

## “The Cost of Discipleship”

Mark 10:17-31

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This story from Mark’s Gospel has always been troubling to people who consider themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. Are we all to go and sell all we have, give the proceeds to the poor, and then follow Jesus? Is that the intent of the teaching? I think not.

I think the rich young man who approaches Jesus with the question about inheriting eternal life has taken the whole matter of his personal discipleship for granted. He is unconscious of the claim God has on his time and his talent and his treasure. The answer Jesus gives is intended to bring this fellow to consciousness, to wake him up to the truth that God has a claim on his life. In a way, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to celebrate this truth; that God has a claim on my life.

In my imagination, I picture this rich young fellow later that same day. He is no longer sulking. He is now reflecting on what Jesus has taught him. He is now considering how he has been using his life up to that point, and is considering how he will use his life moving forward! Instead of feeling chagrined, he is feeling inspired. He looks over at the kitchen table, and there, under some other mail he has considered junk mail, is the stewardship mailing from his church! With a smile, he opens that envelope and considers the claim God has on his time and his talent and even his treasure.

He takes out his pocket calculator and calculates that the one hour a week he devotes to doing God’s work is actually one one hundred and sixty eighth of the total time he’s been given by God each week. He thinks maybe he can double that!

He remembers reading in the weekly newsletter that his church needs someone to take over the scheduling for cooks at the Wednesday School supper for the next school year! He's an accountant! He passed the CPA exams. Spread sheets are his daily business. Surely, he can volunteer to organize this ministry which he understands is critical to the youth of his church! He picks up the phone and makes the call. It occurs to him that God really does have a claim on his time. How much of his time is up to him to decide.

In my imagination, the rich young man from our story wakes up the following day and heads out the front door with a new kick in his step. He takes a deep breath and exhales mightily as he plunges down the steps and into his busy day. He remembers how at church the previous Sunday, the Joyful Noise Band had played the prelude and accompanied the hymns. They were pretty good, but they could have used some help in the percussion section. "When the Saints Go Marching In" reaches a person's heart when a snare drum sets the beat! "When the Saints Go Marching In" comes alive and stirs your bones when a drummer gets into the act.

The rich young man remembers his drum set, the one from his high school days, the one that's stored in the basement. He lights a lamp and descends the steps into the cellar. And there they are! The drums from his youth are just waiting to be resurrected. He remembers his talent for beating a drum. Just thinking out this hidden talent of his makes his foot start to tap; makes his hips start to sway, makes his whole body reverberate. In my imagination, he picks up the phone and calls the leader of the Joyful Noise Band. Says something like: "I'm the new drummer in the Joyful Noise Band! I've got talent to share. I've realized this very day that God has a claim on some of my talent! When's the next rehearsal?"

As you can see, I have a fairly active imagination. But I want you to know that my imagination is grounded in Biblical theology.

In my imagination, the very next day, our rich young man is reconciling his checkbook; he's perusing all his expenses for the previous month. He sees that Starbucks has a significant claim on his income. He sees that Five Guys and 2 Hopewell and Pizza Hut have a bigger claim on his income than he had realized. He sees he is practically tithing to the local gas station where he fills up his fleet of vehicles. Finally, he sees that his weekly gifts to his church add up to less than what he has invested in the care of his front lawn, his pride and joy.

In my imagination, I see the rich young man reconsidering the claim God has on his income. He pulls in \$6000 per month, and his current pledge is \$25 per week. He pulls out his calculator and sees that this amounts to 1.6% of his income. He is stunned by this realization. He thinks out loud, "I can double that. I think maybe God has more of a claim on my income than I had thought at first. He's good at math.

But the thing is; he's becoming very good at theology. He's growing in his understanding that his life is really not his own. God has a claim on some of his time, some of his talent, and some of his treasure. It's up to him to work out the details. But now he does so consciously, with intentionality. He considers tracking down Jesus one more time. This time his question won't be, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" This time his question will be, "Where's my pledge card? I can't wait to fill it out and return it to my church on October 25<sup>th</sup>!"

I offer this sermon to my church believing as I always have that the God who cares about my soul also has a claim on my life. Thus, I share this sermon with you all today in the greatest of hope.  
Amen.