

The Uncomfortable Truth About What Sits on Your Heart's Throne

Have you ever had someone challenge a belief you've held for years? Maybe it was something small—like discovering that bees do, in fact, sting in summer despite what you were told as a child. Or maybe it was something bigger, something that made your stomach drop and your defenses rise.

There's actually a name for that uncomfortable feeling: cognitive dissonance. It's the mental discomfort we experience when two contradictory beliefs collide, or when our actions don't match what we say we believe. Scientists have discovered that when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, our brains register it the same way they register physical threats or pain. Our dopamine levels drop, and our minds immediately scramble to resolve the conflict—not necessarily to find truth, but to restore comfort.

And here's the thing: our brains will almost always choose the easiest path to feeling good again. We have three options when confronted with uncomfortable truth: change our behavior (hard work), change our beliefs (also difficult), or rationalize why the challenge is wrong (much easier). That third option is where most of us live.

The Man Who Had Everything Except One Thing

In Matthew 19, we encounter a young man who seemingly had it all figured out. He was wealthy, influential, young, and by all religious standards, righteous. He kept the commandments. He gave to the poor. He honored his parents. He was the kind of person everyone in his community would have looked up to—a model citizen and faithful follower of God.

Yet something gnawed at him. Despite checking every box, despite doing everything "right," he felt a desperate emptiness. So desperate, in fact, that when he saw Jesus, he ran up to him and fell on his knees.

"Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" he asked.

Jesus responded by listing the commandments: don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, honor your parents, love your neighbor.

"All these I have kept," the young man replied. "What do I still lack?"

And then Jesus said the thing that changed everything: "If you want to be complete, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

The young man walked away sad. He had great wealth.

The Real Issue Wasn't Money

Here's what's easy to miss: Jesus wasn't instituting a poverty requirement for salvation. He wasn't saying that everyone who follows him must liquidate their assets and live with nothing. What Jesus was doing was far more penetrating—he was exposing what sat on the throne of this young man's heart.

The young man's wealth had become more than just money in the bank. It had become his identity, his security, his source of power and purpose. It had, in a very real sense, become his god. And Jesus, with surgical precision, identified exactly what needed to be addressed for salvation to be possible.

Religion says it's enough for God to be part of your life—somewhere in the circle, present but not necessarily central. But Jesus says that eternity and salvation require God to be on the throne of your heart. Not just present. Not just acknowledged. But supreme. Sovereign. The center from which everything else flows.

The disciples were shocked by this exchange. If this righteous, law-keeping, wealthy young man couldn't make it, who could? Jesus's response is profound: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Salvation isn't something we earn through good behavior or religious activity. It's a work accomplished only by God, requiring complete and total surrender to him.

What's on Your Throne?

The uncomfortable question this story asks each of us is this: What's the one thing in your life that, if Jesus pointed at it, would make you walk away sad?

It doesn't have to be money. It could be your career, your reputation, your comfort, your relationships, your plans for the future. It could be control itself—the white-knuckled grip we keep on our lives, terrified of what might happen if we truly let go.

The thing on your heart's throne doesn't even have to be bad. It just has to be more precious to you than God.

And here's the really uncomfortable part: you can be doing a lot of good things and still be living an unsundered life. You can check all the religious boxes—attend church, serve others, give generously, read your Bible—and still have something other than Jesus on the throne of your heart.

We don't usually reject Jesus outright. We just put something above him. We negotiate. We delay. We say, "Yes, Lord, but first let me..." And delayed obedience is still disobedience.

The Daily Work of Surrender

So what do we do with this uncomfortable truth?

First, we identify our "one thing." What would it cost you to follow Jesus completely? What are you holding onto that you're afraid to release?

Second, we stop negotiating obedience. Following Jesus isn't about finding the minimum requirement or carving out space for him in our already-full lives. It's about reordering everything around him.

Third, we reorder our priorities. Is finding our soul's contentment in God the first thing we think about when we wake up? Or are we so self-conscious that we can barely be God-conscious?

Finally—and this is crucial—we embrace the pace of grace.

Notice that Jesus told the rich young ruler to "go sell" his possessions. He didn't say, "Leave everything right now and walk away." He gave him a task that would take time. Liquidating an estate isn't a one-day project. It requires going back again and again, dealing with item after item, making decision after decision.

Surrender is the same way. It's not usually a one-time event but a daily practice. Jesus said that following him requires taking up our cross daily—dying to ourselves, dethroning whatever has crept back onto the throne of our hearts, and choosing surrender again.

Some days God does a supernatural, instantaneous work of transformation. Other days, it's the slow, faithful work of sanctification—becoming more like Jesus one small surrender at a time.

The Finished Work

The beautiful truth underneath all of this is that the work has already been done. We don't have to earn our salvation. Jesus accomplished it completely on the cross. His body was broken, his blood was shed, the price was paid in full.

What Jesus invites us into isn't a performance to earn God's love, but a relationship of complete trust and surrender. He's asking us to let go not because he wants to take things from us, but because he wants to give us something infinitely better: himself.

The question remains: What sits on the throne of your heart today? And what would it look like to finally, fully surrender it to the only One worthy of that place?

Scripture References from the Sermon

Directly Cited or Referenced:

1. **Matthew 28:19-20** - The Great Commission about making disciples and teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded
2. **John 1:14** - Jesus came full of grace and truth; the Word became flesh and dwelt among us
3. **Matthew 19:16-30** - The story of the rich young ruler (primary text for the sermon)
4. **Mark 10:17** - Mark's account of the rich young ruler running up to Jesus and falling on his knees
5. **Romans 7:16, 19** - Paul's discussion about doing what he doesn't want to do
6. **John 15** - Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit would lead and guide into all truth (referenced in closing prayer)

Alluded to or Thematically Connected:

7. **Luke 9:23** - Taking up your cross daily (referenced in discussion of daily surrender)
8. **Luke 18:18-30** - Luke's account of the rich young ruler

9. **Matthew 13:53-58** / **Mark 6:1-6** - Jesus in his hometown where he could not do many miracles because of their unbelief

10. **Exodus 20:1-17** - The Ten Commandments (referenced when Jesus lists the commandments to the rich young ruler)

11. **Leviticus 19:18** - "Love your neighbor as yourself" (part of Jesus' response to the ruler)

12. **Matthew 6:24** / **Luke 16:13** - Cannot serve two masters/God and money (thematic connection to idolatry of wealth)

13. **Psalm 37:4** - Delight yourself in the Lord (thematic connection to finding contentment in God)

14. **Philippians 1:6** - God who began a good work will be faithful to complete it (pace of grace/sanctification theme)

15. **1 Corinthians 11:23-26** - Institution of communion/Lord's Supper (referenced during communion)