

"THE COST OF COMMITMENT"

{Matthew 19:16-26}

Trinity Presbyterian Church

November 16, 2008

George Curcija attended Trinity Presbyterian Church for many years before moving to Southern California last year. He sent me a quote that his pastor used last Sunday to open his Stewardship Sunday Sermon—

Caller to the church office: *"I want to speak to the head hog at the trough!"*

Church Secretary: *"I beg your pardon!"*

Caller: *"I want to speak to the head hog at the trough!"*

Secretary {upon hearing correctly}: *"If you are referring to the pastor, you need to show more respect. Please refer to him as Pastor, Reverend, or Father!"*

Caller: *"Well I just had \$75,000 I wanted to donate, but I guess..."*

Secretary: *"Well, I think the big pig just walked in!"*

STEVE

Steve was a senior in high school—a member of our Omega youth group. He had just completed the new member class and came into my office in Southern California to discuss church membership and baptism with me.

Steve was a handsome 17-year-old young man with blonde wavy hair standing about 6' 1" tall. I can still see him sitting across from me telling me how excited he was to be joining the church with his friends and being baptized.

As was the norm, I asked Steve to share with me his personal testimony—his commitment to Jesus Christ.

He responded, *"Oh, I'm not ready to become a born-again Christian, I just want to join the church and be baptized!"* He saw that as something that was "cool" that he could do with his other friends who were joining the church.

Steve's jaw dropped halfway to the floor when I told him that I couldn't let that happen—I **could/would not recommend him to the session for membership**. I said to him, *"Steve, I would be asking you to lie in front of the entire congregation...and your friends."*

I explained that he would be asked to declare his personal commitment to Jesus Christ and that his baptism would declare to everyone that he had made a commitment to follow Christ.

He asked if there was anyway that he could be baptized with his class without receiving Christ?

I offered to pray with him on the spot if he would like to invite Christ into his life, but he repeated that he just wasn't ready.

He slowly got up from his chair and I can remember watching him from my office window as he walked with his head down towards his yellow pick-up truck feeling dejected...and rejected.

That Sunday we received the new member class and Steve watched from the balcony.

COMMITMENT

Some weeks later Steve attended college-briefing retreat led by another member of our youth staff. I recall John calling me and telling me of the miraculous transformation in Steve's life and he said, *"He can hardly wait to tell you about it!"* *{I confess, I could hardly wait either—this was GREAT news!}*

On Monday I received a phone call from Steve asking if he could come and see me. You can imagine how excited I was for this meeting to take place.

This time Steve had that lift in his step that was so familiar as he came bounding into my office wearing his tank top, cut-offs, and Van's shoes. It was immediately apparent that something had happened.

His opening words to me were, *"I'm so joyful....wow!"* I can still see him in my mind's eye.

After sharing with me what God had done in his heart and life and how he had decided to make a total commitment of his life to follow Jesus he said, *"Now, I'm really ready to join the church and be baptized!"*

The morning that he was presented to the congregation he had the biggest grin on his face you could imagine. When he rose to his feet after kneeling to be baptized his eyes were wet with tears.

Shortly thereafter, Steve and a friend went hiking in the Sierra Madre Mountains and they made a video: *"Why I'm Glad to be Alive"* featuring Steve telling his story about receiving Christ and the difference it had made in his life.

FALL 1975

Several months passed and one Saturday morning I arrived at my office and was handed a note from the receptionist asking me to call Steve's family. Before I was able to make the call his father called a second time and the receptionist came running in to tell me, *"Steve was killed last night following the football game!"*

Four nights later the church was jam-packed with over 1,000 high school and college classmates, members of the youth group, family and friends—even the choir loft was filled with mourners. That night I told Steve's story...his reluctance to follow Christ...then his commitment...and we concluded with the video he and his friend had made, *"Why I'm Glad to be Alive!"*

I assured those in attendance—*"Steve's alive! Steve had the assurance of eternal life!"*

And, I'm so glad that I had been faithful in sharing the good news with him...for John and others who presided over that college-briefing retreat...and Steve's response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in his life to make a commitment to follow Christ. **I know beyond any shadow of doubt today that Steve is in the very presence of the Almighty!**

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

Jesus' story of the rich young man who approached Him with a question about what was necessary for him to do to obtain eternal life is probably one of the best-loved encounters of Jesus. It's found in three of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

We know little of this gentleman; however, as we put together the three accounts we realize that he was a young adult and a ruler with considerable respect and responsibility.

THE QUESTION

“Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

Interesting, isn't it that people still think it's by their good works that they can gain favor with God when salvation (eternal life) has absolutely nothing to do with good works. It is *ONLY* by God's grace that one can receive the gift of eternal life. It is by grace through faith—not of works!

JESUS' UNEXPECTED RESPONSE

“Why do you ask Me about what is good?” Jesus replied. ‘There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.’”

Jesus tells the young man all he has to do—if it is doing that one gains eternal life—is to keep the commandments. Jesus is endeavoring to teach this gentleman the fundamentals of salvation—and what one *really* needs to do is acceptance of Him as Savior. He knew full well that no one could keep the commandments—if they could, there would've been no reason for His coming to earth.

RESPONSE

“Which ones?” the young man replied.”

Somewhat a strange response, isn't it? It's as if he's wondering if some commands were more important than others—perhaps if he kept some over the others he would find favor with God.

In a way this was also an honest question because the Jews had distilled the entire law down to 613 commandments—365 negative, 248 were positive, and they had categorized the laws of greater and lesser; however, Jesus wasn't about to let the young man off by watering down his obligation.

JESUS' LISTS FIVE COMMANDMENTS PLUS ONE

“Jesus replied, ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Note that these commandments all have to do with our personal relationships with one another. Think of it, Jesus was asking this young man about his personal relationships—and, his attitude toward his parents. Then after He quotes five of the Ten Commandments, Jesus tacks on *“love your neighbor as yourself!”*

RESPONSE TO JESUS

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’”

The young man claimed that he had kept the law—which obviously was not true. He had a selfish attitude so Jesus confronted him at the core of his life...

JESUS' CALL TO TOTAL COMMITMENT

“Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me!’”

I remind you of the Martin Luther quote I shared last Sunday: *“Three conversions that are necessary: Conversion of the Heart, Conversion of the Mind, and Conversion of the Purse!”*

Jesus dared to point out the one thing this man lacked that kept him from making a commitment—his wealth/purse!

Jesus tells the young man to give it all up and follow Him! What an incredible invitation.

The Gospel of Mark says that Jesus looked at the young man and loved him but the young man responded with...

A REJECTION OF JESUS' CALL

“When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

His bank accounts and financial accumulations were too great to make a total commitment to follow Jesus.

He turned...walked away...and it must've broken Jesus' heart just as it did mine that first time that Steve walked out of my office with his head bent low.

APPLICATION

Gaining the free gift of eternal life requires a clear understanding of what God requires of us. Salvation is *ONLY* for those who are willing to put Christ first in their life and to *FOLLOW* wherever that road may lead. It requires giving Him our best...making a *TOTAL COMMITMENT* not to keeping Laws, but to the *LORDSHIP* of Jesus Christ.

The GREAT TRAGEDY of this story is that this young gentleman loved his possessions more than he loved Jesus and he turned his back and walked away.

The GRAND CLIMAX is that a person can indeed reverse this—as did Steve—and follow Christ and walk day by day, moment by moment KNOWING that they have eternal life.