Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN *Presbyterian Church*

"NEEDY CHILDREN AND A RICH RULER"

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: February 25, 2024

SPEAKER: Wil/Brian

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 18:15-30

The novel *Lord Jim* by Joseph Conrad tells the story of a sailor who, in a moment of testing, discovers his true self. In the middle of the night, during a violent storm, chief mate Jim discovers his ship is sinking but realizes there are not enough life boats to save all the passengers on board. Panicked, he abandons ship with the unscrupulous captain and crew, and they leave the sleeping passengers to their fate. They invent a cover story for their survival, only later to discover that the passengers had been rescued, exposing the cowardice of the crew. Jim is crushed by his self-knowledge and never recovers.

In Luke 18:15-30, we read a similar story of self-realization, when a rich young ruler discovers his true character. During Christ's journey to Jerusalem, his many Kingdom declarations are "hard sayings." They continue to catch crowds by surprise, as in today's passage, where Jesus explains that ***entrance into the kingdom of God is granted to those who embrace a childlike dependence on God and forsake every other source of sufficiency.***

The necessity of dependence (vv. 15-17)

The helplessness and dependence of children exemplify the kind of relationship and posture we should have with God. In verses 15-17, we note how the disciples arrogantly assume that keeping the children away from Christ is an act of service, only to realize it is counterintuitive to his Kingdom values.

- Read Matthew 18:1-6 and Luke 18:9-14. Why is it good news for us that Jesus welcomes weak and needy people who cannot help themselves? Why is this hard news for the strong and self-sufficient?

The danger of independence (vv. 18-25)

At first glance, the rich young ruler seems to have the right posture before Jesus (cf. Mark 10:17). But he is in for a rude awakening when Jesus asks him to define "good." Christ then presses him toward the logical conclusion (v. 22) as he exposes the ruler's heart, demonstrating the young man's true inability to keep the Law.

- Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. What did Jesus want the rich young ruler to understand about his true spiritual condition? How can material wealth prevent us from the vital posture of helpless dependence upon Christ?
- Read Luke 10:25-37. Discuss the similarities in attitude of the lawyer and the ruler. Jesus challenged both of them to put love for God first. Why did Jesus often connect obedience with faith? (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; John 14:15)

The vindication of dependence (vv. 26-30)

The disciples are shocked at Jesus' hard saying in verse 25, and wonder if anyone can be saved. But then Jesus turns their despair on its head by declaring, "What is impossible with man is possible with God" (v. 27). Theologian R. Kent Hughes concludes, *"I like Jesus' odds, so to speak. It is totally impossible for us to enter the kingdom of God, an impossibility that is intensified by wealth. The odds for all of us are zero. But with God, thanks to his grace, the odds are infinite."*[1]

- "*With great power comes great responsibility*" is a proverb popularized by the Marvel comic, *Spiderman*. But today's story in Luke offers an even more dire warning as summarized by Hughes, "*With prosperity comes great danger.*"[2] Read 1 Timothy 6:10 and Ecclesiastes 5:10. In your life, where do you see a need to alter your attitude and reliance upon money?
- Read Matthew 16:24. Jesus consistently asks people to lay down the things they trust in or love more than God. What is he asking of you?

Family Dinner Table

The Cruciform Life

As Jesus commends his disciples for leaving home and following him (vv. 28-30), we are reminded of the cost of discipleship from previous studies in Luke 9:23-25; 14:25-33. Just as Jesus "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8), we are called to be imitators of him, bearing our crosses daily. Or as author and pastor Rankin Wilbourne writes, we are called to the "*cruciform life.*" He explains, *"The cruciform way is the cross-shaped way. And the cruciform way is God's way to the good and beautiful life he intends for us. This seems strange to us. Are you telling me the way to wholeness and flourishing is through loss and deprivation, through suffering and death? That seems counterproductive and counterintuitive. Exactly. We believe the cross has something to teach us, all of us, about what it means to live a fully human life here and now. The cross is God's wisdom for human flourishing. Not only is the cross the instrument of our salvation; it also sets a pattern for the whole art of living. The cross is more than an ethic, a way of doing things; it sets up a whole new way of being, fueled by a whole new way of seeing. Everything must now be interpreted in light of the cross."*[3]

- Read Matthew 16:21-28. How did Jesus model the cruciform life for his disciples and us? What do we stand to gain when we take up our crosses and follow him?

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[1-2]Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth, Volume 2*. 1998. Wheaton, IL. Crossway Books. 208-9.

[3]Wilbourne, Rankin/Gregor, Brian. *The Cross Before Me: Reimagining the Way to the Good Life.* 2019. Colorado Springs, CO. David C. Cook Publishers. 20