

Heaven - Cost Conscience

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The difference in the cost of housing was debilitating. We were confronted with the enormous price variance in homes upon our move from Oklahoma City to Washington, D.C. A comparable house in which we lived in Oklahoma would cost at least 5 times more in Washington. I would like to say the increase meant nothing at all to Debby and me. But that would be a lie. Admittedly, we are cost conscience and limited in means. We typically pay close attention to the price of almost everything purchased. I am not sure what that says about us. But what I do know is that we are not unaccompanied.

There was a man two millennium ago equally cost conscience. We know very little about him. Yet, his life has served for years as a reminder to us all of the expense of highly sought after housing. The housing in which I am referring is identified in the Bible as Heaven.

Mark 10:17-31

17As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 19You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

20"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

21Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

24The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

26The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

27Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

28Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

29"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30will fail

to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

The Man

Even though there is much we do not know, there are sufficient details provided about the nameless MAN that helps us understand his thinking and life.

Spiritually Sensitive

This MAN is concerned about spiritual matters. He believes in the existence of God. He believes that God has spoken through the prophets in different ways and at different times. He is a Jew and has been brought up under the teaching and traditions of the law, prophets and poetic portions of the Old Testament. It is assumed that he would be known as one who attends the synagogue. The annual feast, such as the Day of Atonement, Passover, and Feast of Tabernacles would have been regularly observed. His answer to Christ questions in verse 20 reveals not only his understanding of the Law, but also his understanding of its application to his own life. The Scriptures were important to keep, and he kept them religiously. In fact in responds to Christ question regarding his knowledge of the law he confessed complete adherence to it since childhood.

There is one other Spiritual matter that must not be ignored. He believes that after a person dies they continue to exist. There is the reality of eternal life,

Heaven. It is this portion of his belief system that drives him to locate Christ.

Pragmatic

The future matters to this MAN in Mark's gospel. He does not live in the present only. He is concerned about what is going to happen. That which takes place now has consequences for tomorrow and a person needs to be prepared to deal with the scope of possibilities before it is too late. You can imagine him working through the issue of life insurance, Social Security, retirement properties, and other investments. But the one thing that he seems to find difficulty settling was his standing after death. He lacked peace of mind. Did he fear death? The teachings and study that he had received was not helping resolved the conflict. In fact, the sense is, that he is a bit frantic. He "runs" to Christ and kneels down before him. There is a willingness to humble himself in the presence of Jesus. Such a trait is noteworthy in any era or place.

I suspect that the MAN lived a rather disciplined life. He got things done. If something needed his attention it was going to get it. In this epoch of spiritual need, he seeks out one expert who he believes will resolve the conflict. Jesus is the answer. Everything else that is important to this seeker is placed on hold. When he finally obtains Christ attention he is confident that he has found one who can provide all the answers to his concerns. What is it that he believes about Christ? He believes that Christ is a "good teacher". It is a title that implies honor and respect. This teacher has a grasp of truth. He has

become popular with in the region, and beyond. He is a recognized authority on spiritual matters. His view and opinions can be trusted.

Wealth

The most obvious characteristic of the MAN must be mentioned. Luke 18 and Matthew 19 cover the same event. We read that this was a young wealthy businessman. He is referred to as a ruler in Luke's account, not because he was a king or governor, but because he had many under his authority. He may have owned a great deal of property. He was Jewish and would have been well known in his community as a leader and businessman. Most communities have such men.

Microsoft's Bill Gates might be a contemporary parallel. This multibillionaire certainly has been in charge of many in his successful computer software business. Mr. Gates rides in whatever car he chooses and lives in houses that most of us cannot even begin to imagine. He draws the attention of everyone: When he speaks, people listen. If he shows interest in some business venture, investors think that it must be a winner-- and who would not want to invest in a "winner"? The world and its media are captivated by this kind of intoxicating power. Having "the world," however, does not mean that you have everything. This is clear from the details in Mark's gospel.

It has been noted by those who study the profile of the nations millionaire that they tend to be very cost conscience. Money, time and resources do matter. They are inclined to be analytical when it comes to value. After the evaluation,

if the cost is too great then the deal is dead. Mark, the gospel writer, reports that in this event the cost was a deal breaker. The MAN wanted the assurance that this portion of life was secure, but he could not afford it.

“ 21Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

When was the last time you had to sell everything in order to obtain something of value? It would be fair to say that for the MAN this was a bad day. It takes a lot to cause an eternal optimist to despair.

Christ and His Teaching

Mark is quit helpful in understanding the need to be cost conscience. The interaction between either Christ and the MAN or Christ and the disciples provides important details to consider in understanding the gospel.

Identity

The MAN addressed Christ as “Good teacher”. Jesus does not ignore the choice of words, but immediately informs him that God alone is good. The implication is that the MAN misunderstood Christ nature and thus His true identity. He is more then a good teacher, he is God in the flesh.

Most today will accept Christ as a “Good teacher”, only. This does not work. The gospels are bold in their disclosure of the deity of Christ. If He is not God then his teaching cannot be trusted and He is void of goodness. In some ways the greatest challenge we face is properly identifying and knowing the difference between gods and God. The two are often confused. We seek and embrace gods when we should be in search of God. A proper understanding of God and his nature is at the heart of this passage. The man was looking for a service, a formula, which would enable him to enter heaven. “Just tell me what to do and I will be on my way.” Christ, in the MAN’s analysis, was only an informer, someone to direct. He would learn that this Jesus was the only way to heaven. Christ did not direct his attention to an ideology, political movement, or philosophy. His words could not be clearer. Shed the idolatry. Rid yourself of your gods. In the MAN’s case that meant sell it all. After this is accomplished, turn everything over to me, Christ plus nothing. Meeting Christ is dangerous. There is no question that to be in the presence of God is wonderful, but always in a good way, hazardous.

Problem of Wealth

Christ quoted from the second half of the law (Ten Commandments) when he asked the MAN about his understanding of it. The second half deals with our relationship to each other. The MAN’s answer reveals his blindness if he thinks that he has obeyed any of it. Jesus does not bother with this portion of his loss of sight. He goes to the most obvious. The MAN is deep into idolatry. His wealth has a hold on him. If he were honest, he

would admit that his position and possessions have taken the place of king. When the stock market is good and there is plenty of growth in sales, the MAN is happy. If things go poorly with labor or harvest then life reeks. It all seemed to promise true happiness, life. In the end it gives only death.

Jesus uses the occasion to speak about the truth of wealth. He does not condemn it. He does warn the disciples that those who are wealthy will find a great conflict when is comes to heaven. The problem with earthly wealth is that it is a cheap imitation of heaven. Anything that imitates heaven will be found attractive. It was not wrong for the MAN to have wealth. What was wrong was that he worshiped it. Christ is not teaching, “work righteousness”, when he instructs the MAN to sell. He is informing all that you cannot serve two masters. They will take you in different directions. In verse 26 and 27 Christ informs His listeners that entrance into heaven is impossible. This is not true only for those who have wealth. It is true for all.

26The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

27Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

The MAN wanted to know what he could do to have the assurance of entering heaven. The answer, nothing. None of us can do a thing to enter heaven. We are not good enough. This we all know. At the same time there is reason for hope. That which is impossible for us is possible with God.

The truth is, God is cost conscience. We all owe God. We all cannot pay. The cost is too great for any us. It is for this reason that the gospel is so welcomed. God did that which we cannot. He sends His only Son, Jesus to live a perfect life and die for sinners. The cross on which He dies stands as a divine financial statement, "Paid in Full". Those who embrace this Christ and His word turn to Him in repentance and faith. They experience the truth that they will spend eternity in heaven.

-Reflections -

1. Is there any part of this account given by Mark that speaks to you personally? In what way?

2. Do you believe that there is any evidence in your life of idolatry?

3. How do you define and view wealth? Is there any difference in the definition of wealth today as compared to the times of Christ?

4. What strikes you about the life of the MAN? What do you think happened to him?

5. Some say that this section of Mark's gospel is about repentance. Is repentance a part of your life?

6. What do you consider impossible in life that cannot be changed except by God?

7. Will this passage change your prayer life?