

Welcome to our summer series on Matthew 18-23 about the church. A theme verse sets our series in motion from Matthew 16:18, “I tell you the truth, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” This is a very strong definition for the church. The church is the gathering of Christ followers who will form his community in this world. But a key question would be, who gets in? I was remembering a time when I was about 12 years old, at a local park near my home during the summer. Two captains were choosing sides. I wondered if I would be picked last.

In Matthew 19:30 and 20:16 we read a repeated statement that you probably know very well: “The last will be first and the first will be last.” In Jesus’ day there was a pecking order. Those that were chosen first every time could be summarized with three “R’s.” Religious, Rich and Righteous. These were the signs of acceptance and getting in. It didn’t matter if it was real or not, you just had to make sure that people thought that these were true of you, and then you would get picked. The young man in our story was following that path of getting in. Our Scripture study is from **Matthew 19:16-30**.

* The first will be last. *

- ✓ Not Good: “What good thing must I . . . There is only One who is good.” (vv. 16 & 17) The young man comes to Jesus trying to be good and wanting to be good. Jesus defines good in one way, and one way only . . . God. He is subtly challenging this young man to compare himself to God. When he does he will fall short. In fact, Romans 3:10 & 11 reads, “There is no one righteous . . . there is no one that does good, not even one.”
- ✓ Not Doing: “What good thing must I do . . . ?” (verse 16) He bases his entry on effort. He is like the student who has done all his assignments. He has tried hard; he deserves an A. Jesus answers his question by reciting six commandments in verse 18. The young man’s response in verse 20 is, “All these things I have kept.” He was justifying himself by doing. He was trying to be the most religious person in town.
- ✓ Not Enough: “What do I still lack?” (verse 20) You can see that he wonders if he is still missing something. There was an uneasiness in his soul. Jesus could pinpoint the uneasiness by confronting what was in the way. Verse 21, “Go, sell all your possessions . . .” This is one of our least favorite verses in the Bible. The Bible is clear that riches have the power to keep us stuck. Wealth can give us a false sense of security because it will buy what we need, what we want and use it for our pleasure. Jesus knew that this man’s wealth was more important to him than being saved. Verse 21, “If you want to be perfect.” Jesus is challenging his perspective. He was wanting to be good enough, and yet, what he counted on the most could not save him . . . his wealth.

* The last will be first. *

- ✓ Follow me: Why did Jesus use the ten commandments? Why did he tell him to sell his possessions? The man thought that he was keeping the whole law. He was basing his eternal destiny on something that couldn’t save him. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.” (James 2:10) Jesus says the central most important truth in verse 21, “Then come, follow me.” Jesus makes himself the focal point of salvation. If one doesn’t see his need for Jesus, he won’t be saved.
- ✓ God . . . all things possible: How can salvation be possible when man’s goodness is so stained? “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (verse 26) The idea that Jesus is presenting after the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?” points to the miracle of salvation. No one can save himself. Entering into eternal life is God’s gift. He is the only one who makes it possible.
- ✓ Renewal . . . reward: The ultimate reversal of “the last shall be first” is found in verses 28-30. Peter says, “We have left everything.” (verse 27) Then Jesus clearly says that they will judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the eternal kingdom. He also points to the fact that the rewards of eternity will be multiplied a hundred times. (verse 29)

Conclusion: I think there are three messages that rise to the surface through this story from Jesus: 1) Jesus is the focal point of salvation so come and follow him. Nothing else is more important to your Christian faith than Jesus. 2) Riches can be an obstacle in coming into a relationship with Christ, but they can also distract you from your relationship with Christ. We need to realize the warning that Jesus gives about the lure of wealth. 3) Nothing in this life will compare to the marvelous experience of eternity and God’s forever rewards. Don’t chase after the rewards of this life the most because this can be a major distraction. Live for Christ with a surrendered heart and he will bless you in some ways now, but he will lavish on you his eternal rewards one day forever.

Reflective Questions:

1. What are some of the things that we put first in this life? How are these first things sometimes last in God's priorities?
2. How did you enter into the family of God? How important is Jesus to your salvation?
3. What gets your attention the most from this story about the rich young man? What part of the teaching is something you want to apply to your life?
4. Why is it that so many people believe that being good is the way to heaven? How is that affecting the people around you that you know?
5. How would living with a "last will be first" perspective change your life?

Reading Schedule for July 19th – 25th, 2010

I've read several books on the life of Jesus. One of the more impressive books was written by Philip Yancey entitled, The Jesus I Never Knew. He separated the message of Jesus and his miracles in the book, but we have been reading them side by side. Early on I made an interesting observation about the Gospel of Luke. In the Gospel of Luke, the beginning of the book has a lot of stories about Jesus' life and what he did. When you get to the second half of the book, then there are a lot of read letters highlighting Jesus' teaching. I think you can know that Jesus' miracles were a forerunner to his message. His teaching about the kingdom of God was the most essential, but he also came with the power of God to demonstrate that his message was from God. In the Gospel of John we read that he is the great "I Am" so many different times. I hope you are enjoying the opportunity to learn more about Jesus. I would pray that you would actually learn something about Jesus that you never knew. I don't know what that might be, but knowing Jesus better is the key to your spiritual journey as a follower of Christ.

July 19: **John 6:41-71** – "At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" (vv. 41 & 42) These statements verify what I was saying in the introduction. People in Jesus' day questioned whether he was actually from God. Jesus said that he had come down from heaven. Many people did not believe him. He did many marvelous things to show that he was from God, but still, not all people believed. This is still true today. Jesus is the biggest stumbling block in our faith. He came as a human being, but we know him as the sinless one. As the Messiah of the world he was the perfect Savior. What do you read in this teaching today that encourages you about Jesus? How is your relationship with Christ? Are you walking closely with him? Why or why not?

July 20: **Mark 7:1-37** – "He replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.'" (vv. 6 & 7) This chapter begins with Jesus' teaching and then concludes with more miracles. I mentioned to you that the message and miracles of Jesus are intertwined in our readings this week. This is an example of that truth. These verses from Isaiah have always challenged me. What I say on the outside is not the most important to God. He cares about my heart. In fact, if I say something on the outside that is not true on the inside, that means I am a hypocrite. The word hypocrite in the Greek language refers to an actor – someone who is playing a role but isn't really that person. Another word used for this is integrity. To have an integrated faith is to be the same on the inside and the outside. In fact, what is true on the inside is meant to motivate how you live on the outside. How is your heart? What is Jesus saying in his teaching in these first 23 verses? Why are they so challenging?

July 21: **Matthew 15:32-16:12** – "'A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.' Jesus then left them and went away." (Matthew 16:4) This is not uncommon. People want to experience a miracle from Jesus so that they would believe. But Jesus knew that miracles never convinced a skeptic. Jesus had already been healing people and feeding thousands, and still people wanted him to prove himself. In John 20:29 Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." With all the evidence Jesus gives, those that won't believe are either too proud or too stubborn. What does this say to you? Do you know people like this? Why is God so pleased with simple faith?

July 22: **Mark 8:22 – 9:1** – "'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Christ.'" (verse 29) I guess I have to say that I prefer the recording from Matthew found in Matthew 16:13-20. You might enjoy reading that also. It gives a fuller account of Peter's profession. I like the words, "And the gates of Hades will not overcome it . . ." "it" being the church. The church is built on the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world. Peter announces that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in that Matthew records that this was revealed to him by the Father. Everything we are reading is pointing to the fact that Jesus is the Christ. I hope that this is building your faith. What does it mean that Jesus is the Christ? What other names does the Bible give Jesus? Why is significant that Jesus would then tell his disciples about his upcoming death and also powerful resurrection?

July 23: **Luke 9:28-45** – "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.'" (vv. 34 & 35) What do you call this? This is evidence that Jesus is exactly who he says he is. As God's Son, Jesus has both God's power and authority. His words demand our response. If you believe Jesus is God's Son then you will want to do what he says. What has Jesus been saying? What have you noticed about his teaching? What does it mean when he says, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.?" (Luke 9:23) How do you apply that to your life?

July 24: **Matthew 17:24-18:6** – "At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'" (18:1) We have always been prone to comparisons. It is difficult for us to be content in who we are and where we are in life. Jesus looks at the heart and he wants a response of faith and humility. A child believes freely and is not troubled by being dependent on others. Jesus wants that kind of response to him. He called that the greatest in the kingdom. How great are you? How do you understand the statement, "The greatest in the kingdom will be the servant of all?" What do you think of this statement, ". . . unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (18:3) What do these statements teach us about our response to Jesus?

July 25: **Mark 9:38-50** – "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell." (verse 47) This is one of the many statements that are often referred to as the hard statements of Jesus. I was an assistant to a professor in seminary who wrote a book on the difficult teachings of Jesus. This is obviously one of them. The emphasis here is on the destruction of sin. If we ignore sin or make light of it, it will have devastating consequences. Jesus came to remove sin. Without Jesus the best thing to do would be to pluck out your eye, or to cut off your foot. But Jesus came to cleanse us from sin and to set us right. Forgiveness is about being made new. If this is a true picture of sin, what does it say to you? How should you and I respond to sin? How important is His cleansing work in your life and mine?

Prayers: Pray for the special offering we will receive this coming Sunday, used to meet some urgent needs of repair for our church – new roof, exterior painting and replace our old speaker in the auditorium. Pray for the inspiration of the testimonies for our Mexico Mission. Next Sunday the young people will highlight what God did in their lives and through their lives in Mexico.