



Weekly Newsletter: 26th March 2024

Reflection: Not what was expected

By Lorna Ferguson

"The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Matthew 10:26-27)

How do you feel when things don't work out as you expected? Perhaps you feel frustrated, upset, confused, or discouraged. During Lent, I have been reading through the gospel of Mark and noticing Mark's focus on how the coming of God's kingdom did not match people's expectations. Jesus' first recorded words in Mark are, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Many Jews in those days believed that the Messiah would come as a conquering king who would free them from Roman rule and restore Israel's fortunes. Yet, as the gospel progresses, it gradually becomes clear that Jesus' kingdom is in fact quite different from those expectations. In many ways it is an upside-down kingdom, where people's expectations about it are turned on their heads.

One example of this is in the story of the rich young man in Mark 10. This story is also told in Matthew 19 and Luke 18, and in all three accounts it follows straight on from Jesus' teaching that "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." We are told that a man then runs up to Jesus, kneels and asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. When we put the three accounts together, we know that this man was young, rich, a ruler, and devout about keeping God's law. I wonder what we would think if such a young person came running into church one day, asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. I imagine we might be quite excited, perhaps thinking that this is exactly the kind of person we would love to have in our church. He seems to be so nearly there that we might expect he won't have any problem believing.

Let's look at the different people's expectations and reactions in the story:

The man himself: He asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He may have been wondering if he was doing enough already since he claimed to have kept the commandments Jesus listed since he was a boy. Or perhaps he wanted to check if there was anything else he needed to do, just in case. However, he didn't get the answer he expected. Although he was keeping many of the commandments, Jesus put his finger on the ones he wasn't following – the first commandment to have no other gods before God, and the second commandment not to have any idols. This young man's wealth was his idol, something he was putting

before God. Jesus invited him to give up what he had, promising him treasure in heaven, and to follow him, but the young man rejected the invitation and went away sad. His expectations had not been met.

The disciples: They saw this young man's enthusiasm. In Biblical times, riches were often seen as a sign of God's blessing. Surely this man would be able to enter God's kingdom. But instead, they saw the man go away sad and heard Jesus say that those same riches were a barrier to people entering God's kingdom. This was not what they were expecting, and they were astonished and confused. If people like this cannot enter the kingdom of God, who can?

Jesus: Mark tells us that when Jesus looked at this young man, he loved him. He invited him to follow him and find that his true treasure was in heaven. And because he loved him, Jesus told him the truth, putting his finger on the thing that was stopping him from entering God's kingdom. When the young man declined his invitation and walked away, I can only imagine that Jesus was also sorrowful.

At this point in the story, the disciples did not yet understand the nature of God's kingdom, and that the way to enter it was not by a person's own achievement but rather by being born again, becoming like a little child. It took them time to realise that this is something that only God can do, and that he was going to do it by the most unexpected thing ever, not by a conquering Messiah, but by the death of the Messiah on the cross outside the city. This holy week, may we be amazed afresh at what Jesus accomplished for us by his death and resurrection and may many people hear and accept the invitation he still gives to follow him.

Easter Weekend

This weekend we will have three events:

- **Good Friday service at 7pm.** This will be an opportunity to meditate on the significance of Jesus' death on the cross.
- **Sunday morning at 10.30am** will be a joyful celebration of the resurrection.
- **Sunday evening at 6pm,** we will conclude the evangelistic course that has been run by the Missional Home Group (the 321 Course by Speak Life). Light refreshments will be served from 5.45pm.

Everyone is invited to all three events. Easter is a great opportunity to invite people to church. Let's not allow the weekend to pass without inviting someone to hear the good news that Christ is risen.

Book Group

The book group is meeting this Saturday (30th March) at 3.30pm at 9 Craigentenny Avenue. This month's book is Truth Changes Everything by Jeff Myers. For further information speak to Anncris.

Easter Holidays

Liz will be on holiday from Monday 1st until Friday 5th April and there will be no newsletter or prayer bulletin that week. Normal service will resume the following week 😊

Joe will be on holiday from Monday 8th until Monday 15th April. For any pastoral matters when Joe is away, please speak to one of the elders (Aaron Allen, Alasdair Roberts, Alex MacDonald, Andy Scott, Ernie Shippin, John Stewart, Mark Malaczynski, Murdo Macleod, Nick Archer, Robert Nelson and Roy Tatton).

On **Sunday 7th April**, Joe is away leading a men's retreat with Cross Training Ministries. 12-14 men will be attending from different parts of Scotland. Please pray for their time together. We're grateful to Derek Lamont (Hope Church Leith) for coming to preach on Sunday morning and Nigel Kenny (Christian Institute) for taking our Equip session at 6pm .

Jon Gemmell will take our morning service on **Sunday 14th April** when Joe's on holiday. Thank you, Jon! Home Groups will meet that Sunday.

Prayer Meetings

Here's the plan for the up and coming prayer meetings:

- This week (Wednesday 27th March) we'll be on Zoom at 7pm and are looking forward to hearing from Mairi Giles from Christians Against Poverty (CAP)
- Next week (Wednesday 3rd April) we will be in person at 7pm. Come from 6.45pm to enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and some fellowship together.
- On Wednesday 10th April we will have our final Zoom prayer meeting together. 7pm as usual.
- From Wednesday 17th April we will start meeting in person every week with a Zoom option for those who can't make it in person. 7pm start and refreshment from 6.45pm for those in the building.

Love Life Prayer and Pro Life Chain



On Saturday 27th April, from 10.15 – 10.45am Charlotte Chapel are hosting a time of prayer on the theme of "Love Life".

This is a chance for Christians to meet and pray together before SPUC's National Pro-Life Chain at 11am on Lothian Road. The Pro-Life Chain is a peaceful witness to the millions of unborn children aborted since the implementation of the Abortion Act in 1968.

Church Calendar

For your info and prayers-

- Tuesday: Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm in the church
- Wednesday: Prayer meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Friday: Youth Meeting from 4.30pm; Good Friday Service at 7pm
- Saturday: Book Group at 3.30pm
- Sunday: **Remember the clocks go forward by 1 hour!**
 - Communion Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Last 321 (Speak Life) Session at 6pm. Refreshments from 5.45pm and everyone welcome.



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