

October 14, 2018

“Big Questions: What’s It Gonna Cost Me?”

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20, Mark 10:17-31

This morning we are continuing in our teaching series “ Big Questions”. We are continuing in the lectionary passages which for this series are mainly in Mark’s Gospel.

And as Tom and I looked at these particular passages we discovered there were some really important questions being asked or implied... Big questions.

And If you were here last week, well it is great to see ya back. Tom kicked the series off with one of the more difficult passage that raised important questions on marriage and divorce.

If I am honest I was kind of relieved it wasn’t my week to preach. But... As I looked at the passage for this week I realized it talks a lot about money and wealth and some more hard sayings from Jesus.

So here we are, week two in this series with another easy topic to talk about. And the thing is... we can easily be tempted, especially with these harder more difficult passages, to either water down or soften what it may it be saying or just to tune it out altogether .

But I believe there is an important truth in these passages even in the more difficult sayings of Jesus. So we need to hear the truth but also receive it with God’s amazing grace, so let’s dive in and look at it with grace and truth.

In thinking about money, my mind drifts to the fact I have four wonderful daughters which essentially means I have no money.

Of course I desire to see my daughters get married one day. But with that, there comes a certain reality I face. For one, there is going to be some guy pursuing my daughter. Which I think I can handle and deal with. I have already sat down with my girls laid out the two rules I have for them when it comes to this.

1. He should love Jesus,
2. He has to go on a run with me. You can learn a lot about a person over the course of 100 miles .

But it’s the other reality of our daughters getting married that has me a little worried... the money. Right? “What’s it gonna cost me?”

For many of us, whether its weddings, buying a house, experiences, vacations and trips, investments, we often make decisions with a cost to benefit analysis. Cost worth it?

We also can do this with relationships. In psychology they call it social exchange theory. I am no expert in this, and I realize wikipedia may not be the best source but essentially this theory suggests we look at the benefits or rewards and subtract the costs in order to determine how much a relationship is worth.

What's it gonna cost me? And is it worth the cost... which can include time, money, commitment, mental energy, and so on.

In our passage this morning, which by the way is also found in Matthew and Luke's gospel, we see a rich young man running to Jesus, full of sincerity, anxiousness, and he is asking a very big question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

It is a question of eternal salvation, security, of entering God's kingdom, and in his question I believe there is that underlying question or thought going on and that is, What's it gonna cost me? What, more, do I have to do ? Because as we read on, the answer Jesus gives is not one the rich young man is willing to accept. The cost outweighs the benefit and it's not worth it.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? The thing about this question the young man asks is that I have seen this sort of thing before. This is one of those questions that I am fairly certain this young man already knew the answer to.

It reminds me of daily life with our girls. Every-night they ask me "Dad, Dad what is for dinner?" And they know the answer because they always get the same answer.

"Dad, What is for dinner? "

And my answer is "food". Then the follow up question... "what kind of food?"... "Good food."

Because I learned early on, if they knew what is for dinner they just had more time to complain or think about if the cost of not eating it out weighs the benefit of dessert or not, and they still have to at least try whatever it is. They know the answer.

This young man, as a devout Jew and as someone who knows and keeps the commandments and such he would have known that to inherit eternal life, to enter the kingdom was to "obey God and avoid sin".

So why then was he asking?

My guess is that he just wants to make sure. He senses that Jesus has something more to offer for eternal life. Something that he may have forgotten or missed. He is not satisfied.

But his problem, as we see in his question, is in his belief that he can attain this “something more” by his own efforts.

This young man knew he had done the right things but there still was that nagging sense that there is more out there than what he has experienced and what he has done so far. He can't shake that sense that he is lacking something.

“Be straight with me Jesus, what is it really going to cost to lock this in?”

And so Jesus answers him. After a short conversation about righteous living and Jesus just seeing the sincerity of this young man, he looks at him and loves him (talk about this moment of Jesus' love for him).

Then Jesus gets to the heart of it all and invites him to true discipleship.

Up until this point all the initiative has been from the rich young man, and here Jesus now takes the initiative.

Jesus tells the man the one thing he lacks, the one thing he actually needs to do:

v21-“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

He essentially is telling the rich young man, “Keeping the commandments as you have claimed, that is a good thing, loving your neighbor the way you have, that's great. But, it is not about what you have done. It is not about what you can do or not do to earn salvation. In fact it is not about what you have at all but about what you lack.”

Jesus is saying you lack me. You need to stop putting your faith and trust in your wealth and accomplishments and start only putting your faith and trust in God, in me.

You want to inherit eternal life? You want to enter the kingdom of God? You want to be justified, and no longer wonder what you might be missing?

Then come follow me. Only by surrendering everything will you get everything, will you inherit eternal life, enter the kingdom, be justified. The only way into God's kingdom — follow me. Be connected to me. Depend on all that I am for you.

See, Jesus knew this young man's heart. Jesus knew that the young man trusted and put faith and loved his money more than he trusted and loved God.

Jesus knew that money does not last and in fact often leads people into sin. People who have a love of money are never satisfied. They want more and more of it.

Just like the we read in our Ecclesiastes passage.

The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity. (5:10)

Jesus loved the rich young man and wanted what was best for him.

So, how did the young man respond?

Hearing what Jesus had to say it is clear the cost was too great for the rich young man. He couldn't take that step forward into following Jesus, into receiving the eternal life he desired. And so as we read in v22. "He went away sad, because he had great wealth."

It was the everyday danger of allowing possessions and money to determine and rule one's life as the reason for the man's failure to take that step and become a disciple to follow Jesus and to inherit eternal life.

Back when I was in seminary in California, one of my favorite places I was able to visit a few times was Yosemite. Have you ever been there? The worst part of the drive is you have to go through Fresno but then as you drive up into the Sierra mountains you go around turn after turn and then all of a sudden it opens up and it feels like you are entering Narnia. Water falls, and big rock walls. Amazing and breathtaking.

On one trip I was taking my brother and a friend to hike half dome. A 14 mile round trip hike that is amazing filled with rewarding views and sense of accomplishment getting to the top of half dome.

And right before you get to the top you encounter the most famous— or infamous part of the hike- the last 400 feet ascent up the cables. Two cables up a fairly steep slab that allow you to get to the top of half dome without rock climbing gear. And honestly it is pretty safe and ends up being more of a mental challenge then physical one.

So the three of us make are way to the half dome and upon getting to this final section my friend gets to the cables which he knew about... he looks up, looks at me, looks at his feet and says nope.

My brother and I encouraged him, stood with him, and promised we would be next to him every step of the way. I had done the hike before and knew just how amazing it is to get up there. But that didn't matter.

He was on the brink of a big decision for something amazing and awesome but just couldn't take that next step forward.

And in a way, kind of like my friend this young rich man came to Jesus and was on the brink, the very cusp of a life transforming decision and moment but just can't take that step.

It was going to cost him too much. He couldn't take the last step and "went away grieving." Essentially for the young man, losing his money and wealth meant losing himself. The cost to inherit eternal life was total surrender of his identity, his idol, his savior.

And so His money, his wealth ended up being worth more to him than the eternal life, the kingdom of God he was searching for.

But that is what Jesus was calling that young man to and what calls us to. Jesus' invitation to eternal life involves a surrender of whatever that is we put our faith in, our trust and security in. We have to replace what we are looking to as a savior.

Everybody's got something. What is it for you?

Money? wealth?, accomplishments?, possessions, titles, people?

When the love of money or stuff or things or people grabs us and sits on the throne of our hearts, we also will find ourselves unable to take that step. We find ourselves walking away from Jesus.

Jesus then comments on this whole interaction and takes it even further and drops one of his truth bombs starting in verse 23.

"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

This is some difficult stuff to hear. It was difficult then and it's difficult now. And like many before we may also be tempted to soften it, or avoid it, or find an interpretation that suits us better.

Some have said it's not an actual needle but refers to a small door next to a gate in Jerusalem that camels could get through after hours by getting down on their knees and getting rid of all the baggage and squeezing through.

Which sounds good and makes a great sermon illustration. Right? Just like that camel if we just humble ourselves and come to our knees and remove some things we can get through.

Sounds good right, but it goes back to the initial problem in the question "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" It places the emphasis on our own efforts.

I think Jesus is being very clear here in what he is saying and The statement means what it says: it is impossible. It is just like saying a snowball chance in a hot place, or You've got two chances--slim and none...and Slim left town, or saying it would be like The Colorado rockies to win a world series....too far?

The point is it's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible for the rich person to get into the kingdom of God.

It is impossible for the poor person to get into the kingdom of God. It is impossible for anyone to enter the kingdom by his or her own means.

Which is why it makes sense for the disciples to ask the question "Then who can be saved?"

And Jesus lays out the reality here:

With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.

Timothy Keller points out here that in this passage:

"There is an important nuance here. Jesus didn't mean that it's a sin to be rich. It is not that all individual rich people are bad, nor are individual poor people good. Jesus did not make such blanket assertions. Jesus was saying that there is something radically wrong with all of us(sin)— but money has particular power to blind us to it. IN fact, it has so much power to deceive us of our true spiritual state that we need a gracious, miraculous intervention form God to see it. It's impossible without God, without a miracle, Without grace."

So how can the impossible happen for me?

The answer that Jesus tells us is that true discipleship and entering the kingdom is made possible only by the action of God.

With God all things are possible! It is possible only by God's grace through faith and trust in the one true true rich young ruler.

Jesus is the One True Rich Young Ruler, who sells all that He has and gives to the poor.

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 8:9-

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

When we understand this and when we are blown away and in amazement that Jesus is the true rich young ruler, our hearts and our attitudes will begin to change. The impossible is made possible by God's grace.

So then, what's it gonna cost me?

Everything and nothing!

The kingdom of me is always in opposition to the kingdom of God so it will cost everything other than Christ that we seek our identity in. It will cost everything that sits on the throne of your heart because God will not take second place. It will cost everything other than God that we put our faith in and enslaves us and ties me up from receiving His gift.

Jesus has been very clear about the cost of following him-

*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **35** For whoever wants to save their life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. **36** What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Mark 8)*

And at the same time it will cost nothing. It's not "what must I **do** to inherit eternal life" It is about receiving grace through faith. The work of salvation is complete. At the cross Jesus said "It is finished!"

We can't add to it. There is nothing more we can do or not do to earn salvation to make God love us more or less.

The One True Rich Young Ruler gave everything. He is more precious than riches, more comforting than control, and more satisfying than everything in the world thrown together.

He gave up all of His wealth so that you could have a true treasure that will fulfill & last for eternity. He gave up everything He had for us, even to the pint of death on a cross.

He gave up everything to come after you and me, to rescue, and to love us and invite us into the most abundant life. Eternal life with him.

Will you take that step to come and follow Jesus. Will you receive His grace and fully put your trust and faith in who He is and what he has done for you!

He has done everything!