

January 21, 2024

“Clear Warnings”
Mark 10:23-31

FCF: Conditioned to think in the wrong ways

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Out of love for us, Jesus gives us some clear warnings.
(magnet) We need to humble ourselves and hear what He has to say.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

We are all conditioned to think in certain ways - as accustomed to it as the air we breathe. A couple of examples. In traditional cultures, the priority is the well-being of the group - your tribe and family. In modern cultures, the priority is the individual - your personal peace and freedoms. Both have a point. And either can go terribly sideways. Think honor killings or the epidemic of loneliness. But when you're in it, that's all you know. You can't see anything else.

The point? Again, we are all conditioned to think in certain ways. We are so accustomed to these thought patterns we don't think about it. Jesus confronts us with a humbling and bracing fact. We are often conditioned - in more ways than we realize - to think in the wrong ways. And that has implications for a whole host of things, including how we think about community.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Mark 10:23-31](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION (and how applied to CG's)

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

This part of the country is known for sinkholes. A house can sit for years and then one day everything disappears into a hole. Our response? “It came out of nowhere!” Which isn't quite true. The hole appeared suddenly but the underground erosion had been going on for years.

Sinkholes should remind us of a few things. First, our lives can be affected by the slow steady erosion of our choices. Second, things can look good on the outside while problems are lurking beneath and disaster is about to strike. Third, there is the danger of self-deception. We can tell ourselves all is well when it's not. Which puts us in a position of needing wise warnings.

The context is a dialogue between Jesus and a rich young ruler. The man came to Jesus knowing something was missing in his life. And Jesus declares to him that he needed more than just an addition. He needed a demolition. That was too much for him to hear so he walked away, grieving. That leads to this exchange between Jesus and His disciples and another round of surprises. And warnings - not just for His followers then but now. Out of love for us, Jesus gives us some clear warnings. We then need to humble ourselves and hear what He has to say.

“Warnings about what?” you ask. There are three here, three warnings Jesus gives us. First, of the danger of wealth. Second, the problem of works. And, third, the question of worth.

I. THE DANGER OF WEALTH

First, the danger of wealth ([READ Mark 10:23-25](#)). This is the answer to the first of three questions, this one unspoken. For the disciples are wondering, “What just happened here?”

A) The Effect of Money

And Jesus speaks to them of the effect of money. That is to say, its effect on our hearts.

1. Independence

Wealth often breeds independence in the worst way. As we chase after it and hold tight to what we have, our money and material goods tend to cut us off from each other. And from God.

2. Overconfidence

Beyond that, wealth tends to breed an overconfidence as well. “Look at what I’ve achieved!” A statement betraying a spirit of self-sufficiency and self-reliance that doesn’t square with reality.

B) Our Access to the Kingdom

Which then can have serious repercussions on our ability to enter Jesus’ kingdom.

1. Clear statement

He says it so clearly. “It will be hard.” “Only with difficulty.” We have a hard time hearing this.

2. Vivid picture

So to press this home, Jesus paints this vivid picture of the largest land animal in the region trying to pass through the smallest opening in the home. It’s absurd. Worse, it’s impossible.

And that, my friends, is the danger of which we are warned - the danger of wealth.

Application:

Of course, it’s never just about money. There’s always far more to it than that. You see, money can be an idol - something that serves as a God substitute for what we worship and serve, what we trust and give primacy of place in our hearts. But under that surface idol are our deeper idols. Here’s what I mean. For some of us, money equals security and control. For others, power and influence. For others, comfort and ease. And for others, approval and affirmation. Which is why the Apostle Paul said that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

And so because He loves us, Jesus warns us of this danger. We need to humbly hear Him.

II. THE PROBLEM OF WORKS

Jesus’ answer to the first question was confusing. Which led to another - this one spoken aloud (**READ Mark 10:26-27**). So we shift from the danger of wealth to the problem of works.

A) Our Simplistic Formulas

What Jesus is doing here is shredding our simplistic formulas about spiritual matters.

1. Their assumption

The disciples ask this question because their assumptions have been rocked. And that being that the wealthy are blessed. It was evidence of God’s approval. “Live a good life, get a good life.”

2. Our assumption

We assume much the same ourselves. Train and make the team. Study and get the grades. Work and land the job. True in many ways. Yet utterly untrue when it comes to entering the kingdom.

B) God’s Exclusive Solution

“If those who work hard can’t be saved, who can?” So goes our simplistic formula. To which Jesus then replies with God’s exclusive solution. He alone can do this. It’s monergistic.

1. He has to save us

He has to save us. Only the One who made us can remake us. He alone can do this. We can't.

2. He has to show us

He has to save us. And He has to show us that He has to save us. Only the One who formed us in our mother's womb can bring about this rebirth. He alone can give us new sight, new hearts.

My friends, this is the other danger of which we are warned - the problem of works.

Application:

Let's come back to the idea of exclusivity. That's an offensive idea to most people today. It's offensive but essential. Think with me. According to Jesus, the nature of the problem is such that there is no other solution. If it was a matter of enlightenment, we would just need more information. If it was a matter of a moral balance sheet, we would just need to work harder, do more. But those aren't the problems. The problem is deeper. It's not outside us but within us.

Again, because He loves us, Jesus warns us about works. We need to humbly hear Him.

III. THE QUESTION OF WORTH

Those words prompt another question. Here's where we get to community (**READ Mark 10:28-31**). Peter is saying, "Wait. It doesn't matter what we do? But we've done so much!"

A) A Great Concern

This is a great concern that was warranted both to be felt and expressed by the disciples.

1. Peter's protest

Consider Peter's protest. Sacrifices had been made. They had left behind security - so much of what they knew, including their professions. They had laid down comfort - including houses. They had given up their communities - family and friends, part of one's identity in those times.

2. Jesus' response

Was it all for nothing? Consider Jesus' response. He doesn't argue with Peter. He agrees.

B) A Greater Promise

Jesus acknowledges Peter's concern and then sets forth a greater promise. Vastly greater.

1. A larger view

We can see in Jesus' response that He is taking a larger view. He is looking out over the whole horizon. He speaks of real gains to be had - then and now, in the future and present. But on that landscape, Jesus sees not only comfort but challenge. To follow Him is to be part of the collision of kingdoms. That will mean both resistance and persecution as well as provision and assurance.

2. The present time

Resistance and persecution as well as provision and assurance (**READ Mark 10:29-30a**). How? "Some will follow me. But others will not. That will be cause for sorrow. But you will find consolation, a counterbalancing joy in the gain of a new family, a larger family, as you follow me. Peter, I know you've left much behind. And I'm going to give you so many more. Now."

What are the implications of this for us even now as we think about community?

Illustration:

Perhaps we need our vision checked. Think of the animal kingdom. Not every creature has the sight of an eagle. The rhinoceros has an impressive horn and incredible speed. But at 15 feet, it can't tell a person from a tree. Bats are not blind but dependent upon echolocation to hunt for bugs. Despite what matadors say, it's not red that gets a bull's attention. It's motion. Three quarters of the globe is covered in water. The further down you go, the more diffuse the light. And the less the fish can see. And what of moles? They are the underground equivalent.

The point? Like these creatures, we don't see so well - especially regarding community.

Application:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian as the Nazis were coming to power in the 1930's and 40's. Before his being executed for participating in a plot against Hitler, he led an underground seminary. Out of that experience, he wrote *Life Together* ([READ](#)):

So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in invisible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing.

Bonhoeffer had come to see community as a foretaste of the renewal to come. Community points us to the greatness of God. He is so glorious that it takes all of us to get a hint at who He is. Community points us to the greatness of our spiritual poverty as we struggle with fear, pride, resentment towards one another. But community points us to something else - the greatness of the coming renewal. How? Through it, we get a glimpse of the future. Is that how we see it?

Out of love for us, this is what Jesus is saying. And we need to humbly hear Him.

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with a story from my third year at Virginia Tech – a painful time brought on by the death of one of my roommates. Some weeks later the rest of us in that apartment decided to carve out an evening once a week for Bible study and prayer – just for us. It was remarkable. The bonding in those months, the openness and vulnerability, the way the Lord transformed that place of pain into a place of peace – it was all of Him. And we grew. But it came to an end. The semester was over and we had to go our separate ways. And I mourned losing that connection.

The sequel is worth telling. Through all that turmoil, I was finally able to see that it was time to step away from a longtime unhealthy dating relationship. And then, through that, things opened up such that I became interested in a tall dark-haired beauty named Sarah Murphy. And through that came some people in this room today. My point? Community can be disruptive. But it can also be beautifully transformative. And, if you're not careful, life-giving. Literally.

Out of love for us, this is what Jesus is offering. We need to humbly hear Him.

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