

"Where the Last Are First"

October 14, 2018

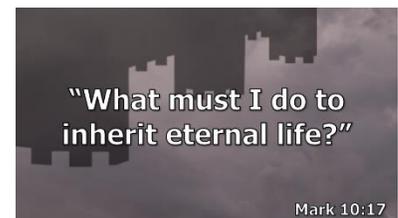
Mark 10: 17-31

¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." ²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said 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 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." ²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!" ²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."



Last week we began our new series, “The Upside-Down Kingdom” by looking at where the children are blessed. Last Sunday we looked at the ways that Jesus reached out to the children – the powerless, the helpless, the ones in need, the least in that culture – and elevated the children. I challenged you to consider how we could do the same. I also shared the story of the “Thirteen Woman”. If you remember, she was the one whose prayers for the 13 children led her to a place of compassion for those children. Her compassion in turn fueled a desire for her church to reach out to those children. And is often the case when you engage and involve the children, the families followed and brought life to that church. The Spirit spoke this week into the heart of one of our own, putting it on her heart to find a way to minister to a group of children she observed when visiting a friend. She saw these children as the least and the lost and wondered in her heart how we, the church, could be a positive influence in their lives. Perhaps others also heard the call or felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit this past week, prompting you to be the hands and feet of Jesus to someone in need. If so, I would love to hear about that too. Let us pray...

Our passage today begins with a question that is common to many religions and to humanity in general. Whether you are Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist or whatever, the question the young man asks is one many people wrestle with and want to know the answer to. In verse 17, he asks, *“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”* People may ask the question using other words or phrases; it is a question of depth and meaning. What must I do to be



able to enter heaven? As people concerned with our present life as well, I think we also ask other very similar questions: What must I do to have a good life here on earth? What brings meaning and purpose to life?

As the conversation unfolds, Jesus quickly discerns the intent or the underlying angle of the young man's question. It is an intent that we also often have when we ask such questions. Just tell me what I have to do. So Jesus does. Jesus quotes some familiar words: *"You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother"*. These commandments would have been very familiar to the young man and to all of the people in Jesus' audience that day. "Yes!", the young man says, *"I have kept all these since I was a boy"*. All good and devout Jews worked hard to keep the commandments. A smile or look of assurance must have come upon the young man's face. In verse 21 we read, *"Jesus looked at him and loved him"*. It is that look we receive when our parent or teacher or coach or pastor or boss says, "that is wonderful, but...".



Where the
Last Are First

In our journeys of faith, we all come to this place.

When I was a youth in high school I attended church every Sunday, sang in the youth choir, went to youth group faithfully, got good grades in school, never got in trouble at school. From a casual observer's viewpoint, I was checking all the boxes – keeping all of the commandments, so to speak. But my Friday and Saturday nights were not so holy. In fact, there was plenty of sinful behavior happening on those nights. This pattern would continue through my first years of college too.

Went to church – when I was home for a weekend or in the summer when I was living at home. Otherwise, not so much. There was no youth group, no choir, no parents to model a life of faith on a daily basis when I was away at college, so I found myself drifting further from God. One day I came to my “church, youth group, choir, grades – that is wonderful, but...” moment. Yes, I was checking the boxes that religion said I had to check, even during college - when I was home. But one day tragedy came knocking. It was because of this tragic event that I saw and then admitted that my heart was not in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I became aware that the world was winning. On one level I was checking some of the religion boxes. I was much like the young man in our passage. I was “doing” religion, not living out my faith. You probably have been there too.

“Jesus looked at him and loved him”. It was a look of love because Jesus was looking past the simple boxes that the man was checking – the things that he was doing – and saw deeper into the man’s heart. Jesus saw into the condition of the man’s heart. He saw that the man was holding some back. We have all been there, when we have gone through the motions, when our heart has not fully been into what we were doing. We did the task itself without connecting to the reason why we were doing the task. The man was following the commandments out of obligation or duty, not because he loved God and sought to please God. Have you ever been there? Yes, we all have. So, we can understand why Jesus looked at him with love in his eyes. Jesus was going to say what needed to be said.

In verse 21, Jesus says: *"One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me"*. I can see the look on the man's face changing as the

"One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me".
- Mark 10:21

implications of what Jesus was saying sank in. Our passage tells us the man's face fell and he went away sad, because he had great wealth. I am not wealthy. For me, Jesus probably would not name 'wealth' as the thing that holds me back from being all in for God. The same may be true for most of you. But there are things that Jesus could name that would cause my countenance to fall. This too is true for each of you, correct? We all have something or many somethings that we hold back from God, things that act as barriers to being fully committed to following Jesus.

In verse 23 Jesus says, *"How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"* For the young man it was wealth that was his barrier. For some it is pride, for some it is the

"How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"
- Mark 10:23

need to be in control, for some it is the temptations that are too much to withstand, for some it is the lack of worth they see in themselves. Yes, it is hard to enter the kingdom of God. The reasons are many, so we will not focus on wealth here today. It was just the case for the young man. Later, in stunned amazement, the disciples ask, *"Who then can be saved"?* It is a genuine,

heartfelt question. Jesus' answer is one of the truth statements of our faith: *"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God"*.

"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God".
- Mark 10:27

Yes, that rich young man can enter eternal life with

God. Yes, prideful and controlling me has a chance with God. Yes, that addict who sees himself as totally unworthy has a chance with God. All can be saved with God in control. Nothing is impossible for God.

Lee, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune and a self-professed atheist was sitting at his desk on Christmas Eve. It was a slow news day and he found himself reminiscing about the Delgado family that he had featured while writing a series of articles about Chicago's neediest people a few days earlier. The Delgado's were comprised of a grandmother named Perfecta and her two granddaughters, Jenny, age 13, and her sister Lydia, 11 years old.

He remembered how unprepared he was when he walked into their two-room apartment on the west side of Chicago for the interview; bare halls and bare walls, no furniture, no rugs, nothing but a kitchen table and a handful of rice in the cupboards. He learned during the interview that Jenny and Lydia only had one short-sleeved dress apiece, plus a thin gray sweater that they shared. On cold days when the girls walked the half-mile to school, one of the girls would start with the sweater and then give it to the other at the halfway mark. It was all they had. Perfecta wanted more for her granddaughters and would gladly have worked, but her severe arthritis and age made work too difficult and painful.

Since it was a slow news day Lee decided to check out a car and drive to Chicago's west side to check up on the Delgado's. When Jenny opened the door Lee couldn't believe what he saw! His article on the Delgado's had touched the hearts of many subscribers who responded with furniture and appliances, rugs,

dozens of coats, scarves and gloves. The girls wouldn't have to share a sweater any longer. There were cartons and cartons and boxes of food everywhere. They had so much food that the cupboards and closets couldn't contain it. Someone had even donated a Christmas tree, and under it were mounds of presents and thousands of dollars in cash!

Lee was astonished! But what astonished him the most was what he found Perfecta and her granddaughters doing. They were preparing to give most of it away. "Why would you give so much of this away?" Lee asked. Perfecta responded, "Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do." Lee was dumbfounded.

After regaining his composure, he asked Perfecta another question. He wanted to know what she and the girls thought about the generosity that was shown to them. Again, Lee was not prepared for the answer. She said, "This is wonderful, this is very good. We did nothing to deserve this; it's all a gift from God. But," she added, "It is not his greatest gift, Lee. No, we celebrate that tomorrow. Jesus."

Lee was speechless as he drove back to the office. In the quiet of his car he noted a couple of observations. He had plenty and along with it plenty of anxiety, while the Delgado's, despite their poverty, had peace. Lee had everything and yet wanted more, but the Delgado's had nothing and yet knew generosity. Lee had everything and yet his life was as bare as the Delgado's apartment prior to the article running. And yet the Delgado's - who had nothing - were filled with hope, contentment, and had a spiritual certainty. Even though Lee had so much more than the Delgado's, he longed for what they had in their

poverty. He longed for hope, for contentment, for that spiritual certainty, and for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

In our passage, Jesus answers the disciples' question:

"No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the

gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — along with persecutions — and in the age to come, eternal life". Ah, what the young man wanted. Ah, what the reporter, Lee, came to realize that he longed for. Meaning, purpose, life. Upon entering into a personal relationship with Jesus, we find all this and more. We find that nothing is impossible with God. As Jesus warns in this verse – yes, there will be persecution. There will be costs to following Jesus. There will be times when we sacrifice and when we make choices that are hard. There will be times when we receive ridicule or are left out of something because of our faith. But there is also a peace and a contentment and a joy and an assurance that we find when we follow Jesus.

"No one who leaves home... will fail to receive a hundred times as much in the present age... - along with persecution – and in the age to come, eternal life".

- Mark 10:29-30

Faith in Jesus Christ is what led the Delgados to give away so much of what they had received. They knew God's blessings and wanted others to be blessed as well. I love this line: *"Our neighbors are still in need.*

We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do". Lee was dumbfounded. Jesus, turning the ways of the world

"Our neighbors are still in need. We cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do".

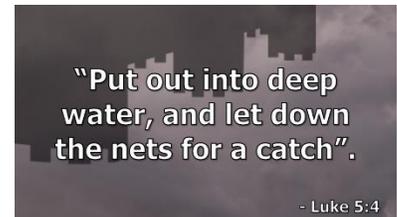
upside-down, makes no sense to the world. But it made perfect sense to the Delgados and it makes perfect sense to us, those who follow Jesus. When we are willing to let go of our material possessions, we have come one step closer to the kingdom of God. When we are willing to let go of our need to be in control and to have status in our lives, then we are another step closer to the kingdom of God. Each step we take away from the kingdom of the world, is one step closer to the kingdom of God.



"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat".

This familiar passage was at the center of the second talk Friday night at the Reach conference. The focus of the talk was centered around the idea of "Deep Water". In this passage from Luke 5, we see Simon Peter is present. He is one of the fisherman, sitting on the shore washing his nets as the crowd gathers around Jesus. Peter is not in the crowd. The people are crowding in, eager to hear Jesus teach. Peter is detached, he is tired from the long night of fishing, he is a bit dejected that they caught nothing, he has lost his passion for fishing. Perhaps noticing this, Jesus asks him to get back in the boat, to push out from shore a bit, so that Jesus can teach the people.

Do you remember the “thirteen woman” from last week and from earlier in this message? She noticed the children’s need and her compassion led her church to action. Last week, I challenged you to find the thirteen in our community. At least one of us did. Thanks be to God. In our passage today, Peter was detached, busying himself washing his nets. This busyness distracted him from what Jesus had to offer. As I thought about Peter, it made me wonder: how often does this happen to us? How often are we too busy to notice? Too busy to take the time to see the need. Peter was not only busy, he also lacked compassion that morning as Jesus taught. Jesus got him in the boat and then Jesus taught the people. And then, when He had finished teaching the crowd, Jesus turns and says to Peter, *“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch”*.



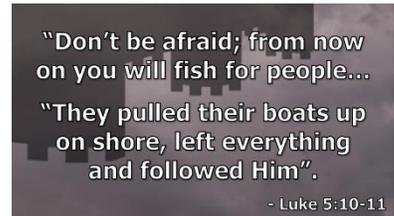
The deep water represents the unknown. It represents where our faith might take us if we are willing to trust in God. For the young man in our scripture from Mark 10, the deep water was living without his possessions, his sense of self-worth and his sense of security. For Lee, the reporter in our story, the deep water was the unknown of stepping into faith, of pursuing that which he longed for – hope, peace, contentment, assurance. For Peter, the deep water was responding to Jesus’ call. It was leaving all and stepping out of the boat and into a life of faith and trust in Jesus. For the “thirteen woman” the deep water was allowing the Holy Spirit to work in her and, through her, in her congregation. She did not know what would come of her vision, but she trusted God and the Spirit went to work in that small church to do an amazing thing. For the woman,

when she was willing to go out into the deep water, she experienced God's Spirit working in and through her church to produce fish, kingdom fruit, in the nets. Lee and the young man in our scripture passage were drawn towards the deep water but were not quite ready to step in. Peter was not quite ready to step out into the deep water right away either.

Peter instantly protests, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything*". I am tired. I am frustrated. I am ready to just go home. At times we too can allow busyness, tiredness, and a lot of other -nesses to deter us from encountering folks with need, from spending time with Jesus, and so on. Like the young man in our passage for today, we just want to know what we have to do. Peter was willing to shove off from shore so that Jesus could teach. He probably kept working on his nets. But then Jesus asks more of him. This is usually where we falter too, isn't it? I came to church this morning Jesus. Now you want me to volunteer when? You want me to teach what? I have to show up another time this week? Jesus asks for more and Peter finally relents.

Even though he may have had slumped shoulders and may have had a bad attitude, Peter gives in, "*But because you say so, I will let down the nets.*" Do you know the end of the story? They caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. The catch was so large that other fishermen had to come help. Simon Peter falls at Jesus' feet and says, "*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!*" Here we see shades of the young man who went away sad. In Jesus' presence each sees his sin, that which holds him back. Lee, the reporter in the story I shared, sees Jesus in the Delgados and realizes what holds him

back. Jesus does not leave Peter here, stuck in the things that hold him back. Instead, He turns to Peter and says, *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people."* In response, Peter and Andrew, James and John, they *"pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him"*. They were touched by the power of Jesus, the possibility of stepping into the deep water, and they were willing to go all in.

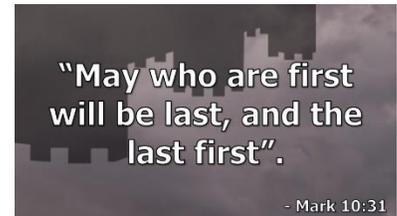


In our passage for the day, the young man thought that his possessions were of great value. For him, and for most of the world today, money makes the world go around. His money, or the unwillingness to let it go, more accurately, was the barrier that kept him from living a fully committed life of faith. In the story of the Delgados, they were overjoyed at the generosity they received and the only solution they could see for the abundance was to use it to bless others. They were living out God's upside-down kingdom here on earth. Just the opposite was Lee, the reporter. He was dumbfounded that the Delgados would not hold onto all of it but would happily give it away.

Like the young man, Lee's world revolved around his possessions. Yet when Lee experienced Jesus' love being lived out, he longed for what the Delgado family had – faith, contentment, hope, peace, assurance. Those that Lee considered the last, according to his standards and the world's standards, were really the first in the things that mattered. He had a sense that the things of the world left him void of what really mattered. This was the lesson that Peter learned too.

His job, his boat, his earthly life – it did not really matter when placed up against Jesus' call to step out into the deep water and to become a fisher of men.

In verse 31, Jesus reassures Peter of the decision he made that day on the seashore, saying, "*Many who are first will be first, and the last first*". Can we be like Peter, like the Delgados, willing to think of ourselves last? Can we think of ways to serve Jesus and His kingdom, thinking less of ourselves? Can we be Jesus to those who are seen and treated as the last by the world? Can we see them as Jesus sees them, elevating them to first instead, inverting the kingdom of this world as we seek to establish God's upside-down kingdom? Can we be like Peter and the other disciples, stepping out into the deep water of faith, trusting Jesus wherever He leads us? May we see as Jesus sees. May we love as Jesus loves. Where He leads, may we go. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.



GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) In order to grow in your love of Jesus, what do you need to give over to Him? Wealth or possessions? Status? Pride?
- 2) What "deep water" is God leading you out into? Don't know – pray about it! Do know – pray for strength, discernment, guidance!!
- 3) Who is the Delgado family in your neighborhood, school, work place? How can you be a blessing to them so that they can, in turn, bless others?