

August 28, 2011

The Road and Rewards of Leaving Everything Behind

Mark 10:28-34

INTRODUCTION

We need to know that it's worth it to have left everything behind. Some people think that Peter is being a little smug here. The rich young ruler has been dismissed; the disciples got the message that earthly possessions are seductive; Peter's habit of distinguishing himself finds new life. That may be. But even if that motive is mixed in, it seems that he had a more basic concern, and that is to be assured that he would not waste his life.

This is the last of three of what are called "passion predictions" of Jesus. And Mark makes it clear that this is the last stretch of highway in the three year ministry of Jesus. It says that *they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem (32)*: or as the Bible calls it, Zion, or the City of God. Rome calls itself the "eternal city," but it is not. God has set his heart on Jerusalem.

- THE MOTIVE TO THE CITY OF GOD IS NECESSARY
- THE ROADWAY TO THE CITY OF GOD IS SUFFERING

The Big Idea is that Jesus leads his people into the inheritance of the eternal City through death in the earthly city.

DOCTRINE

I. THE MOTIVE TO THE CITY OF GOD IS NECESSARY

A) What is Gained Excels What is Exchanged in Quantity

1. Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you" (28). We have left **everything**. Have we? Surely he doesn't mean "We have left you and followed you... We have left God and followed you... We have left our reward in heaven and follow you." Of course not! That would make no sense at all. Peter must mean "everything" as the world would understand it: everything in the world as if Christianity was not true. But if this "everything" he meant was really everything that could be had, then he would be left with

nothing. If you don't have this settled—if you do not know with certainty that is infinitely worth it to have left everything to gain Christ—then the truth is that every moment of your life is a crisis moment similar to what Peter is experiencing right here: “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” [19:27].

2. How does Jesus respond to this? *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, who will not receive a hundredfold (29-30a).* This is one of those **Truly** (*amen*) statements of Jesus so a big kingdom principle is being addressed to us today. And we know it applies to all Christians for all time because He says **no one who has left** this “everything” fails to get—what? He says **a hundredfold**. You may remember that expression from the Parable of the Sower. It just means a “bumper crop,” some reward to the superlative degree. So for the house you “own” as an earthly asset, there are a dozen homes you “form” and “manage” in the kingdom; for every biological sibling, you have hundreds in the church; for every earthly parent, God gives you many mentors and shepherds in his flock; for every earthly child you can conceive (or not), the Spirit gives you offspring through your speaking his gospel. If anything, a hundred-fold greater return is an understatement.

3. In other words this is a battle of “everything.” It is a battle of worldviews or visions in which “everything” means only the things you can see and handle in one view, while in the other view “everything” really means the infinite everything that God gives freely. The children of Israel had to leave behind some-thing that you would think they would never want to go back to. And yet how many times did they grumble and say that they wished to be back in Egypt as slaves? So God would hold before them a picture of the land they were to come into: “a land flowing with milk and honey” [cf. Ex. 3:8, Lev. 20:24, Num. 14:8, Deut. 31:20]. God knows that we have a need to have this reward be intelligible to us. This is a motive that we desperately need, because if we're honest, we forget how worthless earthly rewards are. This motive is necessary. Peter was right about that. Whatever Peter's motive for asking about his motive, he was at least right to ask.

B) What is Gained Excels What is Exchanged in Quality

1. So, not only a “hundred-fold,” but it the reward comes in two waves: **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 (30b).** Even though we are given less information about heaven than we would like, it's still easier to imagine how this investment will wind up better in the age to come. But the present time is a little harder to see it because these tastes of the inheritance

are mixed with persecutions. In fact **persecutions** are lumped in here as if they're part of the inheritance! And there is a strong link:

Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Blessed* are you **when** others revile you and **persecute** you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for **your reward is great** in heaven, *for so they persecuted* the prophets who were before you [Mat. 5:10-12].

2. And Jesus hangs this promise on a principle: *But many who are first will be last, and the last first (31)*. We know it is a deep seated truth that God has built into reality. Jesus has already said that, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" [Mk. 9:35]. God actually ordains all the things in life that make his own last for a time, to build into us an expectation for the happy ending. In the prophets He tells us about the Day of the Lord, how He gives us back what, it turns out, He himself took away: "**I will restore** to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, **which I sent** among you" [Joel 2:25]. So, Peter, what will you get for leaving everything behind? Well, this "everything" which I tore out of your hands (God says), I will restore to you the real version of the same things—mothers, fathers, siblings, children, lands, all eternal!

II. THE ROADWAY TO THE CITY OF GOD IS SUFFERING

A) The Exodus of the True King "Up to" His City

1. Note three things about this seemingly irrelevant first sentence: *And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them (32a)*. They were on the road to Jerusalem: the same destination He had been telling them about. And Mark makes the point to say that Jesus was setting the pace. The word "road" (*hodos*) in the Greek is from the same word as the Greek origins (during the LXX translation) for the book of Exodus. It literally means "his way out." At the Mount of Transfiguration, Luke tells us, that Jesus and the two prophets "spoke of his departure (*ek hodos*) which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" [9:31]. In other words, the exodus from Egypt, which was purchased by the blood of the Passover Lamb, was a type or shadow of the true exodus in the City of God. Now Jerusalem was an elevated city so that you had to literally walk "up" to it.

2. In the original exodus God led his people out of one earthly kingdom to another earthly kingdom. But this was to tell a story of the real thing to come. In the real exodus in Jerusalem, God would lead his people **up** into the eternal city by dying and rising in its

earthly copy. The author of Hebrews says about the sacrifices of the exodus and that of the cross that these things are “copies of the heavenly things...for Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” [9:23, 24].

3. Now as this may be getting fascinating to you, those who were walking with Jesus did not share your impression—yet: *And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him (32b)*. Everything hinges on what was to happen to Jesus. He was their representative. Where He went, all who are placed in Him, will go. So this is not the time to say about their fears: “Oh, no, no, the news isn’t really that bad. I’ve got good news for you.” I sat under a preacher one year who would constantly say, “The good news is the bad news was wrong.” And however catchy that might be, it’s not accurate. The bad news that every sinner has to be executed is truer than we can imagine. The Lamb must be led to the slaughter or else *we* will be. And the sinner needs to be told what is to happen to the Lamb or else what must happen to us.

B) The Imposter Rulers of the City Must Bring Him Down

1. *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles (33)*. In the previous two passion predictions, Jesus had included the “elders” and said that the Son of Man must be handed over to men (*anthropoi*), whereas here He stresses that He must be handed over to the Gentiles or **nations** (*ethne*). That just means ‘non-Jews.’ In other words, there’s a point to these casts of characters. In this prediction, the stress was on the Jewish guardians of the city handing over the true King to the foreigners to the city. You may remember back in Genesis that Joseph was the favorite son of Israel, was sent by the father to his brothers, was despised by them, stripped of his royal robes, cast into a pit and sold to the Gentiles for pieces of silver, was then brought out of the land and placed between two criminals and then raised to the throne of power over all the earth. Well now on this last stretch of road in Jesus’ earthly life, the fulfillment of what must be.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit [Jn. 12:24].

In order to raise the whole new creation, the Servant King must fall to the earth like a seed and die. And God ordains that his enemies be the planters of his Son’s harvest!

2. *And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise* (34). Here is the heart of the work of Christ—his falling to the ground and his being lifted up. But He includes the shameful details of how He will be mistreated to show two things: the wicked irony of it all and the way or the road that all of his people must follow him into. But **after three days he will rise**. How come the disciples, as far as we know, never asked him to expand on that? This is why this third passion prediction is so perfect on the heels of Peter’s question. What’s in it for us—we’ve left everything behind! Paul gives us another version of the same answer:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory [Col. 3:1-14].

You have it all in Christ now and you will have it to the fullest, increasingly, forever. What down here can compare with that?

APPLICATION

To the constant message of the church – Do you notice that surrounding all three of the passion predictions in Mark’s Gospel is the *ground* of the gospel (what Jesus accomplished for sinners) and the *end* of the gospel (who Jesus is for sinners). You need both for there to be good news. If a church doesn’t believe in these two things and teach these two things, there is no good news to be had or heard. The good news needs a **ground**, or a basis, on which God can truly say “Not guilty! Forgiven!” If God has no perfect righteousness to look at when He looks at you, then there is nothing but your sin there for Him to see. That’s bad news. The good news also needs an **end**, a goal, an “X” mark on a treasure map, something that you’re hoping for. Jesus gives us both here on the road to glory. He answers Peter’s concerns by giving him the good news of eternal life. He says, “Peter, you want to know what makes it worth losing everything else—Me! Forever with God!” And then He roots that in with one more reminder that the work of Christ alone.

So let me follow the example of Jesus here by not making Jesus just an example for an earthly city. Why ‘must’ Jesus suffer and be killed and rise for you? What does this thing that happened two thousand years ago have to do with you?

It is that what looks like a dead man walking, toward the execution—that's you. As you leave this place and do whatever it is you plan to do this week, if you are not in Christ, trusting in His performance for you, then every step you take is a step toward your slaughter than will never end. Jesus came down to do something that He never had to do, but something that you and I had to face. "The soul that sins shall die" [Ezk. 18:4]. Jesus never sinned. More than that—He was and is perfectly righteous. On the cross the only perfect One stood in the place of sinners, obeyed on their behalf; and He stood in the place on the punishment due to our disobedience. For those who believe this, every one of our sins are lost and placed on him, and in exchange, everything of his righteousness is gained. That is the great exchange behind Peter's question.