

The Currency of a Validated Life

20 Pentecost B Oct 10, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Gospel: Mark 10:17-31

Jesus has been teaching his disciples about what is most valued in God's eyes. Now, a conversation with a rich man brings his message home to the disciples in a way that is surprising but unforgettable.

¹⁷As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up & knelt before him, & 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 & mother.'" ²⁰The man said to Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹Jesus, looking at him, loved him & said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, & give the money to the poor, & you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²²When the man heard this, he was shocked & went away grieving, for he had many possessions. ²³Then Jesus looked around & said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the dominion of God!" ²⁴& the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the dominion 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 dominion of God." ²⁶They were greatly astounded & said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷Jesus looked at them & said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." ²⁸ Peter began to say to Jesus, "Look, we have left everything & followed you." ²⁹Jesus 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 & for the sake of the good news, ³⁰who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers & sisters, mothers & children, & fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, & the last will be first."

Introduction

The rich man who comes to ask Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life is a good man, sincere in his asking. Mark's gospel is alone in saying that Jesus looked on him & loved him. Out of love, not as judgment, Jesus offers him an open door to life: sell all you own & give it to the poor. Our culture bombards us with the message that

we find life by consuming. Faith counters this message with the invitation to find life by divesting for the sake of the other.

Overview - Fat Camels & Narrow Needles: Only Possible for God

A rich man approaches Jesus & asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to sell what he owns, give the money to the poor, & follow. Jesus will accept nothing less than our very selves. Like the rich man, we too are left defenseless & grieving by Jesus' radical call to leave behind & give away what we count on for our own security (it may not be \$!). He wants US, & therefore also wants the things that keep us from him; he gazes upon us in love, even as he calls us to leave behind our false sources of security. How hard it is for us camels to pass through the eye of the needle! We too grieve at the impossibility. It is in fact impossible for us, yet more than possible for God to make it so. For we have a "great high priest who has passed through the heavens, the Son of God," who is both able to sympathize with our great weakness but also to provide mercy & help. While eternal life on the other side of the needle is a free gift that only God can give, it is a gift that claims the entirety of our lives & therefore reshapes our stewardship of whatever earthly goods we do have. 1st & foremost we are called to follow the Christ who gazes upon us in love. Since we are his, following him we will enter through the eye of the needle, leaving behind what cannot fit through with us. In doing so we are promised that we will gain everything: a hundredfold more in this life in a new community under the Cross, "& in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:30).

Experiential Idea

The church commemorates Teresa of Avila (16th century mystic) on Oct 15. Teresa was herself a member of the nobility before she left all her wealth to serve Jesus. In 1970, Teresa was the 1st woman in Catholic history to be made a Doctor of the Church. During her lifetime, Teresa was accused of heresy for teaching men. Giving up so much & gaining everything.

[Mark 10:17-31](#)

Mark's gospel here summarizes the commandments from Exodus & Deuteronomy. 1st century Christian eschatology is evident (a) in the priority, not of obeying the law from Torah, but of following Jesus, & (b) in new world order that rejects traditional Jewish expectation that wealth is a sign of divine blessing. "Teacher" indicates Jesus' role as similar to a rabbi. The detail that Jesus loved the man reveals his saving care even for

those who cannot follow him. Believers are promised connection with each other as if they are not strangers but family members. Mark's gospel anticipates the coming of the eschaton, for which we prepare by countercultural lives today of ethical justice. We are glad for the forgiveness we will receive at the table. Christians receive the traditional biblical commandments, & yet we know that we cannot keep them. With the Spirit's help, together we become a new family & follow Christ, who radically alters cultural values.

Images in the Readings

The church's adherence to the **10 Commandments**, which Christian traditions have numbered in several different ways, relies in part on their Christian reinterpretation in the New Testament. This passage is one such Christian discussion of the historic Jewish law: here the law is understood as leading to Christ.

Especially for Children

Show the children a needle, & describe the size of a camel. How can the camel fit through the needle's eye? Here are more questions: How can we live this week without ever being selfish or nasty? How can we receive everything we think we need? How can we never be afraid at any time this week? How can we go to God when we die? Jesus says that God can bring the camel through the eye: God can be all that we need. God can bring us through.

Contemplative Comments from the Cloud of Witnesses

If you have a mind to enter into life, keep the commandments. If you have a mind to know the truth, believe in me. If you have a mind to be perfect, sell all you have. If you have a mind to become my follower, renounce yourself. If you have a mind to be exalted in heaven, make yourself humble on earth. I ask nothing more of you except that you should want to surrender yourself entirely to me. I do not care what you give me besides yourself, because I do not want your gifts, but you. Give yourself to me. I gave my whole body & my blood to feed you, so that I should be entirely yours, & you should be kept mine. —*Thomas á Kempis*

[Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, ed. Betty I. Knott (London: Collins, 1963), 203-204, 230.]

Q: By what do you find your life validated?...\$, family mbrs, titles, status, amount/quality/status of mat'l things including car/house/portfolio. What do you think Jesus would lovingly say to you? How do you need to adjust your sense of your identity/existence being validated? What does this empower you to do in living life differently? How will your life change for the better doing this?