

What would you give for the Gospel?
Mark 10: 17-31

1 Corinthians 9

1 Corinthians 10

Responsive Colossians 3:12-17

I want to start out this morning by way of a little review going through and reading the first 16 verses here in chapter 10. As we have been working our way through chapter 10 we have seen that Jesus is teaching an all encompassing lesson on discipleship, or in other words, what it means to be a disciple of Christ. At the beginning of this chapter Jesus was questioned about divorce, and instead of going into what is or is not allowed he merely pointed to the creation, showing that marriage was always to be between one man, and one woman and that they were to be bound together in one flesh. But he then pointed to Moses and said that the mosaic law allowed for divorce because of sin. Not fully answering the question that was asked but rather pointing to what it should be, and showing that because of sin and rebellion mankind had taken what God had created for good and corrupted it.

Then in the verse shortly following we see that he likened being a disciple of Christ's to not only being like a little child, but also the importance of taking care of those who are such. In verse 15 he says "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." As I said when we went through this section of verses I do not believe this to mean as some do that one must have the innocence of a child, or a child like faith, but rather I think he is pointing to the inability, the weakness, of children who are not able to come on their own. The fact that Mark refers to these children that were brought to Jesus to be blessed here in chapter 10 he says that they are little children, and in the other gospels they are referred to as babes. They were not coming to Jesus on their own will, under their own strength but rather they were brought. Much in the same way we like little children must be brought to faith by the grace and revelation of God.

But this lesson here with the little children is two fold, for he says the kingdom of God is made up of such little children, not only it is something that we all were at one time, those of us who have grown and matured in the faith must be careful not to reject, the little children, these new believers by laying burdens upon them that is heavier than they can bear. This is a trend that we see in the churches who favor a legalistic style ministry, who lay burdens upon new believers which they may be unable to carry.

The passage we will be focusing on this morning is usually approached focusing on the possessions of the rich man and his unwillingness to part from them to inherit the kingdom of God. And usually the pastor will continue along these lines teaching the dangers of greed, and of money, and how difficult it is for one who is rich to rely on God. And while I don't disagree with any of those points, and they all surely can be made from this text I believe that there is so much more here. So I want to start this morning getting us thinking in a different direction by asking yourself, What would you give for the gospel?

So let us read this passage this morning here in chapter 10 starting in verse 17 and reading through 31. Right off the bat and just taking this passage at face value we see the simple truth that true discipleship takes sacrifice. This stands in a stark contrast to the health and wealth gospels that we hear today. Teaching that if we just have faith in God that he will grant us our wishes and desires, and if he doesn't the problem lies in our lack of faith.

But as we know faith in God is not health, it is not wealth, it has nothing really to do with the physical earthly realm, but it is spiritual. The treasures that we receive from God is not carnal, but spiritual. Peace in times of suffering, grace and love when we instead deserve judgment, and eternal life in the presence of God when we deserve eternal punishment in hell.

These are the treasures, and the gifts of God, not money, not fame, not comfort, or health, or even happiness. All of scripture points to the suffering savior, who's disciples like wise suffer persecution, hunger, imprisonment, and even death.

This is not your best life now, this is not a name it and claim it faith, no, this is a faith of servitude, and of suffering.

When Jesus called his disciples, he called fishermen to leave their boats, their lively hood, all that they knew to follow him into the unknown. He called a tax collector to leave his table, his riches, his friends and to follow Christ in his ministry wandering the countryside not knowing where or when the next meal was going to be. And as we will see in the coming chapters, another one of Christ's disciples literally come out and takes up Jesus cross, risking everything by leaving the anonymity of the crowd.

The reality of the call to follow Jesus is not that we are given, or gain a new obligation to add to our life, but rather that call to faith replaces, and overtakes all other obligations to the one who says, "Follow me" Even our obligation to our parents, and to our families are subordinate to Jesus call as we see in Matthew 8:18-22. "And when Jesus saw a great multitudes about him, he gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to him, teacher I will follow you where ever you go. And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head. Then another of his disciples said to him, Lord let me first go bury my father, but Jesus said to him, follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Christ call to follow him supersedes all other obligations, and it will include suffering and persecution. If the scribe here in Matthew wants to go through with his word to follow Jesus he must leave his station, his position, his home, his comfort. The other disciple must also leave all that is familiar and important to him to go where Jesus leads, leaving his family behind and following Christ. This gives us a picture of the importance of this calling, and of the difficulty and sacrifice we are called to in our service to Christ and the gospel.

This account of the rich young ruler follows immediately in Mark's writing here after the account with the little children. It stands in comparison between the 2, in one we see the weak, and the ones you are unable to do anything on their own, receiving the blessings of Jesus, but here we see this rich man, with his money, and his power, gains nothing from Jesus, for he is unwilling to become like his disciples and leave all behind, he is unwilling to become like these little children, weak and powerless relying completely upon God.

So in this account with the rich young ruler we see that Jesus is once again traveling on his way to Jerusalem when this man runs to him, drops to his knees and asks, what must I do to inherit eternal life. Now this is an interesting question that he asks Jesus for he is the first one recorded asking such a question. Even Jesus own disciples have yet to speak in such a way, in fact they were not so much concerned about eternal life but rather who was going to be ruling with Jesus in his coming kingdom. So it is interesting to note here that this young ruler has a level of understanding of Jesus ministry that we have not heard from in any of those who Jesus taught in Galilee, or even his own disciples.

Finally, after all of this time someone has come and asks Jesus a question about his ministry and what he was teaching, instead of the constant debates over law keeping, traditions, and divorce. But as we see Jesus does not directly answer him as is often the case with Jesus answers they allude and point to deeper meanings.

Jesus instead returns a question asking the man why he called him Good, because no one is good except God. This man recognized Jesus as a teacher, as one with authority over the scriptures like the rabbis. But even the rabbis would not tolerate being called good, for in Judaism, only the God could rightly carry the characteristic of being good. And the rabbis did not want to be in danger of committing blasphemy by claiming, or allowing others to claim that they also were good. Yet this man, approaches Jesus and calls him Good teacher, and it is here that Jesus first addresses and in doing so I think is pointing directly to this man's own failures.

It was believed that if one followed the Mosaic law perfectly that one would be justified before God, but Jesus takes it one step further. Notice he does not question him on his ability to keep the law, or challenge him that the law was really to point to man's inability to meet God's standard and the need for the messiah, we see none of those arguments here from Jesus, instead he doesn't address this issue at all and says, that there is one thing that he lacks, and he must sell everything and give to the poor.

We can see this mindset of the ruler, feeling that he is justified, that he too is good in the following verses. Jesus asks, "do you know the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother. And he answered and said, Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." So as we are starting to get a picture here of this rich young ruler, we see that he indeed is not like the little children, but has come bringing his own work, and his own righteousness before Jesus. Not coming to him as one who is broken and in need of a savior, but rather as one who deems himself worthy of a place in the kingdom of God. As we can see in the question that this rich man poses, he asks Jesus, What can I do to inherit eternal life. He sees it as something that is tied to his actions, tied to the way he conducts himself and that it is something that can be earned. But it would appear that he understands that even just by keeping the law as he states he has since his youth that he lacks what is needed to inherit this eternal life.

And as we see in the next few verses despite his enthusiasm, and his desire to follow Christ, when confronted with the picture of true discipleship, of sacrifice, and what must be done to inherit eternal life, he falters, and is unwilling to commit fully to Christ. He comes to Jesus thinking himself righteous, having kept all of the laws and traditions from his childhood, but Jesus responds to him, saying, "One thing that you lack, go your way, sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, take up the cross and follow me."

Contrast this with the Children of last week, who have nothing but Jesus says it is they who inherit the Kingdom of God, and this rich ruler who has everything who still lacks something, and it is only when he sells everything, becomes like a helpless child will he possess everything that is needed to inherit eternal life. The man asks what I must do, and Jesus says leave everything and follow me. He is demanding no more than he did with his other disciples, to leave all that they had and follow him but this young ruler had much to leave, and as we see his possessions were more important than following Jesus.

While meditating upon Jesus teachings here in the verses I was thinking about what it means to follow Christ. In the case of this rich young ruler, it was his money and possessions that held him back. But the reality is that is only one aspect and if we are to be honest with ourselves there is probably something that each and every one of us struggle with. As we have seen throughout Jesus ministry, he calls his disciples to serve, and in that service comes sacrifice, What God calls for us to sacrifice for the sake of the gospel can look different in each and every persons life. For some it is the loss of friendship, or family. As we grow in our faith and understanding it can actually cause some division and hardship in relationships.

We can be mocked, scorned or even completely shunned by our family members simply because of our belief. For others it can be a sacrifice of time, the time spent in prayer, the time spent in study, the time spent in ministry that we would rather spend doing something else. These all can be struggles, and even sinful aspects in our lives that we struggle with if we put any of it before God and his gospel. In a nutshell that is the teaching here, that God demands our full devotion, our full love, and our full attention. If we let our family, our money, our time, or pretty much anything else for that matter, supersede God in importance then we are no different then this rich young ruler.

Now It's time to get controversial, I am going to do something here that I usually try to avoid because I think it is over done in the church and in the christian faith and can cause needless divisions which is why I am bringing it up today. Keeping in mind the idea that we are called to sacrifice our all to God for the sake of the gospel, it would seem that there is one area that has become synonymous with the christian faith, and that is politics. But I ask you, was Jesus concerned with the politics of his day? Was he seeking to overthrow the corrupt Roman government and free the nation of Israel from their tyrannical grasp? No, he was on a mission and that was to do the will of the father, to teach, to preach, to die on the cross and rise again. Jesus life was a completely gospel driven life, did he get political, at times yes but it always centered around the faith and the gospel message.

So I ask, and I challenge everyone who is listening today, what has your political affiliations done for your gospel ministry? As I said, I normally avoid this subject like the plague but we are in an environment in our churches, and in the faith today that I think that this needs to be asked. The reason why I say this is because of the way that Christians are being portrayed as within the political sphere here in this country. We are seen as gun toting, ignorant, brain washed fools and we are being linked to violence, hatred, bigotry, and painted in a way that is actually quite honestly the opposite of Christian characteristics. This week following the 2 mass shootings that we had here in this country I have seen a lot of anti christian rederict. One post going around, shows a picture of a pentagram and says, this symbol and those associated with it, somehow instill a sever sense of fear and distrust for many, while historically more death, destruction, oppression, and genocide has been committed under this symbol, and there is a picture of the cross.

Or this quote from Neil degrasse Tyson, "Some claim the USA is a Christian nations, compelling me to wonder which assault rifle Jesus would choose, the AR-15 or the AK-47." And I think Rainn Wilson hit the nail right on the head when he said "The Metamorphosis of Jesus Christ form a humble servant of the abject poor to a symbol that stands for gun rights, prosperity theology, anti-science, limited government (which neglects the destitute) and feirce nationalism is truly the strangest transformation in human history. Do you see what is happening here? Christians are being lumped into one group that is ran by the most extreme right wing loud mouthed group because of our political affiliations. So let me ask again, how does this effect our gospel ministry?

Last week our missionary friend said that our political climate here in the states has actually hindered the ministry in Mexico. He said that they are constantly asked who they voted for, who they support, and while they do not give an answer it is assumed because of their christian faith that they have voted for, and support trump and relationships and ministry opportunities have been lost because of it. Now I honestly couldn't care less who you vote for, or why, we live in this country where we have the freedom to do so, and many have died insuring that we have this right. But I think that it is high time that the organized church gets out of politics.

As individuals, yes, please, go and vote however you like, but we as Christians need to stop inviting politician to our pulpits to speak, christian organizations should not throw their money, or weight behind a political party or campaign.

What does this have to do with today's message you ask? Let me put it in the hypothetical. Say you approach Jesus as this rich young ruler has, and ask, what must I do to be saved, and he says, give up your obsession over politics, give up your guns, give up the freedoms you believe you are fighting for, and follow me. God demands our all, and anything including our politics can stand in the way. If our political affiliations, is hindering our gospel ministry then it has become more important then the God who we claim we are serving in those affiliations.

As I was thinking on this it reminded of the baptists when the wrote one of their confessions, I don't remember which one. One of the reasons they did so was to lay out their differences with the Anabaptist, and to show that they were not affiliated and did not want to be lumped in with the more militant Anabaptist of the time. I think it is the time that we do the same, It is time for Christians in this country to cut their love affair with partisan politics. There are those that I know have judged people to not be a Christian on the simple fact that they voted democrat. Partisan politics have reached a point of being the religion of many who claim christ today, and in doing so many atrocious things are attributed to Christians. So I ask again, how has your political affiliation effected your ministry for the gospel? It is high time that we has Christians, refocus our efforts toward sharing the gospel and winning souls for Christ and not look to our legal system, and political system to solve all of our problems.

I think of our reading this morning in Corinthians, All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful, all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. This not only applies to our conduct to each other in christian liberties and freedoms, but also our gospel ministry to the world. We must not let our christian liberties impede our gospel ministry. Would you give up alcohol for the gospel? Sure it is not forbidden in scripture, but would you sacrifice it for the sake of the gospel? Would you give up right to bear arms if it meant that this world could see Christians in a different light, furthering the gospel ministry? There are many in this country who claim Christ and say that you will have to pry these guns from my cold dead hands, they are willing to fight and die, and in fact seem to be even willing killing others in the process just to keep this as they put it, God given right, But I ask, would you lay down and die for Christ? What God demands is profound, and sadly I think many who claim his name fall short of what is required to inherit eternal life, and just like this rich man are unwilling to do what it takes to do so.

Other things have become more important to us then God, then his word. And it is high time that we as Christians put aside these distractions, these idols, these things that we elevate above our lord. So I challenge you again this morning, God gave his Son for us, Christ gave his life for us, all that we have we owe to him, so I ask again this morning, what will you give for the sake of the gospel?

