

Mark 10:17-31, 2015

17 As Jesus 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.”

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Wow, the vision of trying to get a camel through the eye of a needle is one that grabs your attention and makes it hard to see anything else in this passage.

And this is how hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God?

Well, that is what the words say anyhow.

And just to make the point a rich young man has just gone away grieving because he has many possessions.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” he asks

Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing.”

As I first read this verse of the passage to prepare for this weekend I thought of one thing.

“Tough love” You have all heard the phrase.

I think this is it here.

With tough love you know you have to tell the person something they are not going to want to hear.

But because you love them enough you deliver what will be the bad news to their ear,

You know the risk to the relationship you have always had with them,

But you also know this is the best and healthiest way for you to be the one who loves them most.

In tough love the intent is to make life better for the other one usually by helping them see their need to take responsibility,

to grow up, to change some thing about their life that will make them stronger, more mature, able to live a healthier life.

Jesus sees and knows what needs to be changed in this young man's life,

what is lacking in his life, and He tells him.

“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.”

This man went away shocked and grieving.

Now that in and of itself is a little strange.

Throughout the gospels you read stories of people coming to Jesus and falling to their knees at his feet pleading for one thing or another,

and each time Jesus grants healing, forgiveness, whatever is needed to make life better for that person,

and by way of His actions reveals the Kingdom of God there and then.

I don't know another story where a person goes away unhealed, unforgiven, unchanged for the better.

Truth is, this guy does go away changed for the better, he just doesn't get it.

But, lets go back to why he came in the first place. Do you remember the question he asked Jesus?

What must **I** do to **inherit** eternal life?

As you read the conversation between Jesus and the man perhaps some of his real motive is revealed.

The man tells Jesus how good he is, in fact how perfectly he has kept kept all the commandments,

And so I can't help but wonder if he hasn't come just for the purpose of getting affirmation from Jesus that he has done all the right things and certainly eternal life is his.

Now, to understand this conversation in this way you must remember that in Jesus time, in the Hebrew faith, to be wealthy and have many possessions is to be blessed by God.

Certainly this young man believes he already has God's blessing because he has all this life has to offer.

Now he wants to be assured that he has the life to come as well.

But, Jesus has come with a new message.

The young man has it right when he uses the term inherit when he speaks of receiving eternal life,

But he doesn't get that either.

He, nor anyone else, will inherit anything unless someone else dies.

That is how inheritance works. Jesus will do that for him. In fact, Jesus is on his way to do that as the man appears in the story.

The setting for this passage is described, "As Jesus was setting out on a journey a man ran up and knelt before him."

The journey is the one to Jerusalem and the cross.

In chapter nine of Mark is the story of the Transfiguration and from there on Jesus is headed for Jerusalem and the cross where He will truly die for this young man.

But the young man doesn't get that either.

How does Jesus respond to this man's inquiry about eternal life?

Initially he says do what I have told you and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.

Truthfully I am not sure what to make of Jesus' reference to riches in heaven, but if we read on it is clear that again He changes the focus of His attention to Kingdom of God.

How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God;

harder than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

Does that make you nervous?

Well, it shouldn't.

Yes it is true that Jesus is calling this young man to help the poor and needy, but did He really mean for him to sell everything,

And give all the money away?

Perhaps for him maybe He did for you see, again, Jesus sees and knows what needs to be changed in this young man's life,

what is lacking in his life, and He tells him.

This is all about the man's relationship to and with the things He owns.

Scripture does not say that money is the root of all evil. It says that the love of money is the root of all evil.

Jesus wants the rich man to turn his focus away from all his possessions to him,

and follow him.

It is interesting that when Jesus called his disciples as recorded in the gospels, that without exception each one of them dropped what they were doing,

and most of them were doing the essential task of earning a living,

and they followed Him.

This was part of Peter's complaint or frustration in trying to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them.

“Who can be saved then...We left everything and followed you!”

This rich man turned and went away grieving because the tough love was too tough,

and he was not able to do what Jesus called him to do.

In the process He has missed Jesus' point. He has missed the kingdom of God

Again Jesus describes the kingdom of God for us.

It is the place where Jesus' followers,

“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.”

There is the answer to the rich young man' question.

Follow Jesus and you receive eternal life, but that is not all!

When I read this part of the passage I pictured the new person from our community who comes here and makes new friends and their

relationships grow over time and they come to realize that it is here that they have

another place to call home, brothers and sisters, mothers and children.

Yes Jesus reminds us that living the Christian life often comes with its difficulties that he calls persecutions,

although I don't think any of us have experienced persecutions in our lifetime in the measure that His disciples would

or in the measure that others in the world have and do.

But in being a part of the faith community, this faith community, you see and experience the Kingdom of God.

This is the place where God rules, the place where God works in your lives,

the place where God loves you and calls you to love Him and one another for without God we can do nothing.

That is also part of the point.

“For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

The inheritance is not for sale.

The inheritance cannot be earned.

The inheritance, the kingdom of God in this life and eternal life in the age to come

can be given only by the one who was willing to die.

It is Jesus' inheritance to give, and it is given in His death.

We receive it in our baptism. That is all it takes.
From the moment you are baptized you have,
you live a life that is eternal.