

07-22-18 Parables of Money and Self-Worth

Matt. 19:16 – 20:16

From John White the author of our Parables booklet...

“You deserve the best; Demand your rights; I’m worth it. People today want everything that’s coming to them, and they want it now. Convinced of our own worth, we demand higher paying jobs, better working conditions and more fringe benefits. If these are denied, we feel we have been treated unfairly – and perhaps our feelings are justified.”

This mentality may have been partly catapulted by this jingle...

Hold the Pickles hold the Lettuce – special orders don’t upset us – all we ask is that you let us – serve it your way. Have it your way at Burger King now – Have it your way

What was this jingle saying to us as a culture? How has it become a reality in our culture all these years later? This was the beginning of the “me first” generation that has consumed our lives. How does this align with God’s perspective of our value and worth? Who are you as a person of God?

How do you consider God? Is he a divine employer to you? Do you make demands of Him and then get disappointed in His answer to your requests? Today, Jesus is going to challenge your concepts of fairness and worth. The Kingdom values are often opposite of what we expect in our earthly values.

Matt. 19:16-20 (NIV)

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷ “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸ “Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.”

²⁰ “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Here we see a bunch of things going on. Jesus always appears so simple in Scripture, but He is anything but. He is very complicated and sophisticated in His dealings with people of various statuses.

In this portion of our text He is dealing with a rich, arrogant, snooty congregant. This guy thinks he has everything together in the eyes of God, yet there is an element of doubt in the question

that he brings to Jesus. While he must have been a rich Jew who followed the Law, he asks Jesus a simple question...

“Teacher, what GOOD THING must I do to get eternal life?”

Why is he asking this question? He knows the Law and the requirements. Yet he asks Jesus this question. He may have heard that Jesus is preaching a different message that what he grew up with, or maybe he doesn't even understand his own religion completely? We only know that he asked this.

What **Good Thing** must I do? He is asking about doing or works to earn eternal life. Jesus came to dispel those ideas. It is no longer about doing good things – It's about faith and grace. So Jesus asks him a question in his answer to this man... ***“Why do you ask me about what is good?”*** He would have to have some respect and understanding of who Jesus seems to be to ask Him this question. What good thing will earn me eternal life? So, Jesus answers back in kind.

Why do you ask me about what is good? “There is only One who is good.” This statement should make us aware that no-one can do anything good enough to earn or deserve eternal life. If only God is Good, than Only God can deserve eternal life which He is master over and owns. This was Jesus' way of telling this rich young man, you can't do anything good enough; you are disqualified like the rest of humanity. It is impossible. How can any of us compare ourselves to God – X – We lose.

The young man's question is self-incriminating. Jesus knows this, of course, He lets the man hang himself in his own words and questions. His question shows how far he really is from the humble faith that sets true believers apart from those trying in the flesh to get ahold of spiritual/eternal things. He thinks there are things he can do to guarantee his salvation – or at least he asks Jesus if there are. The belief of many Jews of this time was that there was a specific act of goodness one could work that could win eternal life in the kingdom of God. This young man seeks Jesus' opinion as to what this act of goodness might be. He's looking for a short cut – He's probably used to that sort of thing being rich.

Jesus levels the playing field with His question. He exposes the man's inadequate understanding of goodness. In the sense of eternal life, only God is good. Only God's will can determine what is good. This man wants what is outside of God's will regarding eternal life.

So, Jesus challenges his arrogance by saying, ***“If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”*** (v. 17) The man foolishly accepts the challenge showing even more that he doesn't understand anything about the kingdom of God. Jesus is NOT saying here that one can enter eternal life by keeping the commandments; rather He is showing this man that he

really cannot keep the commandments therefore disqualifying himself from eternal life. Jesus' answer purposely puts the ball into the young man's court. Will this cause humility or further confirm his disqualification?

The man does not understand that without a certain purity, one cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Salvation cannot be earned – period. Today many people are of the same mindset as this rich young ruler. They are looking for that special thing they can do to earn their salvation. This is not part of God's plan, but something contrived by the minds of humanity.

The man continues in his blindness... ¹⁸ ***“Which ones?”*** he inquired.

Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

It is interesting that Jesus tells him five commandments that have to deal with others. Then He hits him with the second most important commandment – Love Your Neighbor as Yourself.

Since these all deal with how we view and treat others, it seems Jesus is hitting him in the head with Scripture to expose his arrogance and self-righteousness.

²⁰ ***“All these I have kept,” the young man said.***

The man answers too quickly. Based on his knowledge of the Law and his religion, he thinks he is OK and safe, but there is still some doubt, or he would not be here asking Jesus these questions. He thinks he has it all together, but he's not really sure, so he comes back to Jesus.

“What do I still lack?”

He is showing by his uncertainty that he really does not know the truth. Isn't this the case for all who question the will of God regarding Salvation? We followed our religious teaching, some more closely than others, but there's still something missing down deep within us. Everyone is faced with the truth at some point. When we hear it, we both understand and repent, or we are offended and reject it.

So, Jesus drops the hammer on this guy. He has asked his questions, received the answers, and now, it's hammer time. Jesus has set him up for the big fall – not that he wants him to fall, but He knows the man's heart.

²¹ Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

You think you're all good before the Lord by keeping commandments? Well, if you really want eternal life, go and get rid of your fortunes and Come Follow Me.

This is the slammer – Jesus knows that because of his wealth, he had a divided heart. He wanted to get the good from God, but he was not willing to sacrifice what he put his true trust in. Isn't it still the same today? We want God's blessings, but we are not willing to put aside our true trust. God's condition for eternal life and the kingdom of God is a totally surrendered life. We have to put aside what we hold high in our lives and surrender to His Will and His desire. It is what He wants for each of us, so why are we so reluctant, and why do we hold off?

God's will for all of us is to follow Jesus, making ourselves nothing for the sake of others just as Jesus did – and just as we heard last week in Mike's sermon. Our focus is usually on our possessions, and ourselves but what would Jesus do? This man's compliance with the Law was worthless because none of it entails, absolute self-surrender.

² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

***Oscar Wilde said this...** "When I was young, I used to think that money was the most important thing in life; now that I am older, I know it is!"*

This was the rich man's dilemma. He had to make a choice between following Jesus or his money. The money won out. We have the same question facing each of us every day. What are our priorities? Our stuff or Jesus?

³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, 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."

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

***Dr. Karl Menninger** once asked a very wealthy patient, "What on earth are you going to do with all of that money?" The patient replied, a bit reluctantly, "Just worry about it, I suppose." Well, Menninger went on, "Do you get that much pleasure out of worrying about it?" "No," replied the patient, "but I get such terror when I think of giving some of it to somebody else."*

Having heard all this, the disciples started thinking about their own wealth, if any, and their possessions including family, etc.

²⁷ Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

Didn't they just hear that it's not about money or possessions or any other material thing that matters to God? He is only concerned about our heart being totally devoted to Him.

I just want to skip through this section to get to the next section...

²⁸ Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

He is not speaking literally, for sure. Would you want 100 wives to replace the one you gave up? Really? I don't think so. I can't handle the one wife I have for the last 42 years. I would die if I received 100 times over that. It is figurative, of course. The point is ... The blessings we will receive in heaven far outweigh the sacrifices we may make on earth for the kingdom of God.

I am skipping over this part of our text, but know that this is also related to the theme of the main text as is the next part that we will look at. Let's look at the next part...

The parable of the workers...

Jesus starts off with a known expression... **The Kingdom of Heaven is Like ...**

Matt:20:1-16

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

Jesus starts off several parables with the words... "The kingdom of heaven is like..." That's because the purpose of the parable is to instruct us what the kingdom of heaven is like. It's not like the kingdoms of the world and in most cases is diametrically opposed to the ways of the world. You will see from this parable, it contradicts our worldly logic and practice.

³ "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went.

"He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. ⁶ About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

⁷ "Because no one has hired us,' they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'

So let's bring this into today's ways. Let's say I am wealthy and have a large piece of property that I can't maintain on my own. Actually, I have a small piece of property that I can't maintain on my own – LOL. So, I get up early and head to 7/11 for my morning coffee, and I see the migrant workers waiting to be hired. I ask two of them if they would work on my property for \$100 for the day, and they agree. I bring them home and instruct them what I need them to do. Then for their lunch break, I go back to 7/11 to get them lunch and refreshments. I see there are still workers waiting for work. I ask two of them if they would like to work at my property and I will pay their daily wage (\$100). They agree (wouldn't you?), and I take them home and give them work to do. Later on around three in the afternoon, I go back to 7/11 to get some Gatorade and snacks for the workers. I notice there are still two men there who are waiting. They say no one has hired us. Out of compassion for them and their families, I ask them to come to my place and work there, and they agree, of course. At the end of the day – around five o'clock – I invite them to come to get their pay starting with the ones I asked last. I give them all the same amount they agreed was their daily wage regardless of the number of hours they worked. How would you think each of the three groups would feel? Wouldn't you think that if the ones hired last get \$100 then each of the other groups should get proportionately more than them?

But they all agreed to work for \$100 a day – what's the complaint. And, it's my property, my money, and my decision how I divide it up among them. Is this unfair? What is their real issue?

⁸ *“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’*

⁹ *“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius.*

¹⁰ *So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’*

¹³ *“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’*

¹⁶ *“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

Eugene Peterson writes these comments about this parable...

One of the dehumanizing features in our society is that there is a price put on nearly everybody. We determine the value of others by their salary, and we even base our own self-image on how much we earn.

Jesus' story proclaims the good news of a different way of determining our value, not by how much we earn or how long we work, not by our productivity or seniority, not by our maleness or femaleness, but simply because we are. We all get treated generously by God.

The striking phrase in the parable is “Can’t I do what I want with my own money?” (v. 15). Can’t I give as I see fit? Not reward, but give. Not evaluate, but give. Not punish, but give. Not lecture, but give. Not sort out and assign places, but give.

This parable creates a community of understanding where each person can be valued the way God values us. We set aside what our parents think of us, what our colleagues think of us, what our friends and acquaintances think of us what our enemies think of us, and we pay attention to what God thinks of us: “I decided to give to the one who came last the same as you” (v. 14).

The parable depicts God’s grace. “His great gifts are not distributed because they are earned, but because He is gracious. In the kingdom of God, the driving force is not merit and ability (as in the world) but grace!” (Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary – N.T.)