

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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That Point of Decision – The Rich Young Ruler

May 8th, 2022

Sermon Text: Matt 19:16-24

Scripture Reading: Matt 13:1-9;
18-23

Mat 19:16-30 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (17) And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

(18) He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, (19) Honor your father and mother, and,

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

(20) The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” (21) Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

(22) When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

(23) And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) Again I tell you, 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.”

This morning I want us to look carefully at this scripture which relates to the subject I spoke about

this past week in the Gospel of John study – *leaving and following*. The repeated theme in Scripture which shows us that Christ’s call to follow Him necessarily requires *leaving someone, something, or someplace*. Leaving our old life and walking in the new life in Christ.

And this means that Christ always brings us to a point of decision. Will we follow? Or will we stay?

Now, this young wealthy man as you can see was like so many people today – even many people who claim to be Christians. *He wanted the best of both. He wanted to remain and yet follow*. Jesus tells him that he cannot have both. You cannot love this world and love Christ – it is impossible.

Consider this interchange again:

Mat 19:16-30 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (17) And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one

who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

Now you will see as you think about his words that his entire concept of salvation was wrong. It was something *we do ourselves*. It is a matter of the works of the Law. But he, like the Pharisees of his day, had not truly heard the Law:

Gal 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

What good deed must I do....? As we heard earlier this morning from Derek Thomas, the answer to that question is....nothing! Or more properly, there is nothing you can do to save yourself. I think this is at the root of why Jesus asked him about “good.” He certainly must have considered himself pretty good – after all, he is about to claim that he has kept all the commandments!! *You aren’t good. Only God is good!*

This is at the root of man's sin – *he really thinks he is quite good!* We would all do well to apply Jesus' challenge to ourselves with harsh honesty – *do you think, basically, that you are really quite good? Do you?* Because if so, you don't believe what Jesus plainly says here - *There is only one who is good...*(and it isn't you!). The more you grow in Christ, the more you will feel this and believe it.

If we are not saved by the Law, then why did Jesus continue like this? –

If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

(18) He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, (19) Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

It is interesting that Jesus mentioned these commandments and the order in which He stated

them:

- Murder 6
- Adultery 7
- Theft 8
- False Witness 9
- Honor Parents 5

The tenth (don't covet) which tripped up the Apostle Paul – isn't mentioned and neither are any of the first 4 which are known as the first table of the Law.

- No other gods 1
- No graven images 2
- No blaspheming the Lord's name 3
- Remember the Sabbath 4

I think that the second table of the Law (less the 10th which Paul noted hit him with his guilt), *is easier to fake*. It is easier to claim I haven't murdered anyone, or actually committed adultery, or stolen, or lied, or disrespected my parents. Jesus of course said that just doing these things in our hearts makes us guilty, let alone the outward act. But this young man apparently had duped himself. He could actually

make the claim that he had kept all those Laws.

But, and I think this is Jesus' point, *the man had not kept the first or the second tables of the Law*. Notice that Jesus ends His list of commandments with a tenth with which He replaces the 10th (coveting) – *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*. We know that this commandment –

Lev 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

...summarizes the second table of the Law. Did Jesus omit the 10th commandment – *you shall not covet* – to emphasize it in the man's mind? "Hey, you left one out! The one about not coveting." Because perhaps that is the one he was most guilty of and which really revealed that he had not loved his neighbor as himself and thus had not, as he falsely claimed, obeyed those commandments.

But Jesus is about to challenge him in regard to the first table of the Law – no false gods. And in doing so, bring him – force him – to that point of decision:

(21) Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Understand? In these few words of command, Jesus is destroying the man's claims to perfect law-keeping:

- Sell what you possess
- Give to the poor

...then come and follow Me. What he possessed was his false god. What he refused to do was give to his neighbor.

And THIS is that point of decision I spoke of. That point to which Jesus brings us all. Will I love God above all else and will I love my neighbor as myself? This means...well, it means this:

Mat 16:24-26 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (26) For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

Here is the sad outcome:

Mat 19:22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

He made his decision, and it was the wrong one. Eternally. He chose the world and lost his soul. He chose life in this world and lost it in the next. That is a very, very bad trade.

This very same transaction happens every single day wherever the gospel of Christ is preached. The gospel brings people to a point at which they must decide. Follow Christ or hold onto this world. Follow Christ or cling to their idol.

I have seen this very thing play itself out many, many times and most of you have as well. When we present the gospel accurately, as Jesus presented it, we can expect the same thing to happen. That seed which so quickly springs up with great promise, soon withers and dies. Why? Because Christ brings us to a point of decision and when the counterfeit realizes what it is going to cost him or her to follow Christ, they go away. It happens very quickly, overnight, in an instant.

Today we are surrounded by people who are rich in this world. Their possessions include:

- Many friends
- Popularity with family
- Career success
- Reputation
- Monetary wealth
- Freedom to indulge their flesh

When Christ’s people today accurately present the gospel, God’s Word, then we must not be surprised when very often people who appeared to us to be members

of Christ's flock suddenly, in a flash, do what this young rich man did:

“...he went away.”

Those are profound and insightful words – don't skim over them. Think about them carefully-

“...he went away.”

Away from...Christ. He came to Christ thinking that he could have it all – his wealth AND eternal life. Jesus exposed his sin to him and showed him what eternal life would cost – everything.

Salvation is a free gift. It cannot be purchased. It is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot even be deserved.

But...to follow Christ in this world. To walk the way He walked, to obey Him....that costs us everything. Taking up our cross means dying to ourselves and loving only Christ. It means, really, being Christ in this world.

And what is going to happen?

What must we expect? Well, if we are following Jesus, we will walk where He walked. We will go through the same way He did. We will be regarded by earth-dwellers – be they family, false Christians, pagan – as fools. As trouble-makers to be done away with. This is what Christ calls us to, and this is what we must decide. Leave the world and follow Christ? Or leave Christ and follow the world.

(23) And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) Again I tell you, 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.”

Jesus will go on to elaborate when His disciples realize what He means:

Mat 19:25-26 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” (26) But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things

are possible.”

What Jesus means is this – *it is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Just as impossible as for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle.*

And the disciples got it. They realized the application applied to EVERYONE, not just to the rich –

“*Who then can be saved?!*”

This is the point Jesus wanted them, and us, to arrive at. Salvation is *impossible* in respect to man. Who can be saved? No one! No one, that is, apart from the Lord. Do you grasp it? Listen to Jesus’ answer again:

“*With man this is impossible.*”

I want us to grasp this clearly. Jesus is saying here in plain words – *salvation is impossible*. You are not good, and neither am I. Only God is. That which is bad (sinful) cannot make itself good (righteous). And yet there is something in the sinner – his hard,

sinful heart – that refuses to admit his helplessness. *Salvation is impossible*. You have a perfectly pure, sinless, holy, holy, holy God who consumes the wicked. And you have the sinner who is helpless to make himself acceptable.

But Jesus goes on-

“*but with God all things are possible.*”

Understand? He means – *salvation is of the Lord, and only of the Lord*. The new birth is only of Him. Only the Lord could effect reconciliation in a scenario where reconciliation between the two parties *was impossible*. Only Christ could put a camel through the eye of a needle-

Rom 3:26bso that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This is the gospel and it is really, really good news. The rich young man walked away from it and chose his earthly treasures instead. Don’t you make the same mistake.

Mat 6:24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.