



Speaker:  
Paul Forrest

## Blessings Now and Forever

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 35 of 35

2/7/2021 (SUN) | Bible: Mark 10:28-34

Then Peter began to say unto him, “Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.” And Jesus answered and said, “Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands (with persecutions); and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus went before them. And they were amazed. And as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve and began to tell them what things should happen unto him saying, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles. And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him. And the third day he shall rise again.”

Last week, we looked at that encounter Jesus had with the rich young magistrate. If you’re not familiar with the story, this rich guy approaches Jesus and asks how he can get eternal life. Jesus says to him, *Go and obey God! You know the rules: don’t steal, don’t commit adultery, and so on.* This lad says he *has* been good. But Jesus knew his heart. He knew he loved his wealth. So he told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor! And at that point, the man backed away, not prepared to make that sacrifice.

Jesus told the crowd, *Do you see how hard it is for rich people to get into God’s Kingdom?* It’s not that when you become a Christian you necessarily have to give up all your possessions, but you do need to lose your *love* for all the things of this world—including your wealth, if you have any. Jesus said it’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

The great thing is, although he paints a bleak picture about all the obstacles men put between themselves and God, he nevertheless shows them salvation is most definitely possible with God. He **can** save people and he **does** save people. Every day. All over the world. When a man, woman or child comes to a halt in their life and turns to God in repentance, he promises to forgive their sins and give them eternal life. No payment required—just a **complete surrender**.

Our passage opens with a statement by Peter. He started telling Jesus about all the disciples had given up to follow him. It looks very much like he was saying, *We’ve done exactly what you told that rich guy to do. We haven’t held on to those things that we loved. To take part in this mission you’ve called us to, we’ve temporarily left even our families behind.* He even asked Jesus what he should expect to get from following him. I despair sometimes, Peter.

Jesus then promises him and the others everyone who's made sacrifices in order to follow him will receive much more—both now and in eternity. Today I'd like to quite simply look at the kind of sacrifices they did make and what they received in exchange.

### Leaving the kingdom of this world

Let's speak about the disciples first. Why did they need to leave anything behind at all? Like I just alluded to, Jesus was calling them to a very special mission. Jesus's ministry on this earth didn't last long, and he needed a group of men who could drop everything during this time to go around preaching and healing with him.

A couple of weeks ago, when I preached on marriage and divorce, I mentioned how good it is if a man or woman is able to live as a single person and devote themselves fully to God. Having a spouse and children is necessary in society at large, and some people feel the need for a family. But it is a responsibility that will sometimes mean being distracted from the work of the gospel.

And this was a unique mission. The ones who had families left them behind. The ones who were fishermen had to walk away from their boats. One of them was a civil servant, and he had to walk away from his tax office.

Family. Property. Social circles. Careers. They had to, for the time being, drop everything and walk away.

But what about everyone else? The Christians who've lived throughout history. And us. How can we apply this to ourselves?

The case of the disciples was a very unusual one. We are not to copy them in this matter.

- If you have a family, God expects you to take care of them.
- If you have a job, God expects you to do it to the best of your ability.
- If you're a student, God expects you to be the best you can.

When someone becomes a Christian, God doesn't ask them to have no possessions, have no family, have no friends, have no job and so on. You may end up in a type of Christian service that needs you to give more things up. But great care needs to be taken in making that sort of decision. What is unacceptable is someone abandoning their responsibilities for the sake of Christian service. If a man neglects his wife and children because he's "doing the Lord's work", God will NOT be impressed. That person needs to attend to BOTH responsibilities: their family *and* the cause of the gospel.

We're not asked to sell our goods. But when you start following Jesus, you don't want to spend your money on the things you formerly did. I used to spend the majority of my income on drink and cigarettes. And I thoroughly enjoyed that life at the time. But when God showed me a new way, there was no going back. I started losing interest in many of the things I used to take pleasure in. And I was more careful about how I spent my money. And Christians, as they are able, love to give offerings to the work of the gospel each week. We could keep the money if we wanted, God says. It's ours to keep or give away. But we *freely choose*, with all gladness, to take a part of our money and donate it to the work of God (and be responsible with the rest too).

We're not asked to give up our jobs. We're to try and be the best employees we can be. We can do that by arriving to work in plenty of time, by being careful not to take too long on our breaks and being diligent and honest in everything we do. In many cases, the Christian won't be the best employee in terms of profit making. A salesman who's prepared to deceive customers can become

far more “successful” than the one who is scrupulously honest. But the believer, if he or she is doing the job the way they're supposed to be, will be respected by their employers and colleagues.

And we're not asked to give up all our friends. Most definitely, the nature of our friendships will change. Some WILL come to an end. A friend who you've gone out drinking with every week may become impatient with the new you and decide, if he can't have the old person back, they're going to find other friends.

Sometimes, the Christian himself will have to sever certain friendships. If they find being in that person's company causes them to fall into temptations, they may have to stop spending time with them. They can still keep contact, of course. But the contact time would have to be minimal. Needless to say, the new believer has a duty to tell all their friends and family about their new-found faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Entering the kingdom of God

When someone becomes a believer, it's described as leaving one kingdom and crossing the border into another. The person who's been shown his sinfulness and the horrible consequences that will come as a result; who has gone to God and said sorry and asked for forgiveness; **that person is said to leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of light.** The kingdom of God. They may live in the same house, in the same street and in the same city, but they are citizens of Zion. A new and better country.

The disciples shelved some responsibilities for the sake of this special ministry. But in following Jesus, they gave something up permanently: the love for the things of this world. And the modern believer has that in common with them. We've all had to renounce our attachment to this world. We have possessions, but we hold them with a loose grip. We have families, but we love God far more than them. We have many other responsibilities, but we'd drop them in an instant if God required us to.

In answer to Peter's question, Jesus promises the disciples and all who follow him throughout time will be more than compensated for anything they've lost in becoming his disciple.

- Have friends abandoned you? You have new friends in the Church of God.
- Have family members started to exclude you? You have the new and much larger family of God's people.
- Are you giving up a property or possessions or had them taken from you? You've entered the society of people who count their own possessions as lent to them by God but belonging to the whole church.

When the New Testament church was getting off the ground, the followers of Jesus had this attitude. Listen to what it says in **Acts 2:44–45** **And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.**

There was no welfare system in those days. The brethren of Jesus Christ had to support one another financially and in many other ways. In our day—in this country anyway—we do have a good welfare and health support system in place for people who struggle financially. It's for that reason we don't see the activity in the church today day like back then.

But we must still hold the attitude that what we own is not ours. **Everything we have is held in trust.** It's been lent to you by God. And you can keep those things and keep your money as long as you are generous with contributing to the Lord's work and you're prepared to let them go if the need arises.

So far, we've been talking about having this new family of believers around us and trusting that they stand ready to help each other whenever they can. But the blessings of God go much further:

- We get to worship God with his people
- We love to spend time with them
- We enjoy singing together
- We take joy in praying together
- And we gather to break bread together

And there's more even more. There's the peace of God in our hearts. A peace based on the understanding that God is in control of all things. A peace that comes from knowing what will happen to you when you've died. The great relief there is in knowing that God has forgiven all your sins. And the knowledge that, anytime you like, you can approach God in prayer and have the very God of heaven listen to **you**.

Manifold blessings. And into this heady mix of blessings that God gives his children, he stirs in some trials. And these trials come in many forms. You may suffer with bodily or mental health. You may be turned on by someone you thought was a friend. And Jesus promises that all those who wish to be courageous, and be at the forefront of the battle, will be *persecuted* too.

**1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.**

Persecution varies dramatically from age to age and from place to place. Persecution can involve being killed. Christians have been shot, stabbed, drowned, beheaded and been stoned to death. They've been thrown into arenas and mauled by wild animals and been locked up in dungeons and left to starve to death. Since the time of the disciples, many millions of believers have been killed for their faith.

At the other extreme, there's the situation we have in present-day Britain. We have plenty of freedoms here. I know we worry about the future. We feel this gradual suppression of our beliefs. Open-air preachers have been arrested, and Christians have lost their jobs just for being faithful to God.

But we do need to get things in perspective. In our country, we're allowed to freely meet unmolested for worship. We can put Christian literature through people's doors. Men can stand in the street and preach the gospel to the crowds. And today we have millions of Christians taking to the internet to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a level of freedom many other generations, and many other places even today, could only dream of. We need to thank God for what we have and also pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who suffer.

What I'm saying is, you may be wondering why *you* haven't had this persecution. If Jesus says that everyone who will obey him properly will suffer persecution, you may wonder if you've maybe been disobedient.

I'll make two points here. firstly, the audience Jesus's words were originally addressed to *would* be suffering persecution. Jesus's disciples did suffer, and some of them were even killed for their faith. Yes, it was a different age, with different circumstances. But the ministry they were involved with would naturally expose them to more persecution. They were working full-time for Jesus. They were travelling around from place to place. In preaching the gospel, they were declaring an unpopular

message to many thousands of people. They lived in a world that was ruled by a pagan superpower. They were even hated by the religious leaders of the day.

You live in a different place. You live in a different generation. Most of you are not in full-time Christian ministry. So there's less potential for you to suffer in any way.

Although persecution in our country today is relatively mild, it can still be very unpleasant. Those who preach in the open-air find themselves subjected to all kinds of verbal abuse and even threats. A crowd once told me they wish they could bring back the Roman Colosseum and feed us all to the lions!

So I wanted to say on the one hand not to be surprised you don't suffer the way others have or do. But as a word of caution, I'd encourage you to take stock of your Christian walk today. Challenge yourself a bit. Ask yourself some hard questions. You might decide you could give a little more time each week to God's work. You could devote some time each week to post Christian leaflets through doors, or you could post Bible texts on social media. Wherever you live and whenever you live, Jesus's principle stands: the more you throw yourself into Christian work, the more likely you are to suffer hostility.

~

So the Christian leaves one country, if you like, and emigrates to another. He leaves the place governed by Satan and becomes a citizen of **God's** country. He has to leave some stuff behind. And what he keeps he must be prepared to give up immediately if need be.

New friends. A new family. Peace. Forgiveness. Access to God. Blessing upon blessing upon blessing.

But the blessing to cap it all is of course **eternal life**. It's to have everything the Christian has now times a thousand. It's to live in a place with no crime. No animal abuse. No hatred. No sorrow. Surrounded by happy, loving people who you'll never fall out with.

And the world that God's prepared for the Christian is a place **where God himself is with his people**. They get to see their saviour Jesus Christ, face to face.

And if this unimaginable blessedness were given to us for a thousand years, it would be a magnificent gift. **But the great wonder of that existence is that it will never end**. Every day a perfect day, and a happy comfort knowing that you'll never have to leave it behind. No one will get old and die. Just a never-ending succession of perfect days.

### How all this is obtained

How is it God can do all this? How can he take someone who's in rebellion to him and have them in his presence? After all, God is holy. And man is the complete opposite! Every member of the human race who's ever lived—aside from Jesus himself—has come into this world sinning. They've grown up sinning. And as they've become adults, people have learned both to sin in a greater variety of ways *and* hide it well.

Mankind faces eternal punishment from almighty God. That's what we deserved. Every one of us. It's in a place our old Bibles call "hell". It's horrible and it's forever.

But we learned last week that WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. And in his mercy, God elected a people who he would save from their sin and all the terrible consequences of it. For this minority of the human race, **the Son of God came into this world as a man in order to die in their place**.

See in verse 32 how amazed they were! He was *determined* to go to his death. This wasn't resigning himself to a failure of his mission. This was to be the main event in God's salvation, and it was planned out before God even made the world.

Jesus outlines this again in verses 33 and 34. This is the third occasion he foretold his death. It started off in Mark chapter 8 with quite a brief mention. In chapter 9, he added another detail of his being betrayed into the hands of his enemies. And in today's prediction, he adds more detail. He tells how he'll first be handed over to the religious leaders. They'd condemn him to death but, because they didn't have the legal ability to give the death penalty, they'd hand Jesus over to the Roman authorities.

He tells them they'd ridicule him. They'd humiliate him. They'd hurt him. His bare back would be shredded by the whips of the Roman soldiers. People would spit in his face. (By the way, it wasn't just the Roman soldiers who did this; the religious leaders spat in his face too. They were happy to contribute to the torture of this man.)

**Mark 14:65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, "Prophecy!" And the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.**

This man going around preaching people should obey God. This man who'd changed people's lives by healing them of diseases. This man they took, put a hood over his head, pushed him about and punched him and taunted him saying, *Go on then. If you're a prophet, tell us which one of us just hit you.* Again: *Go on; which one of us was that?* And so it went on until all that was left was a man with blood dripping from his head to his toes.

When we compare the three predictions Jesus made, there are a couple of details that are seen in all three. They are (a) his death, and (b) his resurrection. His illegal conviction and his subsequent torture one thing. **But it was at the cross where the atonement would take place.**

When they nailed him to a tree, stuck between two criminals, all the people could see at that point was a man suffering mental and physical anguish and pain. But the real suffering was just about to start. Unseen to the onlookers, the Son of God was made to suffer in his soul for all the sins of all the people who would ultimately trust in him. **God found a way to transfer our guilt to his own son and punished HIM for it.** When the punishment had finished, the Son of God died.

The experience of the person who trusts in Jesus Christ goes roughly like this:

- They hear the gospel message
- They learn they're a sinner
- God by his Holy Spirit reveals to that person they're in danger unless they seek salvation.
- They pray to God for rescue. And although every person's prayer is different, they all have this one thing in common: **they believe wholeheartedly that what happened at Calvary was for their benefit.** They believe they were one of the ones Jesus died for. And it's through this God-given trust in Jesus they're saved. They enter into a world of blessings.

**Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.**

The believer's joy is broken from time to time. Those trials come, and they may find they temporarily lose the joy of their salvation. But:

- If they're in constant prayer

- If they lean on God for everything
- If they make use of the Bible, God's word
- If they fellowship regularly with the Lord's people
- If they meet each week to worship God publicly
- If they share their faith with others
- IN OTHER WORDS, IF THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES AS THEY ARE DIRECTED BY GOD, THEY WILL NOT LONG DWELL IN THE DARKNESS OF SADNESS. The God who sends trials to refine us will also wipe away the tears they cause.

Blessings now, and a paradise to come after death, as we receive that heavenly reward of new and incorruptible bodies suited for life in that glorious world.

Let me just finish by addressing anyone listening who's just a pretend Christian. This is a serious business, so I'll risk causing offence by being plain with you:

- If your entire trust is not in God
- If you still think there's something good about you that will mean that God must accept you
- If your Christian life does not include fellowship and worship with other believers; **you are probably lost.**

But thanks be to God that you're listening to this today. I might be ranked as last among preachers, but you **have** heard the gospel today. You've heard what Jesus has done and been told unless you turn to God in repentance, willing to receive his free gift of salvation, you have no hope.

A word from me and all the believers with me. Don't let the sun go down today before you get on your knees and pray to God for deliverance. We, the believers at New Road church, the believers in all the other churches; **we are all living proof that God rescues sinners, blesses them with manifold blessings and gives them the promise of eternal life.** So we'll leave you now, with all our prayers, in the hands of our good and gracious God.

Amen.