

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship
July 5, 2020
Independence Day
“Remembering Sacrifice”

Sunday school at 8:30, in-person Services at 9:15 & 10:45 with King’s Kids (Video live-taped sermon online later).

NEWS

Be respectful of others by allowing them to deal with COVID 19 in their own way.
 Church camp at Little Bitterroot Lake, August 14-16.

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The first thing in chapter 19, is the test of the Pharisees, where Jesus showed that there are only two possible states of being as far as God is concerned:

- 1)
- 2)

Given natural human sexuality - that’s a difficult teaching.

Next, through the attitude of His Disciples concerning the value of little children Jesus showed that the only way any person was ever going to be Saved was by...

Given natural human pride - that is a tuff pill to swallow.

Then, through the Rich Young Ruler’s desire to justify himself, Jesus revealed that the first, greatest Commandment was precisely what it claims to be...

Given natural human desire and lack of faith - that’s a hard concept.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

What sacrifice is too much? At what point, for you, is the sacrifice no longer worth the potential reward?

MATTHEW 19:23-26 ~ ²³And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴“Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁶And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

God’s reign is His realm, and those who are part of it, are His children.

It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just as it is humanly impossible for a rich man to be a Christian, but... Anything is possible with God.

The very notion of trying to do more to gain God’s favor, to be blessed by Him, to be saved into the Kingdom, was what would actually prevent it.

God’s ways are not our ways, God’s economy does not work the way our economy works...

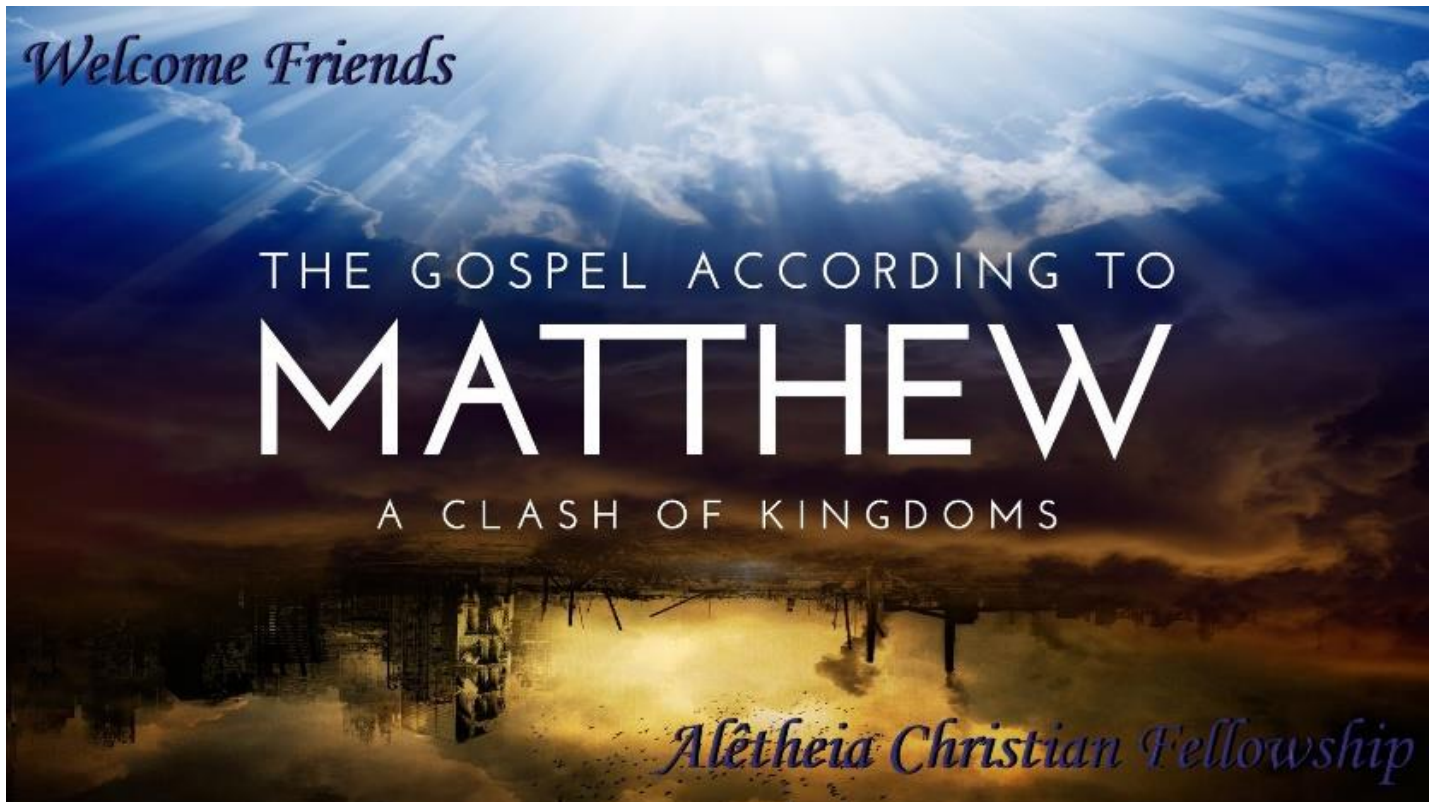
Humans make gods in their own image - God made humans in His image - the difference between those two statements is profound...

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon/Elder

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 19e ~ 070520
“Remembering Sacrifice”



Matthew chapter 18 was Jesus teaching principles about the Kingdom. It turns out that chapter 19 is a series of exchanges that provide concrete examples of the principles taught there.



I mentioned that the first thing in chapter 19, is the test of the Pharisees, where Jesus showed that there are only two possible states of being as far as God is concerned: Faithfully married or faithfully single. That automatically eliminates any further discussion about the acceptability of any sexual intercourse outside of a committed, covenantal, marriage between one man and one woman in the sight of the one true God.

Given natural human sexuality - that's a difficult teaching. Who can accept it?



Next, through the attitude of His Disciples concerning the value of little children Jesus showed that the only way any person was ever going to be Saved was by approaching God without trying to justify themselves in any way... Without offering to pay the tip. In other words, without trying to appease God with human treasure to gain, or enhance, or keep Heavenly treasure... You cannot buy God's favor with who you are, with what you've got, with what you've done, or with any future value potentiality... You must just come... Without guile, without worth, but also without embarrassment... Come with humble, grateful, expectancy for He is able, and He is willing, to bestow His unilateral, undeserved Grace.

Given natural human pride - that is a tuff pill to swallow.
Who can do that?



Then, last time we saw that through the Rich Young Ruler's desire to justify himself, Jesus revealed that the first, greatest Commandment was precisely what it claims to be... Nothing can take precedence over God. Not family, not personal hopes, and dreams, not health, not sexual freedom, not human pride, not earthly possessions... Nothing in a person's life can mean more to them than God... In fact, everything in a person's life must pale in comparison to one's devotion to God... Therefore, anyone so oriented, would happily give up anything God asked them to give up. If it were

true that someone loved God as Commanded in the Bible - that person would not think twice about giving up everything. That is the lesson of man who sold everything to purchase the land with the treasure.

Given natural human desire and lack of faith - that's a hard concept. Who can give up what is most precious to them, tangibly, here, and now, for what is more precious spiritually, metaphysically, hopefully later?



It was clearly too much for the Pharisees in the first case, it proved to be too much for Judas in the second case, and it was too much for the Rich Young Ruler in the third case... What about you?

What sacrifice is too much? At what point, for you, is the sacrifice no longer worth the potential reward?

In business, we could calculate the risk/reward and the time value of wealth and come to some determination about how much we should sacrifice now, for a possible benefit later... We could do that to some extent in religion as well. I sacrifice greatly for sure now, to possibly gain some kind of enhanced future. What are the odds that my sacrifice will actually benefit me later? What are the chances that if I don't sacrifice, I still eventually end up in the good place after all - or at least the good enough place after all? How good is the good place really - is it worth it?

In Biblical Christianity, the sacrifice now, even if it is everything you hold dear, wouldn't even register on the scale of what is to be gained... Any hesitation demonstrates a lack of understanding and/or a lack of trust.



Beyond that, my friends, in Biblical Christianity we're not merely talking about a sacrifice now for a reward later scenario. We're talking about an existential change. It is not a contractual agreement with the Creator. It is not a club to join. It is not a way of life, a philosophy, or a mode of operation... Biblical Christianity is a fundamental rebirth as an actual, fully accepted child of the Living God. It is relational! It isn't sacrifice now, and there will be a future reward - it is God saying trust Me now in everything and you will be set free from the entanglements of life and we will be together now and forevermore. And God is so gracious He gives us His Holy Spirit right now to help our unbelief.

Nearly two and a half centuries ago, a number of British subjects living in the American Colonies decided that their future independence was worth fighting a war with arguably the greatest superpower on earth at that time.

Because they did what they did, you and I, and all other Americans can openly question their actions. They were willing to give up everything precious to them for the chance at a brighter future here on earth for what remained of their relatively short lives.

We, the beneficiaries of their sacrifice have a huge problem being faithful sexually, being faithful in our humble gratitude, being faithful financially, being faithful in anything really, to follow Jesus into the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

Our son Scott is a Captain in the Air Force. He is the direct descendant of ancestors who have fought in every single war America has ever been involved in, starting with Captain William Scott in the Revolutionary war. The military, even in the best of times, is all about sacrifice. Millions of Americans over hundreds of years have sacrificed much, some all, and for what?

For a mostly uncaring, ever-questioning populace. Agree with the public policy over the years, or not, that is your right, because Americans chose to sacrifice to secure and maintain that right.

Burn a flag you own, spout whatever opinion you have, wear whatever outlandish costume you like, but destroy public property, or the property of others, and you should be jailed. That's my Fourth of July soapbox moment.

So many are willing to sacrifice so much for relatively little reward and yet we have a problem if God asks us to restrict our freedom a bit, or be generous with our wallet, or forgive another person who is just as imperfect as we are, or to put aside our agenda for the good of the group. It really makes no sense.



MATTHEW 19:23-26, 23And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24“Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” 25When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

We get from the other accounts that the Disciples didn't know what to make from the example... of the Rich Young Ruler walking away in despondency. Jesus here clarified. Jesus took the example and once again

extrapolated from it a sweeping principle that not only applied to that particular individual in that specific situation, it applies to all people, throughout time, in any situation.

That's really what these verses do... Jesus realized that Disciples were lacking in understanding, so he got their attention by starting off with a dramatic opening... "Amen," "Verily," or "Truly." "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." That is then followed by a parallel statement starting with "Again I say." It is an attention grabber.



Note, in the first half it is “Hard,” but possible. So, not impossible, just very difficult. But then the parallel, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,” is in fact, impossible. Jesus began by indicating that it was only with great difficulty, but finished indicating that it was utterly impossible. That’s the literal meaning, what did Jesus intend with it? We see at the end of verse 26 what Jesus had in mind.

It is humanly impossible for a rich person to enter into Heaven... Period. However, God can accomplish anything, including the salvation of the rich. That’s the overall gist of the passage.



Let's look a little closer and pick up some of the finer points. Much is made, by some, about the differences between "Entering life," from our last passage, "Salvation," "The Kingdom of Heaven" and "The Kingdom of God," in this passage. We can see that they are mostly analogous. What I mean, is that while there can be some nuance differences in those terms and others depending upon the context, for the most part they all mean the same thing. We're talking about the Children of God... And even with that synonymous term, there is a subtle difference, because it stresses our subordinate, dependent, familial relationship to God.

As we discovered before, the Kingdom of Heaven is not a place, but a state of existence, where God rules unopposed. We said it was a reign, not a realm.

It is perfectly present among His people living on earth now. Saved by Christ, we have entered into the Kingdom forensically - our obedience is perfect in Christ. That's a done deal, by God. Secondly, such people can partially obey God's Will personally. The Kingdom is imperfectly present among His people living on earth now, as our personal obedience is commensurate with our faith. The Holy Spirit indwelt

person could, theoretically obey perfectly, but we resist, due to unbelief. An unbelief due to our human perception.

Please see what I'm saying here. Our failure to perfectly conform to Christ Jesus and His perfect obedience to the Father, is only because we do not believe... Enough. We still see too much through our human eyes and it hinders us from full freedom in Christ. Ponder the meaning and ramifications of that statement. Our failure to perfectly conform to Christ Jesus and His perfect obedience to the Father, is only because we do not believe... Enough. It is a faith problem and the problem is with us, not God. We still think this physical world we see, and experience is real - we still think that it is our home and it hinders us from full freedom in Christ.

That is precisely why the Rich Young Ruler went away grieving. He had a limit to his faith. Jesus said sell your earthly rubbish and follow Me... He believed to some small degree, but not enough to sell his junk... Not enough to give up, what to him, was a sure thing.



Abraham and Sarah were finally blessed with a son of promise... God had been faithful even though they had not, and He miraculously gave them Isaac. Then God said, give him back to me permanently. End his physical existence and trust that I will make it better than okay... Have faith that the bird in your hand is not worth two in the bush. The lamb in your hand is not worth the ram in the bush prefiguring My Lamb... Believe.

How much different would things have turned out if the rich kid had cried out just like the father of the demon possessed boy, "I do believe; help my unbelief" Lord, I

want to have enough faith to follow You anywhere, but I just don't... Please help me. (Mark 9:24)?

Our yielding to the Holy Spirit and obedience to His will is hindered only by the fact that we think the physical here and now is more real than the metaphysical future there.

You might be reluctant to believe what I'm saying... If I said God wants you to sign over your house, and trust that He will take care of you, would you say yes? If Jesus physically manifested in all His power, honor and glory right here, right now, and told you to sign over your house and trust that He would take care of you... Would you say no? You see it's not a house problem - it's a faith problem.



Christians are perfectly in the Kingdom now, through Christ and we are partially in the Kingdom through our yielding to the Holy Spirit commensurate with our faith... The Kingdom of Heaven is us in those two different ways... Besides that, there is a presently existing Kingdom, we could call God's throne room - Heaven. It exists alongside our reality. A thin veil separates us from it... Jesus tore it asunder and so when we pray, when we sing God's praises, when we magnify and glorify His name through our humbly grateful worship. When we engage His Holy Word, by listening, and contemplating, and comprehending, and implementing, His sacred Teaching. When we love each other and tangibly act on that love - in short, when we allow the Holy Spirit to move us, we reach

through that veil - we temporarily step beyond that veil to momentarily be in the Kingdom fully. One day, we will step through and never return.

That leads us to the final future Kingdom that will come down to earth ushered in by the Living Word of God and He will set everything right, once and for all.

Kingdom people are called Christians, because they are in Christ and a community of them, is the Bride of Christ, His Body, known as His church. Like the individuals that make up the church, it too is imperfectly obedient. While it is, forensically, the Kingdom of God on earth, it is only so in a tangible way, as much as the people in it, have faith.

The obedience of the people - their demonstrated love for God and their demonstrated love for one another - determines the degree to which the church reflects its true spiritual reality.



People say they love God, but don't want to worship Him with a bunch of other folks. People say they believe in Jesus, but don't believe in church. In the world of bad, wrong, dumb doctrine... This notion is right up there with thinking that God is an alien dude who, over eons, became so noble someone made Him God.

You cannot say that you obey either of the two greatest Commandments if you despise the church. Of course, the church is a mess. Of course, it is full of imperfect people. Of course, it is difficult... You wouldn't need the Holy Spirit if it were easy. But, since the beginning, it has been my prayer that Alêtheia would be a church,

unlike so many others, where it is easier to see the Holy Spirit's fingerprints.

Anyway, God's reign is His realm and those who are part of it are His children - they have entered Life, they are Saved, they are Christians, they are residents of the Kingdom of Heaven and citizens of the Kingdom of God.



The next point we'll explore is the "Camel" and "Needle" bit. Many folks over the years have come up with all kinds of creative ways to explain the "Camel" and the "Eye of the needle."

One of the most popular is that there was a city gate called the needle gate where a camel could not pass - the rider would have to humble himself and get off his camel in order enter through that gate. A variation on the theme is that the camel could pass, but only by being coaxed to humbly crawl through on its knees.

A similar idea assumes that Jesus used an Aramaic word in His analogy that was wrongly translated as "Camel." What they posit is that Jesus really meant a rope, not a camel - because a camel is just ridiculous. The Aramaic words for camel, and for rope, are similar. The meaning, for them, then is that the strong rope needs to be untwisted to the point that each strand can pass through the eye of a needle, thus humbling the mighty rope into many weak threads.

All of that is wrong. Not only is there no compelling evidence for any of those theories, the "Camel and eye of a needle" was a common enough saying, to indicate something impossible. The camel being the largest animal in the region and the eye of a needle being the smallest opening... You can't pass the biggest animal through the smallest hole - it's impossible! That's the entire point.

What has confused people is that in the first half of the parallelism, Jesus says it's difficult, and in the second half, He says it's utterly impossible. People try to make both parallels match.

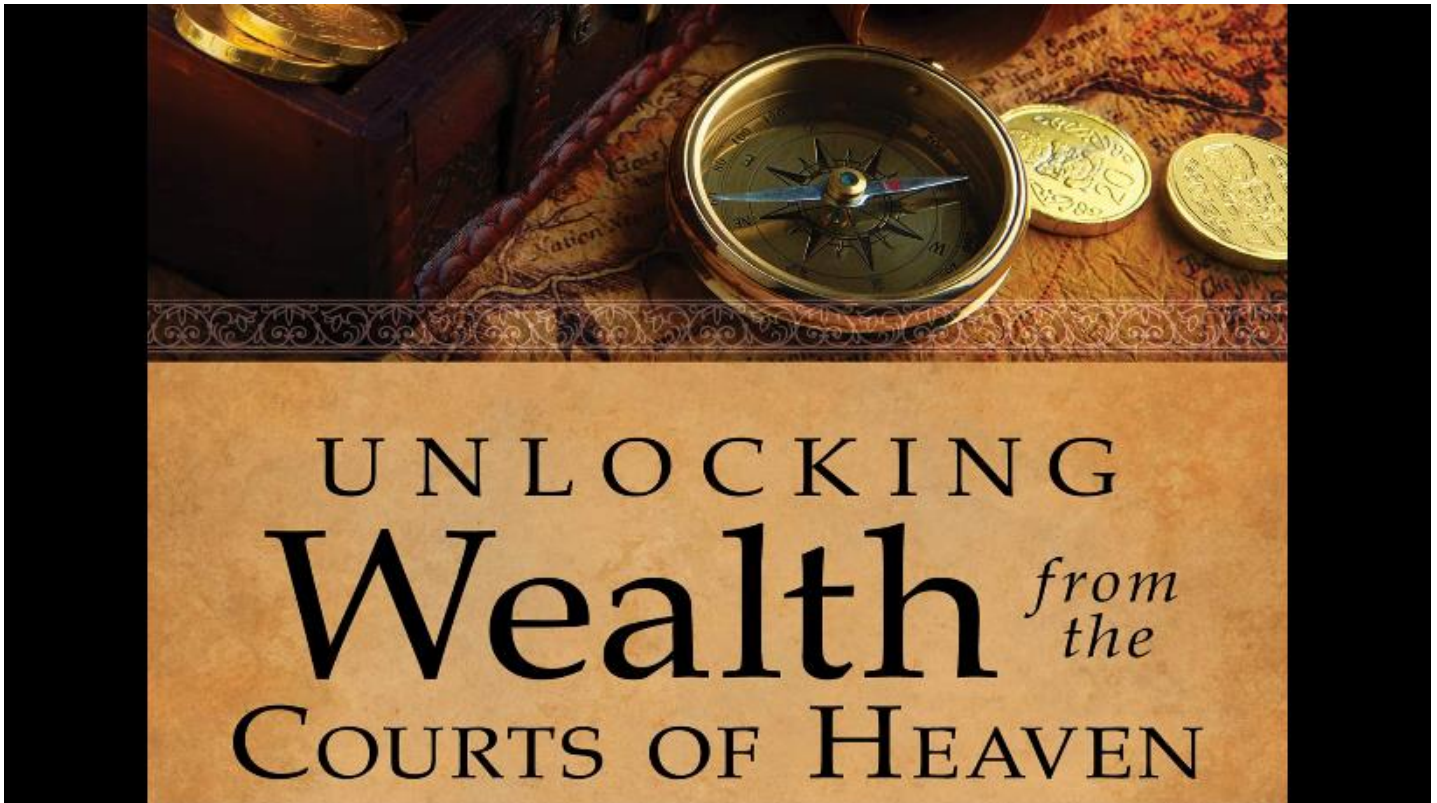
What they miss, is they do match for Jesus' point - both are true. It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just as it is humanly impossible for a rich man to be a Christian, but... But anything is possible where God is concerned. When God intervenes in the humanly impossible... It's a different story altogether... What precisely does that mean though?



To answer that question, we must expand back out to the big picture - to the context of our little passage. Specifically, Jesus was talking about rich people, because of the incident with a particular rich person. What He was really talking about though was the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is humanly impossible for a rich person to enter, just as impossible as it is for any person to enter. Remember sweeping principles? Every person has their personal Isaac. Every person is rich in some way. Rich in their pride, in their sexual promiscuity, in their possessions, in their large family, in their strength, their intellect, their education, their friends, their false humility, their kids, their whatever it is - everyone is rich in some way and that way makes it humanly impossible for them to enter the Kingdom of Heaven - it makes it humanly impossible for them to be saved... But praise be to God... For Him, "All things are possible."

When Jesus clarified why the Rich Young Ruler went away grieving, the Disciples understood Him to say that the most blessed person was not blessed enough.



For their entire lives they had been indoctrinated into the Jewish belief that wealth, position and power were blessings bestowed by God. It stood to reason that any Jewish man who was both rich and a ruler especially when so young was abundantly blessed by God. Extrapolate that out to mean, God's favor rested upon them. The Rich Young Ruler was a guy God undoubtedly loved and was well pleased with and so if he couldn't enter Heaven - who could?

Who could be saved if not this guy who was obviously, clearly, unmistakably, and abundantly blessed by God? Rhetorically, no one. And that is the point. No one is

the only correct answer. No one can be saved apart from God choosing to save... And that's Jesus' point.

The Rich Young Ruler was trying to be saved through his own effort... "What good thing shall I do?" What extra thing can I perform, so that my abundant blessing in this life, will continue into the next? Are we any different? We could talk about other areas, but for most Americans we can stay right here with possessions, wealth, riches. Most of us have so much, we don't need to rely on God for anything in a daily sense. You're probably not seriously worried about how you're going to get enough food today to survive. We have a surplus in both tangible goods and money to buy more... So, we generally think in terms of what can I do, that won't be too painful, to ensure my continued blessing into the next life... Do you see the Rich Young Ruler when you look into a mirror? Maybe you should... Because recognizing your sin is the first step in correcting it.

What Jesus explained and what His Disciples didn't really get was that the very notion of trying to do more to gain God's favor, to be blessed by Him, to be saved into the Kingdom, was what would actually prevent it.

That was the lesson of the small children. If for a moment we think in terms of what we bring to the table, we are stepping down the wrong path. Unfortunately, almost all of Christianity thinks in terms of their human performance gaining, or keeping, or enhancing their favor with God. It is the exact opposite!



God's ways are not our ways, God's economy does not work the way our economy works... It is a tremendous blessing that things are that way because it is how we differentiate between man-made religion and God's true Word.

Humans make gods in their own image - God made humans in His image - the difference between those two statements is profound... In God's world you don't get by grabbing - you get by giving. In this case by giving possessions, but in all cases by giving what earthly thing you cling to and then helplessly placing yourself in God's care. Just as Jesus shouted out from the Cross, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." We say Father, I commit my everything to You and simply trust that You have me.