

Sermon Proper 24 2018

October 21, 2018

Mark 10:23-31

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

On one of the Sundays while I was away, I gleaned from the Bible Study and some other conversation that the pastor at the church I attended that week had caused a bit of a ruckus in preaching on the lesson on divorce that we had a couple of weeks ago. I don't know exactly what he had said, but it was clear from some comments that he made in Bible Class that he had certainly ruffled a few feathers. Of course, when you hear Jesus' words in that text, those words are hard to hear without feathers being ruffled in our day. His words are strong, and as pastors, sometimes it's our job to speak those words full strength. We don't like to because when he preaches law like that it does ruffle feathers. The law is harsh. The law accuses. The law cuts us to the bone and sometimes seems to leave scars. Of course, what's the goal of that law as it cuts? Don't get me wrong, it's still command, it's still God's will, but what is Jesus trying to do when He says something like that? When Jesus says those words about divorce, what's the point? It's to hurt a little bit, isn't it? Why? So that we would be stirred from our complacent self-righteousness and be reminded that we too stand condemned under God's law. The Word of God is cutting out the tumor of our self-justification and leaving us bare, with only the justification of Christ as our hope.

Well, today is another one of those law texts, isn't it? **And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**

Now as I read this, you might be feeling like I'm a bit off on this, because you don't feel wealthy. After all, Jesus is pretty clear here, isn't He? "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth!," right? It's easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a "rich" person to enter the Kingdom, right? Listen, though. You might not feel wealthy compared to some, but this is you. This is me. Think about it. Think

about those Jews living 2000 years ago in Israel. Did they have TV's? Did they have couches? What were their beds like? What were their homes like, etc., etc.? The reality is that we have wealth and we have it in abundance. Even now we can compare our wealth to those in Haiti, for example. What is the floor in our house made of? There, it's dirt for a lot of people. Oh do we have wealth. So Jesus speaks to us. He speaks to you. And if you still feel like this doesn't apply to you, understand the disciples knew it was about all. Look at what they said: **"Then who can be saved?"** You see they understood that this comment was pointing out how our possessions draw us toward unfaithfulness.

So, as I say that—and that's a strong statement—we have to ask: "What's the problem?" What is the problem with our wealth? Why does our wealth draw us to unfaithfulness? What is the problem? Is it the wealth in itself?

You might remember a couple of years ago I preached on the unjust steward and talked a bit about how we can understand wealth. As I did that I mentioned the marriage counseling program I use called Prepare/Enrich. And in that, I discussed how Prepare/Enrich has its participants examine themselves in an inventory that shows how they view money. This view falls into four categories: status; control; enjoyment; and security. Now the fact that we can view money in these different ways tells us something. It tells us that the problem isn't the money itself. The problem isn't actually having the dollars in our wallet or bank account. No the problem is with us.

You see what that inventory is drawing out is what we value. Do you value money because you value pleasure, or status, or control, or security? Of course, as we look at this some of these things also aren't inherently sinful. For example, it's not wrong to want to be self-controlled or disciplined. It's not wrong to want to enjoy things to an extent. Likewise, it's not wrong for us to appreciate some of the fine gifts that God gives us. But how many of us are really capable of that? Pleasure turns into self-centered hedonism. Status turns into haughtiness and arrogance. Control turns into a desire to be God. And security turns into trust in a thing rather than trust that our God will provide for us.

And there we see the heart of all of this: our sin. Why is it easier for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle than a rich man to enter into heaven? Why is it so hard for the wealthy to enter into the Kingdom of God? It's because that call that our God gives us to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things is always frustrated by our

sin. We never do it right. The idol factory of our heart looks to that bank account and says, “oh good, there is what I need.”

And that law comes in and says to you, “Sinner, it’s hard for you to enter the Kingdom of God. You like your money too much. You like your possessions too much. Sure you might think that in some ways you’re exempt, but you’re not. Your comfort is found in things and not in the Lord. Your Security is found in knowing that your purse carries the means to obtain more food. Your pleasure is found in your passions and not in the God who created you.” That word comes to you and it cuts you open like a knife, so that you are laid bare. Just like that rich young man who heard Jesus’ call to sell everything last week, you see that you have no hope in yourself and there should be an aspect that makes you gloomy just like him.

And as you reflect on that, then the question the disciples ask becomes so pertinent, doesn’t it? **“So who then can be saved?”** So who then can be saved? Who can be the camel to pass through the eye of the needle? Look at our Lord’s Words. Look always at the Words of Jesus. Who can be saved? **With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.**

Yes all things are possible with God. All things are possible for the God who has seen the pathetic state of wretched humans who have no ability to save ourselves. All things are possible for the God who has known the immense depth of our unrighteousness, who has seen how unable we are to use these good gifts that He has given to us for right. All things are possible for Him even your salvation. How?

Because as you cling to your wealth, there came the One who didn’t cling to wealth. In fact He didn’t even consider equality with God a thing to be clung to. He came and He emptied Himself of every claim to riches, to honor, to glory that He rightly deserved. Instead He left all of that in Heaven and He came into the poverty of your sin, and He took that sin upon Himself that you might become the righteousness of God.

So who can be saved? You can by the blood of this Son which was shed for you on the cross as He gave up even His life for you, that you could live eternally in His resurrection from the dead. And what does that tell you about Him? What does that tell you about His love? His generosity? His care for you? About where your security and pleasure really are?

In fact, look at the promise that is made: **“I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake**

and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”

I remember one of my professors pointing out how true this is in the church. And I can see it in my own life. What generosity the Lord shows us. Here in these pews we have house and home, we have brothers and sisters, mothers and children. We have such an abundance beyond what we could ask or imagine. And I think you all know that with each other too. You know that bond that is made in the blood of Christ, the bond which He creates as you come forward sharing in the body of His forgiveness, the cup of His blood shed for you in His love, His very life poured out that you would live. Christians, it's in that generosity that we live.

In fact, I remember a profound conversation I had with another pastor this summer about giving in the church. The point that the other pastor made was great. He said that we so often look at our giving in church in relation to our budget. You know, we think, “well we've budgeted x amount of money to spend, and we need to make sure that we come up with that, so I better give y as my part.” Is that what the generosity of our Lord shows us? Give enough to meet the budget?

No, He tells us to give out of a trust in Him. He tells us to give first because we know that our needs of body and soul will be provided for, because we know that He loves us more than the flowers of the field and birds of the air. Christian, He loves you that much. Will He not certainly care for you? He will.

In fact, to close, there's a great story from the life of Luther where the Reformer was travelling with another man in a wagon. A beggar came up to the wagon and Luther's companion contributed alms to the man with the comment: “I never know when I might need the Lord to give me the same.” Luther responded something to the effect, “might need Him to give you the same? He already has and then some.” That is true for you Christian. He has given you your needs and far beyond, so treat your money accordingly. And as I say that, I know that is Law. It's law that cuts to your heart. But you can hear it knowing that the Lord who speaks it is the One relieves you of the curse of the Law in the Gospel of His blood. He frees you not to justify yourself, but to be justified in Him. That is the greatest provision of all. Amen.