

## **“LIFE BEYOND THE NEEDLE.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**March 3, 2013, 10:30AM**

**Scripture Texts: Mark 10:28-31**

### **Introduction.**

In Lewis Carroll’s delightful story, *Alice in Wonderland*, there’s a scene in which Alice is talking to the White Queen and Alice says, “There’s no use trying, one can’t believe impossible things.” And the Queen replies, “I daresay you haven’t had much practice. When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”

Last Sunday morning we talked about one impossible thing after breakfast. It’s impossible to enter the Kingdom of God even if you are rich or smart or hardworking. People who are rich or smart or hardworking or morally decent think they are OK and they think they can get to heaven on their own ability. It’s impossible for them to enter the Kingdom of God.

This leads the disciples to utter astonishment. This is terrible news. If people with all kinds of resources and means and abilities can’t get into the Kingdom of God then who can? And Jesus looks them straight in the eye and says you can’t. With people it’s impossible.

Salvation belongs to God and God saves sinners. Impossible for us, possible for God. God can make a sinner go through the eye of a needle, through the needle of salvation.

Here’s an interesting question. If God actually does get us through that impossible needle’s eye, what awaits us on the other side? What is life like on the other side of the needle?

### **Mark 10:28-31.**

The wheels in Peter’s head are turning. He’s thinking they were poor and gave everything up so what will they get? As you know we can count on whatever is on Peter’s mind will soon be in his mouth. No surprise here is there. Peter is the first to speak up, “See we have left everything and followed you.”

Is this a bit of a ridiculous boast? They were poor, uneducated, unimportant men to start with. Is he proud or humble here?

Is Peter saying they are better than the rich man? If so they while avoiding the danger of money, he casts himself on the rocks of pride. Is it not human nature to over price our sacrifices and duties toward God? Don’t we make much of rather small sacrifices?

Yet it’s true enough, the disciples were from humble backgrounds and had left everything behind. A poor man’s “all” is just as dear to his heart as a rich man’s “all.”

Was Jesus impressed? There does seem to be some implied praise, there’s no strong rebuke. Jesus responds with an affirmation and a warning.

**An Affirmation, those who left everything will receive hundredfold.**

Jesus starts with three kinds of loses, material, relational and vocational. Houses and lands represent our material security and our vocation or career. Family represents all our human relationships from which we also draw much security and comfort and help.

It's a radical call to voluntarily surrender everything near and dear to us for the sake of Christ with an equally radical promise of great rewards.

I am reminded of three illustrations of this in Scripture and three in church history.

**Hebrews 11:24-26** By faith *Moses*, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

Scripture tells us that *Job* received from God double of everything he lost. Jesus tells us we will receive hundredfold all that we lose for His sake.

When *Paul* was dramatically converted and threw off being a Pharisee and everything that went with it, the door to his family may have been shut to him, but the ends of his letters are filled with names of dearly loved friends. Romans 16:13 mentions Rufus' mother who Paul says was as a mother to him. Philemon 10 he mentions Onesimus who was as a son to Paul.

*David Livingstone*, the missionary to Africa said, "Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice." "It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege."

*Hudson Taylor*, a pioneer missionary to China, endured many hardships including arrests, insults, slander and poverty, but lived his life believing what Christ said in Mark 10:29-30—that if we give up anything for the sake of the gospel we will receive blessings one hundred times better in this life, and eternal life in the world to come. With that perspective, he could truly say, "I never made a sacrifice."

50 years of hard labor in the mission field in China and he can say, "I never made a sacrifice."

*C.T. Studd*, another missionary from England, was born to a rich family and had a brilliant career as a cricketer. He gave it up and summed up that apparent sacrifice in these words, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him."

Can we imagine such men? Men who by the worlds standards suffered the loss of everything and yet still saying, "I never made a sacrifice."

Can you imagine a situation in which we would have to give up our houses and land, or our spouses and children for the sake of the Gospel? But it happens every day on the frontiers of where the Gospel is first being preached.

There are those today who upon converting to Jesus Christ hear their fathers pronounce them dead to their families, they lose their fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters.

Can you imagine what kind of comfort these words of Jesus are to those countless thousands who are shunned and abandoned and cast off?

What are we to make of Jesus' words about blessings untold and rewards a hundredfold in this life and the life to come? This sounds very curious in this larger passage about selling all and giving to the poor. This sounds strange to us because it sounds like the health and wealth gospel, like quid pro quo, that whatever we give we will get back hundredfold in this life.

Also these words don't seem to square with our experience. Lots of Christians don't seem to be overflowing with family, friends and material wealth a hundredfold. Some seem to have less now than when they started. Some struggle all of their life in difficulty and poverty, or in poor health or depression.

***Jesus' affirmation of reward in this life extends beyond material blessings to spiritual joys.***

Those who give up family will know the love and affection of Christ Himself. Those who give up the comforts of a home will know the comfort and security of Christ Himself. Those who give up the sweet fellowship of friends will know the greater and lasting friendship of Christ Himself and of all the saints.

They will have greater joys in this life through their trust and dependence on Christ, than those who depend on what they have. There are rewards for sacrifices in this life that outweigh and outnumber the losses.

Those who experience hardship know something the rich never know. They know God's present grace, they know His sweet comforting Spirit, they know His nearness and presence, they know how He carries them and cares for their souls and gives them His peace. These things are better than the riches the world offers.

***Jesus' affirmation of reward also looks beyond the present to the reward of eternal life.***

The reward of eternal life will turn all the costs and sacrifices into nothing by comparison. When we get to heaven, if Jesus asks us was it worth it, we will answer with an enthusiastic "Yes Lord, and even a thousand times worse."

What is lost in this world is gained in the world to come.

**II Corinthians 4:16-17** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

***Persecutions.***

I need to say something about Jesus' insertion of the word persecution. You have to admire Jesus' honesty. He never pulls punches or minces words or sugar coats the truth to gain followers. Jesus doesn't bribe. The sacrifices are real and the sacrifices may be even bigger than you think.

Christianity is not a utopia, no pie in the sky here. It's not a guarantee out of pain or trouble. Hardship is not necessarily a sign of our disobedience or God's disfavor, but an inevitable result of our commitment to Christ in this fallen world.

God allows and even calls us to suffer, to know hardship, heartache, and affliction. Those who share in Christ's sufferings will share in His glory.

**Philippians 3:8-11** Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ... 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul later recounts:

**II Corinthians 6:4-5, 8-10** as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ... 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

What a contrast. The rich think they have it all, when Paul actually says he has it all, "having nothing yet possessing everything."

This rich young ruler thinks he has a lot when he actually has nothing. He wanted eternal life but at no cost, without sacrifice, without suffering.

If he had surrender all he had for Christ he would have had joy and peace in this life and riches untold here and in the hereafter.

**A Warning, the first will be last and the last will be first.**

**Mark 10:31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Many? Some, sure, but many? Really? Jesus says "many" many times. Many are they on the broad and easy road. Many will say Lord, Lord, but be lost. This is a warning.

How many are there that started well but have grown cool or cold? How many are there who make an outward show, but inwardly are dead to Christ? How many are there who counting on their own righteousness?

Don't be impressed by the world. Don't be taken in by the rich and the famous and the important. When accounts are settled at the last day, where will they be? Will they be at the very back of the line? Will they be in the line at all?

This is a call to humility. Who among us have not thought ourselves to be something only to be brought down? Who among us have pushed ourselves forward only to fall?

**Matthew 20:26-28** ... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**Application and Conclusion.**

This is how you store up treasures in heaven. Whatever sacrifice you make on earth will be credited to you hundredfold in heaven (that's not a hundred times more but a hundredfold more or 10,000%).

Christianity is like marriage. In marriage there is a leaving and a cleaving, a leaving of one allegiance and the forming of a new allegiance.

Christianity means leaving the world and worldly pleasures and worldly pursuits and cleaving only to Christ. It's forsaking all others. It's putting our trust no longer in things or in self, but in Christ and in Christ alone.

Christianity is putting God above your material possessions, above all your earthly relationships, above your vocation and career.

The call of Christ in our lives is a scandalous call. He wants everything, all of us heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the cost of discipleship. It's all or nothing. All the old allegiances must be severed. Christianity is never "Jesus and ..." It is only Jesus.

But with the radical call comes the promise that if you give everything over to Him, He will give you everything. Every loss that you suffer for the sake of Jesus, He will personally make it up to you and a hundredfold more. Jesus holds out the promise of a hundredfold more blessing and pleasure than what the world offers you if you will forsake the world for the sake of Christ and His kingdom and His gospel.

Leaving and following. This is what it means to be a disciple, a follower. Who are you following, what are you pursuing?

Why do we grasp our earthen trinkets so tightly when Jesus holds out so much more and so much better. Don't cling to what you have. If you do in the end you will have nothing. But if you let go of all you have to follow Jesus you will gain more than you could have ever asked or imagined or dreamed.

Finally, I hope you will come to the Friday night Missions Celebration dinner on March 15<sup>th</sup>. It's an opportunity to get a glimpse of this vision of surrendering our all for Christ and seeing Him reward it in the lives and ministries of those we partner with. I hope you will sign up for one of the two hands on missions projects as a way of showing our willingness to give up three hours of our time on a Saturday morning for the sake of helping two of our supported ministries.

And see if it isn't true that Jesus will multiply to you and your family the blessings He promises.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, thank you for the promises of your Word received this morning. Father, for every person here who has suffered loss, for everyone who struggles with hardships, send the comforting presence of your Holy Spirit and bring to their minds the affirmations of Jesus Himself. We look forward with great joy to that day when you will reward your children with unfathomable blessings and riches and inheritance in heaven secured for us by the blood of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.