

Sermon Note: Needles & Camels

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

Continuing our Walking with Jesus series, we turn to Mark 10:17-31, where Jesus challenges a rich man to release his wealth and follow him. This difficult passage calls us to examine our own relationship with material things, and in this season of stewardship, we're invited to reflect on how our resources—both financial and otherwise—can be used to further God's work. As we consider how our legacy is built through generosity, let's ask ourselves: What are the "riches" we cling to, and how might Jesus be calling us to release them and embrace a life of generous discipleship? How are we building a foundation for future generations in our church?

Illustration Videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_CwatXdxUA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNQ76UyurLA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u56OqFjs1dg>

Why These Videos?

In these scenes from *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), George Bailey contemplates the value of his life. He feels financially defeated but later realizes that his true wealth lies in the relationships he has built and the lives he's touched.

Video Discussion Questions

1. In the clips above, George Bailey realizes that his true wealth is not in money but in relationships and community. What does this say about the value of human connection compared to financial success?
2. In the beginning of the film, George feels trapped by financial struggles. How does his perspective change when he understands the impact he's had on others?
3. How might we, like George, feel the "gravity" of material concerns in our own lives? What pulls us toward valuing possessions over relationships?
4. The rich man in Mark 10:17-31 walked away from Jesus, unable to let go of his wealth. How might George Bailey's realization of his wealth in relationships give us a different perspective on what it means to live generously?
5. What are some ways you've experienced a sense of "wealth" that had nothing to do with money? How can we gravitate toward those things that offer lasting value?

Mark 10:17-31 (CEB)

¹⁷As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?”

¹⁸Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. ¹⁹You know the commandments: Don’t commit murder. Don’t commit adultery. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony. Don’t cheat. Honor your father and mother.”

²⁰“Teacher,” he responded, “I’ve kept all of these things since I was a boy.”

²¹Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, “You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” ²²But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

²³Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, “It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God’s kingdom!”

²⁴His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, “Children, it’s difficult to enter God’s kingdom!

²⁵It’s easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom.”

²⁶They were shocked even more and said to each other, “Then who can be saved?”

²⁷Jesus looked at them carefully and said, “It’s impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God.”

²⁸Peter said to him, “Look, we’ve left everything and followed you.”

²⁹Jesus said, “I assure you that anyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms because of me and because of the good news ³⁰will receive one hundred times as much now in this life—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms (with harassment)—and in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first.”

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Who is asking about the gift of eternal life? What is his background?
2. Who does the “saving” to give eternal life?
3. In verse 21, Jesus, “looking at him (the young man), loved him,” and then asked him to sell everything he owned, give the money to the poor, and follow him. Why do you think the text emphasizes Jesus loving the man? What does it mean to look at someone with love and then challenge that person?
4. As Jesus talks about money in this passage, he seems to understand the pull money can have in our lives. How does Jesus invite us to rethink how we view wealth and possessions?
5. In verses 29-30, Jesus talks about leaving behind relationships and possessions for the sake of the kingdom. How does this passage invite us to look at our lives and our church as part of a larger inheritance? How does this perspective help us become good stewards, thinking beyond today and toward the future?

Additional (Optional) Questions

Hyperbole is a form of speech that exaggerates something to make a point. Jesus often used hyperbole to challenge his listeners' assumptions and provoke deeper thought. One familiar example is when Jesus tells people to remove the plank from their own eye before pointing out the speck in someone else's eye (Matthew 7:3-5). This exaggerated image is meant to emphasize the importance of addressing one's own faults before criticizing others.

1. Where is hyperbole in the scripture passage from Mark 10?
2. Why do you think hyperbole was included? What are we supposed to focus on?
3. What do you think it means for the "last to be first and the first to be last"?
4. When faced with a situation where we're not sure what we're seeing, how do we decide what is true? (Consider how first impressions or incomplete information can pull us in different directions.)
5. What role does our initial judgment play when we have limited time or viewpoint to assess a situation? How might this relate to how we view wealth or success?
6. What's your first reaction when someone presents a new way of looking at things? How do we react to Jesus challenging our understanding of wealth?

Weekly Action

This week, reflect on one area of your life where you feel you gravitate toward material or worldly concerns—whether it's money, time, or personal comforts. Consider how God may be calling you to release this in favor of something that builds up others or contributes to your faith journey. Choose one way you can release that resource—whether it's offering financial gifts, giving time in service, or being fully present with someone who needs your support.

Prayer

Generous God, You have given us so many good things: food on our table and the people in our community whom we love. Help us be good stewards of everything in our possession, for we know everything belongs to You. Give us hearts willing to follow You and respond to the call You place on our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.