

June 1, 2014
Port Gardner Church
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Mark 10:17-31
The Rich Young Ruler

Welcome:

Last Week: Marriage.Divorce.Children

We saw that to be part of the kingdom of God we must be like children. Vulnerable, trusting with faith in God. Jesus said *“for to such belong the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”*

We hear a lot today in the church today about seekers. Let me ask you this... Were any of you a “seeker” when Jesus saved you? Were you really looking for God? Were you really looking for salvation? Were you looking for God or were you looking for something else? Truth is... you were probably looking for something else... something selfish.

Seeker sensitive, seeker friendly. It almost causes us to assume that the world is full of seekers and that we as the church, just need to find out the angle of what they’re seeking and provide it somehow for them and that will draw them to salvation.

The world is full of seekers... and they’re not seeking God.

Fulfillment? Purpose? Happiness? Love? Meaning? But God? Not really.
Romans 3, the Bible says, “No man seeks after God.”

The world is full of dishonest seekers. There are lots of people who want a more satisfying life, a more fulfilling life and if you throw in heaven, bonus. But they are looking for satisfaction on their terms. There are lots of selfish seekers.

The church is full of selfish seekers. In many ways we are all selfish seekers. We would say we’re seeking God. We would say we are seeking the Kingdom of God. We would say we are seeking heaven, that’s why we’re so religious.

But the truth is, many of us are just superficial religious people. On the outside and even by our own confession, we may appear to be legitimately pursuing the things of God. But if the truth were known, that’s really not the case.

And we have an example of that in our text today. This account of Jesus meeting with a young man is so definitive that it is in 3 of the 4 gospels. Here is Mark’s account...

Mark 10:17-31 [17] 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 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, **“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.”**

This is not a parable. This is **not** a story that Jesus invented as He often did. This is a real encounter between Jesus and this man recorded by **Matthew, Mark and Luke.**

We are proud, selfish people, no matter how much we may say we want eternal life, we **are not able to receive it.** This young man failed the greatest test of his life. He was offered a choice between himself and God, between fulfillment here and now and fulfillment in the life to come. The question was...what was more valuable to him? God and the life to come? Or his own will and the present life?

Let's take a look...

This young man is running to Jesus. This is uncommon for a person of rank and stature. Men of wealth and power never ran anywhere or to anyone. We saw this with the prodigal son when his father ran to meet him upon his return home. This was entirely uncharacteristic of a dignified person. They just did not run.

This guy seems eager. Eager to meet Jesus. Eager to be near Him. **Eager to know his standing with God.**

Isn't this true of most of us? We are interested in our standing. With our friends, our boss, our spouse... and our God. We want to know what others think of us. We post stuff for others to like. We show our best life online and in all our conversations. When asked how we are doing... we usually answer... Good!

And then he falls to his knees in immediate submission. He calls Jesus "Good Teacher". Everything here is done with honor and respect for who Jesus is. When confronted with the one true God... all will bow. All will show respect. We do this as well. In our speech and our actions. There are many reverent people in this world.

And then... the question.

He seems sincere. He is asking what seems to be an authentic and important questions. One that a "good" person who wanted to follow Jesus would ask.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? In reality, this man is asking, *what must I do to be saved?* And his question gives away everything about this man. **"What must I do?"**

This man believes that behavior is the ultimate requirement of religion. He, like all us, believe that our deeds are what determines our destiny. Good deeds = Good Destiny, Bad Deeds = Bad Destiny. Some of us even call it Karma.

Side note on Karma. If you are a follower of Jesus... Please don't use the word Karma to describe the Christian faith. The "what goes around comes around" idea is what this man believes. Unfortunately it is what many in this room believe... me included. I have to fight this part of my sin nature.

If what goes around comes around... you can be sure Hell is coming your way. Grace is not a payout that God grants because you've behaved well... or chosen wisely. It is the Son of God dying in our place so we can be forgiven for our rebellion against Him. Jesus blast Karma back to Hell... without you attached.

Jesus then directs him to the moral law...

'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'

All these I have kept since I was a boy.

It's important to note that in Judaism, it was believed that you could attain heaven by fulfilling and being obedient to all of the law. They believed that it was possible to earn your position in heaven. They even ranked one another as to their standing in the kingdom of God.

And remember Paul?

Paul said that before his conversion on the road to Damascus that “according to righteousness by the law... I was blameless”. In fact, it was so believed that a person possessed the ability to fulfill God’s commandments that in all seriousness, **they spoke of people who had kept the entire Torah from A to Z.**

This was the most intricate moral system the world has ever known.

And Jesus comes into this culture to prove the impossibility of pleasing God in this manner. Jesus comes and blows the whole thing up.

I love this part. Jesus looked at him and loved him.

This young man is so into himself and his accomplishments that he doesn’t even know his method is useless and as Isaiah says... as “filthy rags”. And Jesus, in his compassion sees this. He sees this man’s self centered efforts. And he has love and compassion because Jesus knows that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves worthy of salvation. Nothing.

The word used for “looked at” means to look at intently, to examine or to scrutinized. Jesus is not deceived by the rich man. Jesus is never deceived by us. He sees inside us and sees our sins. And knowing that we were still in our sin, still in rebellion against God, Jesus still went to the cross for us. **Hitler.**

And Jesus says 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.”*

Last week we saw little children who have nothing are told that the Kingdom of God is theirs, but this man who has everything (in a worldly sense... still lacks something. Only when he gives up everything and becomes vulnerable like a little child... will he possess God’s kingdom.

Once again, we are confronted with Jesus. Jesus always brings confrontation before salvation. And a decision must be made. Action must be taken. Hearts must be broken. Jesus offers Himself in exchange for the man’s possessions.

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

As long as we stand on our own merits, we are self assured, but the word of Jesus calls us beyond our safety net of money and possessions. **He calls us beyond our own abilities and will.**

The word Mark used for disheartened means to be **shocked, appalled or overcast as the sky.**

Here is the truth...

A person who leads an exemplary life, who even endears himself to God... can still be an idolater.

By leaving, this man is rejecting Jesus. He is going on his way knowing that he has chosen to serve himself and his riches instead of following Christ.

This story is less about money and more about Lordship. Look what Jesus says.

And now Jesus looks around. He surveys the faces of his disciples.

And Jesus says *“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 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, “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.**”*

At last we hear the right questions... who can be saved? Not, what must I do?

And the answer is that it is impossible for man to earn it.

You can't earn it. You can't buy it. You can't negotiate it. You can't steal it or sneak it. It is by the power of God and God alone that we are saved.

Our deficiency, our inadequacy, our inability and even our futility is exactly what Jesus is asking for us to understand and accept.

At some point, if you want to follow Jesus... you will be challenged on your personal sufficiency.

This is when and where God shows you your own insufficiency. Your inability to even choose Christ. But God gives us the faith. He imparts to us the ability. This man didn't even want the ability. He only wanted to be God of his life. The master of his own destiny. And Jesus allows him to be just that.

Conclusion:

We all try to bring our deeds to God. We all try to bring our accomplishments.

Bible Study, prayer, service towards others, keeping the rules. Our Good Deeds.

But the truth is that we won't choose Christ. We won't choose grace because it doesn't make sense to us. We don't run to Jesus just like convicted felons don't run to the police station. The police station represents everything the convict is trying to avoid. And just like the convict... we avoid Jesus because we see judgment coming.

The Bible says we are dead in our sin. We are not on life support. We are not "getting better". We are dead. And if we are dead, we have no ability to choose Jesus.

Jesus used the raising of Lazarus as an example of our salvation. Do you think Lazarus was laying in the grave and was deciding whether to take God's offer of life? Do you think he heard the voice of Christ and was thinking, hmmm... I wonder if I should take this deal or not? Christ commanded him to "come forth". Our salvation is not our choice. **We are God's choice.**

There is no such thing as a "seeker". Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones state in their book Proof, *"When the living God surveys the inhabitants of earth He doesn't discover multitudes of well intentioned women and men trying to find their way into his kingdom. What he sees instead are hordes of the walking dead, living with an inward inkling that God is real, but refusing to submit to His sovereign will."*

Psalm 14:2-3 *[2] The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.*

[3] They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Psalm 53:2-3 *[2] God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.*

[3] They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Psalm 51:5 *[5] Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Isaiah 53:6 *[6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Romans 3:11-12 [11] no one understands, no one seeks for God.[12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Our nature shapes what we choose. Our nature is sin. Even after our salvation, our nature is still sin and we choose to sin. But this is what Jesus is trying to tell us. It's not about us. It's never about us.

Jesus calls us to give up our right to our run our own life.

Each week we come to church and hear God's truth and we have a chance to give up our baggage. Give up our abilities and accomplishments and possessions and lay them before Jesus...

This guy wanted eternal life... but not enough to give up his pride and his possessions. He never questioned what Jesus said. He never questioned the truthfulness of what Jesus said. He didn't debate or argue, he just walked away. The price was too high... even for eternal life. He loved himself, not God. He loved earth, not heaven. He loved the material, not the spiritual.

The man left the same way he came, without Jesus.

I'm pretty sure he would have prayed a prayer if Jesus had given him one to pray. I'm sure he would have made a decision if Jesus had given him a decision to make. I'm pretty sure he would have agreed to some terms if Jesus had given him some agreeable terms.

Jesus never gave him a prayer, never asked him to make a decision, never called for a commitment, not at all. He told him the truth and the man rejected Jesus.

He didn't reject Jesus with a lot of fanfare. He did it the way most of us do it. He quietly got up, turned around and walked away. He probably decided that he was not going to make that change that Jesus called for... just yet.

In one way or another... we all do what this guy did. We think of Jesus as a Good Teacher. We treat Jesus with respect and courtesy. We listen to his words and teachings and espouse his good deeds as something we should aspire to.

We come with humility and respect. We come in a commendable manner.

Why can't this guy just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved?

Because the issue here is his sense of his own goodness. Before you can talk about the gospel, before you can talk about salvation, before you can talk about the Kingdom and eternal life, and the works of God, we first have to understand that **we are not good.**

Understanding this takes all the works out of it. This man had no true idea of goodness, so he had no real understanding of the law of God which he so intensely studied or he wouldn't have thrown the word "good" around casually and even labeled a stranger with it.

His response is consistent with fallen human nature that thinks its good... and religious people who think they're better than everybody else. **He is sure that he is good.** He has met the Law's demands. He is good. Since Jesus is a teacher from God, He's good, too. He doesn't understand the difference between God and himself.

The most damning delusion that any of us can ever believe is... that we're good. That's it. **That I'm good.**

When you tell people they are wicked, evil, corrupt, and not good at all, they don't believe that. They didn't believe it then, they don't believe it today. People don't believe that. So they go turn around and walk away believing they're good. And until they believe they're not, there's no hope for them. **And until we believe we're not, there's no hope for us either.**