

## **Mark 10:17-31 & Hebrews 4:12-16**

### **Front Line Discipleship**

October 2021

#### **Mark 10: 17-31**

##### *The Rich Young Man*

<sup>17</sup> 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?” <sup>18</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. <sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.’” <sup>20</sup> And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

<sup>23</sup> 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!” <sup>24</sup> 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! <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” <sup>28</sup> Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

#### **Hebrews 4:12-16**

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

##### *Jesus the Great High Priest*

<sup>14</sup> Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

## **Intro**

I’ve been feeling that it’s time to get practical with *Koinonia*-Fellowship in the Spirit of Jesus.

We have enough theory and theology of it so now let’s work on it as discipleship.

So I have been praying. On Thursday morning around 4:00 a.m. the Holy Spirit surprised me with a download relating to this week’s Gospel reading from the lectionary about the Rich Young Man.

This is message comes out of what I suddenly saw at 4:00 a.m:

The conversation between Jesus and the Rich Young Man is one specific conversation with one specific person. What is typical about it is the way Jesus invites this individual to radically embrace him as the source of God’s eternal life.

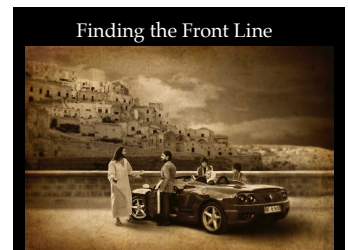
The Rich Young Man is looking for assurance on what really determines being in God’s eternal provision, or God’s Kingdom as Jesus also describes it. After some unwelcome flattery in being called ‘good’ Jesus reminds him of six basic commandments that every Jewish person would know.

<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.’”

The reply is fascinating!

“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

At which point we read something amazing



<sup>21</sup> And Jesus, looking at him, loved him,

Jesus was impressed.

Everything this young man could do he had done and Jesus was very positive to the point of loving him.



Out of that love, Jesus takes him to what I am calling the front line, that place beyond where his own self determined capabilities no longer worked and said something specifically to this Young Man.

*In your search for life in God's Kingdom... 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."*

Remember that Jesus loved this man, and yet he took him to the place he could not go to without letting go what he had come to rely on and define himself by – his wealth.

The front line is the place that divides where we are comfortable and capable from where we really need to be with God as King.

Incidentally, this example really puzzled the disciples because as some people still believe today, wealth is a sure indicator of God's favour so why would God ask this man to give up the clear sign of God's blessing on his life?

Some people do jump across the front line from control and self-reliance to faith and God's provision. This Young man did not so we read.

Disheartened by *Jesus' words*, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Jesus was also disappointed and went on to say to his disciples:

"How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

It would be so easy to think that this is an object lesson about money and the problems of wealth and it's not as if Jesus wants everyone to be poor. No, wealth is simply one of many issues that compete with God for our loyalty and faith, even among Christians.

This man was living a clean respectable Godly life. Jesus loved him for that and yet he was falling short of the great invitation to embrace God as King. That is determined at the front line where our hearts and mind really bend to Jesus as King. This is where we determine whether we really are in the Kingdom of God with 'Team Jesus' or not. This is the place and moment of decision.

So we need to get the bigger picture here,

To be in God's Kingdom you need to be a disciple of Jesus. He is the door, the way the life. – Right?

To be a disciple of Jesus we need to let go of other attachments, bonds, loyalties and authorities so we can obey and follow Jesus which is often a point of crisis - as it was in this story.

With just one question, in a few moments Jesus avoided months if not years of double mindedness by calling him to let go of this wealth to bless the poor now.

You may never have been challenged like that? You may have been able to live thus far with all your treasures and loves secured with Jesus in the frame as well. The common way to achieve this is compromise. Adding water to the wine makes Jesus less challenging so we keep well behind the front line and avoid the crisis he provokes but still sing the songs and all that! Think, 'Jesus lite', Civic Religion, Bourgeois Christianity or folk religion etc.

## Front Lines Considered

So to consider this understanding of the Front Line I can give some general examples of issues that reach crisis when Jesus calls us to cross a line we want to stay behind.

Then I am going to apply one to us here at St Matt's

The first is really simple and most basic:

- My Way or God's Way?

The indication of this is whether decisions are made with reference to God or everything is self-referenced.

I know a man who told me, "God is on my committee." In other words, he himself decides and God is one of several voices he has around the table as consultants. That is a long way from 'Jesus is Lord' and makes God at best to be a co-pilot or consultant navigator. He avoids any front line that may upset this delicate arrangement.

- My Idol or God?

The second common example is having a substitute for God, or an idol. Again God is not denied and this need not be atheism but, real trust and faith is placed in something like the economy, or one career or family, or our toys and pleasures. It might even be aspects of church such as music or our ministry.

In self-delusion the things of the Lord and other good things can block out God as our true life. Jesus would call us to the front line at the cross to bring those things to death so God really can be our God.

- Our Control or Trust in God?

This is a big one.

A former American church member named 'Rita' -like my mother- came to me before services to ask, "Now Francis, is everything under control?" At Pentecost the Church was born in an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit that no one controlled but most church people -especially church committees- expect and even demand that there be control. The cost of that is we lose trust in God as if God is not really active in His church! It also applies in the personal sphere until the day when we lose control and there is no option but to trust God. You may have experienced that yourself?

- Christ or Culture?

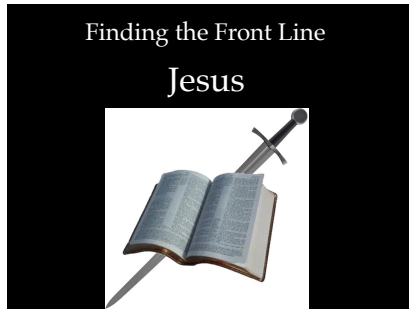
This is a slippery one I have had to learn about. The basic question is whether we expect Christ to conform to culture or the culture to conform to Christ. That applies to the church as well which St Matthews only knows too well. Are the church's views on marriage and sexuality shaped by Christ or by the culture. Which is the horse and which is the cart here?

The front line is the point at which we decide for Christ even when our cultural heritage or context would say differently? Crossing that front line makes people to be the 'salt of the earth' – flavoursome and alternative.

One of the things prophetic pastoral preaching does is take people to the front line so we can make real decisions. At the front line we decide to repent and believe the good news of God's Kingdom life being offered in Jesus Christ but it will involve leaving something behind.

### Finding the Front Line

- My Way or God's Way?
- My Idol or God?
- Our Control or Trust in God?
- Christ or Culture?



One last comment on all this was brought to us in the Hebrews reading today: God's word is sharp, very sharp:

<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's Word is compared to the AK47 or M16 assault rifle of the first century, namely the two-edged sword which was an instrument of violence. God's word to us is most clearly heard in Jesus who is the Word of God. That is why we stand to hear Jesus' words read in the Gospel each week as Words of the Lord.

So, on any matter the frontline outcome is about whether we take his words as they come or add water to the wine, or, excuse and confuse in some way.

### Application

So I want to bring us all to a front line on an aspect of church life, namely conflict. Churches are not immune from conflict just as Jesus and the first disciples experienced conflict as motivated, strong and passionate personalities walked with Jesus.

**Q1** The Questions are:      What do you do about it?  
    How do we process it?

My pastor's question is whether we respond to and process conflict in a Christ determined way or a culture determined way? For most but not all that becomes a question of conforming to Christ or being Kiwi?

That is a frontline issue, conforming to Christ or doing the Kiwi thing?

I say that mindful that some of us are bi-Cultural with roots in other cultures as well.

So let's think about conflict and how we typically process that. This might involve complaints and offenses too?

So for when it goes beyond forgive and forget and really matters Jesus gave some specific instructions involving a 3 step process. This is all based on what we have been teaching about *Koinonia*-Fellowship because that is the issue he is most concerned about for his Church.

We find this in Matthew 18 v.v.15-18: [NRSV]

<sup>15</sup> "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The specific piece of Jesus' instruction that I think we need to hear is what to do when you are sinned against, offended, or have a personal complaint?

Jesus give instruction in relational terms seeking to maintain and repair the *Koinonia*-Fellowship:

<sup>15</sup> “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

Now let me ask, is that a typical kiwi response to differences, conflict or disagreement let alone ‘sin’ or such?

**Q2:** What do you think?

It might be but I would say typically not. First reference is to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party and perhaps then a 4<sup>th</sup> party and then...

Do you see the front line?

Is this front line a scary place?

Would you rather not go there?

Now we are ready to hear Jesus promise of the Holy Spirit to comfort, encourage, empower and such. Crossing front lines to follow Jesus is about letting go of something and trusting which can be a cross like experience. This is where you need the help of Brothers and Sisters and cell groups to support and hold accountable.

But without covering the full counsel of God this morning I want to seriously ask you.

**Q3:** When faced with conflict, light, medium or heavy do you resolve to follow Jesus’ instructions as found in Matthew 18:15 ff. or are you going to do the typical Kiwi thing with round about communication?

## **Conclusion**

If you are feeling that the fence has just been electrified, that is how the Rich Young Man felt whom Jesus loved. He went away very unhappy and Jesus was disappointed.

I want to encourage you, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly to do its work and cut through any confusion or arrogance.

If you have not already done so, decide that because Jesus says it, this is what I’ll do.

That is what makes us disciples and making disciples is what St Matt’s is all about, right?

So perhaps the takeaway here for church people is to get clear on our Front Lines so that more and more of our lives are consciously shaped by the instructions of Jesus rather than, culture, idols, personal preference or the need to be in control.

It will be hard but simple.