

Mark 10:17-31

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’” 20 And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” 21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is[a] to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 26 And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him,[b] “Then who can be saved?” 27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.” 28 Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” 29 Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

What Do You Lack?

You’ve probably heard the old saying, money is the root of all evil. In fact, this passage about the rich young ruler is often used to justify a dislike or distrust of money and especially wealth. After all, Jesus does tell the young man to give away his wealth and the young man leaves, unwilling to do so at that time. But I think

taking this passage to mean money is evil and very bad and evil is an oversimplification of the wealth of wisdom and compassion in this passage of Scripture.

This young man runs up to Jesus. He has kept the law but he is aware that something is missing within him. That he is lacking something. He asks Jesus what must he do to be saved, to be made whole, what does he lack.

Jesus knows very well whether this young man has kept the law. We know he didn't keep it perfectly for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but this young man seems to be trying at least. He knows the value of the law and says to Jesus that he has kept the law. What happens next is so overlooked.

Jesus looks at this man. And Jesus loves this man, And Jesus tells this man exactly what he lacks, exactly what his idols are. This young man was quite wealthy and he loved his wealth, which appears to have been honorably gained or else we might expect Jesus or the gospel writer to say otherwise. So it seems that the wealth itself is not the problem. And plenty of our spiritual ancestors were blessed with great wealth and were saved, such as Job, Abraham, and many of the wealthy ladies who funded the ministry of Jesus. Wealth

was not the problem in and of itself. In fact, the very promised land was to be a place of wealth due to its abundance of natural resources. The problem was that the wealth held the place of highest affection for this young man. It was something he wanted more than Jesus, and thus was an idol. The only path forward for spiritual growth and a fulfilling faith life for this man was to get rid of it, so that he could come to love the Lord more.

Jesus looks at all of us and sees us with just as much clarity. He knows our idols better and even before we do. But Jesus also looks at us with love. Jesus understands us better than we can understand ourselves, and has literally lived in our skin. Jesus understands how hard the temptations of life are. Jesus knows our idols, and has a way of calling them out.

Have you ever heard the joke that goes my wife says its me or the dog. I'll miss her. This is just a joke but we could say that the dog held the highest affection of

the jokester, the place would should be held by the wife. For the rich young ruler, he might say Jesus said me or my money. I'll miss him. It's not as funny that way.

We all have idols or things which vie for the affection and place of honor in our hearts and minds that rightfully should belong to God. Those things which rob us of our contentment. The things we're willing to bend our objectivity and sometimes even our morality for.

For some of us, that may be money. The quest for just a little bit more might rob us of our contentment and threats to our money, including the call of Jesus, may be poorly received. For others, it might be lifestyle or a relationship that they suspect or even know is leading you away from God, but they keep choosing it. It might be sheer stubbornness, wanting our way more than God's, wanting our sins more than righteousness. This even happens in our churches.

Our wise Presbyterian has been known to say something to the effect of you want to know where a church's heart is, look at their budget. I'll give you an example straight out of the Washington Post and CBS News from June of 2019 when a reporter confronted renown televangelist Kenneth Copeland on his fleet of private jets. Now I don't know how many private jets constitute a fleet but I feel like that's at least three. Like I have two and a half cars and no one is calling that a fleet. From this interview, Copeland said if he had to fly commercial he'd have to stop 65% of what he did. In 2015 he went to far as to describe flying commercial as "flying in a long tube with a bunch of demons — and it's deadly." He must've flown frontier. He and the report go back and forth over Copeland's wealth, at the end of which he argues his wealth is biblical and shuts the reporter up by grabbing her hand and praying for her.

I don't know the first thing about Copeland or his ministry, but if I followed our Presbyterian's thinking and followed the money...I think his ministry's heart might be the enriching of Copeland. There might be a tiny chance that those gulfstream five private jets have become an idol.

But it's not just the big ministries that this happens to. It happens to our programs that we preserve long after they're on life support. It happens when we resist the spirit's call because we want to go another way. And I know I'm about to make it a little uncomfortable, but it especially happens with our buildings. So often

buildings become the mission of the church, instead of the Gospel. So often we become so limited by what we are instead of Jesus calls us to be.

But the good news is that Jesus looks at us with love. In this passage the rich young man walks away from Jesus and he is never mentioned in Scripture again, but there's good news. Church tradition, which is certainly not infallible but often a strong source of history, church tradition states that this young man did in fact become a Christian, a well known one at that. Church tradition tells us that the rich young ruler was John Mark, the exuberant author of the gospel of Mark. Consider what things might be fighting for your attention and affection, and whether Jesus might be calling you to give those up, at least for a time. Jesus wishes to be first in our hearts, above all things. And while the rich young ruler walked away for a time and was still saved, we are promised no such good fortune. The time to put Jesus first is always now.

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October 20, 2024