***“Then Who Can Be Saved?”*** by S. Finlan, at The First Church, October 10, 2021

**Hebrews 4:14–16**

14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Mark 10:17–27**

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.

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!” 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.”

Welcome to everyone here today. We come here as life students, always seeking to know more about our heavenly Father and to build love among our fellows in the family of God. It’s time many sought out God to ask important questions about life and truth.

The man who ran up to Jesus with the question about eternal life was a wealthy man who was very attached to his possessions. It is because of *that* attachment that Jesus asked him to sell all that he had. It was not his wealth, but his *love* of wealth, that was a barrier for him. When the same story is recounted in the other gospels, we get more details. Matthew says the man was young, and Luke says he was a ruler. So this is commonly called the Story of the Rich Young Ruler. I think this ruler wanted more than just information. He wanted to become an important disciple, possibly an evangelist. I think Jesus’ big “ask” was because of the big ambitions the fellow had. If this man was going to be recognized as a spiritual leader, he needed to take decisive action to deal with his materialism. Jesus was not intending to be harsh. In fact, it says “Jesus, looking at him, loved him” (Mark 10:21). I think he was giving the guy an opportunity, and told him what he needed to do if he really wanted to join Jesus’ group.

The encounter leads Jesus to make a comment about how difficult it is for those with wealth to enter the kingdom. Again, I think the issue is *attachment* to wealth.

To be wealthy is not the issue, but to be so focused on and attached to material things creates a barrier. When we put material things, *temporary* things, above permanent things, we create barriers that cloud our perspective and dim our deeper understanding of God. We need to let the light of God’s love shine upon our lives here, to be guided by that love just as our ships are guided by a lighthouse, to find their way home safely.

Though the apostles have been blessed with the daily experience of living with Jesus as he travels throughout the country, they are like many of us who cannot immediately grasp the whole essence of truth. Jesus uses simple language to discuss eternal truths.

So the apostles take Jesus’ remark about the difficulty of passing through the eye of a needle literally, and ask who, then, if anyone, can be saved. Oh! We *all* like money, don’t we? So can none of us get saved? Don’t worry, Jesus assures them. What’s impossible—or *seems* to be impossible—for us is possible for God. God can reach anyone’s heart, if the person is open to it. He can even cut through the love of wealth if someone is willing to give it up for a greater and eternal prize.

Jesus understands human weakness. The passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews points out that he was able to “sympathize with our weaknesses,” having been “tested as we are” (4:15). Jesus is a compassionate and understanding leader. In case we are afraid, Hebrews says we may “approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy” (4:16). Don’t be afraid, he is saying. Jesus is sympathetic, God is merciful, and people from every nation and group are welcome to approach the throne of grace.

It is this same kindness that Jesus references elsewhere when he talks about “welcom[ing] one such child in my name” (Mark 9:37), which demands kindness toward children. And when he says “unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3), he is recommending a child-like trustfulness for adults.

What are some of the ways that having a baby changes your life? One is, you’ll never need an alarm clock again. One mother testifies: “You get to see things through the eyes of an innocent child, with wonder and amazement. A crawling caterpillar is more entertaining than Dora, a field of dandelions is not weeds—it’s hundreds of wish flowers—and lemonade is the best drink ever!” (<https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/considering-baby/is-it-time/life-changes-after-baby/?slide=slide_60f1cb0b-b495-45d4-9ab5-075c51c3bb69#slide_60f1cb0b-b495-45d4-9ab5-075c51c3bb69>)

That sense of wonder that this mother experienced is related to the sense of openness and receptivity that Jesus recommends for all believers. Jesus never asks us to lose our ability to think, or revert to childhood in *that* way. But he does recommend the spiritual receptivity of the child who is open to discovery, open to the beauty of the lilies of the field, open to the parental love that is always on offer.

Jesus can retrain our minds, if we let him, so that our honest quest for goodness, fairness, and love comes to dominate our personality, and so that we don’t have materialistic obsessions ruling us. Our materialism can place a barrier between us and godly living. We have to take steps to cut off that materialistic thing. If we want more of God in our life, we have to repudiate something that takes our heart away from God. Maybe you need a God-project in your life, something that helps you rededicate yourself to God, to goodness, to rightness. If you need to make up your mind to do something, pray for help with that. Make a decision and follow through on it. Get closer to Jesus. Ask for greater understanding of your fellow man. Rededicate your life to discerning and doing the will of God in your own life. There is a unique path that God has for you. At any age, you can set out to find it, or find it more fully. “Just a closer walk with thee.”