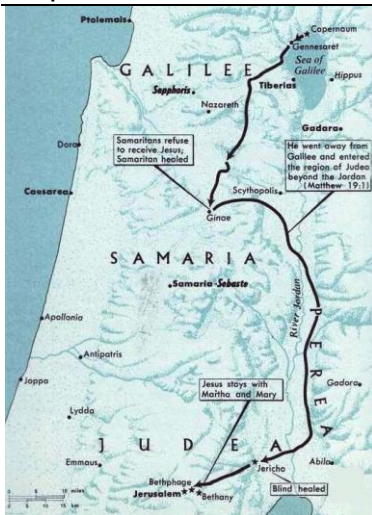


Matthew 19:23-30 “The Eternal Rewards of Following Jesus”

10.8.17

For the past several weeks, we’ve been following the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem as He slowly makes His way to meet His death on the cross to pay for our sins. The Apostle Matthew has chronicled the fact that Jesus is going through the area of what is called Perea. Remember our map...



Perea is on the East Side of the Jordan River and it’s in this area that Jesus has been healing and teaching the massive crowds following Him. He’s encountered all kinds of people from the blood-thirsty Pharisees, to parents wanting their children blessed to a rich young man that we learned about last week. Remember this man?



That’s a man described in Scripture as the “Rich Young Ruler.” Do you see the look on his face? The bible describes that look as sorrow...a sorrow that literally is the type of sorrow that you have when you’re walking away from a loved one’s gravesite. It’s a sorrow that’s best described as gut-wrenching grief!

Why was the young man grieving? Because He couldn’t give up his money to follow Jesus. The young man had “great possessions,” and it was the love of those possessions that doomed the young man’s soul. What a tragedy! And as the young man is walking away, Jesus turns to His disciples as said these words:

Matthew 19:23-30

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” ²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake,

will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Church, let me ask you a question. As Jesus concludes His comments there in verses 29 and 30, what is He talking about? Where will the first be last and the last be first? Heaven, right? Heaven. Jesus used the encounter with the Rich Young Ruler to teach the fact that heaven is where we will receive our ultimate reward for our faithfulness to Him. Hence, the title of this morning's message: **"The Eternal Rewards of Following Jesus."**

What have the disciples just witnessed? They've watched a rich guy walk away without salvation and this has stumped them. Do you want to know why? Because they've been taught all of their lives as part of the Rabbinical tradition that if you're rich, you're blessed by God and you are automatically a part of God's kingdom, otherwise, you wouldn't be rich. In other words, if you've got a lot of money, that's a sign you are blessed by God and going to heaven. But, once again, Jesus debunks the false teaching of the day and says:

Matthews 19:24-25

²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

The Disciples were once again "shell-shocked!" Their belief-system was being imploded by Jesus right before their eyes. Jesus was teaching them the simple fact that being rich won't get you to heaven. That's why Jesus told the Rich Young Ruler he needed to sell all that he had and give it to the poor and THEN "come follow Him." Why? Because the young man's money was his "god!" It was standing in the way of him surrendering to the call to "come follow Jesus." Hey...what's standing in your way today from following Jesus? Let me tell you something...in Hell it won't be worth it. Don't buy the lie! The Rich Young Ruler did. He was deceived to buy the lie and he allowed his money to blind him.

What's your view of money today? How do you view money? You see, the truth of the matter is this: our view of money and how we use it, spend it, save it and invest it, reveals what's in our hearts. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 6:21.

Matthew 6:21

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Listen carefully so that you don't misunderstand what Jesus is teaching (because if we're not careful, we might begin to believe that being wealthy is a bad thing...it's not). Quite simply, what Jesus is teaching is that a person's view of money should be kept in proper perspective and position. Money should never be placed on the throne of a person's life, because Jesus also said:

Matthew 6:24

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Well, whether the Rich Young Ruler would admit it or not, he was controlled by his money. Even though he was a ruler of a synagogue and supposedly in the service of God, he wasn't actually

serving God. He was controlled by money and his encounter with Jesus revealed that truth.

So, I'll ask again, "What's your view of money? How do you feel about your money?" Perhaps I could ask it this way: "Where are you placing your security today? Where have you placed your trust?" Is it in your bank account? Your retirement fund, like your 401-k? How about your stock portfolio? Where have you placed your trust for your financial security?

Do you want to know how you can tell...if you're trusting God or money...well, it will be in direct proportion to how much you give to the work of the Lord...by how much you store up treasures in heaven. You can tell what you believe about the teachings of Jesus and money by what you give to His kingdom's work...it's that simple!

And that's where the rubber hits the road. Here, once again...we are brought front and center with the teaching of Jesus that says, "You and I are to store up treasures in a place we've never seen...heaven." Do you know what that's called? Trust! It's called Faith! Therefore, every time the offering plate is passed in here, or you click online at our secure website...there are faith transactions taking place. Either we're showing trust and faith in the Lord, or we aren't. In fact, you had that opportunity a few minutes ago. How did it go? Did you show faith? (NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED this week...Pam and I have never given less than the set % no matter what happens).

Are you trusting in Jesus and His teachings? Remember what He said:

Luke 6:38

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

Let me ask you a question. Do you want God to bless you financially? Is there anyone in the room that wouldn't raise their hand? Of course we all want the Lord to bless us financially, And there's nothing wrong with that. **But, the principle is this** (and I'm afraid you might not like it, because it's counter-intuitive), you've GOT TO GIVE TO HIM FIRST!

Luke 6:38a

³⁸ give, and it will be given to you.

"Give and it will be given to you!" Translated, when you get paid, you write God's check first. He gets the first slice of bread when you open the bread bag! If we want to be blessed, we must show trust in the Lord...like the widow of Zarephath who took her last bit of oil and flour...



...and made a cake of bread for the prophet Elijah, (who represented God). She trusted God and God blessed her and her oil and flour never ran out. But she had to give to God first and show FAITH in Him!

But that's counter-intuitive. We believe we've got to have a lot of money before we can give. No, no, no! That's totally backwards in God's economy! No! You've got to trust Him first and then you'll be blessed. The farmer has to sow the seed before he can reap the harvest. Does God need your money? No! He owns it all...He wants your heart...your trust... That's why Jesus said what He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 6:31-33

³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Oh, church family, let's not be conned by Satan into thinking these principles only apply to the person or family who is already wealthy? That's a lie!! I'm convinced that these principles apply more to the person in need...than to any one else. This widow of Zarephath was down to nobody but God. But, never ever forget: You and God are a majority! You can trust Him! He's the God of the universe and He can maneuver resources to you at any place at any time.

I had a lady who came up to me after the third service last week and told me how her husband was gone with his job for an extended period of time and she didn't know how she was going to get her yard mowed. But, someone came up to her...here at church last Sunday (and she hadn't said a word about her need) and they handed her a card that said, "We're going to mow your yard while your husband is gone." She told me, "Pastor Kevin, my husband and I have always tithed...even when we had nothing...and **here again is another example of how nothing escapes Him and how He provides when we trust Him!**"

AND...many of you have told me stories similar to this one. Truly, I know there are many of you who could stand up and give testimony of how God has provided for you when you were literally backed up against the wall and down to your last penny.

But, there are those in the room today and you're hesitant. You're wondering if God can do this for you. Because you're not some SUPER SPIRITUAL PERSON. Well, let me put it this way. Is water wet? Well as sure as water is wet...because wetness is a property of water... Well, as sure as water is wet...is the principle that if you trust God first, He'll provide for you and take care of you. Obedience = Blessing. Don't get the order messed up. Obedience comes before blessing. Don't expect Blessings before obedience. You obey and God will bless, as sure as water is wet.

Yet, unfortunately, (according to Pew Research), Christians today in 2017, actually give less per capita than Christians who lived during the Great Depression in the 1930's. During the Great Depression, Christians gave 3.3% of their income to the church. Today Christians only give 2.4% in total. As I told you last week, only 8.8% of American churchgoers tithe. And, get this...it's not the wealthy who are the biggest tithers. Pew reports if you make less than \$20,000 per year, you're 8 times more likely to give than someone who makes more than \$75,000 per year.

Why is this the case? It seems that once we get a little bit of money, we begin to rely on that money as our security and instead of taking the extra and investing it into the kingdom of God, we become frightful and we think we've got to hoard that money so that we can be provided for in the future. We actually begin to distrust God, and trust money. Listen, there's nothing wrong with

saving some money for a rainy day...but don't put your trust in money, because it can all be taken away in a heartbeat. Ask the people who lived the Depression.

You see, God invites us to participate in His mission...His kingdom's work. I love how money guru Dave Ramsey says it:

"Tithing was created for our benefit. It is to teach us how to keep God first in our lives and how to be unselfish people. Unselfish people make better husbands, wives, friends, relatives, employees and employers. God is trying to teach us how to prosper by trusting Him first." Dave Ramsey

Let me encourage you to give. I say that from experience. You can't out give God! I'm a living testimony of that! I'll say this as well, you'll likely struggle to manage your finances and your money if you aren't a budget. That's why a blank budget is in your bulletin. That one piece of paper can so magnanimously bless your life and if you'll look at it, you'll see that the very first line at the top is your tithe/offering.

You'll also notice in your bulletin a Commitment Card for our LAL campaign. Next Sunday we'll have the opportunity to make our annual, (1 Year) commitment to getting this building paid off. We're about two years away at our current giving. But, understand this the commitments we make are only toward the building fund...not the General Fund. We don't ask you to make commitments on that. As I told you last week, (and of course you do as you feel led), but Pam and I give about 80% of our giving toward the General offering and the other 20% toward the building. It's the General offering that funds the work of the church and all the ministries.

So, I want to thank you in advance for what you will do next week as we come together and make our commitments in these boxes together. Also, let me say this...as we come and make our commitments, only our Church Treasurer, Terry Church will see the cards. And BTW, if for some reason, you can't be with us next Sunday, as is noted in the bulletin, the boxes will remain out throughout the rest of October, so that you can make your commitment. Might I say, "If you are receiving a blessing by being here...then, would you please help us by giving." As the old fella says, "If you're going to eat from the table...then please help buy the groceries." ☺

It bears repeating church family...I believe what happens here is very important. Why? Because, **ETERNITY happens in this room every time we meet**, because we are eternal beings, a person's eternal destiny can be changed in this room. That doesn't happen in too many places on this earth, but it happens in here and so the investments you make here have the opportunity to pay dividends for all eternity!

Ah yes...Eternity...and that's the part of the equation that the disciples were missing in what Jesus was teaching. See it in verse 26...

Matthew 19:24-26

²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Some preachers and commentators in trying to explain the “eye of the needle” have really over-exegeted the passage. Listen, there was never a gate in the walls of Jerusalem called the “needle gate” that camels had to get down on their knees to go through. That’s simply not true. What Jesus was using is the same method He used when He said you’d be better off to tie a milestone around your neck rather than to offend a new believer or to cut off your hand or gouge out your eye if they offend you. Folks, that’s hyperbole and the “camel through the eye of a needle is too.”

Jesus point is simple: “A camel can’t go through the eye of a needle...it’s impossible!” You see, no one can get to heaven on his or her own devices or good merit...even if they’re rich! It’s impossible. Only Jesus can get you there. There’s no other way!

Well, Peter is totally perplexed by all of this...

Matthew 19:27-29

²⁷ Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” ²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

Jesus assured Peter that his sacrifices would be rewarded both now-100 fold (in this life, says the companion passage in Mark 10)-and in eternity. Do you see? Jesus is pointing His disciples to heaven. That’s why He said:

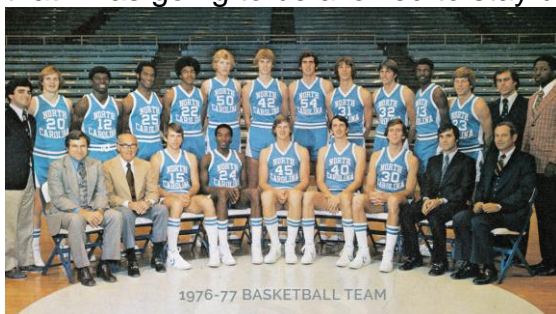
Matthew 6:19-20

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying? He’s saying quite simply: **You can’t take it with you—but you can send it on ahead.**

So, the question is: do you believe in heaven enough to make investments there? Do you believe there is a place right now where God is seated on His throne and Jesus is seated beside of Him at His right hand? Do you really believe it’s there?

I close with this story: It was March 28, 1977 and I had just turned 9 years old...that day as a matter of fact and I was so excited...mainly because the biggest present of my 9th birthday was that I was going to be allowed to stay up and watch this team play later that night:



That’s the 1976-77 UNC men’s basketball team, led by All-American Phil Ford. To say I was a UNC TarHeel fan would have been gross understatement. In

fact, later that evening, I would watch my beloved TarHeels lose 67-59 to the Marquette Golden Eagles. To say I was devastated was an understatement. On my birthday, I cried myself to sleep.

However, about a month later my Dad came home from work one evening and handed me an envelope. I opened it and the letterhead said: UNC Ram's Club. The letter said I would be attending the UNC basketball camp that summer in Chapel Hill. I couldn't believe it! I hugged my dad and shouted!

Dad said, "You'll need to save your money for the camp." Well, let me tell you something...that was not a problem! I couldn't believe that I was going to get to go to where Phil Ford played. Sure enough the second week of June came and sure enough I walked into Carmichael Auditorium, the home of the TarHeels. I couldn't believe it! It was really there! I was in utter awe as I starred in the rafters at all the banners and I saw the state of NC in light blue on the floor. It was all there...just like I had seen on TV.

Now, why do I tell you that story... Because I want you to know that one day...for those of us who have placed our trust not in the Ram's Club...but, in the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, we're going to walk in heaven one day and it's all going to be there just like the Bible says. Streets of gold. Gates of pearl. The River of Life and most of all Jesus! He'll be there.

I stored up my 9-yr old money for Carmichael and the UNC Basketball camp and I didn't mind a bit. I'm storing of my 49-year old money for heaven. I'm convinced it's there because I know a man from there...the God-Man...Jesus Christ...and as sure as He came the first time, He's coming again to receive us to Himself and we'll reign with Him forever. For those who trust Him! Trust Him!