

“TRADING IN THE HONDA
FOR AN OLD CHEVY”

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Text: Mark 10: 32-45

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A few caveats regarding today's sermon title: "Trading in the Honda for an old Chevy." I have nothing against Hondas and wouldn't mind owning one especially a hybrid. I am not trying to promote GM cars though recent business reports suggest American car manufacturers need all the help they can get. What I was trying to do was come up with a possibility that would seem so strange that a person would have to stop and think about it.

That's exactly what we have to do when dealing with this morning's reading from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus' thought pattern, as often was the case, calls for radical re-thinking and requires us "to step out of the box" if we are to grasp his meaning.

Jesus spoke about sharing his "glory" but there was a misunderstanding about the meaning of the word. The two disciples were thinking of "glory" as we might define it as representing "prestige" or "honor." Instead Jesus was speaking of a totally different concept of "glory," one that emerges from a life lived for others and of giving of one's self." Again we find our Lord contrasting his way of thinking with that of society. Surely society, be it 1st Century or 21st, pays a lot of attention to honor and prestige. Just look at how the Kobe Bryants and Madonnas of the world dominate the news. Jesus would push us to look in another direction for true satisfaction and contentment in life.

Right away we have to ask, which kind of glory are we interested in: That of James and John or the Jesus kind? It's a question believers have had to struggle with since the beginning of Christianity. Before we decide, we need to probe deeper.

Not only is Jesus' message misunderstood but also his way of life. The trouble is, as was evident with the request of James and John, the temptation always is to seek this glory without putting in much effort. Athletes know all about the slogan: "No pain. No gain" but today don't a lot of people seem to want something for nothing or with little effort, "a free lunch?" Isn't that the heart of the "gospel of prosperity" churches that we talked about last week? "Just give me the brass ring and I'll be content." Basically that was what the two disciples were asking for in their request. I think that I may have mentioned to you the ad for a trip to the Holy Land in which the travel agency announced: "Come and travel with us to the places where Jesus' lived and do so in air conditioned comfort." That pretty much summarizes modern thinking.

It doesn't matter whether it be the disciples in the 1st Century or Christians in 2006 people fail to comprehend the depth of what Jesus was all about. In verses 32-34 of our New Testament reading, Jesus talked of his upcoming death, of being condemned, mocked, spit upon, beaten. You know the old saying, "in one ear and out the other?" That's not just a problem with children. James and John paid no attention to what their Lord was saying. They were only interested in their desire for seats of honor in the coming kingdom.

These were Jesus' closest friends that we are talking about, the ones he had chosen to carry on his mission! They don't comprehend the magnitude of what is involved in being a disciple and neither do we! "Glory" does not come on a silver platter but rather through service and sacrifice! We traveled through several European countries in 2003. One place that made a great impression upon me was the Coliseum in Rome. Built around 70 A.D. and with much of the outer wall still standing, one can sit in the stadium and just imagine 70,000 people cheering on gladiators. It's not certain whether Christians were persecuted there but it might have been that people who wouldn't swear allegiance to Caesar because of a greater loyalty to God were made sport of in the Coliseum. Contrast what commitment meant in the 1st Century with attitudes today. A young woman wrote this note to her former fiancé.

Dear John,

I have been unable to sleep since I broke off our engagement. Won't you forgive and forget?

Your absence is breaking my heart. I was a fool. Nobody can take your place.

All my love,

Brenda. Xxxooxxxx

P.S. Congratulations on winning the lottery.

Isn't the woman's note close to the thinking of James and John in asking for special privilege in the coming Kingdom? Fortunately we are not faced with the decision of those early Christians and yet standing up for our faith where we work, go to school or play, may mean "standing apart" from the ways of those around us and that certainly can be very uncomfortable. What we are talking about are conscious choices that lead us to develop a lifestyle that is different from those around us. It is the struggle that comes when for the sake of our own health and love for those we care about we try to give up smoking. It is the uneasiness experienced as we refuse to go along with those who at a social event are telling racist jokes.

Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." "Are ye able?" asks the old hymn and we reply, "Yes, Lord, we are able." But not so fast. I can't stress enough that what Jesus is asking does not comfortably fit into the norms of our society. Jesus bids us slow down and listen to one another. In a "buy more and more" society, Jesus asks us to include giving to others in our budget. In a world in which violence begets violence and people say "there are more drugs and murders so let's build more prisons and use the electric chair," Jesus bids us to get at the root of societal problems and think of redemption not punishment. Jesus is calling us to make choices that do not come easily, choices, which involve mental anguish, ethical soul searching and sometimes standing apart from the crowd. Here is a frightening question to consider: "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

Jesus promised that we can "live in glory," to use the phrase of an old spiritual. He said that we could have "life and have it abundantly." Life can be so much more than most people ever realize but it won't happen if we follow the ways of the world. Society suggests that it is in acquiring things and in considering only your needs, that one gains abundance. Basically that was the mentality of James and John. Jesus, on the other hand, kept saying just the opposite. **IT IS IN LOSING YOURSELF, IN BECOMING A SERVANT THAT NEW LIFE EMERGES.** In terms of today's mores that's about as startling as suggesting you "trade in the Honda for an old Chevy." It occurred to me this week that the sermon title might be more than just a phrase to catch attention. Car buffs in the congregation might tell us that if the Chevy you are trading for is from the 1950's it might be worth a lot more than the Honda. Could it be that trading in the flashy attractions of the mall for something that is much longer lasting might prove just as precious spiritually as that 1957 Chevy is to the car collector?

I must be honest with you. What Jesus is advocating in the 10th chapter of Mark is so counter culture that even the most earnest among us are going to have to struggle to move in this direction. Indeed, even in Jesus' own time most people rejected the path he proposed and, when he wouldn't tone down his message, he ended up on a cross. Jesus is asking a great deal of us especially since those around us will be looking for more easy routes to follow.

Those who do respond, however, those who try to make choices that reflect Christ's way, those men, women and youth, discover that Christ isn't asking so much after all and is giving us everything that we need both in this life and that which is to come.