

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

The Blessings Of Discipleship

Villa Rica 3/2/03

Mark 10:23-31 (Cf. Matt 19:22-30; Lu. 18:28-30)

Mark 10:23 through Mark 10:31 23And Jesus, looking around, said* to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" 24The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered* again and said* to them, "Children, how hard 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 man to enter the kingdom of God." 26They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" 27Looking at them, Jesus said*, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." 28Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29Jesus 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 farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. 31"But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

The rich young ruler had come to Jesus wanting to know what he had to do to inherit eternal life and the Lord had told him that he needed to sell all that he had and give the money to the poor and then to come and follow Christ. But the young man couldn't do it. He went away sad because he was a rich man. Jesus made the comment that it was harder for a rich man to enter heaven than it was for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Since that is literally impossible the disciples then asked who could possibly be saved. And Jesus told them that with men it was impossible but not with God. This of course speaks of the grace of God that enables a person to break with his sin, with his old life, with his family, his friends, his money, in order to be a disciple of Jesus.

But that teaching led Peter to say to him, **Matt. 19:27** "**Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?**" I am so glad that Peter asked that question. The answer of Jesus ought to thrill your heart.

I. Discipleship Blessings Received In This Life

A. First let me say that although Peter left everything he hadn't really left all that much. He was a fisherman and fishermen are not noted for being rich men. There may be a few men who own fisheries and have built a business from the fishing industry who have amassed some wealth, but most of them are just ordinary workingmen.

I had a funeral one time in Savannah for a shrimp fisherman. His family owned a couple of fishing boats and I was asked to conduct his funeral. I had never met the man. He was not a member of my church, but I was called upon to have the funeral. We have those kinds of opportunities in the ministry and I was able to witness to his family. I don't believe any of them went to church. They weren't rich but they were not doing badly either.

But Peter and the others were not in the big time. They only had small boats to fish from and they were not on the ocean, just the Sea of Galilee. I am not putting down what they did but I merely point out that Peter didn't leave a fleet of large ships and a big business to follow Jesus.

I can think of my own small resources when I came to Jesus. I just lived from payday to payday and about all I owned was an automobile that wasn't paid for. So I can't say that I left very much. But we do tend to think we left a lot. We leave our worldly ambitions, our self-will, our independence, and if we have any possessions there is a willingness to give it all up. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to leave all, to forsake all.

B. But what did Christ say we gained in this life? He said that we would gain houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms. That is almost a conundrum, a puzzle. He had just gotten through saying that a man had to give up everything. The rich man was told to sell all that he had and give it to the poor. In the next breath he tells Peter that for following him and the gospel he would have houses, brethren and lands added to him a hundred fold. Whatever was given up would be replenished many times over. So on the one hand we are to give up everything, but after we have done that and made peace about that and begun to

serve Christ and the gospel we find that the spigot is opened up with all kinds of blessings.

Faith always works that way. We have to give up faith in ourselves to be a Christian. We have to trust Christ for all of our needs. This is hard to do. The rich man finds this impossible to do because he had come to the place that he believes money is his security and his strong tower. To give up his trust in that and trust in Christ is an exchange of faith in money for a trust in God to take care of him, to provide for him, to protect him.

We have on our money, *In God We Trust*. Before her death Madelyn Murray O'Hair tried to remove our nations' motto, *In God We Trust* from our coins and bills.

A lot of Americans know that *In God We Trust* is on our money but they really haven't put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. *In God We Trust* doesn't really apply to many in this land.

But Jesus is teaching here that when a person truly converts to Jesus Christ, then God sees to it that all of his needs are amply met. He promises here that a person will actually gain much more than he gives up.

That has certainly been true for me. Judy and I thank God every day for all he does for us and has given to us. First of all we have thousands of friends and relatives in the Church of Jesus Christ. We have brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers and children galore. The Church is our family and because we have served several churches we have close ties to many people. We can go anywhere and find Christian brothers and sisters.

On the other hand, unlike some of you, our personal family is fairly small. We have four children and six grandchildren. I have one living sister, one niece and one nephew plus their four children and some cousins in Florida and Ohio that I scarcely know. Judy has no brothers or sisters, only some cousins. Suppose we were not disciples of Christ? That's all the family we would have. But in the Church of Christ here on this earth we have thousands of spiritual kinsmen. Add to that the souls we have yet to meet in heaven and we have gained literally untold millions.

Add to that we have been richly blessed with material things as well. We are so blessed that we have to periodically give away some of the goods we accumulate. We have lived in nice homes, either manses owned by the church or houses that the Lord has allowed us to purchase and enjoy. When I went off to seminary I sold everything I had to pay my way to go there. I traded down to a 1946 beat-up Chevrolet that was worth \$25.00 wholesale to drive to the seminary. That was the car I drove to Midway the first time I ever preached there. People laughed when they saw me driving that old car. They could not believe anyone would seriously

drive a junk heap like that. When I married Judy her Dad felt so sorry for her having to drive in a piece of junk like that that he bought her a new car for a wedding present.

But I still kept that old '46 Chevy and when I left Midway to go to Eastern Heights in Savannah I took it along for a second car and one of the teenagers there couldn't believe they would call a preacher that drove such a wreck of a car. I finally got rid of it.

But we have nice vehicles to drive and a comfortable house to live in and we feel richly blessed with more than enough of the necessities of life. So this scripture has been fulfilled in my life and Judy's life.

I didn't come to Christ for that reason. I didn't even know about this scripture when I came to Christ. But that's the way it works when you forsake all to serve Christ. The Lord may let your faith be tested but all who continue to follow Christ in faithful discipleship will see the blessings of this scripture come to pass in their life. The only unpleasant thing the Lord tells us we can expect to experience for being his disciple is persecution. We would have all these things with persecutions. And we have had some persecution. But Christ said that persecutions only make the treasure in heaven greater. He said in the Sermon on the Mount, **Matt. 5:11 through Matt. 5:12** ¹¹“**Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.** ¹²“**Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** (Matt. 5:11- 12).

So we gain in every way. We gain a host of friends when we are adopted into the grand and glorious family of God. We establish relationships that will endure forever. God's people are the most blessed people on earth. The meek really do inherit the earth. Salvation commences a life of blessings. Yes. We may experience trials, persecution and tribulation. These things are allowed to come to test and strengthen our faith. The gold is refined. The dross is being removed from our faith. But we are the God blessed people. And not only do we gain now we gain hereafter. The apostle says that to die is gain.

II. Discipleship Blessings Are Greatest In The World To Come

A. The quality of life in heaven will be far superior to the life we have known here. It will be a life without pain, without sorrow, without sin, without unpleasantness of any kind, and best of all it will be without death. Death is ended. Death is

vanquished. Death is abolished. No one can ever die from that place. It will be a land of endless delight and joy forevermore. And there will be no more persecutions.

On top of that we will be given authority and rule under God over his eternal Kingdom. The apostles were told that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In one parable Christ taught about the wealthy man who went away to receive a kingdom for himself giving his servants a certain amount of money to invest for him. When he came back they had to render an accounting of what they had done with their capital. The one who had multiplied his money ten times was given authority over ten cities. The man who had gained five times as much was made ruler over five cities, while the man who had hidden away his money and done nothing was rebuked and his capital was taken from him and given to the man who had the most. So those who serve Christ faithfully and help advance the kingdom of God will be richly rewarded in the world to come.

Then he makes the point that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. What does he mean by that? Well, he explains what he means immediately following in chapter 20 of Matthew's gospel in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.

Matt. 20:1-16 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2"When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3"And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; 4and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. 5"Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. 6"And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said* to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' 7"They said* to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said* to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.'

8"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said* to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' 9"When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. 10"When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of

them also received a denarius. 11 "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, 12 saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? 14 'Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. 15 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' 16 "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

The Jews were the first to be chosen as God's people. But as the Jesus himself foretold and history has confirmed they lost their distinguished first place. The chief priests and scribes plotted Christ's death at the hands of the Romans and in general they have rejected the Gospel. The Gentiles on the other hand, who for all the rolling centuries had no name among the living, were called and have been brought to the saving knowledge of the truth. The Jewish loss became the Gentile gain. God has transferred to them the first place that once belonged to the Jews and converted Gentiles have now inherited the chief and most exalted place. That this prediction of our Lord has been literally fulfilled, the present state of the Christian and Jewish Churches sufficiently proves.

"So the last shall be first, and the first last." can also mean that the person who takes the humblest position, who gives the limelight to others and does what he does without seeking personal glory or praise, will shine brighter in the world to come. The person who pushes himself to the front or who is very active for the Lord but makes sure that he gets the proper credit and who likes the titles and special privileges that go with special gifts and talents, will be last in the resurrection recognition. The last are going to be first and the first are going to be last.

That's the way it is in God's economy. Jesus was the greatest of all but took the lowest place of all. He went to the cross, suffering the most humiliating place and scorn of men of any who have ever lived will in heaven be the highest and greatest of all.

B. Now I have to ask the question...Are you a disciple?

Have you forsaken all to be his disciple? Are you willing to do that? Would you do that right now? Would you come to him and say by coming that you want to be his disciple and that by his grace and with his help you will turn your life over to him and follow him wherever he leads you? I invite you to do that right now.

Hymn #591 "Jesus Calls Us"

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA
519 MAIN STREET
VILLA RICA, GA. 30180**

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