

**Pent 23B**

**Amos 5:6-7, 10-15**

5:6 Seek the LORD and live, or he will break out against the house of Joseph like fire, and it will devour Bethel, with no one to quench it.

5:7 Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!

5:10 They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

5:11 Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine

5:12 For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins-- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate.

5:13 Therefore, the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.

5:14 Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said.

5:15 Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

**Mark 10:17-31**

10:17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

10:18 Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.

10:19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'"

10:20 He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."

10:21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

10:22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

10:23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

10:24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

10:26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?"

10:27 Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible."

10:28 Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

10:29 Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news,  
10:30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life.  
10:31 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

### **Proclamation of the Word**

"Hard work and effort will get you everywhere," we tell our children.

"Be all that you can be," says the United States army.

We are conditioned and trained that hard work pays off, and it usually does.

Jesus encounters the man who had much. Matthew calls him rich. Luke tells us he is a ruler. Mark reports that he is a man who kneels before Jesus. Perhaps he has just seen Jesus welcoming the little children and knew that what Jesus offered was something lacking in his own life. Jesus had just taken his hands off the sweet heads of little ones and declared,

"Anyone who will not receive the kingdom like a little child will never enter it."

What he witnessed in Jesus was something rich, real, and worth pursuing. And pursue he does. Falling on his knees, he asks,

"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" I have followed all the laws and been good towards my neighbors. I have done all the right things. Isn't hard work, supposed to bring rewards?

Only God is good, young man, Jesus replies.

I can almost hear Jesus say, "Did you not hear me, son? I said anyone who will not receive the kingdom. You cannot earn it. Hard work and effort cannot save you. Only God can. And this is not about your selfish pursuit of comfort in eternity. Grace like an inheritance is a gift."

But instead of saying that Jesus, "Looked at him and loved him." I don't know about you, but I find this the most comforting line in the whole encounter. Jesus looked at him, really saw him, and loved him. When our vision is limited or we are misguided, I imagine Jesus looks at each of us and loves us. Like a parent watching a child making a mistake or a wrong turn, we look at our child and love them while letting them make choices and learn from consequences. Perhaps from our experience, we can see more than their vision allows. Jesus sees that there is more to life than we can see.

But Jesus does intervene and offer the man who had everything a way forward. He tells him to sell all he has, give it to the poor and come, follow me.

The man who had everything, lacked one thing. He lacked a heart for the kingdom. When he walks away grieving, he is heartsick. The man knows at some level that Jesus is right. Jesus knows what our hearts need most. The man knows his life is lacking, but does not have the ability to see as Jesus see.

Paul Wadell , in his *Christian Century*<sup>i</sup> article on this passage, claims,

"Love is a way of seeing, and those who love us best see us best," so "Jesus sees him as he truly is, but in a way that the young man is not yet capable of seeing himself."

On Friday when I felt stuck on this passage, I went to walk at the Botanical Garden, praying "God show me what it is I should see in this passage. What would you have me say?" My heart was not in it because I was tired from a long week. I go to the garden to connect with God. Maybe you have a similar habit. As I walked I began to be heartsick over the events of the last week. Perhaps your heart has been hurting, too. My friends in the lower part of the state, who are struggling, came to mind. The cares of Fort Hill church members weighed on me. My heart was heavy. The beauty of the garden, the sunlight, and the breeze were like a salve for my soul.

As I was about to leave the parking lot, I saw a young man strapping his kayak onto the roof of his car. I recognized him as Caleb, a college student involved here at Fort Hill. I walked over to ask about his hometown. You see, Caleb is from Johnsonville, SC in the eastern part of the state. His family is a leader in his tribe, the Pee Dee tribe of Native Americans. He shared that he did not feel right being here all week knowing what his community was going through, seeing his hometown under water. He wanted to stay for the game this weekend, but needed to go home and see what he could do. His family and home is fine, but he said his mom went to check on a school janitor who has 4 children who has lost everything. His mom had driven to Florence to buy clean socks and underwear for the kids. Caleb described the land around the Black river, called the "Neck." He said folks who live there have nothing, and they just lost the nothing they had. His dad, a civil engineer, has permission from his work to go serve with the Army Corps to check the safety of dams, roads, and bridges. Caleb lamented that he did not know more so he could help. He, too, is an engineering major. I asked about his church, Indiantown Presbyterian, which he said took on about an inch of water inside, but his grandfather thinks it will be ok.

In one word, Caleb was heartsick. He grieved for his people, his town.

He felt compelled to be home and to do something because he cares.

Two young men, the one Jesus encountered, and the one I encountered.

One knows something is missing from his life and that Jesus is the way to find it.

The other has known and followed Jesus. He knows that to serve others in love is the way.

One comes seeking to earn his way to salvation.

The other seeks to love others in Jesus' name.

One comes as a keeper of the letter of the law.

The other knows the grace of God in his life, and is compelled to serve.

Two young men. Jesus looks at both and loves them, I know.

When the man kneels at the feet of Jesus, he knows Jesus offers something he is missing. The man knows the law by heart, but Jesus offers him a means of grace.

The question the young man must answer is not what will you do, but what kind of person will you be?

One thing the man has is a completed check list. He has done what the law requires, but not with any love for others. His following the law comes from an impulse to do good and to save himself. Trying to be perfect only leads to disappointment and burnout. Without love and gratitude in his life, he is empty, even if he has everything.

He has deluded himself into thinking he, by his good works alone, will be saved.

But Jesus is inviting him into a richer way of life that would expand his heart in love of others. This way of life will also expand his love of God.

Sometimes possessions and wealth, or whatever idols we worship, keep us from the fullness of life in Christ. Even though Mark usually shows the disciples in an unflattering light, here they get it. They have left everything to follow Jesus and understand better than most.

Once we have experienced God's grace in our lives, we are changed.

The man who has everything, lacks the one thing- an understanding of the grace of God.

The best salve for our heartsickness is the grace of God.

And grace like an inheritance is a gift to be received.

Once our hearts are directed toward God, even if our heart is broken by the things that break Jesus' heart, we will know the fullness of the kingdom. Riches unimagined.

But we must let go of distractions and idols,

and follow Jesus to discover,

to receive the Kingdom of God like a little child.

Laura Smith Conrad

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<sup>i</sup> Wadell, Paul J., "Living by the Word: Mark 10:17-31, Hebrews 4:12-16," *The Christian Century*, 2009.