

Walking with Jesus in Lent: Walking in Trust

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Preacher: Rev John Young

[0:00] Thank you, Joe. Shall we pray? Loving Father, our prayer is now that you would open up our hearts and minds! to hear what you want to say to us this morning.

! He's attracting a lot of attention, so there's lots of people gathering and traveling with him, and there's lots of discussion and lots of questions along the way.

And in today's passage, it's a question that's been asked by someone. All we're told is he's a ruler, and then we find out he's quite rich as well, so it's a rich ruler. And he asks the question, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And you know, when you think about it, isn't that the question? Isn't that the biggest question of all? I tend to think even the most hardened of atheists, in their weaker moments, might wonder or hope or long for this idea that there's more to life, that there's life beyond death.

And of course, if you begin to think about that, then you begin to think, well, how do I get there? What must I do to inherit eternal life?

[1:38] And it's a question, I think, the world's most renowned philosophers and religious teachers have been pondering since the beginning of time.

And now someone has had the courage to ask Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And I can imagine the silence descending as people hear what he's asked.

And now everybody's sort of leaning in, because they all want to know the answer. And I find it quite interesting that Jesus doesn't give an answer straight away.

Instead, he probes a bit further. It's like he wants to know why this ruler has asked the question. So he says, well, you know the commandments.

And then he lists, interesting, he lists the commandments that come towards the end. He doesn't list the ones at the beginning about God, but he lists all the commandments about how we treat each other.

[2:41] And it turns out that the man is an absolute model of righteousness. All these I have kept from my youth, he says.

I've always kept the commandments. I've always taken them seriously. Which means that when he was a wee boy, and all the other boys were heading off to steal apples or whatever you do when you're a wee boy, he was going, no, I don't want to be part of that.

And when he was a teenager and all his pals are, you know, exploring all the temptations of teenage life or whatever it is that teenagers do, he's in the synagogue.

He's having nothing of it. So he's taken these things very, very seriously. All these things I have kept from my youth. But, and to me this is the interesting thing, and this is what Jesus is getting at. If this is the case, why is he asking this question? I mean, surely he's been living a good life, hasn't he?

[3:42] So why does he still need some sort of reassurance? And I think his problem is the same problem that all the philosophers of the world have, and all the religious teachers of the world have, who think that somehow eternal life is dependent on what we do.

Because, you know, he says in his question, what must I do? It's all there. If you look at some of the things that come up when the philosophers and the religious teachers of the world are trying to answer this question, their answer usually involves things that we have to do.

Like you have to obey the Ten Commandments. Or you have to observe the seven pillars of Islam. Or the eight precepts of Buddha.

You know, the list goes on and on. It's always things that we have to do. And the basic idea is that eternal life is dependent on how good we are.

And how good we are can be measured by how well we do all these things that they tell us to do. And clearly this young man has been brought up with that idea. But as Jesus says, no one is good. [5:06] Only God is good. Doesn't matter how hard we try, none of us will ever be good enough for God. And so however hard we try, we too will always lack that assurance that this young ruler is longing for.

We'll go around the whole of our lives hoping we've done enough. You know, we have in our mind this idea of a set of scales and we're hoping the good is outweighing the bad.

And oh dear. But we'll never know for sure. And to me this illustrates for us the real fundamental difference between what the philosophies and religions of the world are offering us and what Jesus is offering us.

Because he's offering us something completely different. Jesus teaches us that there is indeed an eternal life on offer.

And that the best is yet to come. But whether or not we inherit it is not dependent on how good we are.

[6:22] Or how well we've kept the Ten Commandments. Or how well we've stuck to the rules. Being a Christian is not about demonstrating what we can do for God.

Being a Christian is about accepting what God has already done for us. It's not about how good we are. It's about how good God has been.

Already been. For us. Because he loves us. You know that famous verse. You know that famous verse. Most people know it off by heart. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. It's all about what God has done for us. And whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. Being a Christian is not primarily about being good.

Being a Christian is primarily about being faithful to this God. Faithful to the God who loved us so much that he was willing even to give his life for us.

[7:31] Faithful to the God. Faithful to the God. And what does it mean to be faithful to this God? What does it mean in practice? Well, that's what comes out through this passage actually.

If you look for it. Because Jesus says, Being faithful is following me. he calls us to follow he calls the ruler to follow him he calls us to follow him to let go to put our trust in him follow me he says come and join me as we journey through life together and if you do you will find that you're not alone you'll find that you have become part of a community of people and they're not perfect people they're not models of righteousness I mean I don't know about you but you know when you look around in church you do not always see models I'm going to be careful what I say here but the best description I've ever had of what church is is church is a community of people who know that their sins have been forgiven you know a church is a community of forgiven sinners and that keeps us humble and that keeps us loving so if we follow Jesus then we're invited to become part of this community of forgiven sinners a community of disciples walking together in the company of Jesus learning from his teaching guided and strengthened by the power of his Holy Spirit sharing in the blessings of his presence and sharing those blessings with everyone else we meet along the way and if you do this if you follow Jesus that is when you will begin to know what it is to be part of the kingdom of God on earth it's interesting that Gordon used the image of Jesus as the light of the world one of my there's a theologian called Graham Tomlin and I heard him speak once and the image he used has stayed with me it's an image he uses to try and help us understand this whole idea of the kingdom of God and he says wherever Jesus goes it's like there's a spotlight on him and now you know if you're when you're in the theater and it's dark and there's an actor on stage wherever that actor goes if the technician is doing their job there'll be a spotlight following him wherever he goes so Graham Tomlin says it's a bit like that with Jesus wherever he goes he's surrounded by a glow of the kingdom and he says and whoever comes within that glow experiences the blessings of the kingdom so it doesn't matter who they are they will have the opportunity to experience grace and mercy and healing and peace because that's what Jesus brings and wherever he goes you know and if you think through the implications so there's there are hundreds thousands of people in Jesus time on earth who came within that glow wherever Jesus went people were experiencing these things and when they experience those things they go wow this is different

this is special but then they have a choice then they go wow this is special and then they go back to where they were before in which case the glow passes on and they're left behind in the darkness or do they think oh

I would like this to be part of and then they go with Jesus they follow him it's an image that I find really helpful because that means that as they're following him other people are being blessed by them because they're within the kingdom glow so we come here and we we worship in the presence of the living God every Sunday we are coming within the glow of his presence but when we go out into the world if we're still following him we're taking that glow with us wherever we go we're taking it back out into our homes we're taking it into our workplaces we're taking it into our golf clubs wherever in the shopping centre we too if Jesus is with us will be surrounded by the glow of his presence and people will experience the blessings of his kingdom not through us but through Jesus' presence with us the kingdom of God on earth it's a lovely image and that rich young ruler Jesus saying follow me stay within the glow and you'll know the blessings of my kingdom on earth but and you're all thinking this I know well most of you if you're still awake are still thinking this I haven't yet answered the scary question have I?

I haven't answered the scary question if I am to follow Jesus do I have to give up all my possessions? do I have to take a vow of poverty?

[13:15] can only poor people make good Christians? and it does sound a very noble ideal doesn't it? a real sort of noble calling but if you stop and think about it it's not very practical because if everybody here oops careful if everybody here gave up everything they had in order to follow Jesus then we'd all starve or we'd all have to live off everybody else who's not following Jesus if you sort of follow my meaning and even Jesus in his lifetime had people who walked with him who used from their wealth to supply his and his disciples' needs particularly women interestingly enough so I don't think what Jesus is saying here is that if you want to follow me you have to give up everything you have in fact do I have to give up everything I think is the wrong question that this passage poses

I think the question Jesus is posing in today's passage is rather is there anything in my life today that is preventing me from following Jesus or holding me back from following Jesus because we all have things in our lives that try to prevent us from following him and the word we use for those things is it's an idol it's an idol is getting between us and God an idol is holding us back is preventing us so for some people wealth has indeed become an idol Jesus says it's really hard if you're rich because it's a you know temptation I know people who are so obsessed and excited by creating money and then holding on to money that it takes over their lives for example the man in today's reading but as Jesus said in another part of the Bible you have to choose you can't serve money and you can't serve God you have to choose which one you're going to serve but for other people it's not wealth for some people it might be ambition you know their ambition just dominates all their decision making it takes over everything it becomes the number one priority in which case it's become an idol and for other people still and this is a more subtle thing it can be friendships relationships that may seem good on the surface but are subtly holding us back preventing us from following Jesus from being the people he wants us to be and then for some people it's simply pride I don't need God's help to be good I don't need to be part of a church to be a believer I can manage on my own thank you very much the truth is of course that none of us can manage on our own so that raises the question is there anything in your life today that might be holding you back from following Jesus he doesn't say that life with him is not going to be challenging and it's not going to be costly he doesn't say that but at the end of the passage he does give a wonderful promise that's sort of twofold it's right there in verse it's there in verse 29 and verse 30 and the first part of the promise is the words many times more whoever gives up whatever it is you have to give up will receive many times more in the kingdom in this present life he's not talking so much about the future about the present life that's the first part of the promise

Lindsay and I as you know lived abroad for a number of years before we came into ministry and that was our experience that you know God supplies so much more than anything we have to give up but and it's probably your experience too the thing though that really impacted our faith journey when we were abroad we were living in a Muslim country was the Christians we met who used to be Muslims and who had given up Islam to become Christians which if you know anything about

Islam is a definite no-no you just cannot do that and so these people knowing that had still done it which meant they'd lost everything they'd lost their homes their families their loved ones their job opportunities they even had to change their names sometimes but what humbled Lindsay and I was if you ever asked them was it worth it do you have any regrets the answer invariably was being no because what we have now is so much more because through their involvement in this community of forgiven sinners which we call the church they'd they'd find new mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers that God had supplied so much more so that's the first part of Jesus' promise okay and the second part again this is in verse 30 received many times more in this time or in this life and the second part and in the age to come eternal life and that brings us to the final question which we haven't answered which is what does Jesus mean by treasures in heaven here's my thoughts I do not think he means Rolex watches or I don't know fancy handbags or gold or jewels when you think about it material possessions in heaven they just don't mix do they these things won't be worth much so I don't think he means that at all I think he means people that our treasures in heaven will be people and let me just explain and I'm going to read my notes here because I don't want to mess this one up okay our treasures in heaven will be the people we will meet there who've gone before us if you like who will be able to look back on their time on earth and say that something we did or said helped them in their journey of faith helped them to follow Jesus treasures in heaven so what have we learned well this is what I learned from that passage that Jesus is not looking for us to be good so much as to be faithful and to be faithful is to be willing to follow him and to trust him with our lives so just for a few moments can I encourage you all just to take a time of silence maybe close your eyes if you find that helpful and ask yourselves the question what has God been saying to me this morning what has God what jumps out from what I've been hearing that God has been saying to me and how am I going to respond to that this is something it's just between you and God so let's just take that time in silence right now loving Father we thank you that you are offering us the unsearchable riches of Christ and so whatever you've been saying to us this morning whatever we might have resolved to do we know we cannot do it without your help but we also know that nothing is impossible for God and so we offer you back our lives now please take us and use us for your glory we ask this in Jesus name

[22:37] Amen Amen Thank you.