

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. 15th Oct. 2006

Keys to the Kingdom – 'The Kingdom is forged in sacrifice'

Mark 10: 17 – 31



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

The kingdom is forged in sacrifice: Sacrifice is 'the act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else more important or worthy.' Albert Schweitzer said "the only ones among us who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve."

In the story of the rich young ruler we see something of how an essential key to the kingdom is forged in sacrifice, but that to receive the kingdom we need to be like children with a simple and open trust. The story of the rich young ruler follows immediately after the story of Jesus and the little children. Jesus in Mark 9 turned upside down the disciples' perception of children in the kingdom of heaven. If we look at the context of today's gospel reading we see in the preceding verses the story of Jesus welcoming little children. Children have an amazing capacity for acceptance of what they are told especially if they are loved and valued. In our story of the rich young man, he seeks out Jesus to ask him the question which might be on all our lips "*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus gives him a very straight answer but the young man looks at Jesus and says "*all these I have kept since I was a boy.*" It's at this point that the young man misses the most wonderful truth. Mark describes it for us like this ²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him.* Because Jesus loved him, he also knew what would be the absolute best for him, but unlike a child who is often willing to accept a loving instruction, the young man wasn't able to accept the sacrifice that Jesus asked of him. The sacrifice that Jesus asked was this "*Go, sell everything you have ... Then come, follow me.*"²² *At this the man's face fell*" The rich young man as far as we know never did get to know the unfathomable riches of following Christ. What sort of ministry he might have had if only he could have taken that one gigantic step by trusting the one who loved him so greatly. He just wasn't able to take that child-like step of faith and acceptance which is so hard for each one of us to take.

Fortunately for us, who in this world's terms are very rich indeed, when the disciples asked who then can be saved, Jesus replied "*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.*" But that doesn't mean that we are not called to live a life of sacrifice, because it's only in those terms that the kingdom of God really grows. The deceitfulness of wealth in successful people like the rich young man is that it kills the humility of a servant heart. The problem for each one of us is that we lean so heavily on our own understanding. God's desire is to see his kingdom grow, but it doesn't grow by material effort. "*Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.*" His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and we are being called to build and prepare for eternity. Jesus had one focus - the kingdom of God - but models the humility of doing whatever God asks of him. God has the master plan and Jesus follows. Gethsemane shows us that he wrestles with his humanity to maintain the focus on God's objectives – the servant heart in the extreme.

Our gospel passage finishes with Peter exclaiming "*We have left everything to follow you!*" and we know as we read through our NT that these disciples of Jesus did sacrifice everything to follow their masters example. If we wish to see the kingdom grow then we have to learn what it means to follow the example of the Lord. We also have the example of those who have given their lives and reputations to follow Christ.

Witness: Questions to discuss



1. Do you think that if we were more childlike, we could respond more easily to Jesus challenge?
2. Discuss how we in the rich western world can rise to Jesus challenge to the rich young ruler.
3. Share with the group anyone who you think exemplifies an attitude of sacrifice, and share what you have learnt from them.
4. "Some are great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Many would regard this quotation as true to life. How does Jesus teaching compare with this?
5. Do you think that we fully understand the concept of sacrifice in the light of eternity and what it means? (*For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*).