Three Others: Faithful to the End

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Preacher: Emily Hatton

[0:00] So this morning we're wrapping up our series on the twelve disciples and after having looked at Andrew, Simon Peter, Matthew, James, Philip, John, Thomas, Nathaniel, and Judas Iscariot.

This morning we're looking at the other three. And I'll admit when I was preparing for this morning I did have to take a moment to work out who the other three were. The thing is each of them share their name with another one of the disciples. So we have Judas, the son of James though, not the traitor.
We have Simon, the zealot, the political one. We have James, the lesser, not to be confused with James the greater. And I wonder how it felt for Judas, James, and Simon to be one of the other twelve disciples who were less known in comparison to the other nine.
To be so unknown that they had to clarify which one they were. You know, I've met so many Emilies. That happens when you have the most popular name of your birth year.
Thanks mum and dad. I've met so many other Emilies in my time that I'll often find myself in the street hearing my name being called only to turn around and it's not me that's being called.
[1:23] Or it's not me who's being spoken about. And I imagine Simon overhearing a conversation between the disciples.

Have you heard Jesus is going to build his church on Simon? Only for Simon to go, ooh, I've got a glimpse of my future. And then they go, no, not you Simon, it's Simon Peter.
Or Judas hearing whispers of, did you hear? It was Judas who betrayed Jesus. Only for him to have to pipe up and go, no, no, no, no, not me.
It was Judas Iscariot, not me. I'm innocent. I'm loyal. But these three disciples, they aren't so well known in comparison to the other better known comrades.
In the story for today, we can gather that all 12 disciples were there when the rich ruler approached Jesus to find out what he must do to inherit eternal life.
[2:23] In the passage, the man comes to Jesus with his question. You see, he's been following the Ten Commandments for all of his life. So what else must he do?

And I find it interesting that he recognizes something about Jesus that moves him to a realization that walking with God, faith, isn't just about following rules.
There has to be something else. He sees that Jesus is offering the eternal life, not based on how well we keep the rules, which is something that the Pharisees have been teaching, but that there was something else required of them, of us.
And Jesus tells the ruler that whilst he's been following all of the commandments, he still lacked one thing. He needed to sell all he had, give to the poor, and then he would have treasure in heaven.
And Jesus says, then come follow me. In other words, stop being so preoccupied with possession and earthly gains. Only when you live by kingdom economy will you find true wealth.
[3:34] Sort your priorities, then come and follow me. And I wonder, and I'm talking to myself here too, when we look at our own lives and ask a similar question, what would Jesus' response to us be?

I wonder if you'd be up for trying something with me this morning. See, I've been reading and learning about some of the old saints of the church. And St. Ignatius gives us this really wonderful meditative way of reading the Bible, dwelling in scripture.
It's really simple and I'll lead us through it. But all you need to do is start by closing your eyes. And if you think you might fall asleep, then maybe just cast your eyes down to your lap, if that's a risk.
So I'm going to read part of the passage again. And I want you to imagine yourself in the scene. Notice where you are in the story. Notice where you're sitting or standing.

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What you see, feel, hear. A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
[4:48] Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God. You know the commandments. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said.
When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 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. When he heard this, he became very sad. Because he was very wealthy.
Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.
Indeed, 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. And with your eyes still closed, I wonder where you are in the scene.
[5:53] I wonder what you see. I wonder where you are in the gathered crowd. Notice what you see. Where is Jesus in proximity to you?

What does the crowd look like? What are people wearing? How do your clothes feel on your skin? Notice what you smell.
Is the air hot, dusty, arid? Notice what you feel. Can you feel bodies close up beside you, peering together, look at this radical teacher.
Can you feel the breeze on your skin? Can you feel the sun on your face? Notice what you hear. Can you hear the birds, the hubbub of conversation, the outrage that Jesus told the man to sell everything he had to give to the poor?
I wonder what Jesus' voice sounds like to you. Notice the gentleness in his voice, the love in his eyes as he looks at each person gathered around him.
[7:12] And I want you to imagine for a moment that Jesus now turns to you with a gentle yet serious look on his face. And he looks you in the eyes and says your name.

Let's talk about your priorities. I ask just one more thing of you. What's he asking?
What's he saying? If you're unsure, maybe it's the first thing that popped into your head. But notice how that makes you feel. When you're ready, open your eyes again.
I wonder what the Lord might have been speaking to you about. What might he have asked you to do? Maybe, like the ruler, it was to give up everything you own and give it to the poor.
Maybe it was to give up one thing. Or to take up one thing. Maybe there's some misaligned priorities in our lives that he wants to speak to us about.
[8:22] And what a joy it is that God loves to work with us to make our lives reflect him more and more clearly every day. Something the rich young ruler got wrong was that he thought that he could do something to inherit the eternal life.

But that's not Jesus' way. That's not his purpose. In fact, we can all inherit eternal life. We all have inherited it when we gave our lives to Jesus.
Or if we haven't yet, we will. And it's a wonderful gift. And that is the good news of the gospel. The grace and mercy of his death and resurrection that it's not by works, but by grace through faith.
But this discipleship journey is a whole life thing. And it requires our everything. And sometimes, like the man, that will require giving up our worldly wealth.
Whatever that wealth might be. And I'd like to point out here, before I carry on talking about wealth, that giving up everything you own, giving up, giving financially to charity, might not be Jesus' call for everybody in the room.
[9:38] Although, please do consider your giving to Christchurch. I know so many people who have wonderfully full, healthy bank accounts, yet that facilitates their ministry of generosity.

And there are people who maybe can't give financially right now. And that's okay. Perhaps with these people giving in time, or hospitality, or service, or some other way, is something that they can do.
My point is that this specific call, when we read it in the Bible, of giving up everything you have, and selling it, and giving to the poor, in that particular way, isn't for everyone, but perhaps there is something to consider in it.
In our own lives, in our own ministries, and walks with the Lord. I won't make assumptions about bank accounts, about education, and qualifications, and home situations, and the things that we have access to.

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What God asks of us, is between us and him. However, in comparison to millions of people around the world, we have so much in the world, in the way of worldly wealth.
[10:48] Swish Goswami, a Canadian entrepreneur, says, if you have food in your fridge, clothes on your body, and a roof over your head, a place to sleep, you're richer than 75% of the entire world.

If you have money in your wallet, and can go anywhere you want, you're among 18% of the world's most wealthy people. If you're alive and healthy, you're more blessed than millions of people, who will not survive this week.
And if you actually can read this message, and understand it, you're more fortunate than 3 billion people around the world, who are blind, deaf, or illiterate. But he ends by saying, count your blessings, view your problems with perspective, most importantly, be grateful and happy.
And that makes me think about what we define as wealth. Because we have so much stuff, don't we? We strive for this worldly view of success, and status, and riches, and significance.
But what is real, true wealth? Is it money in our bank account? Or is it what God offers us? Because when the rich man is sad, because he doesn't want to give up his wealth, the riches that he'd stored up for himself, Jesus says it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
[12:15] And it doesn't take a genius to know that it's impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But I personally struggle to even thread a needle sometimes. So Jesus' disciples were perhaps very reasonable in asking Jesus, then who can enter the kingdom of heaven?

To whom is eternal life even accessible? When I was reflecting on this in preparation for this morning, I had this kind of picture come to mind.
You know when you go to a train station, you have to beep your ticket so that you can go through those electric gates? I had this picture of someone trying to go through the gates with all their backpacks and their suitcases and their shopping bags and everything.
Except when you try and go through with much more than a backpack, it's quite difficult. In fact, sometimes it can be impossible to go through with all your stuff. You can't manipulate your way through one of those gates.
Not even a first class ticket would get you through one of those gates. So you have to lay down your stuff. You need someone to come along and help you with your stuff so you can go through. And Jesus is saying the same thing to the man trying to enter the kingdom of God.
[13:31] That if he's got all his stuff, all his stored up wealth, then no kind of special benefit is going to be given to him just because he kept some rules.

He needs to lay down his stuff in order to enter the pearly gates. He needs to work out whether his riches on earth that he'd gained for himself now are more important than the eternal riches of eternal life with God.
Our sights should be set on Jesus and what he offers us in the eternal life with his eternal riches beyond anything that we could ever store up for ourselves.
Jesus, in his grace, reminds us that what's impossible for man and woman is made possible for us by God. He has made a way for all of us.
As Paul writes in Ephesians, not by works, but by grace through faith. But there is this cost, just as there was a cost for those 12 disciples.
[14:45] We've heard about the disciples who left their jobs, their families, their homes to follow Jesus because they knew that life and faith wasn't just about following Jesus.

It wasn't just about following rules, just like Jesus has pointed out to the rich ruler. Important though, those rules were. Following Jesus is a whole life choice, a complete way of life.
It's not just about coming to church on a Sunday or saying grace before a meal. It's about being willing to lay our lives down, our whole lives, for him, for his kingdom.
Being willing to leave behind comfort and wealth in order to follow him and to go where he sends us and do what he asks of us. As we've said, the rich ruler, he was really sad because he didn't want to give up his wealth.
He didn't want to lose it. But the sad thing is that the ruler's response was that Jesus was promising something even greater. An inheritance of real riches in heaven.
[15:57] Endless joy, perfect peace, eternal presence of the Father. An end to suffering and shame. A world without grief and sadness.

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The ruler didn't want to give up what he had now for the sake of God or even for the sake of what he could gain through God. And I wonder if sometimes we can relate to that.
Do we live in this world of instant gratification where we skip a song five seconds in on Spotify if it hasn't grabbed our attention? Or we're ordering next day delivery on the expense of somebody else's Sabbath.
And I'll put my hand up and say that I am rubbish. When I decide that I want something, I struggle to wait and buy it and I want it now. But I remember this study that we did in my psychology degree where children were given a marshmallow.
And they all knew the rules, they all understood the rules that they could eat the marshmallow now but if they waited, they could get two marshmallows later. Despite knowing the rules, mostly all of them ate the marshmallow straight away because they couldn't see that the delayed gratification was far greater than the instant gratification.
[17:21] And we live in a world where despite the consequences, so often don't we just want that marshmallow right now? We want the riches, the blessings, the good stuff now but what if we were willing to wait, surrender everything because he asks us to?

What if we trusted that the great stuff, the real stuff, is to come even if it means laying down something now? Even if it means living slightly less comfortably?
Trusting that God has something far better for us than we could possibly create or store up for ourselves. And this is the way of life that Jesus is inviting us into.
To live by his kingdom principles. He's inviting us to give it up, to lay it down so that he can show us the real deal. And as well as living in this way of instant gratification, our culture tells us that we need to be significant, that making a name for ourselves by being seen and acknowledged for what we do is of utmost importance.
But it's not. See, our actions won't always be recognized in this world. Our choices and our sacrifices very often won't be seen for what they are by other people.
[18:47] See, those three disciples, James, Simon, and Judas, they were listed at the beginning of the gospel under Jesus' twelve disciples but we don't really hear of them again.

We don't read their names as often as some of the others. But they were willing to give up everything they had. Family, comfortable lifestyles, work, reputation.
all of it so that they could follow Jesus' call. Because that call to come and follow him was so compelling.
Because that they could see the way of life of Jesus, following him was just too good to be missed. I wonder if you know, I recently learned this, that all the twelve disciples, except for one, were martyred.
all of them killed for their faith. All but one. So John, who wasn't killed for his faith, actually survived an attempt and then he was exiled to Ephesus where he wrote Revelation.
[19:58] But that means that even our other three today were martyred. They were willing to die for Jesus, clubbed to death, sawn in half, thrown off a temple and then stoned to death.

But they gave up everything they had, including their very lives for the sake of the kingdom. Even though their names aren't well recorded amongst the others.
Even though they weren't so recognized as others. Even though we don't really remember what they did as well as the others. Because it's not about what other people think.
It's not about gathering up riches and success and significance for ourselves. themselves. And so I guess we land with a couple of questions. Even if people don't get it, don't recognize it, don't thank us for it, are we willing to give it all over to Jesus anyway?
Are we willing to give up everything to follow Jesus, even if it means being criticized or being unpopular or leaving behind our kushti lifestyles?
[21:17] It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. So are we ready and willing to give up a life?

Are we ready and willing to live a life of surrender and obedience to God so that we can serve him fully, body, mind and spirit in obedience here on earth until we receive the fullness of his wonderful glorious riches in the eternal life?
Shall we pray? Amen. Thank you Lord that you have so much more for us than we could possibly ask or imagine.

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Thank you that you invite us to your radical way of living in this world of instant gratification, of searching for significance, of storing up wealth for ourselves.
Would you teach us to lay down that urge for fame and fortune in order to build with you your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven?
[22:38] Would you teach us to live a life of surrender not for our glory but for yours? Amen.

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