

Choices Week 1: The Rich Man

In life there are a lot of **fork in the road** times. Some of them turn out being small things, with little visible effect on our lives, while others set the direction for our future. **For the rest of the summer**, we will be looking at men and women from the Old Testament and the New who had these types of moments. **The difference is that these choices can be boiled down to this; to follow or not.** Real flawed people who have a choice to follow God and to **join him in what he is doing in the world**, or not...some are cautionary tales (Be careful), while others are encouraging tales (Be like _____), while still others are comparison tales (don't be like _____, be like _____).

Along with the Bible stories, we will have **people you know** telling their stories of choosing to follow and obey Jesus.

Today, a man pursues Jesus for some spiritual advice. It will appear that things don't go as he expected. **But like any encounter with Jesus, it demands a choice.** Do I follow him, or do I take another path. That's the choice this man has, and I don't think he saw it that way when he decided to come ask Jesus a very **simple question that any Rabbi gets asked.**

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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."^[d]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 gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes,

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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

For a man to come to a Rabbi to ask this type of question was not unusual. It was like a **spiritual check up**, to see if you are doing ok. Here's an example, a **similar type of encounter**, only the Rabbi wasn't Jesus the Son of God. Listen and notice the differences.

"When R. Eliezer fell ill his disciples came to visit him. They said to him, 'Rabbi. Teach us the paths that we may **merit** the life of the world-to-come.' He said to them, 'Be careful about the honour of your colleagues, restrain your sons from studying Greek learning and place them between the knees of the Sages, and when you pray know before whom you stand, and thereby you will **merit** the life of the world-to-come.'"

A lot of what Eliezer says would not have **caught his disciples off guard.** He undoubtedly was speaking about **good education for your sons.** Don't let **Greek culture** mess with their minds and get them to learn from a Hebrew sage, make sure you **know it is Yahweh you pray to.** The disciples would have been **checking these off as he listed them**, evaluating if there was anything that needed **tweaked** in their approach to their faith.

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Did you notice the word "**merit**" in their question? That's a similar word to earn or achieve. **I think we have found the problem and why this seemed to go so wrong for this man.**

The man may have expected something similar from Jesus.

What we have here is a collision between this man and Jesus. This creates a choice of two paths for the man. So let's look first at **what this man brought** to this encounter, and then **what Jesus brought**. We also can see how these two factors contributed to the choice he made not to follow Jesus.

What did the man bring...**He came looking for confirmation that he is good** (Am I being good enough?).

He brought his own goodness, the only question was, "do I need some more?"

"The man's salutation assumes that one can find goodness in human resources and accomplishments. He wants to know how to ensure that his goodness will pay off in eternal life. He hopes that Jesus can relieve any lingering doubts about his chances and inform him if there is anything in the fine print he needs to worry about." David Garland, NIV App. Commentary

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Let's read it again...**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. Mark 10:17-18**

"Goodness and salvation do not come from our own valiant efforts but only as a gift from God."

Paul experienced a collision with Jesus when he met him on the road to Damascus. **Paul brought some similar things** to this collision with Jesus, but his response to what he brought is very different.⁶ **I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. Philippians 3:6 NLT**

He didn't just obey the ten commandments, which is what Jesus was giving back to the rich man, he obeyed the whole Law of Moses from the Old Testament. **The**

ten commandments were central to the law, but only a part of it. **So Paul brought more "goodness" to this meeting**. He was so zealous about obeying the law as a part of knowing and being ok with God, that he persecuted those who followed Jesus instead.

Jesus was actually affirming the ten commandments by listing them, but he wasn't making them a way for people

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to become good enough to merit entering into his kingdom.

"Laws and rules reveal the kind of concrete issues the will of God is concerned about and in a provisional way show one how one ought to address oneself to these issues." Via 404

In other words, all that this man brought was proof that he knew some of the things that God was really concerned about in the area of behavior and attitude. But, he brought no proof that from those that a man could make himself righteous or ok in God's eyes.

Outside of a relationship with God that allows him to lead thereby being the King, can these laws create anything in us? **These commandments are the starting point, not the end. They are empowered when we follow the one who wrote them.**

So that is what the rich man brought to this meeting. **Here's what Jesus brought**. Now this is pretty complicated, so pay attention. **Jesus came with genuine love for him.**

That's all, nothing more. **Jesus looked at him and loved him. V. 21a**

Here's a simple way to describe the love Jesus brings to this man.

1. **Love wants what is best for the object of his love...**Jesus wants something better for him than he has, which is a **propped up sense of his own goodness**. He wants something **better for him than earthly wealth** that will either disappear or be given to someone else when he dies. Yes, you can't take it with you.

2. **Jesus' love is the kind that is willing to sacrifice for the object of his love to get what is best for them.** Jesus is going to die on a cross to provide this man with **goodness** that isn't his own, but is a gift. **That goodness, or state of being ok in God's eyes, is called righteousness.**

3. **Love challenges others** for their own good. **Jesus is willing to be rejected and misunderstood** because he is willing to challenge this man's way of living and thinking. **In other words, his love allows Jesus to meet him where he is, but love him enough to make him uncomfortable or even wound him in order to not leave him that way.**

That brings us to verse 21..."**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."** V. 21b

Now that's **tough love**. This challenge to sell everything would have been **radical in that day, but not unusual**. The **Dead Sea scroll community, the first church in Jerusalem**, both practices the release of wealth for the community's betterment. There was also a **belief in pagan culture** that renouncing wealth was a good principle.

Jesus asks this man and everyone after for the same thing, to give up what stands in the way of following him.

Jesus knew that the way this man was trying to pursue eternal life and

happiness in this life was not going to work. It was flawed. In the book **Pursuit of Happiness** pg. 406, which compares eras in American history, demonstrated that the number of people who are happy didn't go up with the average income in America.

What would the disciples reaction have been when Jesus lets this man walk away? Could not his wealth have helped them and their cause? First of all, Jesus doesn't need any money. **He has resources that others don't know about.** Also, **Jesus never chases anyone.** He is looking for those who are **moving toward him, not recoiling or running away,** which this man was.

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Here's what **Jesus is challenging this man** to do. **Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. Mark 8:34 NLT**

For him, his life and security and trust were wrapped around his wealth. For him, that was the thing that was keeping him from following.

It takes more than believing in Jesus as a good teacher and earnest attempts to keep God's commands to enter into the Kingdom of God. To enter into the kingdom, one must **submit to God's rule so that he reigns over all parts of life.** And that means getting rid of, or freeing oneself from that which is in the way of following Jesus.

This is what Jesus wanted for this man. Jesus describes this in his teaching to his followers after the rich man walked away, sad and disappointed.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 gospel³⁰ 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.**

This man brings a sense that he is a pretty good person, but just wants to make sure. Jesus brings

genuine love for him. The collision that follows demands a difficult and courageous choice from this man.

But what did Jesus mean when he said that he lacked something? *What did he lack?* We can boil this down to **three things. The first thing that he lacked will sound like an oxymoron.**

From his perspective, he lacked...Nothing.

"I've nailed the ten commandments. I've got money that gives me a sense of security and a strange thought that **God really likes me and approves of me. I'm just coming to you for your tips on being even better than I am and then your **stamp of approval**."**

All who follow Jesus believed that they were missing something and that Jesus could provide it. And they were right. They had no answer for their sin problem.

Peter, after Jesus did the miracle by filling their nets with fish, said to Jesus, "Go away from me, I am a sinful man." This came alive for me when I watched **The Chosen.**

His sadness is that I think he realized that there is something to what Jesus is saying. It struck a nerve. He didn't say, "You're crazy, I'll go find a different

Rabbi to tell me what I want to hear." The collision with Jesus created a choice, to follow or not.

The second thing he lacked was what kept him from following once he realized what it would cost him. He lacked...Trust. He didn't believe that he would be ok leaving his wealth behind and following Jesus.

Matthew left his high paying gig as a tax collector. Peter, James, and John left their **nets and followed him. That takes trust.**

Deb and Dave Yats have done this very thing. Deb quit a good job where she had some tenure, to take a huge pay cut to run Cultivate and be our campus director at Beaverton. **They sold their house** in order to move into the parsonage at Beaverton. **They moved to a town** where they have never lived because **they wanted to literally follow Jesus.**

I'm sure that Tammy Scully left some money on the table by coming to work at Open Door, while giving tons of time to Cultivate and Beaverton Campus. One day I'm going to ask her to tell her story.

This story is not really about money, but on the other hand, it is. It is about the **security and power that we get from it** that prevents us from allowing a king to tell us to cast it aside and follow. **Jesus doesn't ask**

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everyone he collides with to sell everything. But that doesn't mean that we can put all this talk about money away. Here's why. It is because if you have regular employment, three meals a day, a home either rented or owned, and access to transportation, your own or public, then you are in the **top 11% of wealth globally.** **We can't just gloss over this stuff and spiritualize it.**

This man's trust was in his wealth and in his own goodness.

He didn't trust Jesus as king, as the one who loved him better than his reputation as being good or his money ever could.

What are the only responses to colliding with Jesus King, Son of God, God in human flesh? Repent, Believe and Follow. This man didn't **repent of any sin.** He wanted to **focus on what he had done well.** **We are all pretty amazing on our best day.** He didn't **believe or trust Jesus** because if he had, he would have not gone away sad, but happy because he was going to get free from what was keeping him from **running across Palestine with the Son of God.** And that brings us to follow. He didn't run across Palestine with Jesus. He went back home.

[Compassion for others.](#)

Jesus wasn't asking him to do anything that Jesus wasn't willing to do for his heavenly father. What did Jesus do? He had compassion on the crowd of people who followed him into the wilderness and forgot to pack a lunch. In contrast to the rich man, Jesus fed the 5000 in this world and gave his life for them for the next.

The Generous Life is what Jesus wanted for him. When we are fearful, nervous about the future, that is the time when we want to squeeze what we have. That's code for putting our trust in it.

I'm going to say something that I have been thinking about for a bit, and this sermon has convinced me that it is the right thing. In the face of being weeks behind in our offerings, we are going to do two things. #1. We are going to continue to be wise and we will cut where we need to cut in the 2021 budget. #2. We will not cut missions giving, we will increase it! Missions giving is not just what we send overseas, it is anything we send out that we can't control and doesn't directly benefit us.

This week we sent checks to Share, Forgotten Man, Adoption Option, Open Door, Gideon's, Young Lives. We are also partnering with a church of God in Germany to build a training center for Micro Industry development. I want to warn you, do not ask Pastor Julie about this if you don't want to hear, because she is fired up about it.

If he knew that he needed Jesus and he trusted Jesus and saw what his possessions could mean to others, he would have done exactly what Jesus asked him to do. That step of getting rid of what was in the way would have made perfectly good sense once he knew that he needed Jesus more than he needed his own goodness or possessions and he could trust him. It's hard if you're not sure that you need him and you're not sure that he can take care of you.

Remember he asked, "What can I do to get eternal life?" This is about a choice that has eternal consequences as well as this world consequences. In this world, he missed walking around Palestine with God

in human flesh doing miracles and teaching about the Kingdom. Let's say he did choose to sell all he had and give the money to the poor. **We might have a 5th gospel called The Gospel According to The Apostle formerly known as the Rich Man.** But we don't, because he didn't.

The choice is to follow or not to follow. I am king or Jesus is king?

Choosing to follow.

1. Admit that I can relate to this man's reaction to Jesus. Maybe it's not wealth or being "good" that is in the way of you choosing to follow. Maybe it's something else but

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you can relate to that sadness he felt knowing that he was afraid to give up what is in the way. Whatever the case, you can relate to how he felt at that fork in the road. **Maybe this is your chance to choose to follow.**

We don't only come to this collision with Jesus once. As he reveals something to us that **we are starting to love, see, as our goodness or provides security,** then it's time to choose again.

But here's some really great news. Each time you are put off by Jesus and his demands, even offended that he would ask for more, is the opportunity to develop real faith. Soren Kierkegaard wrote that **one must be offended by Jesus first and then push through that offense if she is ever to achieve real, life changing faith.**

Am I willing to push aside what is in the way?

What is it that is in the way? Is it something that you have put your trust in like your **family, education, money, good looks, a plan for the future, a career, a relationship (husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend) and intelligence?** What these things in the way have in common is that they all can be things that **God can use** or they can be idols that we trust in. Do you think like most Americans, "well, I'm a good person"? **Compared to what?**

Yes, God still does call people to leave money and reputation on the table and walk away to do something. Other's he says, "I want you to make money because I've got some Kingdom things that you are going to want to put some of that toward. The question is, "Am I willing to push aside what is in the way when God makes it clear that it is in the way.

This Jesus who met the rich man has come to announce that the Kingdom of God has to begin in him. The kingdom is the restoration of God's rule over all things and that means people like us. He is **Christ**, which means promised king, God in a human body. Because of his love for us, Jesus **suffered and died** on a cross and on the third day was **resurrected**, according to the scriptures. It is through his **sacrificial death** and His Father's grace that the separation between God and people was bridged. Therefore, anyone who **repents** of their sins and **believes** this good news and demonstrates that belief by **following**, God rescues. It is only through the **Holy Spirit** that we can live this new life as disciples of Jesus. When King Jesus returns as he promised on the Day of Judgment, everyone who is following Jesus will enter into God's eternal kingdom.

That is the good news that Jesus brought this man when his life collided with Jesus. It's the same for you if you've never put your trust in him. **Don't walk away**

sad like the rich man did, walk away jumping for joy because you met God, or rather God met you.

Bruce, wouldn't it be amazing if someone put their trust in Jesus today, the day we celebrate Leslie's life of following Jesus?

