

November 11, 2018

“Surprising Answers to Searching Questions”
Matthew 19:23-30

FCF: Conditioned to think in the wrong ways

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because He loves us, Jesus has given 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. 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. Either way, that's what dictates your goals and decisions.

There's wisdom with both. And either can go terribly sideways. The point? Again, we are all conditioned to think in certain ways. Jesus confronts us with a humbling and bracing fact. And that is we are often conditioned - in more ways than we realize - to think in the wrong ways.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 19:16-30](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

This part of the country is known for sinkholes. A house can sit on a block for years and everything can appear normal. Then one day the ground caves in and everything disappears into a gigantic hole. Our response? “That hole came out of nowhere!” Which isn't exactly true. The hole appeared suddenly but the underground erosion that led to it had been going on for years.

Sinkholes should remind us of a few things. First, our lives can be affected by little incremental choices, slow and steady erosion. Second, things can look good on the outside when all the while major problems are lurking beneath and disaster's about to strike. Third, related to that, there is the danger of self-deception. We can tell ourselves all is well when it's not. We can blind ourselves to real and present dangers. We can be blissfully unaware we are in harm's way.

The clear-eyed perception and compassion of others demand they speak. They need to warn us. And that is much the case with Jesus. He sees our self-deception. And He speaks.

Last week, we looked at the exchange between Jesus and a rich young ruler. He 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. Because He loves us, Jesus has given us some clear warnings. We 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 danger of works. And, third, the danger of worth.

I. THE DANGER OF WEALTH

First, the danger of wealth ([READ Matthew 19:22-24](#)). This is the answer to the first of three questions, this one unspoken. 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, upon 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. “Only with difficulty.” “It will be hard.” 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 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. As John Calvin observed, our hearts are idol factories. It’s not a matter of if but what and how.

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II. THE DANGER OF WORKS

Jesus’ answer to that first question caused some confusion and distress. Which then led to another question - this one spoken aloud. And another answer ([READ Matthew 19:25-26](#)).

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. We are conditioned to think this way. Train hard and make the team. Study hard and get the grades. Work hard and land the job. All of which is true in so many ways. Yet all of which is completely untrue when it comes to entry into 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, that’s the other danger of which we are warned - the danger 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 then we would just need more information. If it was a matter of a moral balance sheet then we would just need to work harder. But those aren’t the problems. The problem is far deeper. It’s not outside us but within us.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. The doctor diagnoses you with a particular disease. But she also offers a cure - a rare particular treatment. Would you complain about the exclusivity of the cure? I doubt it. Knowing that you will die without it, you gladly take it. That’s what we see here.

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III. THE DANGER OF WORTH

Not surprisingly, those words then prompt another question (**READ Matthew 19:27-30**). Peter is basically saying, “Wait. It doesn’t matter what we do? But we’ve done so much!”

A) An Amazing Assurance

Listen to what Jesus says in response. He starts with this amazing assurance.

1. A renewal

He speaks of a renewal - the new world, literally, “the regeneration” - His making all things new. Not just His individual followers but the whole cosmos, His whole creation, will be made new.

2. The rewards

Jesus speaks of a renewal. Then He speaks of rewards. Part of which has to do with a ruling of some kind. Perhaps a shared ruling through all His followers or specifically the twelve. In any case, He promises ruling and also receiving. Rich compensation, a counterbalance for whatever has been lost, even the dearest things in our lives. Those who give up the greatest things are guaranteed the greater thing. To some degree, even in this life. But most especially, in the next.

Illustration:

This is the cure for our hoarding. No few of us know people afflicted by this. There are TV shows that focus in on hoarders now. A curious thing is that research has shown that part of

what drives that is a longing for safety and security. Well, my friends, we're all hoarders. And the Gospel of the kingdom is the cure. We have this amazing assurance that utterly frees us.

B) A Sobering Reminder

That said, that's not where Jesus stops. With the assurance comes a sobering reminder.

1. A proverbial statement

(**READ Matthew 19:30**) This is a proverbial statement reminding us that the kingdom economy is not like ours. God's ways are full of surprises. Which Jesus will explore in a coming parable.

2. The specific meaning

Specifically, back to Peter's question, Jesus is saying that the rewards are real. But they are all of His grace. They are His to give. Not a one of them is earned. There is nothing we can claim.

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

Application:

Let's think for a moment of "Orphan Sunday" and every giving of ourselves in radical ways to Jesus because of His radical love for us. That might be a denial of our desires, giving more of our money, a pursuing hard after a broken relationship. Such things are always to be done looking back to what Jesus has already done for us. And they are always to be done looking forward to the great renewal and rewards to come. But never with a sense of rights, of what we think ourselves to be due or owed by the Lord. And it's so easy to slip here. So easy.

So, because He loves us, Jesus warns us. We need to humble ourselves and hear Him.

CONCLUSION:

In any household with children, there are phrases sure to be heard at one time or another. "That's not fair!" or "But everybody else gets to." And the classic, "I can do it all by myself."

In our house, it seemed to come up most with the tying of shoes. Little wonder slip-ons and velcro bands are now so popular. It's hard. You want them to learn how to do it. But you do have places to go and things to do. So you make the suggestion. Then comes the response, "I can do it all by myself." Then come more knots. And the tears. And maybe from you both.

We never outgrow this. We really don't. And the thing is that, when you think back over these three warnings - wealth, works, and worth - you realize the common thread is our tendency to look to ourselves. It's so deeply instinctive. But so futile. And, knowing that, Jesus warns us.

But there's something else to consider as we look back over the whole of this passage. Jesus is the ultimate rich young ruler. The difference being that He did not look at the cost and walk away. It's just the opposite. He was far richer than we can imagine. His was infinite glory, wealth, and joy. And He left it behind. He gave it away to the poorest of the poor - us. Jesus is the ultimate rich young ruler. So truly, it must be out of love He gives us these warnings. And truly, seeing that, we not only need to but we can humble ourselves and hear what He has to say.

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