

On the Way to Jerusalem – Some thoughts and Studies for Lent 2021

One of the names for Christians in the early days of the church was “People of the Way”. In the New International Version of the Bible, Mark 10, verse 17 is translated “As Jesus started on his way”. This was his final journey on the way up to Jerusalem and his trial and death. These last encounters with the people he met, and the ensuing teaching given to his disciples, should have deep meaning for us in the run up to Good Friday and Easter.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, in these readings, follows on from Mark chapter 8, verses 31 – 38 and Mark chapter 9, verses 30 – 32. If we read these verses first we will see the continuity of the Lord’s teaching to his disciples.

We begin with the encounter between Jesus and the rich young man - **Mark 10, verses 17 - 31**

The Encounter:- Mark 10, verses 17 – 22; The Rich Young Man

The first impression given by this youngster is that he is a bit of a show-off! Running up, falling on his knees and addressing Jesus as “Good Teacher”. In Matthew’s Gospel he is recorded as saying “. . . *what good deed must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Matthew 19, verse 16). Most Jews at the time would expect that the keeping of the Law would be sufficient and the young man asserts that he has done so.

In his approach to Jesus, it may be that he realises that external obedience is not enough. He has kept the letter of the Law all his life, and he saw something in the Lord Jesus Christ that was lacking in his own life. “*Jesus, looked at him, and loved him.*” (verse 21). The word used here for “love” is “*agapeo*” - signifying a deep compassionate regard for the individual. Now the Lord puts his finger on the one thing that is holding back the spiritual life of the young man. Christian discipleship is always costly! In this case it is dependence on worldly treasure which is the problem. An unwillingness to break free and give his all to following the Lord Jesus.

The Teaching:- Mark 10, verses 23 – 31; The cost of discipleship

These verses are addressed to the disciples. This is a continuation of the teaching in verses 13 – 16 of this chapter and deals with the need for single mindedness in those seeking to enter the kingdom of God. As back in verse 15, which refers to the single mindedness of a child, so here dependence on worldly goods are a barrier to serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think verse 25 refers to a literal camel and a literal needle! There is no need to try to mitigate the impact of the original teaching! There are sayings by other Jewish teachers of the time, referring to the impossibility of some vast object (e.g. an elephant) getting through the eye of a needle. It is meant to be grotesque to be memorable! However we must not miss the utterly serious truth that it expresses.

The disciples understand that it is not just excess riches that hinder salvation! It is so easy to have a dependence on earthly things, rather than a single minded seeking of the kingdom and a desire to follow Jesus.

The response of Peter to Jesus is to affirm their dependence on him and their sacrifice of abandoning earthly things: see Mark chapter 1, verses 16 – 20. The promise of great rewards both now and through eternity are an encouragement. However there are solemn warnings! The blessings will come with the possibility of persecutions and the Lord’s “pecking order” may not be what we expect!