

## “What’s Missing?”

Luke 18:15-34

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

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What’s missing in your life? Think about it for a moment. What do you keep chasing after thinking that it will make your life complete, or at least better? Is it a new house or a new car or a new spouse or a better job? Every one of us has something that we think is missing from our life, something that we keep thinking about over and over again. Whatever it is, we usually end up planning our life to try to get it. Deep down we know that it shouldn’t be that way. But to make ourselves feel better we call it “the American Dream.”

A recent *USA Today* survey asked adults in the US to describe their understanding of the American dream. What this survey revealed is that 61 percent of Americans define the American dream as being financially secure and 64 percent as their children being financially better off. Seventy four percent of those surveyed said the American dream meant being free to accomplish anything. The idea of the American dream is that this is a land of opportunity. Everyone has the opportunity to pull himself up by the bootstraps and make something of himself.

Our passage this morning from Luke chapter 18 is one with which most people are familiar. This story appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke so it’s obviously one that is important and it’s usually called “The Rich Young Ruler,” although only Matthew tells us he’s young and only Luke calls him a ruler. We don’t really know much about this man but it appears he was very religious and seems to be confident about his religious standing. And yet he’s still looking for more, for something else that he hasn’t found yet. He’s chasing after assurance that he has done enough to earn eternal life and he still feels that something’s missing.

So he comes to Jesus and asks that now-famous question: “Good Teacher, what must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” I think many of us, if we’re honest with ourselves, can identify with this man. When there’s something we want we

ask what we need to do to get it. Most of the time there’s nothing wrong with that, until it comes to the things of God. This man was asking Jesus what he could do so that God would owe him salvation. But God doesn’t owe any of us anything and there’s absolutely nothing that any of us can do to earn eternal life. The Apostle Paul makes this very clear in Ephesians 2. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is *not your own doing*; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

I find it interesting that Jesus didn’t come out and correct the man. Jesus is truly God in person and so he could have said what he said through Paul and told the man that there are no good deeds that will get you to eternal life. But he doesn’t, although he kind of hints at it by asking a rhetorical question, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.” Jesus of course IS good because He IS God. But he knows that this young prince doesn’t know that.

Jesus then points the man to the Ten Commandments saying, “you know the commandments: Do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother.” At this point, the man is thinking he’s got this in the bag. He says, “All these I have kept from my youth.” To understand Jesus’ point, we need to stop and think about what he didn’t say.

Jesus only mentioned *some* of the Ten Commandments and only those dealing with

external actions. What is plainly missing is the first Commandment, which deals with idolatry. And that seems to be this man's problem. In fact, Jesus only mentioned commandments dealing with how we relate to each other, not any of the ones about how we relate to God.

Jesus then tells him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." As you know the idea of getting rid of all his possessions made this wealthy man very sad. Jesus then tells everyone around him, including this man, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For 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."

I want us to stop right there for a moment because most of us, when we hear this passage, think Jesus is talking to us about money. We think that what Jesus wants from us is to take a vow of poverty and go halfway around the world as a missionary. And then we think that because we haven't that we are somehow lesser Christians. God certainly has a lot to say about how we handle our money. In fact, Jesus talked more about our relationship with money than he did about any other subject. But in this passage if we focus on the money we miss the message.

Jesus says, "One thing you still lack." He's saying, "you are spending your life chasing after something. You have tried all kinds of things to fill that void in your life and none of them has worked. You see there's still something missing." What's the one thing this young man is lacking? It's Jesus! What he's missing in his life, what he's been searching for is a relationship with the living God. That's why Jesus says, "come, follow me." Jesus is offering him what is lacking in his life. He is offering him a life-giving relationship that can't be earned and money can't buy.

Peter speaks up and says, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." Jesus answers, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left

house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life." Now just like the money, this is not a command to leave your family. This is about your priorities.

Some of us are like the rich young man and our money or possessions prevent us from truly following Christ. For others of us it might be some position or status. Maybe it's our devotion to our family that gets in the way. Ironically, for some of us it may even be the work we're doing in the church that gets in the way of a relationship with Jesus. None of these things are bad things necessarily, but if anything gets in the way of real discipleship then it is an idol and we must get rid of it.

That's why Jesus said, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." He was not talking about some perceived innocence or humility of children. Instead, Jesus is referring to the fact that at the time children had no legal or social status that guaranteed them any particular treatment. They were totally dependent upon others to provide for their every need. Much like an infant. Infants are not able to do anything for themselves. Someone else must provide for everything they need – food, clothing, shelter, diaper changes, even carrying them everywhere they need to go. Other than breathing, crying and swallowing, infants are simply not able to do anything for themselves. Jesus is saying that you and I are like infants when it comes to the kingdom of God. It is impossible for us to get there on our own. It's only because God became one of us in and as Jesus Christ that we have any hope. He has chosen us and gives us new life as a gift.

So what's missing in your life? What are you spending your time and money trying to get? What occupies your thoughts? If Jesus is not at the top of the list then you still lack one thing. It's time to get rid of whatever it is that keeps you from spending time with Jesus in worship and Bible study and prayer and fellowship. It's

time to stop chasing those things that won't last. It's time to rearrange your priorities and come, follow Jesus.

*Amen.*