

“Set Free by Grace”

Exodus 20:3-5a, 7a, 8, Psalm 90:14, & Mark 10:17-30

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The gospel of Mark proclaims, **Mark 10:17-20 NRSV**, “As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 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.’” Jesus said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” The person makes contrasting statements perhaps revealing his inner turmoil, an inner conflict between fear and love. The person knelt before Jesus revealing his humility, reverence, respect, and recognition of Jesus’ love. In contrast, the person called Jesus, “Good Teacher”. A devout Jew would be taught and proclaim that, “no one is good but God alone” revealing that this person does not make it to worship very often. In contrast, this person knows the final six of the Ten Commandments explaining loving relationships with others and keeps them. In contrast, there is no mention of the first four commandments relating to love of God. Jesus knew he was not keeping the first four commandments which are **Exodus 20:3-5a, 7a, 8 NLT**, “You must not have any other god but me. You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them...You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” Jesus is helping this person wrestle with his fear/love conflict, for Jesus gives him an opening with his question. **Mark 10:18 NRSV** “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.” which should trigger The Shema **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** “Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.” The Shema was recited after the Ten Commandments. He was keeping the letter of the law relating to relationships with others, but not the intent of the law to love God and love others. In a moment we will learn that this person was wealthy. Given his desire to follow the final six commandments, it is likely that he gave generously to the poor even providing financial support for widows and children as the law required. Society would call this person great. He works hard and is productive. He does not lie, cheat, or steal; so, he earns his wealth with honesty and integrity. With honor he cares and provides for his mother and father. He gives generously to Houses for Haiti, Remember Niger, the food shelf, clothing drive, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and his church. He even attends Trunk or Treat slipping 100 dollar bills into the bags of the low income children. Yet, he runs to Jesus fearful that he will not inherit eternal life. He is filled with fear about paying the mortgage, college education for his children, and retirement; so, he works hard and harder to earn more money in hopes of dispersing the fear searching for an elusive feeling of security. He is fearful about

obtaining eternal life, so he works on that as well by keeping six commandments. He doesn't understand the first four. What he really needs is to experience God's grace to spark his love, joy, and peace.

As the account continues notice that the first thing that is mentioned is "Jesus loved him" Right there Jesus is trying to set this man free to love by proclaim God's grace for him. Jesus knows this man is not loving God and truly loving others yet God loves him anyway. The person misses this completely thinking that God loves him for his productivity, integrity and financial generosity. Jesus loves him even though he knows this person is about to reject his call. **Mark 10:21-22NRSV "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." When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."**

This person was so afraid that he might not have enough money in the future that he could not let go of his possessions. He was unable to work a little less, so he can love more. His sense of identity and worth come from his career and his wealth instead of being a child of God. Kenneth Carder said, "God's special friendship with the poor is not a rejection of the rich, but an affirmation that life is not in riches. Life is in God's grace. It is this grace that gives us identity and worth." In this first episode of three we leave this person sad and fearful. Grace and salvation will be offered to him in the second episode.

Love flourishes when one overcomes their fear loosening their grip on wealth. A dialogue with Ramana Maharshi, "A beginner once said to him, "I want to give up my job and family and stay with you, sir, so that I can be with God." Maharshi said, "God is always with you, in you. That is what you should realize." Questioner: But I feel the urge to give up all attachments and renounce the world. Maharshi: Renunciation doesn't mean giving away your money or abandoning your home. True renunciation is the renunciation of desires, passions, and attachments. Questioner: But single-minded devotion to God may not be possible unless one leaves worldly things. Maharshi: No; a true renunciate actually merges in the world and expands their love to embrace the whole world. It would be more correct to describe the attitude of the devotee as universal love than as abandoning home to become a monk. When you truly feel equal love for all, when your heart has expanded so much that it embraces the whole of creation, you will certainly not feel like giving up this or that. You will simply drop off from secular life as a ripe fruit drops from the branch of a tree. You will feel that the whole world is your home."

Possessions, wealth, one's career, sports, and hobbies can be a source of joy and a way of sharing love; however, they can also possess us and make our love smaller. How can you expand your love? Jesus emptied himself, and let go of the glory of heaven to take on human flesh, so we can each experience God's love. Our life's journey is to discover how to let go of all that inhibits our love for others and let go of all that inhibits our acceptance of love, striving to be able to love and be loved through all things, circumstances, and people.

The gospel of Mark continues with episode two. **Mark 10:23-27NRSV "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!” 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! 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.” They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” It is impossible to save ourselves. We are saved by God’s grace alone. No amount of money can buy joy, love, or eternal life. We are saved by God’s grace alone. No matter if we keep all the commandments, abound in good works and generosity, it is still impossible to save ourselves. We are saved by God’s grace. Synthesis explains, “Entering the impossible. In a certain primitive society, when a boy was coming of age, he was brought blindfolded into the deepest, darkest forest. When it grew very dark, his blindfold was removed and the person who had brought him there would leave him alone. The boy would be considered successful and accepted as an adult in the tribe if he didn’t scream until the next morning. Typically the night was very dark, the boy couldn’t even see his own hands in front of him—and he was afraid. Eerie sounds would emerge from the deep recesses of the forest—the wolves’ howls and the wind rustling the branches, perhaps. He became more fearful; but he knew he must keep silent, not screaming, so that he could pass the test. A second seemed like hours; an hour was like years, and he could not close his eyes to sleep. Cold sweat trickled down his body. But as the morning sun at last started to show itself, his terror turned to joy. When he looked around he was shocked to see his father standing not far behind him. His father had a bow and arrows, and a machete sheathed in his waist. He had looked after his son the whole night in case any snake or wild beast came to harm him. He stood ready to shoot arrows from his bow before any beast got too close to his son—praying all the while that the boy would not scream. The door to freedom, to escape from fear and loss of life, is sometimes so narrow and unlikely as to be invisible to our eyes. In other words, God only needs the sinner to open up just a crack for God and God will come pouring in and set up room for an oasis. God only needs a “foot in the door,” so to speak. And we, for our part, need God’s presence.”

Hebrews proclaims, **Hebrews 4:12-16 NLT** “**For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before God’s eyes, and God is the one to whom we are accountable. So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for Jesus faced all of the same testings we do, yet Jesus did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive God’s mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.**”

God’s word is like a sword precisely cutting away fear, hate, and sin, so love can abound. Jesus our high priest is always with us. Jesus knows exactly what you are going through, feeling, and thinking. The resurrected Jesus will resurrect you. Listen to Hebrews 4:16 again. **Hebrews 4:16 NRSV** “**Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**”

That person filled with fear, that workaholic, that perfectionist, came running to Jesus. Jesus offered him grace, but he missed it going away sad. Yet, he opened up a crack for God's grace to come in. God will save him with eternal life for no one is beyond the saving love of God. Jesus will purify him with his sword of grace. Jesus will raise him to abundant eternal life.

Mark concludes with episode three. **Mark 10:28-30NRSV** **“Peter began to say to Jesus, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 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, 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.”**

God's grace assures **Mark 10:30NRSV** **“and in the age to come eternal life.”** However, our earthly life is mixed with both blessings and persecution. Synthesis says, “In immediate terms, this means the reward of having a far more extended, loving family of believers with which to share our lives—a community ready to share houses and resources and all that comes to any of its members. Yet the Lord's pronouncement warns that the rewards will also entail a separation from the world order which will include persecutions—before leading to the final reward of heavenly treasure.”

The psalmist sings. **Psalm 90:14** **“Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”** When we strive to live the first four commandments which explain ways to love God, to be with God, to enjoy God, we receive the continuous love, joy, and blessings of God. God's grace set us free. Grace enables us to share, savor what we have, and be grateful. Grace enables us to follow Jesus in extravagant love. Amen.