

STONE HARBOR

P.O. Box 4049
Monterey CA, 93942
831.655.5800
www.stoneharborchurch.org
Pastor Johnny Potter

June 14, 2009

About The Difficulty Of Entering The KOG (Kingdom Of God)

Mark 10:17-31

INTRODUCTION

Today we will consider a scripture that will change your life! Of course this is true for every passage of this inspired book thoughtfully considered with reliance on and submission to the Holy Spirit.

As I read this passage know that the story itself teaches. So I invite you to listen to and even get caught up in the passion and tragedy of the story, then in the second part Jesus will instruct His disciples turning the event into an object lesson in their training. My hope and prayer it will train us as well.

Let's read Mark 10:17-31

[Prayer for the proper understanding of the passage and for the Holy Spirit to transform us by the renewing of our minds.]

The rich young ruler asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers treating the inheritance of eternal life (v.17, 30) as equivalent with salvation (v. 26) and entrance into the KOG (vv. 23, 24, 25)

This passage is really a continuation of Jesus training His disciples about the KOG. Specifically here Jesus teaches about the difficulty of entering the KOG.

I. Entering the KOG is HARD

A. It is not an easy and casual "whenever it fits just come on by and come on in..." proposition

Entering the KOG is hard and will require more thought than you might think. Not because God wants to see you pay your dues and struggle to find your way in,

but because entrance is secured in a way **other than most people first think**. The rich young ruler learned that ...

B. It takes more than life-long obedience to the Law

Look at verses 19-20 again.

- He recognized his spiritual need. Every person needs to come to the end of their own efforts and see that they are ineffective and unable to close the gap between themselves and “eternal life.” Which is the same as saying, “We can’t save ourselves.” We can’t enter the KOG on our own power. Have you come to this awareness of your own inability? We best learn this lesson now for our own good and for the good of those we will influence. We don’t want to be giving people a bum steer and sending them out to dig a whole and then fill it up again. Which is what we are doing if we think we can obey God’s rules and qualify for the KOG that way.

Romans 8:3 -- For what the **Law could not** do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

Our obedience to the Law of God will never secure our entrance to the KOG!

Salvation is a gift He gives not a wage we earn. That being said...

C. Salvation is the most costly gift you’ll ever receive

Verses 21-22

1. The Divine Diagnosis

Disease: Incapacitating Wealth And Self Reliance

We can be have our hands so full of possessions that we are unable to grasp that which is given to us by God and is of immeasurably greater value.

Jesus: **“One thing you lack...”** He sees lack in the midst of wealth and religious piety!

2. The Divine Remedy

V. 21

“...go and sell...give...come, and follow Me.”

3. The Human Tragedy

V. 22

This man stood at the very entrance to the KOG with the king Himself inviting him in, yet sadly he declined. ☹

Is there any loss greater than that of one who comes upon the door of eternal life and does not enter to possess its immeasurable value, trading it for the soon to be rusted trinkets of this time bound tarnished world? As I studied this past week I felt as if I were standing on the side and watching this drama and

shouting in my heart, "Choose the door, choose The Door! Come to Jesus. Follow Him! Enter into the KOG!"

What was that Jim Carey movie where he grew up in a fake world that was really a TV set. Everyone else were actors and knew it was an artificial world but Jim Carey. Finally he figured it out as a young man and was faced with a dilemma, do I stay in the world I know, and trust the voice of the man who created this sub-world; or do I go through the door which leads to the real world and true freedom but a world that I don't know. All the TV fans were pulling for him: Choose the door, don't listen to him who wants you to settle for a life in his false world of play actors...

The rich young ruler, as every man will, faced a dilemma: do I enter and hopefully receive what I know I don't have at the cost of what I'm sure I do have.

Optional Illus.¹

What value do we put on our relationship with God our heavenly Father who adopts us as His children; or what value do we place on Jesus our spiritual husband who takes us as His precious bride for better or for worse; or, what value does the Christian assign to the Holy Spirit who indwells us in the purest of all intimacy?

We know in the very core of our beings that the value of union and intimacy with God is the greatest of all. It is in us by design to see this value. We know without definitive quantitative analysis that what Jesus extends to us is the most valuable possession of all. Indeed it is life itself.

And yet many falter and weight what is seen, more highly than what is unseen. [But this is a matter of faith which inspire that great poet J.M. Potter to pen, "Lord, give us the faith to know what is unseen yet true, give us eyes that we may know and receive You."]

The human tragedy is that there are so many like this rich man who come so close to entering the kingdom of God, but do not go through "the door" of Jesus by faith even though invited.

Jesus teaches in this passage that ...

D. Salvation is impossible to secure by any action of any man

1. Clear statements of the difficulty of entering the KOG
 - v. 23 – "How hard it will be...,
 - v. 24 – "How hard it is to enter...
 - v. 25 – "It is easier for a camel..."
 - v. 27. – "...with people it is impossible..."

2. Why it is hard

- Because man operates according to what is seen and not by faith. Here the disciples looked at the rich young pious powerful man who kept all the requirements of the Law from his youth up (v. 20) and thought if he can't enter the KOG with all he has going for him, "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26 b)
- This of course just highlights one of the most insidious and long living misunderstandings about how we must come to God – that we must be or do something in order for God to accept us.
- **Last week's lesson:** it is not about our merit, in fact all who enter the KOG, all who are saved, must receive the KOG, must receive Jesus, how? As a child. And how is that? With nothing to offer and everything to receive. Like a nursing babe -- powerless and dependent on the strength and love of the mother who extends herself to the child. God in perfect love and strength extends Himself to us – we must receive Him as a child. And last week we asked, is this how you have come to Jesus?
- **This week's lesson:** the same lesson in grown up clothes. Even the rich ruler for all his wealth and power and piety finds it impossible to enter the KOG and inherit the eternal life he seeks. At least it's impossible in his own strength.

Trans. In v. 27, Jesus says, "With people it is impossible..." to enter the KOG. Oh how glad I am that He continued that statement "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." When it comes to entering the KOG, here is great hope for us, for...

II. **God Makes It Happen (v. 27)**

None of us can do it. But, because it is God's desire to dwell with us in a loving intimate relationship as our Father, It is as if He carries us in.

A. This is the Gospel – God Restores What We Can Not!

B. From Gen to Rev

The gospel has always been the story of God redeeming man **In Spite Of** His failings. Though man is unfaithful and unloving to God, God remains faithful and loving to man.

1. Sacred Space example from Ark of the Covenant

- "The Drawing" –
 - God over the ark (Shekinah glory cloud cf. Ex 25:22 and Lev 16:2)
 - Mercy Seat
 - Ark contained the broken tablets indicating the broken covenant
 - Blood of the animals killed as a substitute for that of covenant breaking man and regarded by God as atoning for their sins

- High Priest
- People of Israel
- The drawing is of God connected to His covenant breaking people by the blood of a substitutionary atoning sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy seat by the high priest. God with man, but at a distance through layers of mediation.
- “The Finished Picture” – Jesus as the final atoning sacrifice offered once for all for the people God would call to Himself. God joined to His people by Jesus who is the New Covenant.
- *In the context of its unfaithfulness to the covenant, the mercy seat and its annual ritual conveyed to Israel that divine grace in the provision of substitutionary atonement constituted the mediating agency that bound them as covenant-breakers to Yahweh, their faithful covenant Father-God.* (Kit Culver, Sacred Space p. 78)

C. It is God Who Makes it Happen for Us and Our Loved Ones

- 1. For Us – We Must Respond to Jesus Ourselves This Way**
- 2. For Our Loved Ones – Preach This Gospel, The Gospel Of Grace**

Although we must come to Jesus not on our own merit but carried there by the goodness and power of God, and contrary to the assessment of the man in this story...

III. Entering the KOG is Worth It, Big Time! (28-31)

A. The Cost of Following Jesus

1. v. 28 What the disciples left -- Peter and the disciples:
 - a. “left everything”
 - b. followed Jesus – and therefore did NOT follow themselves or any other.
2. v. 29 Jesus lists some of the things that may have to be left:
 - a. house
 - b. brother or sisters
 - c. mother or father
 - d. children
 - e. farms
3. Remember the cost considered by the rich ruler
 - a. Wealth – sell and give to poor
 - b. Position -- From leader to follower
 - c. Autonomy – From I call the shots to Jesus calls the shots
 - d. Power – From ruler to disciple
4. The Cost to Me
 - a. Personal Autonomy – I can no longer live as if Jesus didn't. The life steering question is no longer, “What would Johnny do,” but, “What would Jesus do?” If He actually is Lord of my life then I will do what He asks me to do. **If I only say He is Lord but do not do what He**

says, it simply indicates that I'm able to say things that are not true. We used to call that lying. Now we soften it a bit and call it spin and chuckle.

- b. My Life – Of course we are learning that focusing on what we **do** is like addressing the symptom of an illness without treating the cause of the illness itself. **When it comes to our relationship with God the true cost of following Jesus is my life. Following Jesus requires that I "die."** The Johnny that lives apart from God according to the nature I was born with must die and I must be born again a second time this time as a new creation in Christ no longer living according to the old nature but now living as one joined to Christ even filled with His Spirit. I have died and my life is now hidden in Christ with God. It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. Old things have passed away all things become new. **So the cost of following Jesus into the KOG is your life.**
- c. But the life that you give up is just a tarnished shadow of the true and better life God intends for you to enjoy – a life of intimate communion with Him marked not by distance and autonomy from Him but by the closeness and the dependence of a child upon his father.
- d. In fact what we first conceive life to be (human strength vitality and self determination freedom to be who I want to be and do what I want to do...) is actually death according to God. Life apart from God is not life at all! We buy into the lie and then get hooked and blinded by the ruler of this world until it takes its toll on us and we are forced to admit that the life I was living was death disguised.
- e. Our enemy is like the un-tethered cigarette advertisers who glorify their addictive destructive product selling as good that which kills. So too we have bought the lie of the world's ultimate false advertiser that life outside of intimacy with God is strong, desirable and free; when in fact it is impotent, ugly and lived in captivity to one who seeks our destruction.
- f. Once we consider what true life is, we can see that we were placing value in a counterfeit life. We were conned. What we thought was life was a fake. It was cheap costume jewelry. It was a "ticket" we bought on the street that only looked like a real ticket. What we thought was life turns out to be death, and what we thought was death turns out to be life indeed – in fact a life of far greater richness and reward than we could ever imagine.

So yes there is a cost to entering the KOG by coming to Jesus empty handed, but it pales in comparison to ...

B. The Value of Coming To and Following Jesus

The person who leaves behind his former "society" (family) and his network of provision (farm) for Jesus sake and for the sake of His gospel (v.29) will

receive “a hundred times as much...” (30). There is a cost to following Jesus but it is more than offset by the gain.

Here Jesus speaks of the cost by citing family relationships left.ⁱⁱ

Those who come to Jesus and follow Him are considered His new family and that implies not only that **He** has gained a new family but that we who leave our old and follow Him gain a new family as well – we gain the Family of God.

It is in this sense that He describes what will be gained by following Him. William Lane comments, “... all that is lost in one society (v.29) will be regained a hundredfold in the new society created by the dynamic of the gospel (v. 30)... God takes nothing away from a man without restoring it to him in a new and glorious form.” p. 372

Jesus speaks of what is gained in two time periods:

1. “...now in the present age...” (30a)
 - a. We who leave families to follow Jesus will gain: Houses, brothers and sisters, mothers, children and farms in the sense that we have gained a new and global family whose Father is God.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - b. “Along with persecutions” – How I love the full disclosure of the Scriptures. How I love that Jesus didn’t sugar coat true life. How I love that we will have persecution in the sense that they allow us to enter into the fellowship of the suffering of Christ and how they are used in the hands of our perfect God to refine us and perfect us and bring Christ to those who see us patiently endure them. No persecution or trial is enjoyable in the moment, but they bear good fruit just as labor brings forth precious new life.

Our gain is also...

2. In the age to come (30b)
 - a. “eternal life” – the very thing the rich man’s soul longed for (17)
 - b. = salvation
 - c. = entrance to the KOG

C. A Final Caution and Reminder As We Follow Jesus

Jesus concludes in V. 31, “But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.” This has been variously interpreted, but I take it in this context to be a reminder that things are different in the economy of God than they are in the economy of man. In fact they are upside-down; or at least they appear that way to us because we are used to looking at things through the lenses of the natural mind which does not correctly perceive the reality of God.

I hear in this closing what Jesus has already said in 9:35, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.”

So, it is not riches or power or position or a certain social standing, it is not even about leaving everything behind as an act of religious piety; rather entering the KOG, being saved, inheriting eternal life, is all about being “last” in the eyes of the world. In 13-16 Jesus taught that no one will enter the KOG unless they do so as a child. The child was **last** in social standing. In this passage the rich, young, devout ruler -- **first** in the eyes of the world -- is counted as **last** in the economy of God.

It is a whole new way of thinking. Jesus wants us to see things differently than the world apart from Him sees them. I have found that I don't think this way automatically even after 28 years of being a believer in Jesus. My life experience teaches me that the work of being transformed happens slowly. Currently I'm in kind of a spring season of new growth. I'm seeing things in God's word and therefore coming to know God better at a quicker pace than at other times of my life. It is both unsettling, because I'd like to think I've got it all figured out, and exciting, because it means I can know God more fully.

The caution I hear in Jesus words here is don't evaluate things according to your natural mind, but instead see things through God's eyes. What you call first, God calls last.

Based on the use of Jesus words in the Gospel of Matthew I also see Jesus training His disciples to understand that when someone comes to Jesus to follow Him, early in life (first) or on his death bed (last) it makes no difference as to his salvation. God chooses to give salvation to those He chooses when He chooses. So should one come to Jesus late in His life, do not begrudge Him God's gift thinking you should somehow get more since you came earlier. Salvation, Kingdom citizenship, is a gift from God no man merits. Don't sweat the other people who come to Jesus after you and seem to have to do less work in the vineyard, but rejoice with the angels in heaven that God has extended grace to them as well.

“But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”

CONCLUSION

What we do with this story or the rich young devout ruler and Jesus teaching that comes on its heels?

We certainly **don't** want to be that rich man going away from Jesus grieving (v.22). And we certainly **do** want to remedy the one thing we lack (v.21). So maybe this would be a good time to pay especially good attention to anything the Holy Spirit has to minister to our spirits.

Let's do so in prayer. Allow me to guide our prayers in a quiet time of giving the Holy Spirit our focused attention. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, who would You have us be that we are not yet? What would You have us do that we aren't yet doing? In what way am I the rich young ruler? Lord what "one thing" do I lack? Do I have something or someone in my life that prevents me from coming to You Lord Jesus and following You the way you have designed me to? Is it money, is it power, is it possessions, is it self-righteousness or religious acts? Are you calling me to get rid of something in my life so that I might be free to come to and follow You as never before?

You convinced me in this passage that entering the KOG is hard in fact impossible. Have I in the past wrongly thought it easy and never really come to You the way You want me to?

Therefore Lord, we come to You relying only on You and Your grace asking You to do what we can not. Even if we have been a Christian for 60 years, we each come afresh to You as a child depending on You alone. Oh Lord, give me the strength to be weak. Give me the faith to value what I can not see. Help me to see that first is last and last is first.

Jesus, we lay down pride and we take Your hand in humility.

Father, help us to be and live as those joined to You by the atoning blood of Christ.

Spirit, continue the work of transformation in us until Christ has been completely formed in us.

Endnotes

ⁱ If the man was a business man it could have been for him an analysis of value. Which path will give me the highest return? Is it what Jesus is offering, or that which I have in my possession already?

One might see an element of time value in this decision -- what is of greater value to you, \$10,000 now or \$10,000 in 20 years?

Additionally, what he already had was seen, clearly defined and easy to quantify—400 talents of gold, 2,000 shekels of silver, three large fields, 200 camels, 20 slaves.... What Jesus offered was unseen, undefined and more difficult to quantify. One might look at this and see an element of risk involved in the decision and discount the value of what Jesus has to offer us in the future. Which, after all, would you rather have \$10,000 for sure or \$10,000 maybe?

The rich man in this story went with the \$10,000 he had that was for sure.

Let me say that even if we look at this as a question maximizing benefit to self, the rich man did NOT make the best decision, for he apparently neither factored in the value the benefits of the future dividends as a KOG shareholder distributed daily for all eternity, nor did he

factor in the cost of daily eternal separation from God. Had he factored in these two additional elements to his analysis, he would have gone with Jesus.

But this of course is not a financial decision and the goal is not about maximizing wealth now or even my personal advantage for eternity. It is more of a **relational decision** and the goal is **union with God**.

What value do you put on a relationship? Hypothetically if I offered you \$10,000 or a good relationship with your spouse what would you choose? If I offered you \$10,000 or a good relationship with your children what would you choose? How about \$10K or a good relationship with one or both of your parents? If I offered you \$10,000 or a good relationship with a perfect spouse or a perfect child or a perfect father or mother what would you choose? The last question is really the most realistic in this discussion for we **are** talking about choosing a relationship with God who is perfect in every way.

ⁱⁱ He had already paved the way for this in Mark 3:31-35 where instead of dropping everything when His family showed up at the place of His ministry, He said, **“Who are My mother and My brothers?”** And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, **“Behold, My mother and My brother! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”** We see that those who come to Jesus and follow Him (sitting around Him listening to His teaching) are considered His new family and that implies not only that **He** has gained a new family but that we who leave our old and follow Him gain a new family as well – we gain the Family of God.

- a. ⁱⁱⁱ Houses and [in what sense? Sharing all things in common? Maybe in the sense that when Jesus sent His disciples out on mission they were to stay in other’s houses and accept their hospitality (6:10 & ctx). Maybe the degree to which I can’t say this in my life is somewhat of a statement of the lack of fulfillment of the church as the church of God’s intention. If it were all that God intended it to be I may very well feel welcome in homes all over the world.]
- b. Brothers and sisters and [all believers are now my brothers and sisters! We call each other this, but once again the very fact that I will have my brother and sister stay in my house when they travel and I don’t typically have others stay in my home could indicate that we’ve lost a little bit of what God intended for the church. That being said in my house in our body we do have people right now who are extending hospitality to their brothers and sisters who need a place to stay. That is the church being the church.]
- c. Mothers and [Those who look out for me. I am the recipient of some mothering from the “new society” of God’s family]
- d. Children and [Those who receive from me]
- e. Farms [Places that provide my food]