

*“Put Everything in Perspective!”*

Listening to today’s Scripture, it seems we could summarize what Jesus sought to communicate by quoting the title for this sermon, **“Put Everything in Perspective!”** If one were to put everything in perspective, what would we see or find? Our society, like the Jewish culture during Jesus’ public ministry, encourages us to focus on getting money, wealth, power, and the fulfillment of our physical desires. Yes, the world tells us we must strive to become billionaires! However, Jesus made it abundantly clear chasing after money and power, necessarily means, they and the chase control us, instead of God. If you and I are going to make our relationship with God our top priority, then we cannot allow our desires for money, power, prestige, and personal gratification to keep us from living as God’s ambassadors of agape love and servants of Jesus Christ. **What is more important for you? Are we putting reality into perspective?**

Brett Blair shares a story to help us gain a better perspective. He says, “I heard about an expert in diamonds who happened to be seated on an airplane beside a woman with a huge diamond on her finger. Finally, the man introduced himself and said, ‘I couldn’t help but notice your beautiful diamond.’ ‘I am an expert in precious stones. Please tell me about that stone.’ She replied, ‘That is the famous Klopman diamond, one of the largest in the world. But there is a strange curse that comes with it.’ Now the man was really interested. He asked, ‘What is the curse?’ As he waited with bated breath, she replied, ‘It’s Mr. Klopman.’”

Blair humorously suggests, “Some of you may wish to re-evaluate your diamonds on that basis.” Continuing, Blair states, “But seriously the true curse of any kind of valuable possession is its capacity to steal our hearts and souls. The rich young ruler is one of those unique characters from the Bible that have come to represent greed. So unwilling was he to part with earthly wealth that he sold his soul in order to keep his money. He wanted to be saved but not at the expense of losing his possessions.” (“What Must I DO to Receive Life?” by Brett C. Blair)

Today’s Scripture begins in **verses 17-18**, *“As Jesus was starting on his way again, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus asked him. ‘No one is good except God alone.’”* His challenging the young man for talking about someone other than God being “good” was an approach Jesus used to remind the man how no one can be good enough to not need God’s loving forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

Finally addressing the young man’s question, Jesus said in **verse 19**, *“You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; do not cheat; respect your father and your mother.’”* Please note, the Sabbath commandment, which was a major area of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees and priests, was not included in the list of commandments. Also, a new commandment “do not cheat” or “do not defraud” was included by Jesus.

The Gospel of Mark revealed the young man’s earnest yearning to fulfill the Law’s requirements and he said in **verse 20**, *“‘Teacher,’ the man said, ‘ever since I was young, I have obeyed all these commandments.’”* Like most of the then religious elite, the young man believed the obeying of the commandments would make him worthy of God’s love.

However, the young man was like many people today, as Adrian Rogers shares in this story, “There was a man who loved gold. Then he inherited a fortune. With joy he redecorated his bedroom. He put gold parchment wallpaper up, hung yellow curtains, had a golden colored rug and a yellow bedspread. He even bought some yellow pajamas. But then he got sick and came down with, of all things, yellow jaundice. His wife called the doctor who made a house call and went up to that bedroom for an examination. The doctor stayed up there a long while. When he came down, the wife asked, ‘How is he?’

‘Don’t know,’ said the doctor. ‘I couldn’t find him.’”

Rogers concludes, “Indeed many people today are absolutely absorbed in and lost in a world of greed and materialism.” (Adrian Rogers)

Jesus was great at perceiving the real issues for those who sought his help. He knew this young man’s real problem, as well as, how oblivious the man was of how he allowed something to come between himself and God. So, with genuine concern for the welfare of the rich young man, Jesus confronted him and forced him to choose between God and that which separated him from reconciliation with our Divine Parent. He sought to help the young man put everything in perspective. **Jesus did this by saying in verse 21**, *“You need only one thing. Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.”* Mark explained in **verse 22**, *“When the man heard this, gloom spread over his face, and he went away sad, because he was very rich.”*

Gerry Pierse shared the dynamics which take place when something material is allowed to control our lives, as he explained, “The French have a story about a millionaire in his palace who spent his days counting his gold. Beside the palace was a poor cobbler who spent his days singing as he repaired people’s shoes. The joyful singing irritated the rich man. One day he decided to give some gold coins to the cobbler. At first the cobbler was overjoyed, and he took the coins and hid them. But then he would be worried and go back to check if the coins were still there. Then he would be worried in case someone had seen him, and he would move the coins and hide them in another place. During all this, he ceased to sing. Then one day he realized that he had ceased to sing because of the gold coins. He took them back to the rich man and said, ‘take back your coins and give me back my songs.’ (Gerry Pierse, “Detachment and Freedom”) In the end, the cobbler in that story, finally regained his perspective and realized his fixation on wealth – the gold coins was stealing what was really beautiful and valuable to him.

After challenging the rich young man to give up his slave master of wealth and the man went away sad because he was unwilling to be free from the control of his riches, Jesus paid close attention to his disciples' response. Mark tells us in **verse 23**, ***“Jesus looked around at his disciples and said to them, ‘How hard it will be for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God!’”*** Their Teacher and Lord wanted to make sure his disciples did not allow themselves to be in bondage to money and wealth. However, at least in the view of the author of the Gospel of John, Judas Iscariot was in bondage to money. The Gospel of John explained Judas was critical of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, when she poured very expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. **Writing about this in John 12:6, the author wrote, “He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would help himself from it.”**

After Jesus made the point it would be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of God, his disciples could no longer constrain themselves! **Verses 24-25 reported, “The disciples were shocked at these words, but Jesus went on to say, ‘My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.’”** To be completely honest, some scholars believe Jesus was talking about the difficulty camels had getting through a very low gate – the eye of a needle in the walls surrounding Jerusalem. A camel would have to crawl or roll through this very low gate.

**Verse 26 reported, “At this the disciples were completely amazed and asked one another, ‘Who, then, can be saved?’”** Yes, as frequently reported in the gospels, Jesus' original disciples usually preferred the Pharisees' positions or what the rich and powerful of Jewish Society were doing, instead of what Jesus taught and did. This Reading revealed Jesus was demolishing the expectation that the rich and powerful were surely guaranteed entrance into the Kingdom of God. So, the disciples questioned, “Who, then, can be saved?”

Evidently, Jesus recognized his original disciples were about to fall into despair, so he moved quickly to bring them comfort in the midst of what they believed was bad news. **In verse 27, “Jesus looked straight at them and answered, ‘This is impossible for human beings but not for God; everything is possible for God.’”** In other words, he reminded them of the real reason for hope. God, especially through Jesus was doing amazing things and they fully expected he would give them high positions in his Kingdom. It should not surprise us, then, that Peter, the eldest disciple, allowed his impulse to take control of his mouth. **In verse 28 the Scripture states, “Then Peter spoke up, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’”** With Peter's comment – his worry and his inference the disciples were about to suffer a great injustice, Jesus responded in **verses 29-30, “‘Yes,’ ‘and I tell you that those who leave home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in this present age. They will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields - and persecutions as well; and in the age to come they will receive eternal life.’”** Did you notice Jesus did not include wives among the persons a disciple would give up? The specific promises of Jesus, as reported in Mark's account, are a bit strange side by side. “Will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, etc. and persecutions.”

Strangely enough, in the parallels to those verses in Matthew and Luke, there are significant differences from Mark's account. For example, before promising they would have a hundred times more houses, etc., Matthew reported Jesus first promised in **Matthew 19:28, “Jesus said to them, ‘You can be sure that when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne in the New Age, then you twelve followers of mine will also sit on thrones, to rule the twelve tribes of Israel.’”** I am a bit dumbfounded about why Matthew included that verse, especially since he knew Judas had betrayed Jesus and was no longer considered to be one of the disciples. How and why would Jesus promise Judas a throne?

Luke did not include that special Matthew material and Luke, also, did not include Jesus promising they would have a hundred more houses, etc. Luke, instead, reported Jesus said in **Luke 18:29-30, “I assure you that anyone who leaves home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will receive much more in this present age and eternal life in the age to come.”** Did you notice Luke did include wives in the list of persons a disciple might give up to follow Jesus? Given those comparisons between Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it seems Jesus' promise in Luke is more likely the closest to what he actually said on that occasion.

So, after Jesus demolished the disciples' expectations that the rich and powerful will easily enter the Fulfilled Kingdom of God, he then concluded our Scripture by essentially turning the world upside down for he said in **verse 31, “But many who are now first will be last, and many who are now last will be first.”**

**Jesus calls you and me to put everything in perspective, so we recognize our true liberation, hope, forgiveness, and New Life are found in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who was and is the embodiment of God's Self-Giving and Sacrificial Agape Love for us.** Wealth and power all too easily become our masters. They demand our total devotion and separate us from our relationships with and for God. **Let us put everything in perspective and love God instead of money, wealth, or power! Amen.**