

All! That's All!

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

- [0 : 0 0] The question is never, will I be a disciple? Everyone is a disciple of someone or of some way or of some ideology. So we never need to ask the question, will I be a disciple?
- The question is always, whose disciple will I be? Whose word will I trust? Whose way will I take? Whose ideology will I embrace? Who will have the final authority in my life?
- Every new situation of every new day, every turning of the pages of our history poses the question anew and calls for a fresh decision.
- The question is never, will I be? The question is always, whose will I be? Whose disciple will I be? I've been suggesting that in these tumultuous times, it is time for the church worldwide to become much more intentional about being and making disciples of Jesus Christ.
- I have been suggesting that we need to ask about all of our church activities. How is this helping make disciples? Who can make disciples? Who can make disciples?
- [1 : 1 4] How does all the church activity build faithful, vibrant, winsome, contagious disciples of the God-man? Our text today is another tough text.
- As you are learning about me, I do not shy away from the tough texts. Not because I have a handle on them, I do not. Not because I'm brave, I am not.
- But because the tough text cannot be avoided. Sooner or later, something happens to us in our walk with Jesus Christ that focuses the issues addressed in the tough texts.
- As I said last Sunday, I would much rather preach the texts that celebrate all the wonderful blessings of discipleship. But they are, after all, blessings of discipleship.
- Blessings that come to us only when we stand up, get in line behind Jesus, and actually walk down the road with Him. Our text today is Mark, chapter 10, verses 17 through 31.
- [2 : 2 3] Here we have the moving story of the encounter between Jesus and the so-called rich young ruler. As I read the text, and then as I attempt to preach it, I want you to keep one thing in the forefront of your mind.
- One thing in the forefront of your mind. And it is that Jesus loved that man. Jesus really loved that man. Jesus wanted this man to enter the kingdom of God, to enter into His intimacy with the Father, to inherit eternal life.
- Jesus really, really, really loved the man, and you could see the love in Jesus' eyes. If you are able, would you stand for the reading of the gospel?
- Mark 10, 17 to 31. And Jesus was setting out on a journey. And a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him and began asking Him, Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
- And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness.

[3 : 35] Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother. And he said to Jesus, Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up. And looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, One thing you lack.

Go, sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me. But at these words his face fell, and he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property.

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God. And the disciples were amazed at His words, but Jesus answered again and said to them, Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God.

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. And they were even more astonished and said to Him, Who then can be saved? Looking upon them, Jesus said, With men it is impossible, but not with God, for all things are possible with God.

Peter began to say to Him, Behold, we have left everything and followed you. And Jesus said, Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms for my sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life.

[5 : 03] But many who are first will be last, and the last first. Spirit of the living God, we believe that you inspired Mark to write these words down long ago.

And now, in your grace and mercy, will you help us receive this word and cause it to do its work in our lives?

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. The tragedy of this story lies in the fact that the rich young ruler started out so well.

He started out so well. Mark says that he ran up to Jesus. Literally, he raced toward Jesus. That was a courageous act. Luke calls him a ruler.

That is, he was a member of the ruling class, a member of the socially, politically, and religiously elite. And to the ruling class, Jesus of Nazareth and his words and his deeds were detestable.

[6 : 12] Any member of that class seen with this despised Nazarene would certainly be blacklisted and ostracized. But that did not prevent this man from meeting the rabbi who had words about eternal life.

He raced toward Jesus. Not only was that a courageous act, it was, according to that culture, an undignified act. No one of his social class ever ran in public for any reason.

In order to run, a man would have to lift the front of his robe, thereby exposing his undergarments, which was a shameful no-no for a ruler. But here was a chance to speak face-to-face with this man he had heard so much about, and he was not going to let this opportunity go.

So he threw stuffy social convention to the wind, and he raced toward Jesus. And he knelt down before Jesus. The man recognized that there was something special about this teacher, peasant though he may be.

He felt this surprising pull of reverence in the presence of this rabbi who spoke as no other had spoken. And in broad daylight, this rich young ruler knelt in the dust on that public highway.

[7 : 25] And while on his knees, he addresses Jesus as good. That was an uncommon way for anyone to address another human being. The rabbis used to say, there's nothing good but the law.

Good teacher, he says. The rich young ruler had sensed in Jesus something that warranted using this title of profound respect. And then, while still on his knees, he asked one of, if not the, most important question anyone can ever ask.

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? No pious jargon, no wordy philosophizing. He goes right to the fundamentals.

Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? The man had everything his society told him he needed to enjoy the good life. He had it all in abundance.

But apparently, he was feeling unfulfilled. And he had the integrity to admit it and come to Jesus. Apparently, this rich young ruler had heard Jesus speak before, or at least he'd had the reports from other people.

[8 : 29] And he knew that Jesus' major themes were the kingdom of God and eternal life. They always go together. The kingdom of God and eternal life. The life of the kingdom is eternal life.

Not just life that does not end, but life of a qualitatively different order. Life that God lives. Life that is in Jesus. Life that is Jesus. The life that Jesus claims to give.

What a way to begin. The man raced toward Jesus. He knelt down before Jesus. He called Jesus by the respectful title, Good Teacher. And then he posed the timeless question, What must I do to inherit eternal life?

Jesus welcomed the man, looked into the man's eyes, and in love, took the man and his questions seriously. Jesus' initial response has puzzled many people.

He says, Why do you call me Lord? There is no one... Why do you call me good? There is no one good except God alone. Was Jesus denying this title for himself?

[9 : 34] Was Jesus telling the man that he, Jesus, was not worthy to be called what only God can be called? I don't think so. I think, following the lead of John Calvin, that Jesus was deepening this man's already keen insight.

He was bringing the man to think even more deeply about the implications of his own word. Why do you call me good? Do you really believe that I am as good as the good law?

Do you really believe that I am as good as the good God of the good law? If you really think I am good, are you prepared to listen to me in all seriousness? Do you believe in my goodness enough to do what I am about to tell you to do?

I think that is what is going on in that question. Do you believe that Jesus is good? Do you believe that he is good enough that you would do whatever he tells you to do?

Jesus then began answering the man's question. Jesus said, You know the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother. The man, presumably still on his knees, looks up to Jesus and said, Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.

[10 : 49] Really? All these things? Jesus does not challenge the claim, at least not directly. Then looking into the man's eyes and feeling love for him.

Don't forget that. Feeling love for him, Jesus says, One thing you still lack. Go and sell all you possess and give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.

Boy, it takes your breath away. Jesus never soft-pedaled his call upon human lives. Jesus never deceived anyone.

Jesus never lured anyone into following him by hiding the implications, the costly implications. Now, it is extremely important to recognize that the essence of Jesus' answer to this rich young ruler's question is, Come, follow me.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Come, follow me. I'm going to emphasize that again. The essence of Jesus' answer to the rich young ruler is, Come, follow me.

[11 : 59] What must I do to inherit eternal life? Come, follow me. That's all. Now, in that setting, those words had immediate practicality. Get up off your knees now.

Get in line with me and my disciples and follow as I continue down the road. Come, follow me. Me. There's that pronoun again. Me. Jesus calls the man to himself.

For it is in relationship with him that the man will enter the kingdom. It is in relationship with him that the man will inherit eternal life. The man wants to know what it is that he can do to get eternal life.

There's only one do to do. Come, follow me. As Jesus prayed on the night before he went to the cross, this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

So please do not lose sight of this. The essence of Jesus' answer to the rich young ruler's question is, Come to me. Follow me. Okay. Why then does Jesus go on to say the other things he said?

[13 : 02] Why does Jesus remind this man of the commandments of the law, and why did Jesus tell the man to sell all he had and give to the poor? Let's work with the question about the law first.

I think Jesus brings the commandment into the discussion for two reasons. First, Jesus wanted the man to know that following him involved obedience to the commands of God.

This is so crucial to grasp in our time when grace is understood as negating God's commandments. Jesus is here again affirming the eternal validity of the law given to Moses so long ago.

Jesus does not do what many of his disciples try to do. That is, he does not drive a wedge between law and gospel. Following the good teacher, living in the kingdom of grace, having eternal life, enjoying intimacy with the Father, will take on the practical shape of obeying the Ten Commandments.

Remember what Jesus said near the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount. Do not think that I came to abolish the law. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. Following Jesus Christ into eternal life, into the kingdom, into the Father's heart, involves living out the commandments.

[14 : 21] The second reason for reminding the rich young ruler about the commandments is more important. The law calls us to the lawgiver. Genuine seeking to obey the commands leads one to seek the one who commands.

The law is not an end in itself. The law leads to a relationship with the Lord of the law, and apparently that is what the rich young ruler was missing. Notice the man's response.

Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up. I think he's saying, I've tried to obey the law all my life, but I'm unfulfilled. I'm missing something. The man had been living the form of life with God, but was not experiencing the reality of life with God.

He was going through all the motions, doing all the external acts, but missing the basic issue. He was missing out on this personal, dynamic relationship with the living God.

And so, before calling the man to come, follow, Jesus reminds him of the commandments, because following Jesus involves obedience to the ever-contemporary law of God, and following Jesus means fulfilling the purpose of the law, namely entering into a relationship with the living God.

[15 : 38] Well, now let us work with the other concern. If the essence of Jesus' answer to the question, what must I do, is come follow me, then why the command to sell all and give to the poor?

However, I can think of at least three reasons. First, Jesus was helping this man see that as a matter of fact, he was not keeping the commandments.

Nowhere in the law are we commanded to sell all, but we are commanded to give to the poor. From Exodus to Deuteronomy, through the Psalms and Proverbs, from Isaiah to Jeremiah to Amos to Malachi, the command to care for the powerless, is sounded again and again.

The rich young ruler may not have stolen and may not have lied, may not have committed adultery, but he was in the face of horrendous human need, keeping his possessions and wealth for himself, which means he was not fulfilling the intent of the law, namely, love your neighbor as you love yourself.

That was part of the reason he was so unfulfilled. Life is not found in getting and having. It is found in giving and living for others and especially living for the powerless.

[16 : 58] For all of his piety, the rich young ruler was living for himself and therefore was not living in obedience to the law. Jesus brings up the matter of giving to the poor, though, for a second reason.

To follow Jesus is to follow him in his compassion for the poor. We cannot read the Gospels very long without quickly realizing that the God who comes to us as Jesus has a special burden for the powerless.

I think Scripture teaches God's preferential option for the poor. Jesus stands with and for the poor. He says that the kingdom of God is for the poor in spirit, but also for the poor economically.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of the poor and for the poor. When that kingdom breaks into our lives, we cannot but become sensitive to the plight of the hungry and the homeless, the alien and the marginalized.

Indeed, in one of his parables, he says that one of the chief places that a nation meets his hidden presence is in the person of the powerless, the alien, the homeless, the disenfranchised.

[18 : 13] What must I do to inherit eternal life? There's only one do. There's only one. Come, follow me. Jesus brings in the issue of the poor because the rich young ruler needs to know what come, follow me would involve.

It means responsiveness to and advocacy for the needs of the world's poor. However, Jesus calls the man to sell all he possesses and give to the poor for a third reason, and it is the most critical reason.

The man's wealth was in the way. It was in the way of following. The man's wealth was in the way. It was in the way of following.

How? The man's goods and gold had become the basis of his security and identity. That is, the man's goods and gold had become his God, and that God would put tremendous claims upon the man's time and energy and abilities, and those claims would sooner or later conflict with the claims that Jesus and his kingdom would place upon that man's time and energy and ability.

And this man would not be able to walk down the road with Jesus unless he was free to those claims. How could he possibly follow a new Lord when he still wanted to obey the claims of an old Lord?

[19 : 35] Let me say it again. There is only one do to inherit eternal life. There's only one. Come, follow me. Jesus could see into this man's heart, and he could see that there was something in the way of doing the one thing, and it had to be removed so that he could do the one thing and follow.

Jesus loved the rich young ruler. You could see it in his eyes. And Jesus knew that this rich young ruler would not freely follow the living Lord until he was freed of his false God.

Jesus had to say, you must sell it all and give to the poor for the sake of that man's soul. Does the good teacher call everyone who wants to inherit eternal life to sell all and give to the poor?

Many who met Jesus came to that answer. Peter must have. He says in the text that we have left everything to follow you. But how then were all of those disciples' needs met?

According to Luke, by the generosity of well-to-do believers, especially some women who, quote, were contributing to their support out of their private means, close quote. So Jesus did not call every disciple to take the step he called the rich young ruler to take.

[20 : 59] Remember the story of Zacchaeus? After meeting Jesus and being won by his love, Zacchaeus gives half of his money away, a half, to the poor, and then says he will pay back fourfold those whom he has cheated.

But as New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce notes, Jesus did not tell Zacchaeus to get rid of the other half of his goods as well, nor did he suggest that he should quit tax collecting.

So the Lord of life does not call every believer to sell it all, but he does call every believer to employ it all for him and for his kingdom.

How could it be otherwise? How can it be otherwise? To use our homes for his purposes. To allow Jesus to bring the kinds of guests he likes to bring home into our homes.

To use our cars and computers and checking accounts and savings accounts for his purposes. How can it be otherwise?

[22 : 06] Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Come, follow me. I want to stress it again. There is only one do to inherit eternal life. Only one. Come, follow me.

Come, get in line with everything you are and whatever is in the way will have to go. Material wealth, of course, is not the only obstacle.

For some of us, that something in the way is personal ambition. Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. You're going to have to give up your need to be number one and come, follow me.

For some, that something in the way is membership in an organization which is clearly out of sync with the redemptive purposes of Christ. And Jesus says to us, you lack one thing.

You cannot have it both ways. You will have to resign from that organization. Take the flack and come, follow me. For some of us, that something in the way is rigidity.

[23 : 11] Insisting that everything remain as it is. Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. You have to stop trying to keep the world the way it is now. It changes. Accept the fact and come, follow me.

For some of us, that one thing in the way is the refusal to forgive. Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. You must choose to forgive that person who is hurting you.

You are a slave to your pain. You must let it go and come, follow me. For some of us, that something in the way is the preoccupation with our losses. And Jesus says to us, you lack one thing.

Accept the fact that the losses happen. I know it hurts, but now let them go and come, follow me. For some of us, that something in the way is nursing our woundedness, which we use as an excuse for doing the things that we know are contrary to the gospel.

And Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. Stop nursing the wounds. Open them up and let me heal them and come, follow me. For some of us, that something in the way is a faulty view of who the God, the Father is, the consequence of painful experience with earthly fathers.

[24 : 27] And Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. Stop letting your experience shape your view of the Father. Let me, the only begotten son of the Father, tell you who he is and come, follow me into his heart.

For some of us, that something in the way is a relationship that we know is displeasing to God. And Jesus says, you lack one thing. Break off the relationship. Accept the grief and come, follow me.

For some of us, that something in the way is addictive behaviors, things we do to fill the hole in the soul. And Jesus says to us, you lack one thing. You must admit that you are hooked.

And you must admit that you are powerless to free yourself. Embrace the pain. I will meet you in the pain and come follow me. He really wants us to enjoy life in the eternal kingdom which is breaking into the world.

He loves us. You can see the love in his eyes. And in his love, he focuses on that one area of our life that is in the way and he calls us to surrender it. At those words, says Mark, the man's face fell and he went away very sad for he was one who owned much property.

[25 : 44] Feel the tragedy of this. He started out so well. He ran up to Jesus. He knelt down before Jesus. He called Jesus good. You are good. You would only tell me to do what you tell me to do because you're good.

The man could see the goodness in Jesus' eyes. How did he do it? How could he walk away from those eyes?

Every time I work through this tough text, I find myself wanting to yell out, don't do it. Don't go. Don't go. You're so close. He loves you. Don't go away.

Tell Jesus you can't do the one thing. Tell him you're afraid. Jesus will understand. He'll help you let go. His grace will empower you to do the one thing, but don't go. But he did.

He walked away from the only one who can give him what he was looking for. He walks away very sorrowful, leaving, as James Stewart says, an even more sorrowful Jesus.

[26 : 48] Ten years ago now, Sharon and I and Mike and Fran Dennis of our congregation led a different kind of marriage encounter weekend. The goal of this marriage encounter was to call couples to live their marriages with Jesus Christ at the center.

We emphasize that marriage is not an end in itself. We emphasize that marriage is one of the means to the greater end of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ.

Marriage reaches its great end when husband and wife are sold out to Jesus Christ. one Sunday afternoon of that weekend, the Dennis's issued a powerful call to discipleship.

In fact, I remember bristling, feeling like maybe the call was too strong. And as was the case after each of the presentations we made on the weekend, we opened the floor for sharing.

A middle-aged man from Washington asked if he could share. And I was very surprised because the whole weekend long he seemed very, very uneasy about this emphasis on discipleship.

[27 : 51] I actually thought that a couple different times he was actually going to walk up and go, walk out and go back to Washington. He was that uncomfortable. But here he was asking to stand and share.

And this is what he said. I have come to see this weekend that Jesus' call to follow is unremittantly relentless. Jesus doesn't give up.

He continued, and I've come to see that Jesus' call is uncompromisingly total. He wants everything, doesn't he? The gentleman took a deep breath and then he said this, I want to say that today I lay it all down for him.

Ah, what a moment of grace. A rich man didn't walk away. A rich man walked into the arms of the master and what struck me was the joy in his voice and the vitality in his spirit.

I lay it all down today. It's the only appropriate thing to do. When you realize who he is and what he has done for us, what else are you going to do but lay it all down?

[29 : 05] The God who made us became one of us and then as one of us laid it down for us so that we might live. He laid it all down on the cross so that we might have it all.

The kingdom in eternal life intimacy with the triune God and all he asks of us is all. That's all. All he asks of us is all.

That's all. So uncomplicated. Everything. Everything we have. Everything we are. Everything we were. Everything we hope to be. All our fears.

All our dreams. All our brokenness. All our doubts. He's delighted with whatever we bring but he will not be satisfied until he has us completely. All. That's all.

He asks. Come follow me. How can anyone walk away from those eyes?

[30 : 04] Eyes filled with love. How can anyone do it?