

“IT COSTS HOW MUCH?”

Mark 10:17-31 October 13, 2024

Once a candidate was being interviewed for a police officer position: The recruiter asked, “What would you do if you had to arrest your own mother?”

The Candidate answered, “Call for backup.”

Perhaps some of you remember going through the job interview process. You filled out the application, stated your qualifications, listed references, answered interview questions, and if offered the position, talked benefit packages.

My first real job interview was for Dairy Queen. One of our neighbors was the manager of the local DQ. I remember meeting with him, filling out a form, answering some interview questions, and was hired on the spot. I proceeded to watch the training videos, getting my uniform, and practicing making those DQ curls on top of the ice cream cones. It was a tough job, especially on Friday nights after the football games, but I learned a lot.

All of this is relevant because in today’s gospel reading, a young man runs up to Jesus, throws himself at his feet, and asks, “**Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” Why did he come to Jesus? Was he looking for a public pat on the back? Or was something missing in his life, and he thought Jesus might have the answer? Was he looking for an autograph? We don’t know the answers to these questions. What we do know is this interaction quickly becomes a discipleship job interview, and it was not what this young man was prepared for.

However, the man had an impressive resume. Jesus looks at this guy and likes him. In fact, the text says Jesus *loved* him. Jesus would love to have him 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. The man has a good standing in the community and the financial resources to fund Jesus' mission for a long time! And to top it off, he is seeking the kingdom of God, Jesus' favorite subject.

So Jesus gives the man the good news. Another disciple position has opened up. All he has to do is cough up 100 percent of his possessions and give them to the poor. (Evidently, Jesus doesn't need funding after all. He's on his way to an execution. But the young man doesn't know this.) What a great opportunity!

“When the man heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.” This guy turned down the job because it cost too much. He came to get an answer from Jesus and instead received a challenging invitation, one he was unwilling to accept. But he is not the only one shocked and upset, so were the other 12 disciples. When Jesus tells them, **“How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.”** They are taken back. The common belief of that time is that the wealthy were more honored and blessed by God. Their riches were proof of excellent character and righteousness. They were thought to be closer to God and God's kingdom. I sometimes wonder if we don't have a version of this idea to, given the way we worship celebrities.

Then to confirm what he said and confuse the disciples further, Jesus states, **“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.”** Alarmed, they ask, “Then who has a chance of being saved.” Jesus looked at them and said, **“For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”**

I would dare say, these words are as alarming and challenging to us as they are to the disciples back then. At first this giving away everything might be directed just to this particular seeker, after all Jesus specifically is offering him the job of disciple. But the further statements of Jesus seem to apply to disciples in general. What did Jesus mean by them?

Is it wrong to be wealthy? Is Jesus promoting some kind of kingdom socialism? Are we called to take a vow of poverty, and there are historical examples of those who received such a call? Should we give up setting budgets, retirement accounts, savings for college education, and charitable giving? Don't we have a responsibility to meet our needs or those of our family? Is Jesus asking us to go on welfare? Beg on the streets? Of course, if everyone is begging on the street then who will feed them? Perhaps we need to dig a little deeper into the story and not take it at face value.

I. SALVATION IS FROM GOD ALONE.

Have you ever had water get into your house? I'm not talking about a flood or basement water. I'm referring to a drip from the ceiling, a water spot on a wall or near a window. The problem with water coming in from above is you may not know the cause. It could be a waterpipe, a missing shingle, a clogged up gutter, condensation, poor insulation, or any number

of other issues. Before you can repair the problem, you have to trace the path of the water leakage to discover its source. This can be tricky because it is not always obvious. Sometimes you have to wait till it rains and crawl up in the attic.

Sometimes, Jesus is not obvious either. This rich man asked Jesus, “**Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**” Jesus answers, “**Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.**” Obviously, Jesus is throwing water over the man’s enthusiasm, as if to say I don’t want or need your flattery. Perhaps not so obvious, could Jesus be hinting at the source of eternal life and be answering the man’s question? Eternal life comes from God alone. **Who can be saved? What is impossible for us is possible for God.**

You see, the young man’s question is all wrong. He asks what he must do, but eternal life is not an achievement. No one can make it, earn it, or buy it. It is God’s gift to us, and we can only ask, trust in God’s word, and receive it.

By the way, Eternal life is not long life, but a life with God. Eternal life, salvation, the kingdom of God are terms for the same thing, a being with God. Life is found in God alone because God is the source of life. This should be obvious to us, but we often miss it, which leads me to the second lesson for us this morning. Beware of the things that interfere and blind you to living that life with God.

II. BEWARE OF THE LOVE OF MONEY

One of the features I like on our SUV’s is the blind spot alert. The blind spot is the area to the right and left of your car that is not easily seen. It is in that area another vehicle can be located and your mirrors do not

pick it up nor your peripheral vision. If you are shifting lanes, especially at high rates of speed, it is easy to crash into or cut off another vehicle.

Fortunately, with the blind spot alert a sensor will pick up other vehicles in the lanes beside you and alert you both with a sound and a light that it is not safe to turn at the moment. This feature has kept me from causing an accident on several occasions. If only we had a spiritual blind spot detector! Maybe it would have kept us from some of our wrong turns. Perhaps we do.

Jesus responds this rich man by quoting the 10 commandments, or interestingly, at least all the ones that have to do with people. In my opinion, too many people have made those 10 into some kind of legal system. But those commandments are more than a bunch of rules. They serve as a warning system. They tell us if we are about to make a wrong turn in life that will not only harm others, but will hurt our spiritual life with God. Just like road signs, if we would pay more attention to them, use the wisdom they bring, we might have fewer wrecks and more blessings.

But Jesus goes even deeper than the rules. Out of love he tells the young man, **“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.”**

Jesus tells the man to get rid of the thing that you love more than God. Get rid of the stuff that keeps tripping you up, hindering your relationship with God, and that you place your security in, outside of the Lord. Keep God first, because while God is gracious and loving, God does not accept second place. To be really rich is to die to wealth.

Jesus is warning would be disciples of the things that hinder us from experiencing life with God to the fullest. Some of those are envy, bitterness, an unforgiving heart, hatred, gossip, lust, and gluttony. But some are not so obvious. Even seemingly good things can take over our lives such as work, electronics, sports, even family at times. Beware especially of our attachment to wealth because of its tendency to make one arrogant, prideful, and self-centered.

Beware of what you make the center of your life. Jesus's solution is to lighten the load, distribute and not accumulate. It is a call to all disciples to live simply and humbly before their God.

III. CALL TO ACTIVE DUTY

I imagine everyone has heard of the Army Reserve. It was created to provide and maintain trained units at home while active-duty service members are deployed. With the exception of the Space Force, each military branch has a Reserve component under its command, which is available for active-duty deployment in times of war or national emergency. The Military Reserve trains and prepares for action, however most of the time they are on standby. But when the call comes you jump to active duty.

I hate to tell you all this, but there is not a Christian Reserve. All of us have been called to active duty. Notice, all the imperative action verbs Jesus gives the rich man: **go, sell, give, come, follow**. Every one of these words is a call to action. Beware, if we turn our faith into a mere intellectual exercise! Christianity has developed many fine thoughts over the centuries, but it is a doing faith, not a library faith.

Our question should always be, Lord what would you have me do? Just calling ourselves **Christian** is not good enough to be a disciple of Jesus. That's like wearing an army uniform and never serving in the army.

That's the problem with this young rich man. He is nice, respectable, and honorable. As far as we know, the man hasn't harmed anyone. The question is, had he done anyone any good? With all the resources at his disposal what positive good had he accomplished to bless anyone other than himself? Apparently, not much. So, Jesus tells him, "**Take all you have and spend it on others in need.**" Therein lies true happiness and a life with God, both now and in eternity.

I don't know if Jesus is calling any of us to a life of poverty. I do know God calls us to a life with God's self. I do know all of us could lighten our load. And I do know God calls us to life of doing good, especially to the least of these. Let us do things that we do know and not worry too much about the cost. Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley

Sunday, October 13, 2024

Second Scripture Lesson

Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷As 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?" ¹⁸Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹You 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.'" ²⁰He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, 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." ²²When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It 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." ²⁶They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

²⁸Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹Jesus 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, ³⁰who 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. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.