

Sermon for Sunday October 10, 2021
Church of the Holy Trinity, Middletown CT
Steven Horst, Ph.D.

Text: Mark 10:17-31

- So this man approaches Jesus and asks him “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”
- Now, at this point in the Gospel, a lot of people have come up to Jesus.
- Sometimes, it’s people who want to be healed.
- Sometimes it’s religious leaders who want to test him or wrangle over theology.
- They’re usually the ones who ask the theological-sounding questions, like “What must I do to inherit eternal life,” like the man in today’s Gospel.
- Maybe that’s why Jesus tests the man in return: you know what the Law of Moses says....
- But this fellow isn’t there to argue over interpretations.
- He’s followed the law, at least to the best of his ability – he’s worked at being close to God faithfully all his life -- and still he feels something is missing.
- And he knows deep in his heart that it’s Jesus who has the answer. Or maybe that Jesus *is* the answer.
- And when Jesus sees this, he loves him, and even invites the man to follow him.
- And that’s also the central part of Jesus’ answer to the man’s question: what you have to do to inherit eternal life is follow Jesus.
- It’s what he’d said to his disciples when he called them – follow me.

- Maybe if this man had said yes, we'd talk about the 13 disciples instead of the 12.
- But he didn't say yes, because Jesus' answer has two parts.
- The essential answer to the question – what must I do to inherit eternal life – is “come and follow me”.
- The man doesn't need another commandment, or a commentary on the commandments.
- What he needs is a relationship with a *person* – a particular person, a divine person, Jesus
- But in order to have that – in order to follow Jesus – he also needs to give something up, to leave something behind.
- “Following” Jesus implies that Jesus is moving – going somewhere.
- And to follow him, sometimes we have to leave behind whatever is holding us back.

And in this case, Jesus tells him what it is: he is attached to his wealth and possessions, and needs to get rid of those in order to follow Jesus.

And he goes away shocked and grieved, because he was very wealthy.

Maybe if he was someone else, he would have had to give up something different.

But what Jesus comments on to his disciples is how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God – harder than fitting a camel through the eye of a needle.

And the disciples are just as shocked at this as the rich man was.

As far as we know, none of them had been rich, but they had all left whatever they had to follow Jesus, and they understood at least some of the costs.

But apparently none of them had considered the possibility that it might have been even harder if they had been rich.

Probably half the sermons that are preached today are going to be about what that means for us and money.

Maybe about how a handful of people own most of the wealth, while others can't pay the rent on what they earn and also buy food for their children.

Or maybe about how, even if we're not rich, our attachment to money and to possessions and maybe to the dream of becoming rich can keep us from following Jesus faithfully.

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- But I think this passage speaks to all of us, even if it isn't our money and possessions that are holding us back.

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- Because I think we all have times in our lives when we feel like we've tried to be faithful in following Jesus, but there's something missing now.

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- Maybe we feel separated from Him.

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- Maybe we know why, or maybe we don't.

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- Maybe we've fallen into sin, or maybe we've been growing and doing our best, but now there is a dry spell.

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- I think what this passage tells us is that these are times to ask what is separating us from God, what is keeping us from following Jesus on the next steps of the way.
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- Jesus *tells this* man what his obstacle is – what he has to give up.
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- Sometimes we know too.
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- Sometimes we don't even realize we have a problem – that we've stopped to look at the scenery and Jesus has gone on ahead out of sight.
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- And sometimes we know we're no longer close to God, or moving forward, but don't know why.
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- This isn't always where we're at – but we're all at this point at some time or other.
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- So what do we do when we're there?
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- Last year, when we were on zoom, I shared a message from an Egyptian desert monk named Matthew the Poor on how to pray when this is where we're at.
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- Basically, his advice for how to pray is this: to ask God

- Lord, show me what is separating us?
- How am I grieving you?
- Show me my sin.
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- He says to make this your constant prayer until God shows you the answer.
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- It's a hard and courageous thing to pray – God's answer might be hard to hear, though it might be something that, when you hear it, you realize you already knew it in your heart of hearts.
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- It probably won't be that you have to sell all your possessions.
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- But it might be that you have to stop caring so much about money and financial security.
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- Or how prestigious you are in your career.
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- Or it might be that you have to give up something, like gambling, or alcohol, or gossip, or resentment, or binge watching TV shows.
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- Or it might be that you have to be willing to do *more* of something – like prayer, or visiting people in need, or giving your money to those who need it.
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- Only God can tell you what you, in particular, need to do at this point in your spiritual life.
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- When we became Christians, we renounced the world, the flesh and the devil
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- But the details of what this means are different for each of us, and we didn't have to confront all of them at the same time when we started out.
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- God leads us one step at a time.
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- So, if you're feeling separated from God, I invite you to see if the Spirit is calling you to make this your daily prayer:
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- Lord, what is keeping me from a deeper relationship with you?
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- What am I doing – or neglecting to do – that is grieving you?
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- Show me my sin – and then lead me in how to turn it over to you, and be healed and filled with the Holy Spirit, and move forward in a deeper relationship with you?
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- The idea of following Jesus implies that he is moving, and so we have to keep moving with him.
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- If he feels far away, it might not mean that we've fallen away – it might just mean that it's time for the next step in our life with God.
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- Sometimes that means starting something new.
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- Sometimes it means letting go of something old – something that is holding us back from following Jesus, and it's only once we let go of this that we can move forward.
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- As Christians, we've already decided to follow Jesus.
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- As the old song says, no turning back.
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- But most of us get stuck from time to time.
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- We need God to tell us what we need to do next to get unstuck – and to help us take the next steps.
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- If this is where you're at today, I invite you to make this your prayer: Lord, please show me what is keeping me from following you, and help me along the way.
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- It's ultimately between each of us and God – but there are things that can help us in this.
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- One of them is the ministry of spiritual direction – which Elaine Ramshaw is offering to members of this congregation.
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- If you want help discerning where you're stuck in your spiritual life, and how to renew your spiritual life and move forward where Jesus is leading, you might want to consider working with her.
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- God doesn't want us to go away dejected and grieving, like the man in the story.
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- God promises us abundant life, and wants to help us live that abundant life – no turning back.

I have decided to follow Jesus – no turning back.
The cross before me, the world behind me – no turning back.
Though none go with me, still I will follow – no turning back.
I have decided to follow Jesus – no turning back.