

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: MARK 10:28-31 | SERMON TITLE: THE REWARD OF DISCIPLESHIP****DAVE WAGNER**

Jesus offers people eternal life. Any who want it can have it. There's just one condition: You have to follow Christ. Eternal life can be had on no other terms. Eternal life is like a far away city. You can go there if you want, but the only way to get there is by travelling the same road Jesus traveled.

So what road did he travel? He traveled the Cross-Road; that's the road that leads to crucifixion. You might call it the death-road, since it entails a daily death to self. And last time Jesus revealed what all this means for disciples and their possessions.

I told you last time that Jesus requires every disciple to renounce all he has to follow Christ. You do not get to be Lord over your possessions if you want eternal life. You have to give it all up to Christ.

Now let's face it: For most people that's a tall order. Too tall. Jesus is asking too much, people think. The rich young ruler thought that and he walked away from eternal life to go back to his possessions. That's tragic.

It's tragic because he abandoned a greater treasure to retain a lesser treasure. And that's the whole reason people balk at Jesus' commands concerning wealth: They don't know that eternal life is greater treasure than their possessions.

What Christ offers is a greater reward than anything we possess. And that's the subject of today's text: Jesus offers great reward for anyone who will renounce their possessions and become his disciple. Let's look at the text.

The Text

We continue on from last week's story. Jesus called the rich, young ruler to renounce all his possessions and follow Jesus; the young man refused and went away sad. Then Jesus remarked on how hard it is for rich people to enter the kingdom. That's where we pick up today.

Peter apparently sees this as a good chance to remind Jesus that what the rich, young ruler won't do, the 12 already did. There is perhaps in Peter's comment a touch of self-congratulation; I'll show you why I think that in a minute.

So Peter is pointing to his own obedience; he has renounced his possessions. He has left all. He has not allowed his wealth to get in his way. And that's true; Peter has done well so far, though his attitude and understanding have a long way to go.

And how does Jesus respond? Does Jesus rebuke Peter for his mercenary motives? Is Jesus angry that Peter seems to be fishing for reward? Not at all, folks. I want you to see clearly that Jesus has zero problem with disciples seeking the reward of eternal life. That is a right motive for following Christ. In fact, we won't pursue it today but I tell you whoever does not desire the reward of God's presence and kingdom is sinning by their very lack of desire. And not desiring God is not only sin, it is possibly the most offensive sin.

Instead of rebuking Peter, Jesus points out Peter's reward. And that reward has two parts, one pertaining to this life and the other pertaining to the next.

First, this life: Jesus promises that whoever leaves family and possessions for Jesus and the Gospel will get back 100 times as much in this life! Whoever leaves his home and land for Jesus gets back a hundred homes and lands in this life.

Whoever leaves a mother for Jesus gets back a hundred mothers in this life! Now what is Jesus talking about?

The likely answer is that followers of Christ often lose many things at their conversion; friends, family, job, standard of living, etc. But then the Christian enters the Christian community, and that community affords 100 mothers to replace the one who disowned him. As a servant of Christ he is welcomed into 100 homes to replace the one he was forced to leave for Christ's sake.

What is surprising is that the disciple need not wait for heaven to obtain these blessings! God intends to load you down with blessings 100 fold in this life, even before you enter the kingdom!

Actually we should have expected that. Whatever God takes away with his right hand he gives back with his left. Do we really think God will be found a niggardly master when all is said and done? Do we think we'll go out to serve him on our own dime and he won't make it good?

Listen to me: The only reason God commanded you to empty your hands of all your possessions, is so he can fill them with more possessions. God wants to make you very wealthy indeed; but he has one condition: You have to empty your hands first.

You have to let go of everything you call "Yours." You have to rid yourself of lesser gems so there's room for him to fill you with greater ones. But God's will is that you be full to overflowing with greater ones.

As Lewis put it, God is a great hedonist at heart. In Christ, there is no such thing as self-denial for its own sake. If we must deny ourselves it's so we may receive our selves back, later on, better, brighter, and more

glorious. Remember, it isn't God who made the world what it is today, full of deprivation and unfulfilled desire; that's the work of men and devils, not God.

God made a world very good at the beginning. God made a promised land flowing with milk and honey and wine. That's who God is.

And so apparently, God cannot restrain himself from giving disciples abundant gifts even in this life, even before our work is totally finished. And in this life many of those gifts are found inside the Christian community. Listen:

Psalm 16:2-3 ² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you." ³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.

The Psalmist takes extreme delight in the people of God. They are his family and friends, his community, his comrades, his exceeding pleasure. And enjoying the fellowship of the people of God more than makes up for many of the things we lose in coming to Christ, even a hundred fold.

Now many of you know the pain of family strife. Some of you know what it is to be unloved by parents, or siblings, or children, or a spouse. And in some cases the precipitating factor is your allegiance to Christ. Don't worry about it at all: The community of Christ will more than make up for that loss.

Yahweh sets the lonely in families. He takes the eunuch, and the barren woman, who feel like a dry tree, and he makes them fruitful with a hundred children! Even if our very mother, a nursing mother should forget us, Yahweh will never forget us because we are inscribed on his hands!

Go on and lose it for Christ, brothers! Whatever it is, go on and lose it. Put Him to the test and see if he doesn't pour out a blessing one hundred fold for you! You just see if he comes up short! Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. Not even in this life! That's the first part of the reward, pertaining to this life.

Here's the second part, pertaining to the next: Everyone who renounces their possessions gets eternal life in the age to come.

Picture history in two ages. This present, evil age, and the future, golden age of blessedness. Followers of Christ receive eternal life in the age to come.

It is life that doesn't end. It is life which is not subject to death. Further, it is life free from the toil, pain, sin, tragedy, disappointment and evil of this age. It is blessed life; it is the life God intended for his creatures.

Above all, it is life in the direct presence of God. It is a life of union and communion with God. He comes near to us, and we walk in his light. For this you were created.

This is what the rich, young ruler was asking for. This is what he gave up in order to retain a comfortable retirement. And folks, that's how I know he didn't know God. For all his commandment keeping, he had never met God a day in his life.

How do I know? Because the man who meets God thereafter longs for God above all. Tell that man to renounce all he owns and he will have done it before you finish telling him. He's already done it. He's already been separated from the world and all it contains. He's already dead; dead to this present, evil age.

Simply put, eternal life is life in the fullness of the blessing, and presence, and love and glory, and power of God. This is what you are headed for if you will give up all you own to follow Jesus.

The Warning

Well, that sounds pretty good. We give up our stuff but get 100 times back now and then eternal life. It's a good deal; we get back more than we give. The wise man gladly accepts this arrangement because he knows a good deal when he sees one.

But there's a little more to add to this picture. In fact, Jesus has two warnings to give, again, one for this life and one for the next. What are they?

First, for this life. Remember how we receive a hundred fold back in the Christian community? Well, that's not all we receive. We also receive persecutions.

Renouncing our possessions is painful, but it isn't the end of the disciple's pain in this life. Every Christian is appointed for trials. That's part of the deal.

And it is so much part of the deal that whoever will not accept such persecutions is not permitted, and not able, to follow Christ. And no following Christ means no eternal life.

What kind of persecutions? Well, how about the same kind Jesus faced. People hated Jesus because he told them the truth, he testified that their deeds were evil. He was a holy man who preached incessantly that everyone should do the will of God, from the heart, on pain of death. And people hated him for it.

So, you may have eternal life if you would like it. But it is obtained a certain way. That way includes, necessarily includes, people hating you for Christ's sake. Are you ready for that?

Are you ready to be called a bigot, or racist, or sexist, or anti-gay, or a cave-man, or a fundamentalist, for Jesus? Are you willing to be thought backward and unscientific? Are you willing to be thought hateful, cruel and mean? This way lies eternal life.

If you insist on having the good opinion of men, you must lose the good opinion of God. If you insist on having the good life now, you must lose eternal life later. There's no other way.

How can you believe, who seek glory from men but do not seek the glory that comes from God alone? Many of the Pharisees believed Christ but wouldn't confess him for they loved the praise of men. The desire for human praise makes saving faith impossible. If you must have man's praise you may have it; it will just cost you heaven, that's all.

So, brothers, along with our possessions we must also renounce human praise. Otherwise we can't be saved. That's the warning for this life.

The warning for the next life works differently. Listen again:

Mark 10:31 ³¹ **But many who are first will be last, and the last first."**

Now why did Jesus say that? How does that fit in this text?

Remember I told you I thought Peter's comment was somewhat self-congratulatory? This is why. I believe Peter's attitude reveals some wrong thinking which Jesus addresses with this statement. So what does it mean?

I take it to mean here that position in the kingdom is a matter of God's own prerogative. God is free to give his gifts to whom he will, and as he will, and as much as he will, and it's none of our business how he does it.

So, envision Peter watching gladly as the rich, young ruler leaves defeated, unwilling to pay the price of discipleship. Peter then comments on how what that guy didn't have the guts to do, Peter and the others have courageously done. And perhaps implicit in Peter's comment is a sort of smugness, a sort of self-congratulation as he thinks of the points he has earned in the kingdom of God. After all, Peter's actions must ensure that he now has very high place in the kingdom!

So Jesus says, "Uh, Peter, watch out. The kingdom doesn't work like that. It isn't tit for tat; position in the kingdom cannot be earned. It is a matter of gracious gift from God. God decides who gets in and where they sit and he is free to overturn human expectation. Some will do great things for God and expect great things in return as payment; others will seemingly do little for God but God will move them to the front of the line. Be ready for surprises, Peter."

So this is a warning based on divine grace, and based upon The Great Reversal. We must never think the sacrifices we make or the persecutions we suffer entitle us to high position in the kingdom; they don't. High position in the kingdom is a matter of grace. God decides and he decides freely. Behold the Free Will of God.

And further, God loves reversing things and up-ending human expectation. God loves moving the losers to the front of the line. The guys who bore the burden and heat of the day complain; when they see how gracious God is it makes them mad!

Does God's grace make you mad? Does it irk you to see what blessings others get, blessings which you believe they don't deserve? Lets prepare ourselves for Grace and Reversal right now; then we won't walk into the kingdom with wrong expectations.

Summary

So, great reward is coming for those who renounce their possessions, and human praise, to follow Jesus. A hundred fold in this age and eternal life in the age to come. But none of this implies that position in the kingdom is earned by our renunciation; the kingdom cannot be earned, since it is an entirely gracious gift from the Father.