what one travel expert said, "If you want to get away from it all, don't take it all with you."

You see, heaven is not a possession that we can acquire on our own. Heaven is finding the faith and the courage to drop everything in order to follow Jesus and trust in him alone.

THE HIGH COST

We often think about faith in terms of what we can get out of it. We want faith to make us safe.

Unfortunately, following Jesus is not a safe thing to do.
It's a risky thing to do.
It requires courage.
It is very costly.

And yet deciding to follow Jesus is also the one thing that we really need to do.

The Scripture says that the man was shocked and discouraged by Jesus' statement.

And he went away "grieving" because he had many possessions. Odd. The man still hung on to his possessions even though they caused him grief.

And after the man left Jesus said something that was even more shocking.

Jesus told his disciples, "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Now in Jesus' day people thought that the rich were being rewarded for living a righteous life. If anyone could make it to heaven, they would. But, Jesus says, "It's impossible for the rich to make it into heaven."

The disciples are flabbergasted by what Jesus has to say.
If righteous, hardworking rich people can't make it into heaven, who can make it?

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE

The answer? No one can make it into heaven, at least on their own they can't. It's impossible.
But, fortunately God is in the business of making the impossible possible.

Standing before the disciples is one who gave up the joys of heaven in order to die for the sins of the world. Through the life of Jesus, God is going to make the impossible possible. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus a new day is coming.

The camel will go through the eye of the needle. A dead man will be raised. And a sin sick world will be given hope not only for this life but also for the life to come.

Heaven will become a possibility, even for the least among us. But, heaven will not come on our own terms. It will come on God's terms.

We will be saved by grace through faith and not by works.

LEAVING HOME TO FIND OUR TRUE HOME

Notice in our passage for today that Peter remarks that they, that is the disciples, had given up everything to follow Jesus. This is true.

James and John left their father Zebedee in the fishing boat and immediately followed Jesus. Peter left his job as a fisherman to follow Jesus. Matthew quit his lucrative job as a tax collector to follow Jesus.

And when Jesus started his ministry they were going at it 24/7. In fact, the Bible says that they didn't even have time to eat or sleep.

The family got worried, and Mary and some of Jesus' brothers came to take Jesus home to get some much needed rest. Their schedule was killing them. It was crazy.

But, Jesus turned away from his natural family and turned toward his disciples. And he said in essence, "This is my new family. We don't need to go home. We are home."

I think Peter understood the feelings of the rich man who couldn't follow Jesus. Leaving everything to follow Jesus continued to be a scary proposition for the disciples. I think Peter was saying in effect,

"Lord, I understand the worries of that rich man. We've left everything to follow you, and right now things don't look so good. We're on the road to

Jerusalem, and you've already told us that there's a cross waiting for us there."

And Jesus replies "Don't worry Peter. There is also a reward for following me. Everything you have left behind for my sake and for the gospel will be replenished. If you left your home, you will be given a new home. If you left your family you will be given a new family."

THE FAMILY GROWS

Isn't that what the kingdom of God is all about ... creating a larger family in God's name? That's why Jesus challenged the rich man to give his money to the poor. It was a way to increase his family and his faith.

In the book of Acts we see that under the influence of the Spirit those early Christians did this very thing. In a time of famine the richer Christians sold what they had and shared it with those who were in need.

They didn't do it because someone forced them to do it. They did it because they had a loving relationship with each other. They cared about each other and helped each other because they had been miraculously changed by the Spirit of God.

What was once impossible was now a reality.

In the new community of faith rich and poor, slave and free, men and women all shared their life together. And it was this shared life that initially attracted so many to the Christian way.

All sorts of people found that their desire for something more, that their desire for something eternal was filled by this experience of this Christian community.

THE CHALLENGE OF NEW LIFE

Just as he did with that rich man long ago, Jesus looks at us and loves us. The Bible tells us that Jesus wants us to have a life that is abundant and full.

And sometimes that means taking something out of our life so that we can receive something that is even better.

Sometimes that means giving something away that is holding us back.

We who have so much tend to look upon this as bad news. We are perplexed and dismayed by what Jesus has to say.

But, is it possible that this call to give up the old way of life is actually good news?

I think that many of us here today are like this rich man.

We are seekers. Even though we have tried to do the right thing and manage what we have effectively, we somehow know deep down inside that what we have and who we are is not enough. We know that there is something more to life and are desperately seeking that something more.

So we come running to Jesus, fall at his feet and desperately seeking the eternal life that begins here and now.

We are like the rich man in other ways as well. Jesus tells us that our life is more than the trophies that we collect and the money that's in our bank account.

In our hearts we know he's right. But, instead of acting upon this we stick with the same old way of life. We go back to the familiar way instead of accepting Jesus' challenge to live in a new way.

NO COMPROMISE

I suspect most of us would like to compromise when it comes to this passage. There is something frightening about turning our whole life over to Jesus so we want to give him just a little bit of our lives.

You miss the point of this passage if you think that it's just about money. This passage is about the cost of discipleship.

This passage is about turning our whole life over to Jesus unconditionally here and now. This passage is about going wherever he leads because we believe that in the end the path will lead to our true home.

No wonder we find this a difficult passage to hear. There is always a part of us that just wants to be safe. And yet there is also a part of us who grieves our lack of courage. We want eternal life, but we are bogged down by the tyranny of the mundane.

The fact of the matter is this. Many of the things that occupy our attention in life are, in the grand scheme of things, not that important. The things that we treasure are not really treasures at all but fool's gold.

That's why Jesus said that it was important to search for that one pearl of great price, that one thing in life that matters more than anything else.

That's what the rich man was looking for and that's what we need to look for as well.

What is that pearl of great price?

What is that real treasure that surpasses all others? What is the one thing that is secure in this life?

It is God's grace.

Nothing in this world is secure except the hope for salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. And if our ultimate loyalty is to someone or something else, then we too will go away grieving.

How does the old hymn put it?

"I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back."

Let that be our theme song.

We will not regret it.

Amen.