

*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."*

Last week we asked some difficult questions driven by this particular account of a fine young man who wanted salvation and having heard the terms given by the King of the kingdom, he turned and walked away.

There's a famous painting from the Victorian England era by a man named George Frederic Watts of this scene. We don't see the man's face, it's a rear side view of the luxurious enjeweled robes and turban on a head that is downcast in deep sorrow as he turns to leave.

What has just played out in front of our eyes is exactly what Jesus described in the parables of the treasures;

*44 "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and **sells all that he has, and buys that field.***

45 *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls,*  
46 *and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and **sold all** that he*  
*had, and **bought it.***

Except this was not a parable, this was a real event, and this man calculated the cost to have Jesus and would not pay it. In this case, all the worldly wealth that this man had would not be sold in order to have Jesus.

I'm more of a horse trader than many of you here. I make these calculations on a daily basis but on smaller matters. I'm the car dealers worst nightmare. Because I can walk out of the showroom without the car. That part in me that says I want this shiny thing and life can't go on without it that the dealers count on, doesn't work that way with me. I can walk out. When we get to that part, Pam leaves and waits in the old car.

We all calculate the price of things. The cost is too much. The value isn't correct. You want too much for what you're selling and I'm not going to budge. Impass. No deal. We calculate how much we'll let go of in order to have the treasure that we're wanting. This man calculated the value of Jesus and the value of his worldly treasure and kept the world's vanishing junk.

What is the value of your eternal soul? How much is too much? Jesus said;

34b . . . *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s shall save it. 36 “**For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?** 37 *“For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Mark 8:34 - 37**

Not only did he lose his own soul, he lost eternity with Jesus, beginning on the day he ran up and bowed before him. Whatever we have to give up in order to have Jesus, He gives more back.

We don't want to make light of this. The cost was indeed high. Because in that culture, wealth like we see with this man, may have been under his

control, but it actually belonged to his family. Wealth was passed down from fathers to sons and enjoyed by the larger family around him.

He would have been expected to handle that money wisely and when it was time to hand it down to his sons it would be increased by his care and wisdom. That was built into his culture. So when Jesus demanded he sell his wealth and give the proceeds to the poor, he would have also had to alienate his own family. Those folks would be furious with him.

*36 A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37 Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; Matt. 10:36,37*

This is nothing new. We live in this weird little bubble in the 2000 year history of the church. Everybody's a 'good person'. If you want to call it christian, knock yourself out. It's all good. Nobody cares very much. It costs exactly nothing to be a christian. Even so, there's only a dozen of us in church out of 2400 on a Sunday morning. About .5%. But nobody cares that we're here.

That's an anomaly in the 2000 year history of the church. For centuries the church was a radical departure. For 2000 years there has always been some place in the world where your family would cast you out, at best, or stone you at worst for leaving the religion of human achievement and joining the religion of divine accomplishment. Satan's religion. God's religion.

There was clear demarcation. It was a fierce departure out of Satan's kingdom and into God's. We enjoy this dangerous phenomenon where for 250 years, it's not only OK to be a christian, it was considered a bit of a scandal if you were vociferously NOT.

Was it that Satan finally figured it out that if you persecute the church it makes it pure and strong, but if you go hands off, it gets impure and weak? Was it the wisdom of God that allowed a nation to set itself up on protestant principles with the 10 commandments as a base structure and Satan's influence

restrained. Did God do that so the world could look on and say, wow, look at the thriving that is possible when people are even a little bit moral and hold up God's laws.

I've heard at least one wise man state that the whole point of America for these 250 years was to raise up a nation who could stand alongside Israel and protect her from her natural enemies. I think that's highly possible. God is sovereign over history.

America began as a protestant christian stronghold and it waxed strong as God blessed even the most minimal moral acknowledgement of His laws. America was user friendly to christians because it was persecuted christians who came here in the first place to escape states that were enforcing state religions.

But the result, 200+ years later is that this cost that Jesus speaks of in His parables and this particular real account is completely foreign to us. We know nothing of this. We understand sin and depravity. We understand that we stand condemned before a holy God. We understand that Jesus stood in our place and shed His blood for us to atone for our sins. We understand that He freely gives to us His righteousness.

We were told, whosoever will may come, and we came. My family was excited for me because they were believers. Other families we knew were like; Oh you're a christian huh. We'll see what you are 6 months from now. Whatever floats your boat. Good for you. Either way, there was no real cost. We didn't leave anything behind. Our families didn't forbid faith in Jesus. It was like an addition to the portfolio along with everything else.

How many of us will be standing if it suddenly costs everything to be a christian. Something totally foreign to our experience. Is it worth thinking about? How often have I already heard, that can never happen. That's crazy.

One thing I do know is that if this rich young ruler had come wanting to add Jesus to his portfolio today, no one would have discouraged him. No one would challenge him. There are very few evangel's today who will tell

someone, you can't stay in whatever sin situation you're living in, as a lifestyle, AND be a christian.

Last week we asked some compelling questions. We said; 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've got Saul who was on his way to Antioch to murder christians and suddenly Jesus shows up and knocks him down and orders him to become a christian. He does! Then later on you've got Lydia who was at a quiet spot with other women along a river bank enjoying a time of prayer when Paul shares about Jesus with them, and it says simply; *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* Acts 16:14

Some get called very quietly. Some get called and come in fighting to stay out. Let's look at what just happened with this rich young ruler who had everything going for him as far as the world would judge but who Jesus sort of stopped at the gate and said, there's only room for one ruler in this kingdom.

*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."*

The invitation was offered. Jesus would have loved to follow through on His side of the bargain. He loved this man. But the man calculated the cost and went away without Jesus.

*23 But when he had heard these things, he became very sad; for he was extremely rich.*

He wanted to add Jesus to his portfolio. Eternal life. Salvation. The kingdom

of God; plus wealth and status and everything he already possessed. But Jesus wouldn't allow him to come in with all the baggage. So, he did the math, he was sad, because he couldn't give up his extreme riches in order to have life. He couldn't walk away from family in order to have a new family in the kingdom.

Mark says; *But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.*

In my 50 years as a christian, how often I have wished I had control over this process. Someone who you really love and you want them to have what you have and you pray for them and encourage them but it doesn't happen. No control. If we had been there this day, this incident would have been painful. Jesus and the disciples are going to have a conversation about this exact pain.

*24 And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"*

Is anybody actually astonished by those words? We read that and we're like, no it isn't. What difference does it make if you're rich? Rich people can become christians. They do, all the time.

Actually, to compound the problem, everybody in America except the poorest of the poor are probably richer than this particular rich man. We're all rich. It isn't hard Jesus. You just pray the prayer and accept Jesus into your heart. Not hard at all.

Then He compounds the problem for us; *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."*

Can a camel go through the eye of a needle? I can't even get a tiny thread to go through the eye of a needle. Maybe we can reduce the camel to individual cells and shoot him through one cell at a time with a laser. The re-assembly would be problematic. It's a rhetoric question. Of course NOT.

It's the lesser to the greater argument that Jesus loves. A camel through a needle would be simple by comparison to a rich man getting saved. Camel through a needle. Impossible. Rich man getting saved. Even more impossible! REALLY impossible. The camel is easy by comparison.

*26 And they who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"*

The rich man came asking how to have eternal life. After he leaves, Jesus talks about entering the kingdom of God. How difficult it is for those rich with the stuff of this world to leave it behind in order to have life, the kingdom as opposed to this world. And those present, the disciples ask this question; then, who can be saved. Eternal life, kingdom of God, salvation are all the same essence. All of those terms are used interchangeably here. And that's the question we want to contemplate this morning. *"Then who can be saved?"*

Jesus gives us the answer; *27 But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God."*

Jesus introduces us to a doctrine here that is difficult. This is a problematic doctrine for men. Our natural fallen inclination is to hate this doctrine because it goes against our fallen pride. Salvation is impossible. It's out of reach for men to accomplish. Regeneration, the quickening of a dead spirit within man is no more possible than a physically dead man using his mind to bring life back to his dead body.

*27 But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God."*

God saves those who He sovereignly chooses to save. That statement has divided the church and continues to divide the church for centuries. There are solid christians in this village that we all know and do not question their salvation who would be inclined to get up and leave this gathering this morning because of disagreement over what I just stated. God saves those who He sovereignly chooses to save.

That's what Jesus just said. You don't have to like it. Better perhaps to leave the emotions out of it and simply say, obviously, I don't understand what Jesus just clearly said.

The disciples ask a very simple question with some exasperation because of the non-salvation that has just occurred with a candidate they considered to be supremely suited FOR salvation.

A fine young man of superb intelligence and character comes to Jesus, bows down in humility before Him, a rich young ruler bowing before a homeless man, asking what must I do to be saved.

Jesus gives him opportunity to acknowledge his sinfulness before a Holy God and he does not. Then Jesus gives him the opportunity to demonstrate in reality that Jesus is Lord of all things, and the man does not submit to the Lordship of Jesus. He evaluates the value of his earthly treasure against the treasure of having Jesus, and he makes his choice. Jesus isn't worth the personal cost to him. And he retreats with sadness.

Jesus makes the observation that a camel has a better shot at getting through the eye of a needle than a rich man has of gaining salvation. And the astonished disciples ask the obvious question. Who, then, CAN be saved. And Jesus gives us the answer that is so troubling to our fallen pride;

*27 But He said, "The things impossible with men are possible with God."*

God saves those who He sovereignly chooses to save. Salvation is simply impossible for men to accomplish. The eternal quickening of a dead spirit to life is impossible for dead men to accomplish. Impossible for men, but not impossible for God.

That opens to us the uncomfortable realisation that God is solely in control of who comes into His kingdom, and who does not. Let's consider this difficult truth for a few brief minutes then and at least understand what this book clearly says about a difficult issue that all of us grapple with to some extent.

In Exodus 33 Moses asks to see God's glory, and inextricably linked to that request about understanding God's glory is this doctrine of sovereign election.

Moses says let me see your glory, God says here's my glory, I choose;  
18 *Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!"* 19 *And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion."*

The question was glory. The answer was sovereignty of choice. We don't have to like it. We don't even have to understand it. But you need to acknowledge the connection. Glory equals Sovereignty. *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.*

Paul uses this exact Exodus passage to declare the sovereignty of God in salvation in Romans 9. God saves His chosen elect. Their names are written in a book of remembrance before they were born. Before the foundation of the world. God had already chosen those who would be His possession.

That's what Jesus is telling the disciples here in this moment of exasperation. Q; If that guy can't be saved, then who CAN be saved. A; with men it's impossible, but with God, all things are possible. God saves who He chooses.

*"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. John 6:37*

Do you see what this doctrine does to evangelism. We have for centuries now been lowering the bar, lowering the bar trying to get salvation so easy and so cheap that anyone who ever raises a hand in an invitation, anyone who is in any situation contrary to God's commands, anyone, anytime, for any reason or no reason, can be a christian by believing just about anything they want about Jesus. Easy believism. And easier and easier and easier. The bar goes down down down.

The net is full of fish. Good fish, worthless fish. The wheat field is full of something. Looks like wheat, but on closer inspection, it's mostly tares. The disciples are exasperated that the bar is so high. Couldn't you have cut this guy some slack Jesus and let him come in? Couldn't you have lowered the bar just a little?

Here's the division in the church. If salvation is man caused, solely by man's choice, man's will, you want to get the bar as low as possible to be able to sweep more people into the kingdom.

OTOH if salvation is solely the sovereign choice of God who grants repentance and quickens dead spirits to life, lowering the bar and creating the First Such and Such Church of the Tares is not only pointless, it's counter productive.

The world is looking at the church to see if there's anything real that would draw them in and what they see is a bunch of tares all fighting amongst themselves and also fighting with the wheat, and not exhibiting anything different or better than the world they're already in. Sometimes the world lives better than the so-called church and their condemnations are real.

In Acts 3 we are looking at the first beginnings of the church age as the church is being formed by God at Jerusalem, and Peter is preaching what? Acts 3:19  
*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; ...*

Paul says; *First to those in Damascus and Jerusalem, then to everyone in the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I declared that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds worthy of their repentance.* Acts 26:20

Salvation happens with repentance. A turning away from this world and a turning towards God's authority to reign as Lord. Jesus made that offer to the rich young ruler when He spoke of keeping the Law, which no sinful human can do. The law kills. The law is an invitation to repent because of the sin dwelling within you that no one can control perfectly according to God's

standard.

The new testament authors speak of repentance as something that God grants.

*Acts 5:31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

*Acts 11:18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."*

*2Tim. 2:25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,*

The first quote was Peter. The second quote was all of the apostles at Jerusalem hearing about the first conversions among gentiles. And the final quote was Paul. In each case, the repentance that leads to life is something that God grants.

Jesus says; John 6:65 *"This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has granted it to him."*

The entire chapter of Ephesians 2 defines this quickening from the dead that God accomplishes as He adds to His church, His own possession by His choice. But to condense a bit let me read vs. 8 - 10;  
*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and **that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God**; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast. 10 For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The faith that saves you is a gift from God. The repentance that removes you out of this world and into God's kingdom is part of that gift of faith. None of those things happens because of our will. We were dead in our sins. God quickens our spirits to both believe and repent. That's why Paul says we are His workmanship.

God accomplishes everything beginning with quickening our dead spirits to life. Suddenly the lights come on. Suddenly we hear something in God's word and we believe. Suddenly we repent of our past sins and give our hearts completely to belong to Jesus. God causes all of those things to happen in us.

If this doctrine is true, and it is, it means you could set up a bulletproof enclosure right in the middle of 100,000 muslims all bowing on their prayer rugs at Mecca and preach repentance in Jesus from God's word, and the elect in that crowd would hear and believe.

Nothing to do with the message. Nothing to do with the requirements of God's moral law. Nothing to do with anything inside dead human spirits. Everything to do with God's electing grace calling His chosen elect out of this world and into His kingdom as He quickens their dead spirits and grants repentance and gives the gift of faith. God does it all.

Every person in heaven will be there because;

- God chose them before the foundation of the world
- God quickened their dead spirits to life
- God granted repentance from past sin
- God supplied the gift of faith to believe

That's the answer to the disciples exasperated question. Then who can be saved! Every person that God chooses and calls into His kingdom will be saved.

What about this rich young ruler. Some christians with over-active imaginations speculate that this person was pre-conversion apostle Paul. Everything about him could be said of Paul. Just because someone does the math and rejects the treasure on one day doesn't mean God won't quicken them from the dead in His perfect time. This man could have been Saul of Tarsus for all we know.

Men have zero control over who and how and when God decides to call

someone into His kingdom. We pray, we preach, we teach, we encourage, we share God's truth. Plant the seed. Water, water, water, that's all we can do for our part. Only God can cause the increase.

In Mark 4 Jesus gives a parable about how this phenomenon works between the worker and the life. *26 And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts up and grows—how, he himself does not know.*

All we can do is spread good seeds. We have no control over life that occurs while we're sleeping or awake. We don't cause the life. All we can do is throw out good seed and wait.

Jesus speaks of this mystical phenomenon beyond our control as he explains how life happens in a dead spirit in John 3 to Nicodemus. You're all very familiar with this story;

*1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (How do I do it! I need to understand how to DO it!) 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (How! How do I control this? How do I make this happen?) 8 "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

Men have no more control over the quickening of dead spirits to life than they have control over the wind. With men this is impossible. But with God, all

things are possible!

Let me show you another familiar passage that you may not have considered concerning this truth. Very familiar words; John chapter 1;

*9 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,*

That sounds very man caused, doesn't it. Every old time evangelist used John 1:12 to call on people to receive Jesus. Do this, do this, do this, close those eyes, raise those hands, I see that hand, yes, yes, I see those hands, now I want you, if you raised your hand to come down to the front, we've got some folks here that want to pray with you. But we leave off verse 13;

*13 who were **born** not of blood, **nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.***

Did you receive Jesus? Was your life forever changed? Is there evidence of regeneration caused by a quickened spirit and new life together with Him. Then the reason isn't because YOU did anything, it's because God did it all.

We can't finish a message like this about such a difficult thing to try to understand without some balance that is impossible for us to comprehend. Back to John chapter 3 and Nicodemus;

*14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 that **whoever** believes may in Him have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

Whoever. Anyone can come. No limits. The offer is open to all peoples of every nation. Anyone can believe and repent and leave this troubled world

behind them as they come into God's kingdom, God's authority to reign.

Listen to Isaiah, over 700 years before Jesus died for us;

*1 "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost.*

*2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread,  
And your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,  
And delight yourself in abundance.*

*3 "Incline your ear and come to Me.  
Listen, that you may live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
According to the faithful mercies shown to David.*

The offer is open to every one. Who-so-ever will, may come.

*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 not the prosperity gospel. We don't walk away from this world and it's things in order to have a multiplication of this world and it's things. That philosophy would be the prosperity gospel.

We walk away from this world, and it's stuff, in order to possess the treasure. Jesus IS the treasure. We walk away from whatever is required of us in this world, in order to have Jesus.

He pours out His Holy Spirit on us. We gain Christ. And the Holy Spirit, the fellowship with God of very God that is ours, that's only the engagement ring for later.

Having Christ, having the spiritual treasure of knowing God, intimately and personally, the debt of sin removed, His righteousness gained, is better than anything or everything that this world can give. But that's just the downpayment. The promise of the wealth in our future.

Even so, God is generous with us. He gives us plentiful good things of this world to enjoy. But that isn't the treasure, He is the treasure.