



THE NEW SHOFAR

Discipleship is shaped by the reality of Christ's Cross

1 Kings 3:3-14 - Mark 10:17-30

Trinity 20

It is not easy being a follower of Christ – so says Jesus

What Mark has Jesus now doing is expand on his expectations of disciples. He had previously spoke of disciples as needing to be *like little children*. In the culture of the time, that meant considering themselves to be among the lowest of the low, people who served the world rather than looked upon others as being opportunities for their own advancement and social position in society. They had to live as people in need.

Importantly, Mark locates this discussion amidst his expansion of the idea of what it means to live under the Rule of God – *entering into the Kingdom of God*. It is not possible to live under divine Rule when everything a person does in life is calculated in terms of how it might be of advantage to them or how it fits in with their own personal views on life in the world. When a disciple lives under Divine Rule, the first question asked will always be – how does this fit in with God wants, demands, expects of followers of His only Son? The tool to assist in measuring that is spelled out for us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,6,7).

There is a Way of Discipleship – it is the Way of the Cross

What is not to be missed in our present passage is the location of this particular incident. The evangelist tells us how Jesus is *setting off on his way*. What is that way? It is the Way of the Cross, the road that will take him to Jerusalem and his destiny on the cross. It is the Way of Salvation. It is the shadow of the cross that now hangs over everything Jesus will do and say and it is under the same shadow all discipleship is to be measured. And so, when a *certain man* comes to him and asks *what must I do to inherit eternal life* the answer is going to be given in terms of the Way that leads through Golgotha.

“Eternal life” here is a synonym for salvation – what must I do to be saved? This was a discussion of some importance among the Jews and this particular young man would have used the word *inherit* deliberately. For him it was to be understood in the way all in Israel understood their past and their future. They were the children of Abraham, sons and daughters of God and it was as God’s children they were inheriting the Promised Land, the abundant blessings of God (characterized as being *milk and honey*). This was their right as Jews. Contained within this was the hope for the blessing of eternal life that would be the inheritance of the righteous – those who kept the commandments

Salvation is all about what we are prepared to let God do

Jesus begins by challenging the man for referring to him as being *good*. That seems a little odd as most of us would naturally think of Jesus as being “good”. However, Jesus is affirming how it is *God alone who is good*. *The point he is making is* how this “goodness” is not something coming about through personal effort, through the keeping of the commandments. God is *good*. Goodness is therefore a gift

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from God, a sharing in the very life of God. Divine *goodness* is shared freely with those who come into the divine presence. It is what happens when men and women live in God and allow God to rule over their lives. In biblical terms it is the understanding of what the Garden of Eden represents. Life for Adam and Eve before they sinned was a life of this *goodness*. It is destroyed and diminished by human sin, by selfishness, arrogance and hubris.

Keeping the laws is essential but only as a starting point

This was an important contribution to the argument of the time. Jesus declares how it is not possible for a person to make themselves *good* by keeping a set of rules. It is no surprise when Jesus speaks of the ten commandments but he uses them only as the starting point. If a Jew was to maintain he or she was keeping all of the commandments then the divine response would be “Great, now you that you have the right foundation, you can begin the demanding work of living as a child of God”! Keeping the commandments is but the start of a life of discipleship. It does not define, limit or define who a disciple is and what a disciple is called to be.

The Old Testament records God’s solemn promise: if the people are faithful to obey the commandments they will live long and prosper in the land of Canaan, a land given to them by Yahweh their God. Without the slightest hint of arrogance or pride the man reassures Jesus how he has kept all of these. In other words, he has reached the starting barrier for *the way of discipleship*. He thinks he has reached his spiritual goal which is why the reply of Jesus to this man is so shocking and terrible. He tells the man that *there is one thing you lack*. How could that be? If he is already keeping all of the commandments, and has done so for the whole of his adult life, what is left for him to be doing?

The is a divinely mandated rule for Christian living

What Jesus tells him goes to the very heart of how a person is to live under the Rule of God. They must have God as their first love. It is God who must be the primary focus of all they do and say. For Jesus this is not just a notional concept, something to be acknowledged but then kept in the background, a belief brought to mind during religious celebrations and services. It is the defining and shaping reality that must mould the day to day living of everyone seeking to follow Christ. How a person lives in the world, relates to others, makes decisions and plans, sets goals and expectations – these are all to be shaped according to the will of God. This divine will is expressed in the person and ministry of his Son Jesus who is the Christ, the Messiah and Saviour of the world. Jesus is the *rule* by which we measure life and the way we participate in it. For the disciple, nothing is done or considered apart from Christ. No wonder then this man thought it was too tough a life for him to undertake!

Of course, the present teaching needs to be added to the earlier teaching as to how disciples need to *repent and believe*. They are to repent of the primacy of wealth, privilege, status and power in life and believe and trust in God. God alone gives salvation and as a just God this salvation is given freely and without cost in and through Jesus Christ his Son. This is not a new teaching as it is reflected in Jesus’ earlier command: a disciple needs to *take up your cross and follow me*. This is what is so appalling in what Jesus is saying. It turns the social standards upside down and reverses the way the community tends to measure the worth of a person and establishes social status. Christ’s followers (Christians) need to be as *little children*, people seeking no social status or standing in the eyes of the world, people for whom God alone is their enduring treasure.