

¹⁷As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus looked at him and loved him. “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.” ²²At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It 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.”

²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

²⁸Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

²⁹“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” Matt.6:33 “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well.”

[Pray]

How would you complete this sentence:

“If I won the Lottery, I would...” (Turn and tell your neighbor how you would finish that sentence.)

Money—no matter how much we have, it never seems to be enough, right?

I find it interesting that it is not uncommon for actual lottery winners to end up losers. That is to say, many do not manage their winnings well and end up either broke or in debt.

In a worst-case scenario, 46 year old Urooj Khan won one million dollars in the Illinois Lottery in 2012. Within a week, he dropped dead. An autopsy revealed that he died of cyanide poisoning. Both his sister in law and her father were suspected to have been involved in his death, but no one was ever charged. His winnings were divided between his widow and his daughter. Like Amy said last week, there are no Uhaul trailers behind hearses. You can't take it with you!

Other lottery winners have determined to improve the lives of others. Sheelah Ryan won \$52 million in the Florida State Lottery, which at the time was the biggest individual lottery jackpot ever won. She then spent the last years of her life giving it away. She created a non-profit organization that grants money to groups building low income housing, pays medical bills, and provides financial assistance to seniors on fixed incomes. She died six years after winning the lottery, but her organization continues its mission today. Most of us will not win the lottery, but still, we must manage the resources we have—our time, talent, and yes, our finances, all of which are gifts from God.

In this episode, Jesus is sought out by a seeker. What do we know about this person? Each of the synoptic gospels adds its own detail until we get this picture:

- 1—He is in a position of power, a person of influence (Luke).
- 2—He has many possessions, which indicate that he is wealthy (Mark).
- 3—He is passionate—he runs to Jesus and knelt at his feet (Mark).
- 4—He is young.

He seems to have it all. What more could he want?

Yet he knows that something is missing. So, he asks Jesus:

“What must I DO to have eternal life?”

He asks the right question, or does he?

One danger of possessing wealth is the assumption that everything/anything can be bought for a price. We have all seen the credit card commercials that assure us that only a very few things are “priceless”, because “for everything else, there’s Mastercard!”

Another danger of wealth is the assumption of self-sufficiency. In terms of spirituality, the young man believes that if he just DOES the right thing, he can achieve salvation/eternal life. It all depends on him! Thus, he asks the question: "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus helps him take inventory by starting with the second half of the ten commandments—those that focus on human relationships. To this, the young man claims compliance—he says he has kept them all since childhood. (The commands include not committing murder, or adultery, not stealing, not being a false witness or committing fraud, and honoring ones parents.)

Now, if I were Jesus—I would have gone for the jugular. I would have started with the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me!" Or as he states it positively (in Mark 12) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul...and love your neighbor as yourself."

But Jesus is not me, and Jesus does not do this.

Rather, Jesus looks him right in the eye, and Mark tells us:

"Jesus loved him." (Mark 10:21)

This is unique in Mark's gospel.

Imagine the intensity of Jesus' gaze as he sees beyond the superficial, and into the young man's very soul. Jesus loved him.

Imagine Jesus is facing you...He is looking directly into your eyes. How does this feel?

I imagine it is somewhat intimidating...Jesus' gaze is penetrating...it is intimate. Feeling Jesus' eyes on me, is honestly, a little uncomfortable. When Jesus looks, he sees us as we are--the good, the bad and the ugly--and yet, Jesus loves me...Jesus loves you...Jesus loved this man. The word in Greek is agape—unconditional love, the highest form of love!

It is because of this very love, that Jesus calls this man--just as Jesus calls you and me--to radical discipleship.

"This one thing you lack" ...there is one barrier, one hindrance to his experiencing eternal life.

What is this one thing that he lacks?? On the surface, he appears to have everything!

Are you and I lacking something? Where does our treasure reside? What is the source of our abundance? What is it that prevents you and me from completely and fully following Jesus whole-heartedly?

These are important questions to ponder relative to our own discipleship. In order to follow Jesus, there is a prerequisite.

Jesus tells the rich young ruler to first,

“Go and sell what you have.”

“Give the money to the poor.”

“THEN, come and follow me.”

In essence, Jesus asks the young man to love him more than the things of this world—he asks him to demonstrate that love by divesting himself of his earthly treasures, in order to invest in the treasure of God’s Kingdom.

He must let go of material treasures, in order to receive spiritual ones.

It is a matter of priority—he has kept all the commandments with the exception of the first and the last. He failed to put God first! (“You shall have no other gods before Me.”)

The last command concerns covetousness. In the end, his possessions possessed him. He is shocked, he is grieved. He goes away with everything in the world, but nothing lasting. He goes away with all manner of earthy wealth, but he possesses nothing of eternal value.

It was safe to follow the rules and keep the commandments; it was too risky, too radical, to follow Jesus!

Jesus makes the most of this teachable moment, which is not lost on his disciples. Jesus took a commonly held belief of the OT—that worldly goods are a sign of God’s blessing—and turned it on its head! Jesus emphasizes at least twice in this episode; how HARD it is for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God. He even makes a joke when he tells of the impossibility of a camel—the largest known animal at the time—trying to fit through the eye of a needle. Not only is it impossible, it is laughable!

Likewise, it is impossible for us to think we can buy our salvation, earn our salvation, or save ourselves. The Apostle Paul tells us that it is *“by grace that you have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one can boast.”* Ephesians 2:8-9

It is difficult if not impossible for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!

Now before we too quickly dismiss this passage as applying only to the Bill Gates and Warren Buffets of this world, may I remind us that in comparison to 2/3 of the world’s inhabitants, you and I *are* wealthy.

So how does this passage apply to you and me?

Must we sell all we have, give the money to the poor, before we can follow Jesus? Perhaps...

Let me suggest that in order to embrace the free gift of salvation that God offers us, we must be able to let go of whatever may hinder us...whatever else might be taking first place in our lives. It is a matter of priorities.

Have you ever put on a button-down shirt, only to discover that you got the first button in the second buttonhole? You know. The result is that all the buttons are out of order, because you started with putting the first button in the second buttonhole. If the first one is off, all the others will be too. (St. Ignatius called this concept, “disordered attachments”.) So it is with our spiritual lives. We must take care that what we choose to give first place in our lives, lasts. That is, it must have lasting value—lasting for an eternity.

It is easier said than done. We live in a material world. We want and desire—yes, in fact, we need—things that we can feel and hold and touch—tangibles. Jesus recognizes this. But Jesus also says in Matthew 6—keep things in the right order. **Put first things, first. Put first, things that Last.**

Jesus put it this way: Matthew 6:19-21,24, 33

¹⁹*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

²⁴“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

³³“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

This is a story of unrequited love. This young man was smitten with the material world. He could not love his possessions and love Jesus at the same time. There is only so much room at the top—that is to say—**we can only give our total allegiance to one person or thing.**

Jesus looked at this young man with love. Jesus looks at you and me, with a deep, unconditional love.

Jesus’ deepest desire is for us to receive and return that love—to love Him above all else.

This is what Jesus means when he says: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness...” “You shall have no other gods before me.”

What hinders you and me from putting God first? How attached are you and I to the things of this world?

Do we love them more than we love Jesus? What prevents us from giving God our all? That is, not only 100% of what we have, but 100% of who we are.

God loves us with an everlasting, unconditional, amazing love. What prevents us from loving God whole-heartedly in return?

May we choose carefully. **Put first things, first.** **Put first, things that last!**

[PRAY]