

031721 Mark 10:17-31 *Reality Road series: "Utterly Honest"*

Does everyone know the expression, "sugar-coat the truth?" That means to put a positive spin on something that's not so positive. Sugar-coating the truth means to make something sound more appealing or attractive than it really is.

When we read in the Bible about Jesus interacting with people, there's no sugar-coating. Jesus tells it like it is. To person after person, in situation after situation, Jesus speaks the truth in love. His speech is direct and candid. He's utterly honest with the people to whom he speaks.

And this is because Jesus is God. He can see all things. He understands everything that's hidden to us. He knows the real score. None of us can pretend to be something we're not. Not with Jesus. He sees the truth of who we are, the truth of what we've done, and the truth of what is going to happen next in our lives. So when the Lord Jesus speaks to us, there's no sugar-coating. He's utterly honest.

Tonight, two words from our Gospel Lesson are a prime example. Two words from the mouth of our Savior reveal a great deal about our lives. Two utterly honest words from Jesus that are so important for our faith, and so crucial for our spiritual understanding. Two words: "... *with persecutions.*"

These words come while Jesus is schooling his disciples. They're confused. They're often confused by Jesus. Not that they're lacking intelligence. They're human. Like us, they're conditioned by the world's way of thinking. The disciples are inclined toward sin, toward selfishness, toward materialism, just as we are, while Jesus is instructing them in God's ways.

In Mark 10 we read about the disciples questioning Jesus. They had just heard Jesus' conversation with a God-fearing, respectful, wealthy young man. Jesus challenged him to give up what he was holding in his heart to be more precious than God, his money. And when Jesus proclaimed, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God," the disciples couldn't believe it. They all thought that wealth was a sign of God's favor. The disciples assumed that this devout young man, with his riches and his good intentions, had the best possible chance of doing good in God's eyes, and finding his way into heaven. But Jesus says, "No. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

"Then who can be saved?" the disciples ask, in pure frustration. Jesus responds with a clear, unmistakable piece of divine wisdom. "With man, it's impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." In other words, no human will ever enter heaven based on their own reason, or strength, or willpower, or good deeds, or generous gifts, or fancy white pastor robes. No one can do it. But God, by his grace, makes it happen. God saves. God gives mercy. God forgives, and God brings those with faith in Jesus into his kingdom.

So then Peter, the most outspoken and impulsive of the disciples, blurts out that he and his fellow disciples have given up everything to follow Jesus. He's implying that they should be rewarded and remunerated, right?

And the Lord Jesus responds, assuring Peter that, "Yes, if you've given up families and homes for me, you will eventually be loved by an even greater, larger family of Christian believers, and you will definitely be welcomed in Christian home after Christian home, as one of my apostles."

But then come those two utterly honest words that Peter and the other disciples really need to hear, as they walk with Jesus on his road to the cross. Two utterly honest words that are crucial for us to hear, and to understand, as we continue on our own reality road of Christian living.

“Yes, there are blessings to experience in this world, when it comes to following me,” Jesus tells us. “But they will come,” he says, “*with persecutions.*” With persecutions. Two words that Peter and the other disciples must have cringed at. Two words that I’d rather not hear about my Christian living. Two words that none of us want to come true in our lives.

After all, who wants to experience persecution? Who wants to be rejected? We understand that Jesus, the Suffering Servant, was destined to be crucified and killed. The Messiah, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed for our sins. Jesus was persecuted; but why is he talking about us being persecuted?

Jesus is being utterly honest. He can foresee his own suffering, but also that of his disciples. He’s telling his followers straight out that to be a Christian is a costly thing. The Lord never offers his disciples an easy way. Jesus wants us to know that, while there are blessing and privileges that result from our faith in him, they will come *with persecutions*. Two utterly honest words.

You see, Jesus knows that the world and God are not often in sync. The good Lord knows just how sinful and selfish people can be. Jesus sees all the evil, the wickedness, and the immorality that goes on in our world. And he knows that Christians who follow him -- Christians who live like him, Christians who stand up for him -- are not always going to be well-received and well-regarded. If you’re a faithful Christian, Jesus is saying, you may find yourself out of step with

society. Your morals and standards may clash with the culture around you. You might end up being rejected, ridiculed, picked on, like Jesus was.

History tells us Jesus is right. Time and again through the centuries, Jesus-followers have been persecuted. Christians in 2021 are being persecuted, in many nations. And the impact and influence of Christianity in our own nation is eroding, lessening, being criticized, or just being ignored more and more and more.

Jesus knows this. And he wants you to know this, too. It's part of the deal. He's not sugar-coating the truth, but he's telling you the way it is. He is, as always, utterly honest.

But, at the same time, Jesus is utterly supportive, utterly obliging, utterly ready to help and lend you a hand. You'll never face persecution on your own. You'll never endure persecution without a purpose. You'll never suffer for the name of Jesus without Jesus himself standing right beside you. You'll never do battle against evil and be left to wonder if God is really on your side, or what the final outcome of good vs. evil will be. Jesus nailed that all down on the cross, didn't he? So you can be utterly confident, utterly assured.

Wherever life's reality road leads you, your Savior Jesus promises to walk with you. Through blessings, through challenges, through dangers, through changes, through pandemics, even through persecutions.

May Christ's utterly honest words be a blessing to you tonight on your reality road. Amen.