

Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

The Family of God
October 6th, 2019
Mark 10:28-31
Pastor Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning!

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 10.

We are in week three of a ten week series in which we are revisiting our mission statement as a church. In these first five weeks we are asking the question: Who are we?

Thus far we have learned that we are built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone and we are Jesus people. Last week we were reminded that we are witnesses! We proclaim a glorious, life changing gospel!

This week, we will see in the text that we are a family.

In our current cultural climate I believe that there is a HUGE opportunity for us as a church to shine if we can do this right. We live in a culture that is often described as cold, self-serving and isolated. Families are crumbling. Loneliness is widespread. People are hungry for authentic community.

The challenge, of course, is that we ourselves are PRODUCTS of this culture. We should not assume that we are immune. If we are not careful – if we do not allow God’s Word to challenge our natural lean – then we will raise families and cultivate church communities that are as cold, self-serving and isolated as the culture around them.

That would be tragic. That would be a wasted opportunity. And, as we will see in today’s text, that would be a BETRAYAL of who God has made us to be!

So, by the grace of God, let's invite Him to speak to us by His Word and to shape us into who we were made to be. Look now at Mark 10:23-31. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today:

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God."²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."²⁹ Jesus 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 lands, for my sake and for the gospel,³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:23-31 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

In our text this morning, Jesus has a lesson to teach us about conversion. For some of us, we've been walking with the Lord with a long time. I would imagine that, for some of us, we have all but forgotten how traumatic it was when the God of the universe opened up our eyes and turned our worlds upside down! If we are going to be witnesses to this glorious gospel, then we need to stop and to reflect on the portrait of conversion that Jesus paints for us here.

A Portrait of Conversion

The first thing that we are confronted with in this text is the real trauma of conversion.

1. The real trauma of conversion

Jesus did not preach an easy-sell gospel, did he? In fact, he was very forthcoming in his representation of how difficult it would be to follow him. He said:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:25 ESV)

The camel was the largest common animal in the middle-east and the eye of a needle was the smallest entrance that they could conceive of. Some scholars have attempted to argue that Jesus was referring to a small gate in Jerusalem which camels would need to crawl through, but that can't be what he meant because the disciples responded:

"Then who can be saved?" (Mark 10:26b ESV)

They knew what he was saying! The point of Jesus' teaching was not that discipleship would be difficult for wealthy people. The point wasn't that we would need to bend and contort ourselves in order to fit into the entrance. The point of this illustration was that it would be HUMANLY IMPOSSIBLE! That sounds a lot like what we were discussing last week, doesn't it? Let's never forget that we are calling people to do something that is humanly impossible! We are inviting them to leave behind all of the comforts and pleasures that

they've ever known – we're calling them to look in faith to Jesus and to say "Jesus is worth more than anything else in the entire world!" One commentator notes:

Jesus will have no divided allegiances; he will have all of us or he will not have us at all — so jealous is his love.¹

We're inviting people to surrender everything in their pursuit of Jesus. Do you realize that? Think about how reluctant we are to part with a dollar at Tim Hortons for a good cause – even when we get a COOKIE in return. People don't readily part with the things that they hold dear to them. But Jesus calls us to part with EVERYTHING – to lay it ALL down on the altar for his service. We might as well just spend our time trying to squeeze camels through the eyes of needles! Who would ever accept such an invitation?

It seems impossible, doesn't it?

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27 ESV)

Let's make sure that we never give ourselves permission to soften the call of the gospel. I think it is a fair assessment to say that there are a number of people sitting in church pews today who call themselves disciples but who have never considered the cost. Countless people have waved their hand at Jesus and passed through the waters of baptism without ever letting go of their former life. They tried to squeeze through the eye of the needle while they still held tightly to their treasures and their pleasures. Now they are wasting their lives, worshiping Jesus on Sunday and the idols of comfort and family and wealth through the rest of the week all the while wondering why they don't feel the power and the presence of God! They have been deceived!

Let's make sure that that doesn't happen here! When we preach the gospel, let's make sure that we clearly communicate the trauma. Jesus will not be second in your life. He wants everything, or nothing at all. He will flip your whole world upside down.

This is the trauma of conversion but, thanks be to God, our text doesn't stop there! Jesus goes on to describe:

2. The grace that God provides

Look at verse 29:

Jesus 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 lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:29-31 ESV)

Yes, following Jesus will require you to lay down everything that you once held dear, but don't for a second think that God will not return to you a hundredfold that which you have surrendered! I love the way one commentator describes this. He says:

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 316.

To conceive of discipleship solely in terms of its costs and sacrifices is to conceive of it wrongly — as though in marrying a beautiful bride a young man would think only of what he was giving up.²

I think that's a helpful illustration! Can you imagine a groom who said in his vows: "So I guess I'm going to have to stop playing x-box all day..."

Yes, the conversion experience is traumatic. Yes, the world as you knew it is turned upside down. Yes, let's be upfront and honest about that as we call people to surrender their lives to Jesus.

But let's be faithful in showing them that the trauma is worth it! Because there is GRACE on the other side.

Look again at what Jesus said and take a closer look at verse 30:

Jesus 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 lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold **now in this time**, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30 ESV)

Do you see that?

Jesus promises a blessing TODAY. And that blessing is the family of God. Houses and sisters and mothers and lands. When a new believer passes through the eye of the needle – when they let go of everything else to lay hold of Christ – they're going to come out on the other side with some very real needs.

Jesus sees that, and he makes a promise here to meet those needs. Jesus here promises to every new believer that – though they might lose it all in surrendering to him, they will find something on the other side that will be a hundred times better. And they're going to experience that NOW.

So, what is he talking about then? He's promising that new believers are going to have houses but Jesus didn't even OWN a house, so who's house is he promising? Answer: yours! And mine!

Jesus is saying here that the experience of conversion is going to leave people empty handed and needy but that they are going to come out on the other side into a big, generous family that is going to pick them up and meet their needs. WE are that family, church! We are the blessing that Jesus promised to new believers.

And, of course, Jesus goes on to promise the culmination of this grace:

and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:30b ESV)

In the life to come, you will not spend one second thinking about what you left behind, amen? When you stand before the throne and you see JESUS, there won't be a single inch of you that wonders: "Is this worth it?" In his amazing vision of the coming kingdom, the Apostle John describes:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 316.

from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4 ESV)

God is no man's debtor. He calls us to lay aside everything in our pursuit of Him, but that is because He is going to give us everything in the age to come! We are bound for glory!

But we're not in glory yet, are we?

So, how are we going to live this out?

Listen carefully: When the new believer miraculously passes through the eye of the needle and finds themselves naked and empty handed on the other side, our job is not simply to point them ahead to a future glory. That's a big part of the job, but that's not ALL of the job. What are they going to do until that final day arrives? What about the needs that they have today? They might have fifty, sixty, SEVENTY more years to live before they reach the finish line. What are we going to do to fulfill the promise that Jesus has made in today's text?

It says here that we are a part of the blessing that Jesus PROMISED and since Jesus never breaks his promises, we had better think carefully about how we are to live as the family of God.

Living Like the Family of God

Before I dive into this application, I just want to take a moment to express that I am really proud of the way that we do this. We have come through some really challenging seasons as a congregation – we've weathered some storms together – and with each passing trial I have come away with a greater confidence that God has uniquely blessed us in this area. By and large, we think and move like a family. Thanks be to God for that.

But with all that being said, we still have work to do. Amen? There are still cracks, and people still slip through. So let's think together about how we can better live like the family of God.

First of all, if we are going to live like the family of God in this place then we are going to need to:

1. Overhaul our understanding of family

In order to understand this a little better, I want you to flip back a few pages to Mark chapter 3.

Jesus' biological family had become concerned for him. They worried that he was perhaps getting a little carried away and so they came to a gathering where Jesus was teaching in order to bring him back home. Do you remember how Jesus responded? Look at Mark chapter 3, beginning in verse 31:

³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my

brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35 ESV)

Now, Jesus isn't saying here that his biological family is no longer important. The commandment to honour your father and mother is still in effect and Jesus in his final moments ensured that his mother would be cared for. Biological families are a gift from God and we need to steward them accordingly.

But what Jesus IS saying is that the kingdom of God is characterized by a complete overhaul of family! Everyone who has surrendered his or her life to Jesus Christ is a member of this family.

Do we think that way about one another? Look around you this morning. Do you love these people like family? I want to invite you to really stew on that for a minute.

In our passage this morning, Jesus tells us clearly that we have to get this right. He PROMISED that we would! God's Word proclaims to lost people that, should they lose their family in their pursuit of Christ – should mom and dad disown them or husband leave them – they WILL FIND a family that is a hundred-fold what they left behind.

Have we failed in upholding this promise for any of our brothers or sisters in this room? By God's grace, let that never be true of us.

Second, if we are going to live like the family of God then we are going to need to:

2. Enter into the mess

This is a lesson that I didn't understand when we first planted this church. Some of you might remember Louie who attended here three years ago. Most of you know that Louie went home to be with the Lord in August and I had the privilege of preaching at his funeral. In his baptism testimony, he proclaimed from the tank that he was “putting on different colours.” That was the first gang reference in an RCC baptism service. And he meant it. He was leaving his gang to follow Jesus.

That being said, I've spent some time recently reflecting on my walk with Louie and his walk with the Lord. I think that experience was the closest I've come to truly understanding the reality that Jesus is presenting in this passage. What will we do in this place when following Christ means that someone is going to have to leave behind their primary source of income and their entire support network?

There was a time when he asked me for a ride to the grocery store and I couldn't do it. I was busy. I had my own errands to run. As a result, he got a ride with an old friend from his old life and he wound up spiraling into a month long relapse.

That relationship really challenged me. It was the first time I realized that my brother NEEDED me. He needed us. He traded his intimate, loyal community for this community. He signed up for a relationship that would stretch beyond Sunday mornings. And JESUS promised that we would surpass that which he left behind. Isn't that sobering?

So here's the question: If lost and broken people come to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ in our church, are we ready and willing to walk with them? Are we ready to enter into the mess and to lead people through to the other side?

If you haven't read it already, I would once again like to commend the book: "The Gospel Comes with a Housekey" by Rosaria Butterfield. She sets the bar REALLY high. But I'd rather aim for a high bar and miss than succeed at surpassing the low bar of our culture. Jesus is worth our best effort. Amen?

Third, if we are going to live like the family of God then we are going to need to:

3. Open our homes and share our stuff

Let's think really practically this morning. If a young woman comes to Christ and immediately moves out of her boyfriend's house, do we have an affordable apartment for her? Do we have a job opening for the young man who leaves behind a life of selling drugs? Do we have some tools that we could lend him? Do we have a place at the Thanksgiving table for the young family who is no longer invited to their family dinner?

In the book of Acts, we find a beautiful description of how the early church was living this out. Now, before I read the text I want to be clear: This passage is a DESCRIPTION of how the church was living. It is not necessarily a PRESCRIPTION for us today. Do you understand the difference? Luke never tells his readers that they must go and do exactly as the early church did in Jerusalem but instead he presents them as a commendable example of what radical generosity looked like in the family of God. We find this example in Acts 2:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47 ESV)

Having already provided the disclaimer, now I want to dig deeper into this example and to allow it to challenge us. Here's a question: If your father died and your mother was left to pay rent for a big house that she couldn't afford, would you do something for her? Would you consider selling your cozy house to buy something with an in-law suite so as to better care for her?

You probably would, right?

Well, then why is it that this story in Acts 2 seems so extreme and foreign to us? It sounds to me like the early church really BELIEVED that they were a family! And, if they were a family, and if someone in the family needed a place to live, then it only made sense that members of the family would sell their houses in order to fund the solution.

My question for us today is this: Does Jesus have permission to use our homes and our possessions to meet the needs of the family of God? Or have we taken those things off of the table?

Fourth, if we are going to live like the family of God then we are going to need to:

4. Make space for every generation

One challenge that we face as a church plant is that we predominantly attract young families. This is not unique to Redeemer. We, like most other church plants, begin and end each morning by throwing 150 chairs around. We meet in a gym with limited accessibility for wheel chairs. Naturally, this setup is going to be something of a stumbling block for the older generation.

But I want to make it crystal clear this morning that we are not young by design. We aspire to be a multi-generational church! To every senior saint who braves those stairs and who endures these uncomfortable chairs – thank you! You are such a blessing to this family and we need you.

When new believers surrender their lives to Jesus Christ in this place, they are going to need brothers and sisters but they are also going to need mothers and fathers and grandparents.

To that end, as you pray for this congregation, please pray that God would bless us with some more godly, senior saints.

Finally, if we are going to live like the family of God then we are going to need to:

5. Take initiative

This is by far the easiest application but I also think it will produce the most immediate fruit. When we gather together on Sunday mornings, our natural tendencies will lead us to gravitate towards the people that we know. But what if, before we gathered in our holy huddles, we took a look around and then took some initiative?

Who is sitting all alone?

Is there someone whose name you don't know?

Is there a new family here?

Before you gravitate towards your comfortable circle, what if you went and grabbed that person and brought them with you?

Look around right now? Is there someone here who you've never had into your home for dinner? Why don't you invite them?

I always love listening to people's testimonies and it's amazing how often people point back to the simplest acts of kindness. It's astonishing how much you can make a person feel loved just by remembering their name.

I mentioned off the top that there is a void today that we are uniquely positioned to fill. The light always shines brighter in the darkness and we are living in a day and age where the darkness of loneliness and isolation are deeply felt. What an opportunity it is then for us to model a better way!

If, by God's grace, we are fortunate enough to see men, women, boys and girls coming to Christ in this church then let's make sure that we take very seriously the promise that Jesus made about what they would find in here. May they find the family of God, built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

This is who God has made us to be. This is who Jesus PROMISED we would be! And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.