

Reconciliation

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Date: 29 August 2021

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[0 : 0 0] we're in the middle of a series about justice and race in America, and you're not going to know that for a little bit, because I want to tell you a story about one of my favorite biblical characters that you probably don't know this story.

So in Mark chapter 10, there's a story about Jesus, and Jesus started on his way, and a man, and other gospels tell us that this man was a young man.

Other gospels tell us that this was a young ruler of a man, and this man walks up to Jesus, goes to him, falls on his knees before Jesus, and says, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Now, the word eternal has been ruined by Christian culture. Eternal comes from a Greek word, ionios, and we think of eternal as a long span of time, of forever, or eternity, or infinite, but ionios is not about chronology and time.

Ionios is about the character, the nature of time. And so when the young ruler of a man goes to Jesus and says, how can I have eternal life? He's not asking about, how can I live forever?

[1 : 0 8] How can I go to heaven when I die? He's saying, how can I live the kind of life that is represented by the kingdom of God, a quality of life that I can enter into today, if I become one with God, if I become one with Yahweh?

And so Jesus says, why do you call me good? He's putting forth a riddle. No one is good except God alone, which is Jesus's hint of, if you call me good, what does that mean about me?

You know the commandments, Jesus says. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother. And so this young ruler of a man says, teacher, rabbi, Jesus.

He declared, all these I have kept since I was a boy. So Jesus looked at him and loved him. One thing you lack, Jesus says, go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.

And then come follow me. At this, the young man's face fell and he walked away sad because he had great wealth.

[2 : 1 6] Now, some preachers have said that when this young man turned and walked away from Jesus, that he walked straight into hell, which is terrible preaching and not at all true.

Now, when you close your Bible on the book of Revelation, you have to remember that Christians didn't stop writing just because Revelation was done. Christians continued to write about the early church, about their experiences with Jesus, about the teachings of the apostles, even outside of books of the Bible.

We call these books the Apostolic Fathers. There's a whole field of study called Patristics about these writings. And these writings tell us that this young man's story is not finished.

It goes on. So I want to tie some things together for you to see what this man's story looks like. So we go from the book of Mark chapter 10, and we continue on to Mark chapter 12.

Excuse me, 14. And Jesus, at this point, has come to Jerusalem during the Jewish festival of Passover. And Jesus is a rabbi.

[3 : 2 3] He has disciples. The disciples know that Jesus is going to celebrate Passover. And so they come to Jesus, the disciples say, and come to him and say, where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?

So Jesus sent two of his disciples, telling them, go into the city of Jerusalem, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him and then say to the owner of the house, he enters.

The teacher, Jesus asks, where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.

So Jesus is making it ready for the Passover meal, what we call the Last Supper, where we are about to celebrate communion, remembers this meal.

And again, just like the word eternal has been ruined by English, so has the Last Supper been ruined by Da Vinci's painting of 12 people all sitting in a line at a table. That's not how people eat, except in sitcoms.

[4 : 24] Rather, there is a large room, and it wasn't just 12 men plus Jesus. These 12 disciples all had families, and there were women who were traveling alongside the rabbi, and there were children that were traveling alongside the rabbi.

Because remember, there's a story about Jesus. It says, I shall compare the kingdom of God, and he turns towards the children who are there with him and says, if you become like a child, then you can be entered into the kingdom, this quality of life that can begin today.

And so this upper room is prepared for not just 12 plus Jesus, but a whole party, around 70 people that were all preparing and eating and drinking and dining together, hearing the story of Israel being led out of Egypt.

But whose room is it? Well, the early church tells us that the rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus, his story continues by being the man who owns the upper room.

The story goes on. Jesus institutes the Last Supper. He breaks the bread. He hands over the cup. They sing a hymn together, verse 26, and then they make their way to the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus sweats like great drops of blood.

[5 : 38] And he asks Peter to stay awake, but he keeps falling asleep because that's totally Peter's M.O. And then Judas comes into the garden to betray Jesus.

Peter cuts off an ear. Jesus puts it back on. And Jesus is led away. And the disciples who had just an hour or so earlier said, we would never leave you or forsake you.

Oh, surprise, leave him and forsake him. And then there's this wonderful verse in Mark 14, verse 51, that says, everyone deserted and fled. And a young man wearing nothing but a linen garment, linen, very high quality, the clothing of the rich, a young man wearing nothing but a linen garment was following Jesus.

And when they seized him, I love this, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. He would rather run away, disrobed, than be caught associated with Jesus.

And the early church tells us that the young ruler who walked away from Jesus is the same man who offered up an upper room, is the same man who runs away naked, rather than being known as a follower of the rabbi from Nazareth.

[6 : 51] And the story continues. It goes on. In Acts chapter 12, Peter is in prison.

Herod has decided that he's had enough of these Jesus followers, these mini Christ, these Christians. And so he puts Peter in prison, the intent to kill him.

But the church was earnestly praying to God for him. And on the night before Herod is going to bring him the child, Peter is sleeping and he's woken up. And an angel says, get up, grab your clothing and get out.

Peter wakes up and he realizes, I know that the angel has rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything, the Jewish people would hoping would happen. And when this is dawn on him, he gets out of prison and he goes, this is Acts 12 verse 12, to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Heidi, do you have a slide of the upper room? There it is. And so this is the upper room, the place where Jesus met with the disciples and offered them the bread and the cup.

[7 : 57] It's the place where at Pentecost, they had gathered and then the Holy Spirit came like tongues of fire and they all began speaking in languages they did not know so that people could understand.

And it's the place where the church gathered to pray for Peter and Peter had escaped. And it's owned by Mary, the mother of John, who's also called Mark, who had also lent the upper room to Jesus, who had also ran away naked, who had also heard that he had to give up his wealth and walked away sad.

The story continues. End of chapter 12, Barnabas and Saul, who's also called Paul, decide to go on a mission to go and build new communities of believers, of fellowships of different kinds of people that the Roman Empire and culture said should not associate men and women and slaves and free and Romans and Greeks and barbarians and Scythians.

And Paul and Barnabas are said, no, in Jesus Christ, we are all one. And so let's go and plant churches, ecclesias, gatherings of those people that the empire says shouldn't gather. And they take with them John, also called Mark. And so now this rich young ruler who had walked away from Jesus is about to go, in the words of Bilbo, on an adventure. [9 : 19] Chapter 13 of Acts. No, not chapter 13, excuse me. Chapter 15. Sometime later, Paul said to Barnabas, let's go back.

They had finished their missionary journey and they wanted to do a round two and visit everybody. Visit the believers in the town that we preach the word of the Lord and see how they're doing. And Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark.

But Paul did not think it was wise to take him because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. And Paul and Barnabas had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company.

And so Barnabas took, by the way, his cousin Mark and sailed for Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and went somewhere else, committed by the believers, the grace of the Lord. And so, John Mark, he meets Jesus.

What must I do to inherit the kind of life that's called eternal? Jesus says, all you have, give it to the poor, come follow me. No, thank you. But I'll lend you a room, but I'd rather run away naked than be associated with you.

[10 : 23] But you can keep using the room. I'll go on a trip to tell people about Jesus, but I'll desert partway through. And so Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, keeps his cousin alongside him. Paul says, no thanks.

I'd rather go with somebody else. But the story continues. Go to book of Colossians. General Electric Power Company.

Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Even pastors have to do this. My fellow prisoner, Paul writes to the church in Colossae.

My fellow prisoner, Paul's in prison writing letters. My fellow prisoner, Aristotarchus, sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

So Mark is now with Paul again, in prison, or at least helping Paul as he's in prison, because if you were imprisoned in the Roman Empire, the empire did not do anything to take care of you.

[11 : 29] You had to solely rely on the well-wishings of your family or associates. And so the church took it upon themselves to care for Paul, the imprisoned one. So my fellow prisoner, Aristotarchus, sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

Parentheses, you've received instructions about him. If he comes to you, welcome him. Which the only reason you would say that is because if you, Mark came to you, you'd be tempted to not welcome him.

Mark's got himself a reputation now as the rich young ruler who walked away from Jesus, who fled naked in the middle of the night to not be associated with Jesus, who had deserted Paul and Barnabas in the middle of a trip.

And Paul says, you know what? If he comes to you, welcome him. Then we get to 1 Peter. Now Peter is writing. Peter, that loud-mouthed disciple of Jesus, and says, we send you our greetings and so does my son, Mark.

And so there's this story in the ancient church about Peter who's imprisoned in Rome, who is going to end up crucified upside down, and he insisted on him being crucified upside down because he didn't think that dying in the same way as his Lord and rabbi was fit for him.

[12 : 48] And in those last months of Peter's life, Mark comes and joins him and starts writing down Peter's stories, parable by parable, verse by verse.

And then eventually, one of the last books to be written by Paul in the end of Paul's life, Paul writes this in 2 Timothy chapter 4, only Luke is with me.

Get Mark and bring him with you because he is helpful to me in my ministry. And so this young man who said no to Jesus, who lent a room, who ran away naked, who deserted the trip, and is now known as useful to Paul, starts rubbing shoulders with people like Peter and Luke.

And biblical scholars tell us that the book of Mark, the gospel of Mark, was the first gospel to be written. And then the Greek is really rough and some of the stories seem out of order, but he started to write it all down.

And then you start looking at the book of Matthew and the book of Luke and you can see, oh, they're using the same stories that Mark is using. Luke says in the very opening chapter of his gospel, I began to collect the stories and make an orderly account because he's rubbing shoulders with Peter and Paul and Mark, real life people who had known Jesus, even some who had said no to Jesus and then followed and then deserted and then followed and finally gave us the gospels that we have today.

[14 : 29] Now, why tell this story? Today we're supposed to be talking about reconciliation. It's one of the last steps in this series on race and justice.

We're using LaTosha Morrison's book, *Be the Bridge*, and she reminds us that if we want to talk about racial reconciliation, we can't talk about reconciliation as the first step, but rather the last step in many, many things that must come first, like awareness of the truth and confession and lament and repentance and reparations.

And then we get to reconciliation. But here's the thing, we are all cynics when it comes to reconciliation reconciliation, because it's difficult and it's rare.

Last year, there was something in the air that made at least some of us hopeful that things could change, that things could be different, that maybe we could actually change the trajectory of this nation.

I'm going to put up that chart, Heidi. White people are less supportive of Black Lives Matter now than they were at the beginning of 2020.

[15 : 49] So you can see the 2020 chart peaks with the murder of George Floyd and the protest that happens anywhere and then follow that purple line down.

it's hard to preach about reconciliation, it's hard to preach about race and justice when it seems that we're actually making backwards movement.

When it seems like as people or as a society or I'll speak for myself for my race that we are like the rich young ruler, what must we have to have that quality of life that only God can offer?

Well, this is the cost. No thanks. But then maybe we get more interested. Hey, you can borrow my stuff.

You can borrow my room. But I don't want to be associated with things like Black Lives Matter.

They're a bunch of Marxists. Who knows what they'll do? Well, okay, I'll go with you on this trip.

[16 : 47] We can learn and we can help tell people about it. But there's too much resistance. I don't want my name to be slandered or associated with things like that. We often can be like Mark back and forth, back and forth.

Akamini Uwan wrote in an article called *We Could Have Changed the World*. The pandemic laid bare the speed at which societal change can occur when the threat is big enough.

Conversely, society's reopening is revealing just how quickly we can slide back into complacency. The chasm between the legion of inequities confronting us and the modest responses to them that they have been responded to at all is stunning.

We are much like the rich young ruler who hears the cost and walks away sad. But our stories, just like Mark, don't have to end that way.

another reason I'm kind of tired and sad today is that this past Friday was the three-year anniversary, seems like the wrong word, for my brother's death in a car accident.

[18 : 06] And, you know, it's got me down thinking about his life that could have been. He's only a couple years older than me. And his life is a lot like John Mark's life.

He was adopted when he was a child and taken out of a life of, you know, alcoholic, drugged up mom, no dad.

He comes to the parent family who adopts him and raises him and to know Jesus. And then David begins to struggle with alcoholism. David and I had promised to each other that we would be in each other's weddings as best men.

But when my wedding came around in January, he was in jail for fleeing the cops. But then David got out of jail and began the recovery process and began to put his life back together with the help of family and friends and a church.

And so then, you can put that picture on the screen, I got to officiate his wedding. And so, you know, not best man, but pretty good gig. So he gets married and has a daughter and then he dies.

[19 : 24] And I'm like, what the actual God? Quick aside. I have the word written in my notes, but there are kids in the room.

But I wanted to say, don't censor your prayers before God. If you're the swearing and cussing type, please cuss and swear before God, do not insult God's intelligence by thinking that he hasn't heard or experienced far worse things than whatever lame cuss words you happen to know.

Okay? So you get this kind of story of like, yes, reconciliation, redemption, and then death. What the actual bleep?

That's how it can often feel when we talk about these issues of justice, these issues of can the world be made right? And that's why I'm a Christian.

That's why I follow the way of Jesus, because I choose to believe that all things will be made well. How we think about the end of the story affects how we act today.

[20 : 31] We've talked about this before. We talked about the end of the world. How we think about the end of the story, where it's all going affects how we act today. If we believe that the world is going to go up in smoke and fire, God's going to destroy it all and start all over again like the flood, 2 Peter, the world being burned up.

If we believe that, then it's no surprise that some of us want to consume and pollute and eat and waste our way through life because God's going to burn it all up anyway.

But if we believe that the world ends with a place, again, 2 Peter, where justice can make its home, where if the world ends with God not burning it all down to the ground but rather reconciling it and redeeming it, and in the words of Tolkien, making everything sad, becoming untrue, well, then that changes our mission as well.

We can become co-laborers in God's cause, not workers against it. If we believe that a world is coming where swords are beaten into plowshares, where the lion will walk with the lamb, where we all can call each other human beings, then our mission is made more clear.

How we think about the end defines the middle, where we are now. But why believe that? Why believe in these fairy tales we call scripture?

[21 : 59] Why believe it? Because if someone called Jesus goes around claiming to be Israel's God in the flesh and then gets himself killed and then against all prior expectations comes back to life and starts a movement of people who are willing to die for that cause, then that person might be worth paying attention to.

And Jesus declared that eternal life, the Ionian life, that kingdom of God life, God's will being carried out here on earth as it is in heaven, has arrived, is here now.

It's not future, it's current. It can happen today. We don't have to live like we're still in the kingdom of darkness. We can live like it's a kingdom of light.

2 Corinthians 5 talks about it in this way. 2 Corinthians 5 says, now, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Though we once regarded Christ in that way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here.

[23 : 15] There are some translations that say that if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. But that's not what the Greek says. The Greek actually says it very, very bluntly. If anyone is in Christ, new creation.

If anyone is in Christ, if anyone has experienced redemption, reconciliation, being known and knowing God, then we have the promise that new creation has arrived, is here today, which then changes the way that we view everyone.

The old ways of white supremacy and racism and homophobia and all of that are gone. They must be because we now view people in the way that God views people.

All of this is from God who reconciled us to himself. And notice the word choice there. It's not that God had to reconcile himself to us. It's not that God was always standing 16 million light years away until eventually Jesus said, no, but daddy, I promised they'll be better this time.

No, God has always been the sort of God who gets into the messy middle to reconcile us to him, not counting people's sins against them.

[24 : 21] And he has committed to us this message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassador. As though God were making his appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

As God's co-laborers, co-workers, we urge you to not receive this grace in vain. If anyone is in Christ, new creation has come.

God has never been against us. God has never needed to be placated. Like we said in the scripture earlier tonight, desire is love, not sacrifice.

What are we saved from? What is salvation? We don't need to be saved from God's wrath. We need to be saved from thinking we need to be saved from God's wrath. That belief that we need to placate the gods has put us on this big, big, big trajectory out into the middle of nowhere that we should have never been.

Chris Green, theologian, says there's more to the goodness of God than all sad things becoming untrue. Meaning that there's more to the end of the world than just sad things not being sad anymore, sad things not happening anymore.

[25 : 34] God's goodness far exceeds that. It's bigger than that. It's grander than that. It's far more than we can imagine. There's more to the goodness of God than all sad things becoming untrue.

It's nothing less than that either. And so we have to ask as practical theologians, what would it be like if Jesus were king?

Washington, D.C., as if Jesus were king. Your neighborhood as if Jesus were king. If we want to be the bringers of reconciliation, what does it look like in our lives to live as if Jesus were king?

If we want to be the bringers of healing in the world, then we're going to need healing ourselves.

That's why the gospel is about both inner transformation and societal transformation.

It's why Jesus both healed the sick and turned over tables. It's why he both preached repentance and stood before Pilate and called his kingdom a mundane pile of lies.

[26 : 44] If you turn the gospel into merely a personal experience, then you've bastardized it into moralistic, therapeutic deism that does nobody any good but yourself. And on the other hand, if you use the gospel to only further your particular societal or political ends and refuse to be transformed by it from the inside out, then you're like a quack therapist who takes all their problems, refuses to be healed by them and puts them on to someone else.

Can you put that comic on the screen? Like a lot of you, I have a real problem with projection. If you don't know what projection is, ask your therapist.

If you don't have a therapist, get one. Christians and Jews have always believed that God created the world and then called it good.

We are not a religion of escapist. We are not a religion waiting to be raptured into some other place. We are not a faith that's about leaving the world to burn so we can create our little holy huddles and enclaves and pat ourselves on the back.

Rather, we are meant to be a faith, a community of images of the living God, reminding the rest of creation that they are images of the living God.

[28 : 05] we are reconcilers. If you grew up in the faith tradition, maybe you heard to be not carnal, to not be of the world. The word carnal is an interesting choice because Christians believe that God took on flesh.

Theologically we call that the incarnation. Christians should be the most carnal people in the world, meaning we should be the people who appreciate the creation, God's physical world the most, and work with God to bring it back to where it was meant to be.

And that's why it belongs to a community of hope. We can't do this reconciling work alone.

Reconciliation is not a one-woman job. It takes a village to back you up, to be in your corner, to pick you back up.

When David died, my brother died, we got the call like 11 p.m. at night, one of those midnight calls from your mom that you know something bad has happened. And I got the call, I didn't know what to do.

Emily and I have very different responses. She couldn't sleep, I could only sleep. And I woke up the next morning and I went to work. And I was, of course, acting a little funny and my co-workers were like, what's going on?

[29 : 20] I'm like, well, I just, I got a call last time my brother died. They're like, Anthony, you idiot, what are you doing here? They sent me home. After the funeral, we had a small group and they had sent a foreword of this viral video of a Scottish woman reading Wonky Donkey and cry-lapping through the whole thing.

And it was just the right amount of ridiculousness to have in the middle of grief. And they came over our house and we read Wonky Donkey, this children's book together. And they brought meals and sat with us in the Hardin.

Not a difficulty of it all. The church ought to be a place where we have each other's back. Back to the story of Mark.

But this, the young man's face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth. And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how hard it is for the rich or the racist or the white supremacist to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed at his words. Isn't wealth a sign of God's blessing? But Jesus said it again. Jesus, children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who's rich.

[30 : 42] Fill in the blank with what you think is against God's good will. Than to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were even more amazed and said, how can then anyone be saved?

Jesus looked and said, with man, humanity, this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God. And then Peter spoke up, like Peter does. We've left everything to follow you, says the man who's about to abandon Jesus in a couple of chapters.

And truly I tell you, Jesus says, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel, the good news that God's kingdom is available today, no one who has left family for that will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age.

Homes and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, and along with persecutions, and in the age to come that Ionia's life.

For many who are first will be last and the last first. Friends, we have got to have each other's backs. people and people and people and people and systems.

[31 : 59] The church, this place, the table church, ought to be a place where you can come and tell those stories and we can have your back. If you've made yourself an ally or accomplice in racial justice, you may have been on the receiving end of being called a traitor to your country or a police hater or a racist against white people.

people and you should be able to come here and know that we have your back. This is the same for LGBTQ folks. You've been on the receiving end of dehumanizing everything.

You should be able to come to this colony of heaven on earth and know that we have your back.

The same should be true for allies. If you're a queer ally that came from religious circles, you've probably been told that you've abandoned the Bible and you abandoned God and the scriptures and maybe even you're demon-possessed and you should be able to come here and know that we have each other's back.

If this is going to be a church, a church that's about the work of reconciliation, a church that's about the marks who hear it's too expensive to follow Jesus, but then try it a little and then fail and then try again and then fail and then try again.

If we're going to be a church of people like that, we have to be committed to making those words of Jesus coming true, of turning aside one kind of family and receiving a family a hundredfold as large.

[33 : 27] That if we take the hard path, that we are the kind of place that gives people all kinds of people, new aunts and uncles, new siblings and spiritual parents, that this is a place that people can truly call home.

That is the ministry of reconciliation. That is our work. Nothing less. Thank you.