

Series: Embracing a Radical Faith

VBC

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Matthew 19:16-30

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“When We Try to Impress God”

You can't go to a place like Ethiopia without part of your heart breaking

-three moments stand out:

-a woman without hands

-women lined up to be sold

-emaciated horses intentionally set out to be killed

What is our response in the face of such brokenness?

-do we have a certain responsibility?

-God speaks to this in our text—read Matthew 19:16-22

Matthew tells the story of a nameless man

-but we have met him—he might even be some of us—or someone we would like to become

-for he is an achiever—a young urban professional—a man of some influence

-who seemingly had it all—money, looks, power, position

-but like many having it all—there was a void

-something was not right—he sees the thinness of it all—he wants to explore the other side

-wants to open up a spiritual portfolio alongside his financial one

-so he runs to Jesus, the latest guru—“Teacher” is a safe category—it is non committal

-like a lot of people—he wants someone to point the way—not rule his life

-Jesus had just said the kingdom of heaven belongs to those like children—vs 14

-and he may have wondered—*how can I have it?*

-his question in vs 16 is revealing—

A. he views eternal life as one more acquisition for him

-and in a consumption culture—we have been trained to think this way as well
-how can I have a successful life, a great career, financial security, a great relationship?

-how can I have Jesus?

-but as he will soon discover—eternal life is not like some spiritual real estate for a person on the make

- B. he also views having eternal life as something that depends upon him
- what good thing must I do?
 - the tense of the verb points to a specific act—he wants to know what one great deed can he do
 - what will it take? A large check? A pilgrimage?
 - in the system he grew up, doing, is always the ultimate requirement

Illustration—like a T-shirt I once saw—“*Jesus is Coming—Everybody Look Busy*”

- so Jesus gave him a map—verse 17
- if you want to enter—if you are interested in a “good” list—here’s where it starts
- keep the Law—for it does matter to God what we do

- but this man knew there were too many obediences to follow
- so Jesus pointed him to the center—the 10 commandments—begin here—begin with the commands that compel us to love one another

- but as vs 20 notes—in his mind—he had met these obligations—already checked these off
- still—there was something he was overlooking, something he was missing

A. maybe it was an instinctive awareness that legalism falls short of kingdom qualifications

B. or maybe it was a religious boredom that was seeking for something more spiritually adventurous—Extreme Religiosity

- some discipline that was extraordinary—that would set him apart
- some demanding pilgrimage, fasting for 41 days—memorizing the Torah backwards
- so Jesus in vs 21 responded to his spiritual ambition

- you want to breathe the rarified air of the spiritual high country?
- want to move from something *to have* to something *to be*—than be perfect
- and here’s what this means for you—step into this brokenness—go and downsize
- divest and dispose of everything you own—and give it all to the poor
- in other words—if you want to have everything—you must have nothing—can you live with that?*

- but there’s something even more radical
- come and follow Me—drop everything—make a clean break
- leave the bondage of materialism and come and be My slave

- but it was all too much—vs 22
- Mark tells us he was stunned, appalled
- turns out this Jesus we look for our comfort is equally good at disturbing our souls*
- he was thinking of a contribution—Jesus called for total commitment
- and so he walked away with full hands and an empty heart

All of this became a teachable moment for the disciples—for us—who may have been confused by now

- talk about seeker sensitive ministry—read 19:23-26

- we use other language—a snowball's chance in hell—the Chargers getting to the Super Bowl

- to describe near impossibilities

- it will take a major transformation for the rich to enter eternity

- all of this amazed, confounded the disciples—and maybe us—vs 25

- they assumed wealth was to one's advantage—a sign of divine favor—a reward for moral behavior

- not a barrier

- they may have begun to feel overwhelmed—it's beginning to feel like a spiritual Everest Jesus expects us to climb

- if this man isn't already saved—who is?

- but God can make new possibilities, dethrone idols, change hearts—26

APPLICATION

So where do we go with this?

- walking some of the back roads in Ethiopia—this is what I asked myself—

1. *The story tells us something we need to know about GOD*
 - A. that what we do with our possessions matters to Him
 - Jesus had more to say about money than faith and prayer, heaven and hell combined
 - maybe because He knows how important it is to us
 - B. that He sees into our hearts
 - Jesus didn't call for total abandonment of wealth of everyone
 - but He could see the grip of wealth in this man
 - and knew releasing this grip was his only hope
 - we all have something like that in our lives
 - things that are primary—that make Him secondary

-things we may have to abandon

- C. He cares for the poor—and takes very serious how we respond to them
- one of the most frequent refrains of the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets is God's concern for the widow, the orphan, the poor
 - He identifies with them—*He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord*—Pro 19:17
 - and He cares for us—He wants the best for us—He was offering this man a way to become far richer than he already was

2. *The story tells us something we need to know about WEALTH*

- that while wealth and possessions are not inherently bad
- they can actually be good gifts from the hand of God to enjoy

- nonetheless sin has a way of distorting wealth—what can be an advantage often ends up to be a dangerous disadvantage—an obstacle
- wealth has a way of subtly deceiving us, taking hold of us
- turning our hearts away from God
- turning into greed, avarice, materialism—excessive acquisition and excessive retaining
- which can cause us to be selfish, even callous toward those in want (which is illustrated in our story)

- possessions can take on God like proportion—become an idol that spins out of control
- which explains our present economic collapse

3. *The story tells us something about GIVING*

-Jesus called this man to give because he needed to give—and we need to give

- A. for giving is the best antidote to possessiveness
- the remedy for the inner attachment of avarice
 - it is what keeps greed in check in our lives

- B. but more—as vs 21 affirms—giving is one of our greatest investments
- it's what guarantees a huge return in heaven
 - Jesus was actually offering this man a greater wealth

- but based upon our giving patterns—most of us do not really believe this
- 20% of Christians give nothing—most others give about 3%
- some try to follow an OT principle and give 10 per cent—which in actuality is an OT minimum requirement
- “tithe” is training wheels language
- we really don't get giving*

4. *This story tells us something about DISCIPLESHIP*
- a decision to follow Jesus demands a radical reorientation—exclusive devotion—a certain abandonment—the deeper we get in Matthew—the clearer this message
 - and giving—as well as radical compassion—for the sake of the poor—is one of the greatest indicators that our discipleship is real
 - rich people who neglect the poor are not the people of God*
- what this requires in our discipleship is to have the courage to look in the faces of the malnourished
- sometimes go to places not as a tourist—but as one willing to see and not turn away
- until we begin to get it—that we cannot live with needless luxuries—that we must make needed adjustments for the sake of the gospel
- draw lines that say—this is enough
- declare war on this consumerist culture—live more simply
- and if God keeps giving us more—it may be so that we can give more
- and if we try to explain this away—we are starting to redefine true Christianity
- twist Jesus into a version we are more comfortable with—a Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion
- who isn't into extremes—who is mainly interested in our prosperity

CONCLUSION

So let me ask you—

1. does wealth have a grip on you—or do you have a grip on it?
2. if you have a grip on it—are you holding it loosely—as someone who has come to terms with the fact it all belongs to Him?
-are we willing to do whatever God calls us to do with what we have?
3. are we doing something about the poor?
-something more than lip service
-more than something convenient—but something costly

Martin Luther once said:

“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess”