

Sermon File # 849

Scripture Text: Luke 18:18-30

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Salvation and Riches

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 18:18-30.

In verse 18 of our text for today Jesus resumes his journey to the cross, and as he does so, he is met by a wealthy ruler, the one we usually refer to as the rich young ruler. He was probably a leader of a synagogue or member of the Pharisees' Sanhedrin (See I Howard Marshall, page 684, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC). All three Synoptic Gospels refer to him as rich, while Luke refers to him as a ruler (18:18) and Matthew says he was young (19:22). The way this young man responds to Jesus is in stark contrast to the little children in the previous passage (verses 15-17). The children are an example of the way we are to approach and respond to Jesus Christ. The kind of faith we must have to enter the kingdom of heaven is that of childlike, unquestioning trust and openness.

By contrast is the way this rich young ruler approaches and responds to Jesus. This encounter tells us something very important about the connection between salvation and material riches.

Follow as I read **Luke 18:18-30**.

In his powerful book, *Loving God* (page 14), Chuck Colson says that the evangelical church in the West (particularly in North America, but also increasingly in Western Europe) is in almost as much trouble as the secular culture around us in that we have bought into the same value system—fame, success, materialism, and celebrity.

“We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues,” comments Colson. “We want to emulate the best-known preachers with the biggest sanctuaries and the grandest edifices.”

“Preoccupation with these values,” Colson adds, “has also perverted the church’s message. The assistant to one renowned media pastor, when asked the key to his man’s success, replied without hesitation, ‘We give the people what they want.’ This heresy is at the root of the most dangerous message preached today: the what’s-in-it-for-me gospel,” Colson writes.

He continues by saying, “The ‘victorious Christian life’ has become man’s victorious life, not God’s. A popular devotional quotes Psalm 65:9, ‘The streams of God are filled with water,’ and paraphrases it, ‘I fill my mind to overflowing with thoughts of prosperity and success. I affirm that God is my source and God is unlimited.’ This is not just a religious adaptation of the look-out-for-number-one, winner-take-all, God-helps-those-who-help-themselves gospel of our culture,” says Colson. “It is heresy.”

Seduction by these values has also perverted the church’s message. As a result, much of the church finds itself co-opting the world’s dangerous message—the “What’s in it for me?” gospel.

Much of the evangelical Christian world is strangely beginning to look and think like Old Testament and first century Judaism that wrongly concluded that material prosperity was an infallible sign of God’s favor. God has indeed blessed us, but only because of his goodness and not because of our deserving. Because we have been given so much we begin to think we deserve these blessings, and also that as a materially blessed people of God we have a right to revel in those blessings. We even begin to think we have a right to more and are driven by a desire for more.

All of us have indulged in the rather harmless activity of window-shopping. Usually we go gawking after things we would like to have but cannot afford to buy.

This rich young man, a “yuppie” of his day, was out “window shopping,” as it were. He had heard about Jesus’ teaching and that he had been announcing the arrival and availability of the kingdom of God. He was even more than a window shopper. He “went inside” and made an inquiry about this new product line that

was being offered by the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. He even was prepared to make an offer.

The offer he makes and the response of Jesus tells us some vital truth about salvation and riches. As Darrel Bock remarks, perhaps Luke omits the reference to this ruler's youth to communicate the fact that problems with wealth "are not age-confined" (Page 467, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*). Jesus taught him what we, regardless of our age or level of wealth, need to learn also. Jesus taught him, first of all, that...

➤ **Riches cannot save (verses 17-22)**

In this experience we see once again that Jesus, the God/Man knows what is in our hearts (John 2:24-25). He knew that this rich young man was under a false illusion about material wealth. He came to Jesus to make another deal on his terms, just as he had made a thousand deals before. Notice...

- *The man came seeking*

Perhaps this young man expresses to us an example of the yearning in the heart of all people for that which material wealth cannot buy. King Solomon, when he looked around at all his wealth and achievements, concluded that all is vanity, and in contrast observed that God "has set eternity in the hearts of men..." (Ecclesiastes 1-2; 3:11). Like King Solomon, this young man had wealth, and according to our text, he was a ruler (Luke 18:18). Thus, along with his wealth he had power and influence. Yet, there was in his heart a sense of need that his wealth and influence could not buy. So, he came seeking after Jesus, whom he had heard, was able to give him something that perhaps was the missing ingredient in his life. And, he came also seeking...

- *With self-righteousness*

The rich young ruler came to Jesus asking, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" I think it's significant that he asked what he needed to do, and not what he needed to receive.

This was a man who was perhaps self-made, and had fought his way to the top in the business, religious and/or political world. He may at the same time have been privileged, since he used the word "inherit," which might have been the way he came about his wealth. In any case, he was wealthy, and he was influential, but also he was not satisfied with his life. Something was still missing.

He was indeed a religious and moral young man. Luke refers to him as a ruler, and he may have been a synagogue ruler. In the Jewish world, wealth was a sign of God's favor and no doubt his wealth had given this young man a notion

that he was a prime candidate for heaven. He vowed that he had kept the 2nd tablet of the Moral Law, the Decalogue. No doubt this was a sincere reply that he gave to Jesus, and was a claim commonly made by Pharisees. He had kept the Ten Commandments in his relationships, at least outwardly, with others. If he were to present himself for membership in our church, we would be likely to receive him. We might even nominate him, in short order, to serve as an elder!

If you have come about your religious life, or even what you think of as your salvation by your efforts, you are wide of the mark. If you think of your life as something you have accomplished and your standing with God as something you deserve, then you are self-righteous. Likely there is a longing in your heart to know God. I pray that you are aware that there is something missing that only God can do for you and give to you. Your wealth, your influence, and your religion are not able to save you. Perhaps this young man came to Jesus also as one who was...

- *Superficial/empty/lacking*

The rich young man came to Jesus, who told him there was something lacking (verse 22). I suppose no one knew this any more than the young man himself. His emptiness is what drove him to Jesus in the first place. And Jesus gave a strange reply about the Moral Law. Jesus did not use the Law answer to show the young man how to be saved but that he needed to be saved (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Courageous: Luke 14-24*, pages 67f)). The young man had kept the Ten Commandments, at least the last six, in the *outward* sense. Yet something was lacking. Perhaps he knew he lacked the power to keep the commandments in the spiritual and deepest sense.

In this way he might have been like the Apostle Paul, who shared his testimony about his life before encountering Christ. Paul, or rather Saul, at that time, had kept the outward implications of the Moral Law, but the Tenth Commandment against covetousness got to his inner being. He then experienced the condemning effect of the Law in his inner being (Romans 7:7-12). So, this rich young ruler, in the presence of Jesus Christ, no doubt realized he was not so righteous and complete after all.

In Mark's Gospel we read that, "Jesus looked at him and loved him," (Mark 10:21). And Jesus said, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

Jesus knew his heart, and he knew this young man lacked obedience to the first table of the Moral Law, the first four of the Ten Commandments that are summarized in the Great Commandment to love God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:29-30). As the perfect Son of God, Jesus' role was to glorify God the Father, and so he said, "No one is good—except God alone"

(verse 18). But perhaps Jesus also was alluding to his deity when he asked the young man why he had called him good. In other words, "When you called me 'good,' did you know I am God?" It is as though Jesus now says to him, "Show your love for God, and demonstrate that there are no other gods before me (Exodus 20:3) by selling everything you have and giving it to the poor and coming to follow me." (I Howard Marshall notes that the rabbis used this term "good" only in reference to God and that this rich ruler was cheapening this as a form of flattery. Had he believed that Jesus was truly "good," he would have met the conditions for following him [Page 684, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGNT]).

This passage always challenges me. Does Jesus ask us all to sell everything, give it away to the poor, and follow him? Godly people like Saint Francis of Assisi took this verse 22 as applying literally to themselves. I don't believe Jesus gives this command to all, yet we should not quickly dismiss the possible literal application of these words to our lives. As David Garland says, we have our ways of softening this passage by thinking automatically that this man's wealth was in another category from ours, and that Jesus would never ask us to do such a radical thing. Garland says that we manage to keep ourselves below an "imaginary riches danger line." And we also soften this passage for the wealthier financial contributors to our church budgets, not wanting to offend them by implying that their affluence could be a danger to their soul. (Page 401, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*). But Jesus does indeed warn all of us about the danger of riches, and by most of the world's standard of living, just about every one of us here today is incredibly rich. And Jesus demands to be Lord and God of our lives, and will ask us to relinquish what else is "god" in our lives. He, of course, knew this rich young man's heart and knew he loved his wealth more than he loved God.

This man came to realize that his wealth could not save him, and he left Jesus with...

- *Sadness and regret*

We see in verse 23 what some have called the saddest verse in the Bible. Mark's version says, "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth" (See James A. Brooks, Vol. 23, Mark, *New American Commentary*, in his comments on the parallel version in Mark 10:22). I wonder if after this encounter with Jesus this young man ever enjoyed his wealth again. My hope is that later he realized the folly of his choice and returned to Jesus, perhaps when the gospel was preached by the church after Jesus' ascension. I base my hope that this young man later came to repent and follow Jesus on the statement that Jesus loved him (Mark 10:21). I think that perhaps Jesus' love was to be requited in time.

Those who have been under the convicting power of the gospel and the claims of Jesus are faced with either following him or living a sad life of regret. This is because those who turn from Jesus are often in...

- *Slavery to riches*

Either we control wealth or are controlled by it, which was obviously the case with this rich young man. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24). In our Bible translations this word "Money" is capitalized in order to show that "Mammon" is more than simply inanimate, neutral currency. There is an inherent power within wealth that Satan uses to capture and corrupt the human heart (See Richard Foster's *Money, Sex and Power* for a detailed study of "mammon.").

And, Warren Wiersbe says, in reflecting on these words of Jesus, that money is a wonderful servant, but a terrible master.

Again, the Bible does not say that money is the root of evil, but rather, "...the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people," says Paul to Timothy, "eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10). So, we don't have to be wealthy to contend with the spiritual dangers of money. We can simply want to be wealthy at the peril and neglect of our soul. Wealth insidiously produces a false sense of security and lessens one's sense of dependence on God. This is what happened to the church in Laodicea, which received Christ's rebuke and judgment because they said they were rich, had acquired wealth and did not need a thing. But Christ told them that they did not realize that they instead were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked and were in desperate need of his grace and righteousness (Revelation 3:16-18).

Obviously, this young ruler had a desire for eternal life, but was in the grip of his love of his wealth. Rather than controlling his wealth, he was controlled by his wealth. And, what a terrible master his wealth proved to be, causing him to turn away from following Jesus. He was willing to gain just a part of this world at the expense of his soul. And, Jesus said it's a bad bargain to gain the entire world at the expense of your soul (Mark 8:36). Riches perilously keep us too attached to this fallen world and too unprepared for eternity.

The great 18th Century literary critic, Samuel Johnson, was given a tour of a wealthy and luxurious English castle and estate and then, according to William Barclay, "grimly remarked: 'These are the things which make it difficult to die'" (page 241, *The Gospel of Matthew*, volume 2, DSBS).

Jesus taught, in this encounter with the rich young ruler, that riches cannot save. The rich young man had great wealth, but he left Jesus a lost man, without hope

and without God, even though he had great wealth. Sadly, he left Jesus, who then turned to his disciples to teach them that...

➤ **The rich can be saved (23-27)**

In verses 23-27, Jesus teaches us that even the rich can be saved.

But he begins on a note of irony, saying that it is hard for the rich to be saved. In fact, he says, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved!

This was amazing for the disciples. Many of the great religious leaders were from the wealthier classes, and their Old Testament background led them to believe that worldly blessing was a sign of God's favor and even evidence of salvation. This mindset they had would fit well with the "Name-it-and-claim-it" theology of some TV evangelists of today. Some of these false teachers say that especially if you contribute a big gift to their kingdom enterprise that God will bless you with material wealth. If you have enough faith, they say, you can trust God, when you send them your contribution, to make you rich, famous, and successful, just as you are helping them to become.

But Jesus says, quite to the contrary, that material wealth is beset with inherent dangers that are inimical to the spiritual life. Wealth easily takes a grip on the human soul, and is addictive at the expense of a life of trust in God to provide our needs.

Jesus says the rich can be saved, but only...

- *By a miracle of grace*

Jesus is teaching his disciples a lesson about grace. He says that it takes a miracle for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But that's what it takes for anyone to enter the kingdom—a miracle. The disciples, who thought the wealthy might have an advantage in getting into the kingdom, show how little they understood grace and the power of God. They thought the wealthy had an advantage because they could give more to the kingdom, and their wealth showed some measure of deserving. After all, didn't the fact that they were blessed with wealth show they had done something to earn God's favor? Jesus is about to say that it is totally impossible for anybody to get to heaven apart from the grace of God. We are depending absolutely on what Jesus did for us on the cross. If there were anyway anyone could be saved apart from Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, he would have avoided it (Mark 14:35).

Perhaps it is a bit harder for the rich and the powerful to understand grace, but it is impossible for anyone to be saved apart from absolute dependence on Jesus.

He knew the wealthy perhaps, like this rich young man, have a particular problem understanding grace. For that reason, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the wealthy to be saved. (The camel was the largest animal in Palestine, and the eye of a needle the smallest known opening.) Not only does wealth gain a grip on the heart, and become a tyrant, and the object of one's devotion, but also wealth and success tend to make folks oblivious to grace.

I remember Chuck Swindoll's comments about successful men who are self-made. He noted that it's difficult for them to let anyone do anything for them. He mentioned how self-made men refuse to let him pay the dinner tab in a restaurant (I must not have many self-made men in churches that I have served!). It is hard for someone who has "pulled himself up from his/her bootstraps" to give God any of the credit. It is hard for such a person to receive a gift. It is difficult to admit a need for grace—what God gives which we so desperately need but could never deserve.

The rich young man came to Jesus wishing to add eternal life to his fortune. And why not? He had everything else. But it would be hard for him to understand that to have the kingdom he would have to let go of his fortune, those things he had earned and all that represented his hard work and his success. To receive grace means admitting a need. It means you have to let God pay the tab. Grace means God is in control, and he demands we die to self.

Salvation, he discovered, is not another commodity to add to your list of personal fortune and achievement. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ, whereby we are always on the receiving end. Even when we give and sacrifice and serve, it is always in response to his grace. Salvation begins when we cast ourselves on God's grace, accepting Jesus' provision of his death for our sins. Salvation is a life of following Jesus on his terms, giving what he demands.

The Grand Canyon is a mile deep gorge, 4 to 18 miles wide and 217 miles long. To say you can get to heaven by yourself is like saying you can jump across the Grand Canyon. Suppose you trained with Mike Powell, or the greatest long jumper from your home country. Powell, from the USA, holds the world's outdoor record for men at 8.95 meters. So, the farthest anyone could jump would be less than 29 feet. If you were rich, and could train with the best, and were the best gear and *Nike* ("boing!") shoes, still this is all you could hope for. You would need some outside help to clear the Grand Canyon!

So Jesus says that with man or woman, rich or poor, religious or pagan, good deeds or not, eternal life is impossible to attain by human effort or merit. It's as impossible as a camel going through the eye of a needle. We all depend on what God did for us through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. He paid our sin penalty, and when we turn from our sin and call upon him, he forgives us and gives us a right relationship with God.

I mentioned before that Jesus might not ask you and me to sell all we have, give it to the poor, before we can follow him. But he knows what we must give in response to his grace. He asks us to let go of our efforts, and trust him to provide for our needs as we follow and serve him as Lord.

We are saved by the miracle of grace...

- *And the gift of faith*

Jesus is saying that the rich can be saved by the miracle of God's grace received through faith.

"Jesus replied, 'What is impossible with men is possible with God'" (verse 27). Note, Jesus is saying that salvation is impossible for all people, rich and poor alike. All are dependent on grace. All have to exercise faith in the God of the impossible.

The Message paraphrases verses 26 and 27, which follow Jesus' saying about the camel and the eye of a needle:

"'Then who has any chance at all?' the others asked. 'No chance at all,' Jesus said, 'if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you trust God to do it.'"

That's what saving grace is—letting God do it for us.

This relationship with Jesus Christ that gives eternal life begins with God's grace, and calls into being our faith. Faith is our response of childlike trust in Jesus and accepting him without reservation. Jesus had just finished saying that we must receive the kingdom like a child or we will not enter it (verse 17).

Faith is our willingness to repent of all sin, and turn our lives toward Jesus, who is now the most important person in our life. Faith says I am responding to God's grace, and am now going to give all Jesus asks. He is now the object of my supreme love and devotion. This is the commitment the rich young man was unwilling to give.

Zacchaeus was another rich man who encountered Jesus. But he was willing to accept the grace of Jesus, and was willing to respond in faith and with grateful, childlike obedience. He gave evidence of grace in his life when he made restitution with those he had defrauded. He went beyond what the Law required in repaying those he had cheated in the process of becoming wealthy (Luke 19:1-10).

Jesus told his disciples that the rich can be saved just like the poor and the middle class can be saved. You don't have to be rich to be materialistic, and held captive by the love of money and the desire to be rich.

A popular show in the US for several years, and I notice is now copied in European game shows is "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" This is the question millions are asked several nights a week, and most would like to be at least a millionaire.

Jesus says he is able to save all who really want to be saved. He does the impossible. What Jesus provided on the cross was the full payment for all the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). He has grace to save us from all kinds of sins and all kinds of idolatries. He can break your bondage to wealth, greed, sexual lust, addiction to drugs, alcohol, or pornography, and even years of unbelief. Grace is his power and ability to forgive you and deliver you from whatever is keeping you from the kingdom of God.

Jesus says to his disciples, in verses 23-27, that the rich can be saved. And in verses 28-31 he is saying that...

➤ **The saved can be rich (28-31)**

Peter seemed to miss the point Jesus was making about grace, and how the materially rich, like everyone else, can be saved only because God can do the impossible. Immediately Peter seems to pat himself on the back, as if to say, "I'm not like those rich people you've been talking about. In fact, "We have left everything to follow you." Maybe Peter was saying, "This rich guy was not willing to pay the price, but look at us. We've left everything to follow you." Maybe also in his statement of loyalty, he was also implying this question: "What's in it for me?"

How gracious is Jesus in his reply! Instead of rebuking Peter, he assures him that his disciples can be rich, but not necessarily in the way pursued by the rich ruler and even by many in the church of today. Jesus implies that the saved can be rich...

- *In immediate riches*

In verses 29f Jesus assures his disciples, with "a solemn promise" (See IH Marshall, above citation, page 688, on the Greek, "amen"), that they will be repaid even in this life all they have sacrificed to follow him. And, what demands he places on his followers! What a price he has demanded! He even says our love for him must be undivided, and must make our other loves look like hatred in comparison (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 14:25-27). But Jesus says that he will

repay what we sacrifice for him. If we leave home, family, vocation and livelihood for him, he will see to it that we are included in the extended family of God.

Jesus himself knew this provision of extended family. When his immediate family, who did not understand his mission, came to rescue him from what they perceived to be his fanaticism, he pointed to his disciples as his new family. "Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:34-35).

This is part of what Jesus meant in his Sermon on the Mount, when he said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

Paul knew this kind of kingdom sponsorship when he said to the Corinthians, after recounting his hardships, we have nothing, yet possess all things (2 Corinthians 6:10). Paul spoke of how God used the Macedonian church, a people who themselves were very poor compared to the Corinthians, to be an example of generosity (2 Corinthians 8 & 9). In that passage Paul explained that God allows us to prosper, not for our personal gain, but to enable us to give generously to others, so that no one will have need. We need to be reminded that compared with the rest of the world, most of us here today would be considered very wealthy.

Mark, who wrote his gospel to a persecuted church in Rome, remembered that Jesus included in our provisions, the element of persecution (Mark 10:30).

There are many of our fellow believers in parts of our world who even this morning are experiencing the truth of Jesus' promise. There are believers living in North Korea, China, Indonesia, Sudan, Nigeria, Iran and Iraq, who have had to say "no" to family, jobs, and financial security for the sake of the kingdom. Jesus is giving them extended family in the suffering church. He is meeting their needs through the Body of Christ.

And, even for you and me, there is a cost in following Jesus. He asks our obedience, and that could be costly. It might just cost you your job security to follow Jesus. He might ask you to go into vocational ministry. Your unwillingness to be a part of ungodly or unethical business practice might cost you your job. Or, just because he asks you to give first to his kingdom your first fruits, your tithe, might be a real step of faith for some of you.

Life in the kingdom, of following Jesus, is a life of trust that the saved can be wealthy, that is, trusting God to give all that's needed for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). God will provide immediate wealth, i.e. necessities.

But also Jesus speaks to the truth that we can be wealthy...

- *With deferred riches*

Jesus mentioned also the matter of deferred wealth when he added “and, in the age to come, eternal life” (verse 30).

The rich ruler had made a bad bargain. He bargained that his wealth was worth keeping at the cost of following Jesus and receiving his free gift of eternal life. Jesus says that even if we gain the entire world at the cost of our soul, it’s a bad exchange. And, the gift of eternal life makes any sacrifice in this life seem insignificant.

That’s what the Apostle Paul was saying to the Romans when he said, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). To the Corinthians he said, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Salvation, then, redefines the believer’s understanding of wealth. Jesus turned the tables on the world’s understanding and even the religious world’s understanding of wealth. Jesus taught us not to ask “How rich am I” but rather, “How am I rich?”

I’ve shared with you about my boyhood experiences of traveling with my dad when he would be the guest preacher in an Ohio church on a given Sunday. Usually he would be given an envelope at the end of the Sunday evening service prior to our getting in his car for the trip back to our home in Columbus.

Usually I would ask if I could open the envelope to see what the church had given him for his travel expenses or as an honorarium. One evening, I asked him if I could look in the envelope, and he said, “Son, there isn’t an envelope this time. We didn’t get paid for this one, son, so I guess this is one we can put in the heavenly bank.”

Since that experience I have had many occasions to think about this heavenly bank. This is the deferred wealth we will not see till we get to heaven.

And then there is what AW Tozer called “the transmutation of wealth.” He said, “As base a thing as money often is, it yet can be transmuted into everlasting treasure. It can be converted into food for the hungry and clothing for the poor; it can keep a missionary actively winning lost men to the light of the gospel and thus transmute itself into heavenly values.

“Any temporal possession,” says Tozer, “can be turned into everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality. Hosanna to God in the highest!” (pages 106f, *Born after Midnight*).

So, Jesus says that the saved can thus be wealthy, for all eternity. This is what Jesus meant by storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).

Conclusion:

What a mood shift there is between verse 23, the saddest verse, and this 30th verse! The rich man left sad (verse 23, esp. Mark 10:22). Jesus promises us eternal life in the glorious age to come (verse 30). Had the rich ruler been willing, he could have followed Jesus. Then he would have had kingdom riches. And he would have found fulfillment even in his temporal wealth. Instead, he was out to get what he could for himself.

The question of our materialistic age is “What’s in it for me?” That was the reason the wealthy young man came to Jesus. I believe that still today people come to Jesus to get something out of him. Even salvation and eternal life people are seeking as some kind of commodity. They aren’t interested in a relationship with Jesus and with his people. They want to know they are going to heaven when they die, so they “pray the prayer,” get baptized, and then don’t want to be inconvenienced by such things as commitment. They don’t want to hear about the cost of discipleship.

Even Peter’s remark in Matthew’s account is one we as Christians continued to carry in the backs of our minds: “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27). *The Message* says it this way: “What do we get out of it?”

Because we are called into a relationship that is ongoing, we always will be faced with the demands and costs of discipleship. Occasionally and perhaps always we will have to stop and hear Jesus say, “You still lack one thing” (verse 22). One thing stands in the way of freely and fully following Jesus. I have to ask myself, “Is it my desire for security in my looming retirement? When my first grandchild is born early next year, will my desire to be near our children keep me from following Jesus?” Salvation assurance is tied to a relationship, and that relationship with Jesus means he is Lord, and lordship means he must come first.

I recall a Black preacher who spoke in our seminary’s chapel service one day. He said that people were asking “What’s in it *for me?*” when in fact they should as followers of Jesus ask, “What’s in me *for it?*”

May we come to Jesus, and receive his grace to enable us to follow him. May he give us grace we need to pay the price that he demands. He can give us what we need for it, that is, for life in the kingdom, a life of truly following Jesus.

Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. In what ways is our culture similar to that of first century Judaism that said that material prosperity is a sign of God's favor? How does the teaching of Jesus challenge this concept?
2. Do you agree that the "What's-in-it-for-me" mindset of our culture has crept into the church? Why or why do you not agree?
3. What do you think was the motivation of the rich ruler in approaching Jesus?
4. Why do you think Jesus made the requirement that the rich man sell all that he had before following Jesus?
5. What requirement do you think that Jesus has made of you to follow him?
6. In the light of our text, what is the role of God's grace and our faith/obedience in receiving God's gift of eternal life?
7. In verses 29-30 and in Mark 10:29-30, what did Jesus say are the rewards of following him?

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