

“Giving Up What Hold’s You Captive” A sermon by Kevin Bowers
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
October 14, 2018, Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 10:1-31

Last week, Pastor Lee delivered a message based on the scripture in Mark where Jesus said, “let the little children come to me.” Lee pointed out the social status of children and that, in fact, they had none. The disciples would have culturally wished away the children, so that Jesus could talk to more important people.

In one passage you have Jesus breaking all the social norms by inviting the children to come fellowship with and spend time with him. Now, in this passage, you have a socially important, lavishly dressed person, boisterously touting his own goodness, while boldly approaching Christ.

Jesus cues into the person that he really is and says: *sell everything you have, give the money to the poor, and follow me.* If you do, you will have treasures in Heaven. Everyone is perplexed. Give up wealth to receive more wealth? Give up everything to receive one-hundred times more? Poverty equals wealth?

It becomes clear that riches and blessings are not synonymous. The giving up of what holds us captive allows us to surrender to Christ. In contrast, recall the thief on the cross that had faith. We might think of his plea to Christ as a last-ditch effort to sneak into heaven under the radar, but Jesus understood the man’s heart through those simple words, *remember me before your Father in Heaven.* Jesus replied, *“today you will be with me in paradise.”*

God is *the* God of transformation and change. God freely offers redemptive eternal life to all those who follow him. Jesus has just proclaimed that “whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” (Sincere, total abandonment of self.) But here, we have the wealthy man asking some very insincere questions. First, what must I *DO to inherit eternal life?* One does not *Do* anything for an inheritance; an inheritance is something that can only be given. Secondly, the man touts his keeping of the commandments since his youth but is not clearly hearing the message of the Gospel.

I appreciate Mark as a person who typically zeroed in on the more human elements of Jesus when he writes, Jesus loved the man when He said, *sell everything you have and come and follow me.* The man hangs his head and leaves.

We all have something that can derail or even cripple our walk with God. When we speak of being held captive, we understand what it is like to be controlled by a force that seems bigger and stronger than we are.

I think of the story of Raul Ries, a man consumed by rage and violence. Since his youth, he witnessed the beatings of his mother by his father. He watched as drunken outbursts by his father riddled the family with fear and destruction. Raul himself was so filled with rage that he was eventually sent away to a mountain camp where he was taught discipline and control in a military style setting.

After tours in Vietnam, he began corresponding with a woman who eventually became his wife. His rage grew so violent that his family could no longer stand it. His wife so feared for her life that she packed the bags of her and her children and were planning a departure from their family home. One day, Raul entered the family home and saw the packed bags. He got his rifle and made a conscience decision to kill his wife and children.

Raul was waiting in the family home, clutching the rifle, eagerly waiting for the final moments to come when the butt of the rifle activated the family Television set. A scene popped up on the screen with Pastor Chuck Smith preaching the Gospel. Enraged, Raul turned to fire at the TV set but couldn't seem to pull the trigger. He was mesmerized by the smile and words spoken by Chuck Smith.

In an instant, Paul Ries dropped his rifle and fell to the floor and asked God to forgive him. Over the next year, family, friends, and co-workers witnessed the transformation that took place in his heart and life. Raul eventually became a Pastor in the Calvary Chapel church and has been preaching the Gospel for 40 years since that dark day in his living room.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Transformed? Now what?

Evidence of a transformed life doesn't come easily. For wife, Sharon Ries, it took a year for her to embrace the idea that her husband was truly changing. It was a transforming process for the children who had witnessed abuse against their mother. It was down right freakish to his friends who testified that if you were on Raul's good side you were fine; if you were on his bad side, he could kill you. It takes time for others to adjust when you give up what holds you captive.

What if the rich man would have been documented as selling everything he had? What if strength overcame his weakness and his captivity to his possessions was no longer an issue? Might we see city streets that no longer had hunger? Would we see people rejoicing that now had shelter? Would we have witnessed the overwhelming joy that comes when we love and care for God's children? In the end, all we know is that we are commanded to be transformed.

Transformation brings glory to God!

When Paul and Silas were in prison, the Bible describes the other inmates as being listeners to the Gospel. We know they became hearers of the Gospel when a certain event took place.

Acts 16:16-36

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened,

and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul shouted in a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' ²⁹The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

Here we have men who are truly being held captive in a prison. We know they were worshipping and praising God when the earthquake took place. Now, when you are a prisoner being held by the magistrates under these conditions, who wouldn't flee!

Why do you suppose the prisoners didn't flee? THEY DIDN'T *RUN*, BECAUSE THEY WERE *FREE!* For the first time in their lives, they were unencumbered by rage, wealth, or circumstance. Their trust in Christ made them *free indeed*. Because, in obedience, they did not flee, the life of the guard was now transformed. The guard's family was transformed. God did his transformative work and his followers were *FREE!*

³⁰Then he (the guard) brought them outside and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ³¹They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' ³²They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. ³⁴He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God. ³⁵When morning came, the magistrates sent the police, saying, 'Let those men go.' ³⁶And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, 'The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore, come out now and go in peace.'

Whenever God's Word is spoken, our hearts can be penetrated by the saving grace of Jesus Christ. When we respond, the transformation begins. When we relinquish all that holds us captive, we open our lives to see through spirit eyes, and not our own eyes. We see more clearly as God's wealth of compassion and grace flows over our lives and frees us of our hinderances.

It's simple. This particular man was held captive by his possessions.

Is there anything in your life holding you captive? Are you imprisoned by a vice, a secret or a lie? John 1:12 says; but as many as who have received Him, to the He gave the right to become children of God; even to those who believe on His name.

Today is the day of salvation!