

18 And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 20 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 And when Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich. 24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 25 "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 And they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27 But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God." 28 And Peter said, "Behold, we have left our own homes, and followed You." 29 And He said to them, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who shall not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life."

This is now the third time that I've had the privilege to preach on this story of the rich young ruler. He appears in exactly the same time frame after the incident with the parents and the children that Jesus calls to himself to bless in all three of the synoptic gospels.

I preached on this story from Mark's gospel in 2012. Actually that time was an evening bible study before you kind folks honored me with this pulpit. Then in 2016, in April I preached this story from Matthew's account. And this morning I have one final chance to try to get it right. The odds are that I won't visit this passage directly from the pulpit again. The fact that all three synoptic gospels include this story is a testament to it's importance. The truth's here are vital for us. And so we begin.

In Lukes carefully orchestrated succession of events and teaching as Jesus has set His face to go to Jerusalem, this story is yet another facet of the diamond

that is the kingdom of God, the authority to reign of God, and more to the point, who will enter into that kingdom, and who will not.

The kingdom has been the thrust of Luke's teaching and we can clearly see how this story fits perfectly in the context of the kingdom of God. Over and over Jesus keeps warning the folks that the kingdom is not going to include who you logically think should be there, the very religious, and it IS going to include folks who no one thinks would ever be there. Sinners and gentiles. The last will be first and the first will be last. And all of this kingdom teaching touches on that truth.

Just to recap a little bit for the sake of context;

The prodigal son. It's the guy who goes whoring and wastes his life but repents who will be in the kingdom, not the upright uptight son who stays home.

In the teaching about paying your wealth forward to a kingdom not of this world, the unrighteous steward, the religious folks, the pharisee's scoff. They laugh at the Son of God. What an idiot.

In the Rich man and Lazarus, it's Lazarus who is comforted in Abraham's bosom, and the rich man in this world who inhabits hell in the next world.

In chapter 17 we have prophecies surrounding the return of Jesus to set up His kingdom on earth as a result of a pharisee asking when the Kingdom will come. Jesus says, it's already here. You're looking at the King. But you're rebelling against the King that you don't want. The result will be punishment and loss.

In Chapter 18 we looked at the pharisee and the publican. The pharisee who just exudes religiosity to the point that he's not a person anyone really would want to be anywhere near, and that's OK with him because he's too good to be near us lowlife's. But a publican, a spiritual bankrupt beats his breast and cries out to God for mercy. Jesus says that pharisee will be in hell. That

publican will be in heaven. Justified. Sin atoned for.

Then the babies. The children. The perfect object lesson. The babies, who have no value to this world, no accomplishments, no worth, the lowest common denominator in this world's value system; They're in the kingdom. The righteous pharisee's, they're out.

The continuing theme in all of it is who gets into the kingdom of God. Not who you think. Not who Oprah says will definitely be there. None of the heroes of this world will be heroes in the next. The rock stars aren't going to be there. God's values are not this fallen world's values.

But that brings us to this story of this rich young ruler and it's really sort of heart rending. We're secretly glad the holier than thou proud pharisee is going to miss the kingdom. We don't like those guys. Puffed up religious hypocrites.

When I was a teenager way way long time ago in a different century, I used to work at an Arco station in Hollywood and one of our customer's always had the black suit with the white starched collar, and as if that wasn't enough, in the back window of his car he had a little sign that said; Clergy. Just in case the outfit didn't tip you off, he really wanted you to know, he was of the Clergy.

I was already a christian then. And I distinctly remember thinking to myself, "Really?" "Dude, really?" "I've got a clue for you, get over yourself." That's one point of agreement with God and the fallen world. Neither of them likes puffed up religious dudes.

But this guy is not that. He's got so much going for him, that we watch this little movie of Jesus here, and we're pulling for this guy. We really want him to win. But he doesn't, and it's kind of a shock to us. It shocked the disciples. They were like Yikes, if that guy can't get in, who can.

And Jesus concurs. You're right. It's impossible. All these stories end with a

surprise. Value to this world is no value to God. No value to this world is high value to God. Rock stars are turned away. Babies are in. Self-Righteous men are turned away. Sinners who repent are in. And that's actually the key.

18 And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

All three of the gospel accounts tell us something we've included in the traditional title of this story. Matthew tells us he's young. Luke tells us he's a ruler. All of the accounts tell us he's rich.

There are limited possibilities in Israel for ruler's and what everyone agrees upon is that this term logically falls to a ruler of a synagogue. And in that land you had to have at least achieved your 30th birthday to be considered for that category. So this young man is in full prime, and probably almost exactly the same age as Jesus who he approaches.

Mark tells us that he ran to approach Jesus and that he bowed down before Him. *Vs. 17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Mk 10:17*

That's actually remarkable. It's customary from time to time to bow down before someone else. A common man might bow down in a king's presence. But never the reciprocal. This is a rich man bowing down in worshipful posture before a homeless Man.

There is effort and posturing and acknowledgment in this gesture. Jesus, who heals everyone, who does miracles, and who speaks like no man ever spoke is someone who this ruler truly thinks may have the answers to the big questions.

He isn't aligned with the scoffing, dis-believing pharisees. He comes with purpose and with a respectful humility. This guy is a winner. We can't help but like him. We're in good company because in Mark's account we're told that mid conversation, Jesus had a particular love for this fellow.

What is it we like so much. Humanly we tend to make constant value assignments of people. Rich, good looking, smart, high achiever, youthful, sweet, respectful, seeking, humble. We tend to often think, that's a guy I could let into my club, and then sometimes the gifting is so obvious it's more like, I wish I could be in his club.

That's this guy. He's really got everything. From the world's accounting he's got more going for him than almost anyone. He's cream of the crop. Still young but already so well esteemed that he's a ruler. He's got wealth. Lots of it, we'll learn. You just look at him and you can't help yourself, you find yourself thinking, in my next life, I want to be him. We're pulling for him. There's never been a single better candidate to recruit onto our team. Man, if we can get this guy! Wow. What a total package. He's got everything.

Paul says; *For consider your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.* 1Cor. 1:26 We can't help ourselves. We read that, and it's so true, but we can't help but think, we could use a couple, Lord. Wise, noble, powerful. We're painfully ordinary.

On the other hand, if you had that guy you'd get rid of me in a hurry. It's OK, I'm just as guilty of this. We look at guys like this and this guy's a winner, and we want him. Sign him up. Quick, before he changes his mind. Get him. This only happens on TV, right. The best candidate anyone ever saw walks up and bows down in worship and asks, how can I get saved.

For the record here, in this single story, the terms, "eternal life", "kingdom of God," and "saved" are all used interchangeably in this account. That's what we're talking about.

The best looking rich young guy in 3 states just walked up, bowed down, and said, Good Teacher, what do I need to do to be saved. We dream about that, right. Only on TV. We'd have this guy saved before lunch and baptised before the evening service. We'd parade him around like a trophy. And then 6 years later he'd leave his wife and we find out he's been messing around

with other women and we never see him again.

We read about it all the time. Right? Maybe you don't, but I do. We've had several just in the last year. Winner winner chicken dinner. And then train wreck. And then exit. He gone. The rumors were all true. How many people died with him in that wreck. A bunch of people crashed with him.

Jesus doesn't operate that way. In our defense, we can't look inside hearts and know what's there like Jesus can. We 'believe all things' like it says in the love passage. We have to. Jesus can see inside hearts.

And Jesus says; Whoa. Stop right there. We need to define terms.

19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

A good theologian could camp here for months. Lucky for you, I'm not a very good theologian. There's so much here. Astonishing truths. Two truths here. First of all, Jesus either just claimed to be an ordinary sinful human, or He claimed to be God. Those are the only two options in what He just said.

Think about what you just said. *Good teacher*. Only God is *good*. Either I'm God, and what you said is correct, or I'm just like you, and I can't help you. Which is it? What do you really believe about me.

No man ever spoke like this man spoke. He speaks and the wind and the waves cease their roaring. He speaks and 3 fishes and two loaves feed perhaps 20,000 people. He speaks and the blind see, the lame walk, the dead rise up again. The demons flee in terror at His voice.

Good teacher is actually who I am, but is that what you meant. Let's elevate what you said to what is actually true. Is that what you meant when you said Good teacher?

And then He says a second incredible theological truth. No one is good

except God alone. He approaches this man with the dual truth that God alone is Holy, Holy, Holy, and all men are not. Mankind is hopelessly depraved. We inherited our depravity. It's all over the old testament. *There is none righteous. No, not one.* 11 *THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;*
12 *ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;*
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

So Jesus, in effect says; Stop right there. God is Holy, you are depraved. Is that what you meant? You called me good. Do you realize that you are sinful and I am Holy? Is that the discussion we're having. Is that what you meant when you approached me and called me Good? Did you mean that you're a bankrupt helpless sinner asking to be accepted by a Holy God? Not so much??

And then Jesus, with infinite omniscience that we don't have, says, almost like a throw away line, *keep the commandments*, you'll be fine. What?? It's not what the ruler expected to hear either. It sort of knocks him off guard.

In Matthew's account it says; *but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.*" 18 He said to Him, "Which ones?"

Which ones? Which ones?? God is Holy. You're depraved. Keep the commandments if you want to be in the Kingdom. Which ones??

Actually, this seems very odd to us, but this is the game the pharisee's were playing. They didn't really admit it, but they ignored the weighty commandments. The ones that come from a pure heart. They made up for it by over-playing the sabbath day and the tithing of mint and anise and cummin. 9 grains of salt for me. One grain of salt for God. I wish my neighbor would die. That sort of thing.

So we aren't surprised quite so much by the question. Which ones. The

possible ones, like the pharisee's or the impossible ones?

20 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

Matthew tells us that Jesus also added; and *YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*" from the shema.

All of these are impossible for depraved hearts. Really. Think in terms of inside attitudes vss. outside actions. We could arrange the commandments in order of difficulty as regarding inside attitude vss. outside show. The 5 Jesus mentions are actually the easiest ones, as far as outward show. We can do this. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't murder. Don't lie. Honor Father and Mother.

Been there, done that. I'm good. Until I get to the sermon on the mount. And Jesus says, it's what is inside the heart that counts, not outside. Ever look at a woman with lust? Ever wish you had an oozie mounted on the pickup truck roof for that guy that just ran you off the road? Ever lied to keep the peace. Ever stolen something?

We can pull off the exterior thing. Squeaky clean. But Jesus looks inside. Hatred. Murder. Lust. Thievery. Lying. Dis-honor of parents. It's all there.

Apparently what Jesus said first hadn't really sunk in. Or there was no concept of Jesus really being any better than anyone else, even though he calls Him Good. Holy teacher. No repentance comes. No acknowledgement of inner secret sin. No corrupt heart inside the beautiful exterior.

The love your neighbor as yourself should have been the tip-off. The commandments *not* mentioned are the hard ones. Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength. Every breath for the glory of God. The whole point of the commandments is to look in that mirror and get real. I'm bankrupt. There's nothing inside my heart except shmoot. Slimy filth. I look

in the mirror and I'm hopelessly bankrupt.

Paul says in Romans 7:7b *I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."*

Notice, Jesus didn't include this final commandment of the decalogue in His brief list of the possible ones, but he did include love of neighbors as yourself from the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. An inward command but as long as the outward is acceptable, no one knows what's going on inside your heart.

Paul continues; *8 But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. 9 And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; 10 and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; 11 for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.*

The easy commandments point outward. The difficult ones point inside our hearts. In the sermon on the mount Jesus shows us, you may be looking OK to everyone even on the showy ones, but inside your heart, those are all filth too. We are depraved, hopeless bankrupt sinners before a Holy God.

When Jesus told this young man to keep the commandments he should have fallen down in bankrupt repentance to a Holy God if he's honest about what reflects back on him from that mirror of holiness. The law. It shows us we're bankrupt. Every soul of man. Every one. That would have been the right answer.

What conclusions can we draw from what we know so far? A young ruler comes bowing before Jesus asking what he must DO to obtain salvation. Jesus quickly takes him to God's holiness and man's depravity, tells him to just do the commandments and he'll be OK. Which ones?

That's our clue that Jesus hasn't gotten through to him. All of them! Of

course. Any of them. Pick any one and look inside your heart. Jesus makes it easy on him. The first 5 second section of the decalogue. How're you doing with those.

20 "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'"

21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." Been there, done that. All these things I have kept from my youth.

Matthew says; *20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"*

I'm religious. I do that stuff. I'm the ruler of the synagogue. Everybody knows I keep God's laws. What am I still lacking, he says. I'm doing the religious thing, why am I still empty? This is the point where Mark remarks to us how much Jesus really loved this guy.

Mark 10:20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." 21a And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him, and said to him, "One thing you lack:

You know a lot of people simply go down the wrong road and that's all that ever happens. You go to the wrong church. You ask the wrong questions. You're on the broad highway to hell. We understand that. This guy came to the singular right person and asked the single most important question possible.

How do I obtain salvation? A lot of commentators want to jump on him for saying what do I do. That was all that culture knew. Do stuff. Keep the law. I don't think that was the problem. Jesus is going to reveal the problem for us though.

22 And when Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell

*all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and **come, follow Me.***”

One thing you lack. Me. You have everything this world offers, but you don't have me. Get rid of this world's stuff and come have Me.

Two opposing kingdom's exist, side by side, with two rulers. Satan is ruler of this world. He reigns on earth. He rules the cosmos, the world systems. And we're born into that world. Born with a sinful flesh. And God has revealed His law, His holiness so the we understand by looking in that mirror, just how sinful we really are.

In Satan's kingdom there's body and soul but our spirits, that part of us that was made to have a friendship with God, is dead. Empty. Void. We try to fill up that void with stuff this world offers. All shapes and sizes of void filler-uppers. Everything from sex to drugs to rock-n-roll. Wealth. Things. Houses. Land. Pretty things. Ugly things. Whatever. Satan's got a plan for all types.

Everything from satan worshipper druggies to clean religious folks like this young man in our story. Whatever floats your boat. Everything is offered and available in the town of Vanity Fair. Pick out what you like and get on the wide road to hell.

How much of that can you bring with you into the Kingdom of God? Because it turns out, whatever it is that's lighting up your soul, religion, drugs, sex, rock n roll, money, power, whatever that thing is, that's an idol.

If you want to be saved can you bring your idols with you from Satan's kingdom into God's?

21st century evangelicalism says; Bunk. All you have to do is believe. Believe Jesus died on the cross to forgive your sins and accept the free gift. He doesn't require you to give up anything in order to have Him. Come as you are. Bring all the baggage.

If that's right, is Jesus wrong here in this story? Did Paul change the gospel. Did Jesus need a refresher course in evangelism strategy. Listen again to a transliteration of the Beatitudes, the manifesto of the Kingdom of God;

3 *“Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *“Blessed are brokenhearted over sin, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *“Blessed are the powerless, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness not their own, for they shall be satisfied.*

Are the Beatitudes still the manifesto of the Kingdom of God, or has that all changed.

Jesus goes to work on this guy. There is only one person who is good. God alone is holy. By that standard all men are reprobates. All have sinned. Keep the commandments. How's that going for you. Which ones? OK, how about the easy ones. Oh, you did all of that? Let's try this then, if I'm Lord of the Kingdom of God, here's what I'll require of you;

*“One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and **come, follow Me.**”*

Lose your idols. Actually pay it forward. Give it to the poor and you'll have a big fat investment in heaven waiting for you in the Kingdom. But mostly, what you'll need to do when the idols are gone, is come, follow me.

Lose your idols. Follow me. Pretty simple plan.

What about the lady who gave her last two mite's at the temple treasury. Would Jesus tell her to sell all she has in order to be saved. No. That's not her idol. Money was definitely not her idol. Jesus tailor's whatever it is He requires to the individual.

We've lost that in our modern message. That's actually what repentance means. We leave our sin behind. We leave this world and its idols behind. We come out of Satan's kingdom and enter into God's kingdom, empty handed. Actually the bottom line is willingness to do that. Because we're pretty helpless at actually doing stuff.

God requires willing hearts. Willing to leave this world behind, whatever He requires. God responds to willing hearts. He actually does all the rest. John 7:17 *“If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself.”*

Jesus doesn't get into a long discussion about law and grace, depravity and forgiveness and reconciliation. He skips all of that and says, here's what I'll require of you to be in my kingdom. We'll find out if I'm Lord, or not. Sell your stuff. Give the proceeds to the poor. Come, follow me.

Does this story make your stomach sort of queasy? Has the requirement changed? Has the gospel changed. Does Jesus still make these kinds of impossible requirements to come into His kingdom? Does He still require people to walk away from their idols in order to have Him?

Was I a better candidate for salvation than this young man and that's why I'm in and he walked away? These questions and many more are compelling. This passage is so rich with inscrutable truths that we're going to spend two weeks in here looking at the hard questions. We'll pick up the story here next week if the Lord allows us to.

We look at our current Christendom large, and evangelicalism within the big tent and we have to ask, does what we see align itself with this story. Easy believism. Bring your baggage and your garbage and your sin and come on in. Does our current evangelicalism look more like the wide gate and giant highway or the narrow gate with the difficult path.

Jesus crushed this fellow. No sin, no repentance, sorry, no entrance into my Kingdom. Leave your idols behind and follow me. He couldn't do it.

The kingdom is such a conundrum. We can't sort it out. Why do some get swept in. Why do others not get the invitation. 5 minutes later Jesus looks up into a tree at a short tax collector named Zaccheus and says come on down Zack, I'm coming to your house today. Why him? Why not the rich young ruler?

You'll have to come next week to explore the answers to the impossible questions.