
FORSAKE ALL AND FOLLOW ME

September 5, 2010 | By Derick Parfan | Scripture: Mark 10:17-31

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."¹

SEARCHING (10:17-20)

We ask hundreds of questions everyday. We hear these from conversations between husband and wife. What shall we eat today? How shall we pay the bills that are due tomorrow? Shall we continue renting this house or consider buying our own? Shall we go to church this Sunday or go out of town for vacation? We want answers to our questions because we have needs to be met. The need to eat. The need to pay the bills. The need for security. The need to satisfy our soul. Throughout our lifetime we have asked thousands of questions. Some have answers. Some don't.

However, there is nothing more significant than this question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). This is the question burning in the heart of the rich man. He was waiting for days to catch a glimpse of this Jesus whom he was hearing from other people. He sincerely wanted to ask this question, the question he sensed his colleagues

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) and *Ang Biblia* (Philippine Bible Society, 2001). Scripture quotations marked by MBB are from *Magandang Balita Biblia* (Philippine Bible Society, 2005).

in religion or politics or business cannot answer. Then he saw Jesus and his disciples on the road to Jerusalem. He ran to catch this now popular teacher and miracle worker, knelt in respect, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus' immediate reply is not meant to answer that question but to draw out what is lacking in that young man's heart. "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. (Are you ready to recognize I am God and, therefore, has God's authority?) And this good God gave these commandments, surely you know all these:

Commandment No. 6 – Do not murder. No. 7 – Do not commit adultery. No. 8 – Do not steal. No. 9 – Do not bear false witness, do not defraud. No. 5 – Honor your father and mother."

Not really arrogant, but with honesty and sincerity, he said, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." The man was religious. Externally, he was righteous before the people. He has a good name in the social, religious and political community. Yet, he felt there was "something" lacking. Hence Matthew's account adds, "What am I still lacking?" (Matt. 19:20). He went to Jesus and desperately looking for that "something" that will complete his riches and his religiosity.

It is the same for all of us. We are looking for that "something." That's why we are here. Even if we have done all that we could, we still sense that we are missing something. This story tells not just of experiencing something good or fulfilling in life, but of "eternal life." It is not about duration, but the quality and satisfaction in life. The question inside the rich man's heart reveals that *all of us, religious or not, desire fulfillment in life, whether here on earth or the next*. The hole inside the human heart continues to look for answer to life's most important question, "What must I do to have a satisfaction in life which never ends?" The same question bothers a churchgoer like you and your drunkard neighbor, or business people and the tricycle drivers, and the fishball vendors.

THE LORD's CALL (10:21-22)

Jesus, always true and loving, likes to answer that question. Looking straight into the eyes of the rich man, Jesus did not condemn him but lovingly issued this command, "You lack one thing (here's this 'something' you're looking for): go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (v. 21). This challenge is specifically directed to the rich man. Jesus knows this man. Yes, he was faithful regarding the last half of the 10 Commandments, but disobedient regarding the first, You shall have no other gods before me. Jesus knows that his wealth is the god this man was worshipping. He commanded him to forsake this earthly treasure so that he will receive the heavenly riches; to leave this wealth which has mastery over his soul so that he may follow the Lord of his life and wealth.

It might be wrong to say that Jesus is asking all of us to do exactly as Jesus told the rich man (although he may require it for some). But the same command to forsake everything we value above God (that's repentance) and turn to follow Jesus (that's faith) is for all of us. At the outset of his Jerusalem journey, he summarized his call to discipleship, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34). Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." The self who trusts in wealth must die. The self who loves family more than Jesus must die. The self who pursues worldly ambitions must die. *Jesus calls all of us to forsake everything we value and follow him.* This is true Christianity.

That's the call of the One who is Lord over all; it is not a suggestion. It is a call to regard Jesus as the most important in our life, to trust in him, to love him more than anything or anyone else. The rich man was "disheartened" (v. 22) by this call. "He went away sorrowful," not because of repentance, but because of his love for his great wealth. Jesus called for a life-changing decision. The rich man decided it is not worth it. He wants to have the best of both worlds. But when Jesus confronted him to choose discipleship, he decided to pursue his selfish ambition. That's how many people today have responded to Jesus. We shared the gospel to them and they said, "No, it is better for me to keep this religion; No, it is better for me to keep this business. It is not worth following Jesus."

AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION (10:23-25)

Well, if that's the way you think, listen to what Jesus would teach his disciples. Or if that's the way your unbelieving husband or friend thinks, share Jesus' answer to this question, "Is it worth clinging to your possessions or your ambitions or your family's religion as if they are gods, as if they can truly satisfy the longings of our heart?"

Jesus doesn't think so. He exclaimed, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth (or those who trust in their wealth for their security or their significance) to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 23)! What is at stake here is "entering the kingdom of God," that is, eternal life. No one who trusts in riches can truly trust in God and enter his kingdom. At this statement, Jesus' disciples were "amazed" and were not sure if they were hearing Jesus correctly. "Oh! All our lives we thought that wealth is a sign of God's blessings. Now Jesus is saying, it is a great hindrance to entering the kingdom." Still scratching their heads, Jesus reiterated, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (vv. 24-25). What chance in a million tries can you force a camel to go through a needle! Jesus was saying that it is not easy to enter the kingdom. It is not even difficult. It is impossible! *For those who continue to cling to what they value above Jesus, it is absolutely impossible to take hold of eternal life.* If you are saying,

"I will cling to my wealth and I will not follow Jesus," Jesus is saying to you, "If that's what you want, you will be outside my Father's kingdom, with Satan and his angels. You are will not inherit eternal life, but will suffer eternal punishment in hell." Now tell me, is it worth clinging to what's in your hand right now and not follow Jesus?

MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE (10:26-27)

At this point, you might begin to say, "If what Jesus was saying is impossible, what can I do about it?" The rich man approached Jesus with the hope that there is something he can do to inherit life, but he went away sorrowful, saying to himself, "I can't do what Jesus was asking me. It is impossible." Yet it is. The disciples, too, "were exceedingly astonished" when they asked Jesus, "Then who can be saved" (v. 26)? It is a common response to regard that salvation or the experience of eternal life with God in heaven is a human achievement. That there is something we can do or at least contribute for God to accept us before him. Jesus' point earlier is that it is humanly impossible! If it is, then who can be saved, who can forsake all and follow Jesus and experience eternal life?

Jesus replied, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (v. 27). Salvation is not human achievement, it is God's accomplishment. Salvation is not by maintaining the external elements of the law, but by the inner change of the heart that only the Spirit can accomplish. *God, by his grace, makes the experience of eternal life possible for us.* What is humanly impossible, God makes possible. The call of Jesus to forsake all and follow him is a call to abandon self-reliance or trust in other things and to put one's trust in God who is Savior and Lord. It is like a three-year old child crossing a four-lane highway not by his own, but letting her father carry her in his arms. This is child-like faith.

LOOKING FORWARD (10:28-30)

Like this child, what do we need to keep in mind for us to continue trusting in Jesus – that when we see a beautiful toy in the middle of the highway, we will not jump out of the father's arms and grab that toy? Not only shall we look at the danger of being hit by speeding cars but also remember the promise of a date with daddy at Jollibee. That is how Jesus reminded his disciples when Peter asked, "See, we have left everything and followed you" (v. 28). We have businesses, we have families, but we left them for your sake, Lord. We are that child who clings to your loving arms and are not jumping out. We trusted in you, Lord; is it really worth it? What's in it for us then?

Jesus reassured them of the staggering promised rewards for those who forsake all and follow him:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not

receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (vv. 29-30).

Jesus' message is not just for unbelievers or non-followers. This is a message for all followers of Jesus to stay committed and fully devoted to him. Along our journey with Jesus, we may find worthless toys like money or job or relationship or time which are hindering our full commitment to following Jesus. We need the assurances of God's promise that it is worth following Jesus in every area of our lives. That's the point of Jesus' words to his disciples. *We can continue following Jesus and not let other things hinder us by looking forward to God's gracious rewards.* If for the sake of Jesus, we love him more than any in our family, we will receive a hundred times the love that a wife can offer. If for the sake of Jesus, we are willing to give up even our jobs in obedience to his will, we will receive a hundred times better than what the company can offer us. Jesus was offering his disciples a thousand times better than what they would have left.

Jesus' call is unmistakeable: *forsake all to follow Jesus and you will gain everything.* It is worth losing everything in order to gain Jesus, our everlasting treasure and joy. It is not worth not to follow Jesus. You will lose everything, because you will lose Jesus your life. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (8:35).

FOOLISH, BUT NO FOOL (10:31)

At one point in the life of the disciples, they heard Jesus calling them, "Come, follow me." They left everything and followed him. Most people, even their relatives, thought they have made a foolish decision. The rich man heard Jesus' call, "Come, follow me." He did not leave everything and chose not to follow Christ. He thought it is foolish to abandon earthly riches to follow Jesus. But Jesus said, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (10:31). The rich man may be "first" in the eyes of men when it comes to wealth, prestige, and power; but he is "last" in the eyes of God. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul" (8:36-37). Those who follow Jesus may be "last" in the eyes of men and regarded as fools for Christ's sake; but they are certainly "first" in the kingdom of God.

Many, including Christians, thought that Jim Elliot's decision to leave his ministry in the US to reach a savage tribe in Ecuador a foolish decision. When he, with his four friends, attempted first contact with that tribe, they were speared to death. Many thought it is a waste of five lives. God doesn't think so. Jim Elliot wrote while he was still young, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We may not die like Jim Elliot, but we are also called to take up our cross and follow Jesus. We are

called to forsake all and follow Jesus. He is no fool who gives up everything to gain everything.

Committing your life to Christ is difficult. Leaving my job in San Miguel and pursuing seminary studies were difficult decision. It is difficult when I left personal comfort to embrace the demands of pastoral ministries. It is not easy for my wife to resign from her job. It is not easy to move out of our house in Quezon City to transfer here in Baliwag. As followers of Jesus, he may require us to really do difficult things as acts of obedience to his will. Everytime we face that decision, the question must not be, "Is it difficult?" but, "Is it worth it?" I did not regret following Jesus. No one who truly follows Christ will regret it.

What is that "little toy" in your hands that you cannot let go and is hindering you from being fully committed to Jesus? Will you forsake it for the sake of the One who died on the cross for you? Will you forsake it in order to experience the joy of having Jesus as Lord and Savior? Will you forsake it for the sake of gaining everything?