**Mark 10:23-31**

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!” **24** 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! **25** 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.” **26** And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” **27** Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” **28** Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” **29** Jesus said, “Truly, 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, **30** 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. **31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

**“Who Can Be Saved?”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. In the eyes of ancient Egyptians, their kings were pinnacles of glory. Even after death, pyramids held more than a mummy but were sealed up with all his possessions . They believed that “…the king's soul could move through the burial chamber as it wished. After the funeral the king becomes a god and could be worshipped in the temples beside his pyramid.”[[1]](#footnote-1) As we know from archeology, none of the Egyptian kings were gods or kept what they had. Our world today puts the afterlife on the back burner or flat-out denies it. However, this cold hard reality means all we have is a shallow definition of life based on possessions.

Even if we do not worship at the wealthy pyramids of dead kings, riches and success still catch our attention. Names stick out like, Bill Gates creator of Microsoft, Alice Walton one of the heirs to the founder of Walmart, Mark Zuckerberg 30-year-old co-founder to Facebook, and who can miss Donald Trump running now for president. King Solomon, the richest king ever in Israel, had such glory only to say, “When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?” There is no advantage for the eye is never satisfied with what it sees. Yet, Jesus saw the difficulty that none can escape in this life. God alone does the impossible by breaking into hearts with the richness of His Word.

The Gospel reading for today continues from last week when Jesus encountered a rich young man. He had come to Jesus looking for advice on salvation. Only the demand was beyond his ability for as we heard, “…He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). The Law had done its task by crushing the sinner, but it is unknown if he ever heard the Gospel. It is this sad situation that Jesus takes what happens to one and applies it to the rest of His disciples. His gaze looks around and stares into their hearts declaring, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

Our hearts need to hear the Law. The rich man had to hear very specific judgement concerning his sin of self-righteousness. However, Jesus left none of His disciples off the hook to hear the same. It goes for us all as well since our reading from Hebrews said, “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” As much as the judgment of God falls upon a particular person and situation, it always comes back to stare us in the face. None can enter Christ’s kingdom based on their strength and goodness, no not one.

The disciples were broken when the most impossible news hit their hearts. Not only did a successful man walk away, but also wealth itself actually did not pave the way to salvation. Mastery of life in terms of the Law in what was good did not change what God saw in the hearts of men. Matter a fact, Jesus used the imagery of a camel and needle to show how ridiculous works were in justifying sinners. The disciples did not hear good news, but only had distress. Instead of walking away, they asked the ultimate question, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus put the nail in the coffin and turned everything away from humanity saying, “With man it is impossible...”

The Law will never calm our troubled hearts. To focus more on self, more on works, more on humanity denies entrance into the kingdom of God. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword…discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Sinners always seek to shift things away from God to finally, “call the shots.” The best marriages still know what it means to fight against one you love. A good government still suffers when backbiting happens behinds the scenes. Reconciling relationships is important, but falls apart when justifying my life choices is all that matters. Such a sorry state of affairs focused away from God makes things impossible. All of it denies faith in Christ who alone saves.

Jesus directs attention away from man to all things being possible with God. The disciples faced more than the limits of any person. All were captive under the Law of works. Accept God had other plans that made all things possible. As promised by the Psalmist, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalms 34:18). Jesus looking at His disciples not only saw the Law, but the hope He gave by the Gospel. He was the fulfillment to what all feared of judgment and hell from God. Christ was the substitute so any could receive the riches He gave by His sacrifice. God had the power to convert and sustain sinners in His Son. The Word not only broke into hearts, but at last would break out in love by the cross.

God’s Word and Sacrament have become the center of focus for sinners. Jesus made this shift happen by His death and resurrection. No longer is it about humanity, but Him who has loved us. No longer is it works that save, but He who has worked all things for us. No longer is it the self that needs to justify, but Jesus who alone is Savior. By water and the Word, God broke into our hearts joining us to Christ. This life of baptism let us daily confess our sins, since Christ cares to speak forgiveness to set the prisoners free. At His altar, our Lord promises His true body and blood reconciles the brokenness. The fruits of His cross bind life and salvation together in Him. Instead, of sinners trying to “call the shots,” Jesus stands in our place. God at last fills in the gap with His Word.

Yet, Peter still wanted the last word about how the disciples had left more than money, but everything and followed Jesus. Jesus did not dismiss their sacrifice as unimportant or small. Whatever the disciples left behind it would be a profit for them by faith in Christ. However, the reward or satisfaction was not going to be in their work, strength, or decision. It was to glory in Christ and the Gospel for that made life under persecution richly blessed a hundredfold. This was to see far more than wealth of this world but the wealth of God at work in a sinful world by His Word.

Whatever the cost, it is always gain for faith rests in Christ alone. The Christian life is nothing less than fixed on Christ for He alone saves. This life is far from chasing after the wind of what the world says is good. It is to take up our crosses and callings to follow Christ and none other. This life is bigger than our families of the flesh. Baptism blesses us with a family throughout the world built on the Gospel. This life is rich in Christ who values all. His love turns us to love even those that do not deserve it. The sacrifice of Jesus has made all things possible not merely for today, but the eternal victory that stands in the grace given for sinners. God alone does the impossible by breaking into hearts with the richness of His Word. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\_Egyptian\_funerary\_practices#Burial\_goods [↑](#footnote-ref-1)