

Sell All Your Possessions

Good morning LakeRidge. We have come to the last message in our Cringe series: words Jesus spoke that make us cringe. That's an ominous title – right? But seriously, not everything Jesus said was balloons and party hats. He was a straight shooter.

Always full of grace and compassion, Jesus never compromised the truth. We all know that sometimes the truth hurts. Sometimes, it hits a little too close to home. This Sunday is no different. So put on your steel toe boots or pull on some thick skin because we are about to look at another message from Jesus that is hard to hear.

This parable comes from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Before I read the parable, I want to point out what has just happened. Little children have come and surrounded Jesus. His disciples have tried to keep them at a distance and told them to go away. Jesus quickly rebukes them and uses the opportunity to teach. Looking at the children, he tells the disciples that no one will inherit the kingdom unless they receive it like these little children do.

It's at that point that we pick up in verse 17.

17 As 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. 19 You 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."
21 Jesus 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." 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"
24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard 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 someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."
28 Then 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 30 will 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. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first." **Mark 10:17-31 NIV***

The story is often referred to as the parable of the Rich Young Ruler. It's found in all three synoptic Gospels. Sometimes people joke that the parable of the Rich Young Ruler clearly does not apply to them. They are not rich, young or a ruler so Jesus must be talking to someone else. Well only Matthew refers to him as young and Luke is the only one who describes him as a ruler so those attributes don't seem to be the point of this parable. I'm going to suggest all of us have something to learn from this interaction between Jesus and a seemingly random man on the street.

Let's jump into the text. Jesus and his disciples have been moving about teaching and healing everywhere they went. Of course, this created quite a stir. Crowds gathered everywhere he went. People approaching Jesus was the norm. As a matter of fact, he and his disciples often had to withdraw because the crowds were so large. I mentioned earlier that a group of little children had just run up to Jesus with the faith only a child can have. By contrast, Jesus' opponents often set traps by asking questions in an attempt to trick him into saying something they could use against him.

So, in the midst of all this attention, a single man approaches Jesus and falls down on his knees and calls him "good teacher." He then goes on to ask a question; "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" It is important to note that both the man's posture – on his knees – and addressing Jesus as "good teacher" are clear indications that this man is genuine. Jesus' opponents were almost always aloof and condescending. They might be cordial but they were cold. His enemies among the Pharisees and Sadducees would never bow before Jesus. Everything we see in this man seems to point to a genuine desire to know the answer.

In light of that, Jesus answer seems almost flippant: "*Why do you call me good? No one is good – except God alone.*" He then goes on to rattle off several of the Ten 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 mother and father.* It doesn't seem like Jesus is answering his question about eternal life. Instead, he seems to be making the point that eternal life is not about being *good*. No one, except God himself, can be *good enough* to enter the kingdom. Remember the point he had just made as the children gathered around him?

Interestingly, the man refers to his own childhood. "*Teacher,*" he declared, "*all these I have kept since I was a boy.*" Jesus has just given him a checklist of sorts and the man replies, check, check, check, check. Sounds like everything is in order. And they all lived happily ever after. The end. Mmmm...not exactly.

Verse 21 is the meat of this passage but I've always thought the first sentence is so powerful and so overlooked. "*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*" I envision this long pause. This is just me so you can take it for what it's worth but I picture Jesus looking intently at this man. He has been constantly surrounded by people clamoring for something. Jesus is somewhat of a rock star by now. Things are really getting crazy for him and the disciples. I imagine the sounds of people talking and pushing, jostling for a better spot in the crowd, the sound of wagon wheels going over rocks, and all of the

other normal sounds of a busy gathering of people mixed in with birds chirping and the wind blowing in the trees. In the midst of all of that I see Jesus being singularly focused – in that moment – on one thing and one thing only: this man kneeling in front of him. I wonder if he is thinking to himself, “Are you really ready to hear this?” Ready or not, here it comes.

Jesus goes on, “One thing you lack, go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” Jesus issues both a command and a call. In case we are tempted to dismiss any personal link to this parable because we are not rich, young, or a ruler let’s compare this to how Jesus called his disciples, and others, throughout the gospels. In each instance, he issues a command and a call. Sometimes it’s in reverse order but you *always* have both parts. The calling of the original 12 disciples was connected to a new way of doing things. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fisherman. Jesus said to them, “Put down your nets and follow me.” When he calls Matthew (also called Levi) he simply says, “follow me” – there is not an explicit command but Matthew, who is sitting at a tax collectors table, immediately gets up and leaves his former occupation. When Jesus calls us to follow him there is inherently a requirement to leave certain things behind. Being a follower of Jesus means that we will be changed. I will be – I must be – different.

Each of the 12 accepted the call and set aside the old things. For them, the kingdom was worth it. What they gave up could not compare to what they received.

Mark 10:22, “*At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*” This man did not accept the call. It certainly seems that he came to Jesus in good faith. He really wanted to know the answer. The cost was just too great. I mentioned earlier that Matthew describes the man as being young and Luke called him a ruler. One thing is certain and unanimous - the man had great wealth. For a young man to have great wealth it would most likely have been inherited. Let me be clear, this is an assumption and I do not know this with certainty. The Bible does not give us that information. However, being a Jew in the economy of that time, did not typically afford opportunities to get rich quickly – at least not legally. Certainly, a man could build a business over time and accumulate wealth but if a young man had lots of money, it was probably family money. I mention that because of the man’s original question, “*what must I do to **inherit** eternal life?*” That’s interesting because an inheritance is given. It is not earned. Jesus is not talking to this man about how he can earn eternal life. As we mentioned, I believe the whole exchange about being good was Jesus’ way of saying no one can be good enough for eternal life. This is not about works righteousness. We inherit eternal life. We do not earn it.

Who inherits something? Typically, children inherit wealth from their parents. They receive it because their parents give it to them. It’s not given to just anyone. The kids don’t earn it - they receive it as a gift from their parents. When we accept Jesus’ call to follow him, we become a part of his family.

At verse 23 the story pivots to the disciples. The “Rich, Young Ruler” has made his choice. Now, Jesus begins to teach his disciples by saying, “*How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!*” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said it again, ‘*Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It 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!*’”

Notice the family language as he addresses them as “children.” It is quite possible and even likely that some of the 12 were older than Jesus. Calling them children would have been odd at best and offensive at worst. Jesus is using family language.

This teaching was certainly confusing for the family. The disciples were amazed and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus quickly clears up the confusion by simply stating, “With man this is impossible, but not God; all things are possible with God.”

For centuries the whole camel going through the eye of a needle analogy has received a tremendous amount of scrutiny. We’ve debated whether that referred to some tiny gate that may or may not have been in the walls of Jerusalem at that time. We fret over whether this means that it is impossible for a wealthy person to go to heaven. We contemplate and debate over whether Jesus is actually saying that every person who becomes wealthy will end up in hell. It is amazing how seldom we consider the context of a passage. In this case it’s inexcusable because it’s right there in the immediate context.

Just like with the Rich Young Ruler’s original question, Jesus is saying that this is NOT about a checklist; Poor people go to heaven, rich people go to hell. No! He’s talking about what it means to live and be a part of the kingdom of God both during our time here and in eternity. What matters is whether we are part of the family of God. Being a part of the family is not earned by good deeds or purchased with money. It is simply accepting the call of Jesus in faith.

Jesus looks at all of us, just like he did the Rich Young Ruler, and he loves us. Because he loves us, he calls us to follow him – to be a part of the family of God. Because he loves us, he also tells us, just like he did the rich young ruler, that following him, requires leaving the old things behind. Anything that stands between us and him must be discarded.

The last two verses repeat – and highlight – this stark contrast between those who accept the call and those who do not. Peter speaks up and says, “*Jesus, we have left everything to follow you!*” Jesus responds by telling him “*no one who was left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive 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. Many who are first will be last, and the last first.*”

What must I do to inherit eternal life? It doesn't matter whether we are rich, young, or a ruler, we all want to know the answer to that question. We don't have to debate camels and tiny gates or check all the boxes on some arbitrary list. We just have to answer the call to follow Jesus. Because He loves us, he issues that call to everyone. Because he loves us, he tells everyone what we must leave behind in order to follow him.

I do not know what that is for you. I do know it is *something* for everyone. For the Rich Young Ruler, it was wealth. That may be what it is for you. I'm going to recommend that you not rush past that just because you are not wealthy. I'm going to recommend that you not panic if it is. This passage is not teaching us that everyone must live in a cardboard box underneath a bridge in order to be approved by God. Nowhere in the Bible or in this passage is there a box on a checklist that reads "poor people go to heaven; rich people go to hell."

This passage is not complicated. Jesus is telling ALL of us that ANYTHING that is a barrier to fully following him must be set aside. Often that is money and the things money can buy. It really doesn't matter whether we have a little or a lot, it can still be a barrier. Whatever it is for you, I can guarantee you that it will be worth it. I can almost guarantee you that it probably won't seem like it at first. That's why it's called faith.