

September 9, 2012 by Steve Brandon



The American Dream

Mark 10:17-31

1. Wanting Eternal Life (verses 17-21)
2. Wanting the World (verse 22)
3. Lacking God (verses 23-27)
4. Needing Perspective (verses 28-31)

I want to introduce you to a book this morning. It's called, "Radical", and it is written by David Platt. I have presented this book to you before. Perhaps you recognize the following section from this book, ...

On one hand, we were created by God to enjoy his grace. Apart from everything else God created, we were made in his image. We alone have the capacity to enjoy God in intimate relationship with him. The first word the Bible uses to describe that relationship is blessing. God blessed the human race, not because of any merit or inherent worth in us, but simply out of pure, unadulterated grace. God created humankind to enjoy his grace.

But that was not the end of the story, because on the other hand, God immediately followed his blessing with a command. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'" God gave his people his image for a reason--so that they might multiply his image throughout the world. He created human beings, not only to enjoy his grace in a relationship with him, but also to extend his glory to the ends of the earth.

Simple enough. Enjoy his grace and extend his glory. This is the twofold purpose behind the creation of the human race in Genesis 1, and it sets the stage for an entire Book that revolves around the same purpose. In every genre of biblical literature and every stage of biblical history, God is seen pouring out his grace on his people for the sake of his glory among all peoples. [\[1\]](#)

I trust that you recognize these words: enjoy His grace and extend His glory. They form the purpose statement for Rock Valley Bible Church. "We exist to enjoy His grace and extend His glory." Those words aren't original with me. I got those words from David Platt. I got those words from this book, "Radical."

Several years ago, as I was reading those words to my children, the thought struck me: "What a great way to summarize our mission in life. We are those who enjoy His grace and extend His glory." [\[2\]](#)

We have adopted these words for our church. "We exist to enjoy His grace and extend His glory." And they have served us well.

The priority of these words is right. We begin with our relationship with the Lord. We enjoy the Lord. We find satisfaction in Him. We rejoice in the grace that has been given to us in Jesus Christ. Then, we carry through with our relationship by telling others about Him. We long for others to enjoy Him as well. We make efforts to let others know of His grace. Thereby, we extend the glory of the Lord.

This morning, I want to read another portion of this book to you. This portion gets more to the heart of why David Platt wrote this book. See, the book is entitled, "Radical: taking back your faith from the American dream." Platt writes, ...

As the American dream goes, we can do anything we set our minds to accomplish. There is no limit to what we can accomplish when we combine ingenuity, imagination, and innovation with skill and hard work. We can earn any degree, start any business, climb any ladder, attain any prize, achieve any goal. James Truslow Adams, who is credited with coining the phrase, 'American dream' in 1931, spoke of it as "a dream ... in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are."

So is there anything wrong with this picture? Certainly hard work and high aspirations are not bad, and the freedom to pursue our goals is something we should celebrate. Scripture explicitly commends all these things. But underlying this American dream are a dangerous assumption that, if we are not cautious, we will unknowingly accept and a deadly goal that, if we are not careful, we will ultimately achieve.

The dangerous assumption we unknowingly accept in the American dream is that our greatest asset is our own ability. The American dream prizes what people can accomplish when they believe in themselves and trust in themselves., and we are drawn to such thinking. But the gospel has different priorities. The gospel beckons us to die to ourselves and to believe in God and to trust in his power. In the gospel, God confronts us with our utter inability to accomplish anything of value apart from him. This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

Even more important is the subtly fatal goal we will achieve when we pursue the American dream. As long as we achieve our desires in our power, we will always attribute it to our own glory. To use Adams's words, we will be 'recognized by others for what [we] are.' This, after all, is the goal of the American dream: to make much of ourselves. But here the gospel and the American dream are clearly and ultimately antithetical to each other. While the goal of the American dream is to make much of us, the goal of the gospel is the make much of God. [\[3\]](#)

In our text this morning, Mark 10:17-31, we see a man pursuing the American dream. To be sure, he wasn't an American. Our continent wasn't even discovered in his lifetime. But, there within him was the deep, abiding, belief, that he could have anything that he wanted. And he wanted eternal life. But, he wanted the world also. So, he left Jesus without eternal life.

I fear that many in America are just like this man. They want the American dream. They want the world. And they want Jesus also. But, you can't have both. Let's read the story, ...

Mark 10:17-31

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

My first point comes in verse 17-21. We see this man, ...
1. Wanting Eternal Life (verses 17-21)

This man had all of that the world had to offer. He was rich (verse 22). Matthew tells us that he was young (Matt. 19:20). Luke tells us that he was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He was probably a lay-leader in the local synagogue. He had a measure of influence in his society.

But, he knew that something was missing. And so, he came to Jesus, seeking eternal life (verse 17). This was not hap-hazard coming. This man was in earnest. Look at verse 17, ...

Mark 10:17

As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

In the days of Jesus, such a display would surely have caught the attention of many. In those days, it was undignified for men to run. In order to do so, they had to pick up their robes they wore, so that their legs would be free to run. But, (even today) in the Middle East, men don't show their legs in public. They wear long pants. To expose your legs as you ran, simply wasn't done.

But, this man didn't care. He had an opportunity to ask Jesus this burning question. And so, he ran to Jesus, lest he miss this opportunity.

He also "knelt before [Jesus]." This also would have made everyone take notice. Kneeling is a begging posture. And you only beg when you are desperate. It was OK for blind people to beg on their knees. It was OK for deaf people to beg on their knees. But, for a rich, young, ruler, such an action would have been undignified. But, it showed his desperation. He really wanted eternal life, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (verse 17).

I want for you to notice how good a question this is. In many ways, this is the most fundamental question about life. Everybody knows that our life on earth will end. Many realize just how short it is. James calls it a "vapor" (James 4:14). The best thing that we can do in this life is to prepare for the life to come. And so, this young man asks the best question that anyone can ever ask, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (verse 17).

Not only did this man ask the right question. He asked the right person. He asked Jesus! If anyone was able to answer this question, it would be Jesus -- the Son of God -- who came down from heaven to grant eternal life to those who believe.

Of course, there were several things about this question that aren't quite right. You can talk about the word, "do." Of course you can't "do"

anything to have eternal life. You can talk about the word, "inherit." You don't do anything to get an inheritance. You are given an inheritance. But, the basic thrust of his question was a good one. He was seeking eternal life from the right person.

Jesus did take issue with his question. Verse 18, ...

Mark 10:18

And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

In many ways, this is a setup of what follows next. Jesus begins to address his greatest issue. He thought that he was good enough to do something to inherit eternal life. So, Jesus mentions that "No one is good except God alone." This man didn't see his sin. This man didn't understand sin (as we shall see in verse 20). So, after the clarification, Jesus gives him his answer.

Mark 10:19

You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"

Jesus tells this man to keep the commandments. In one regard, this isn't the right answer. For instance, imagine yourself in a Bible College, taking an examination. The question on the exam asks, "What must you do to have eternal life." If you write, "Keep the commandments", what sort of grade do you think that you will receive? I would bet that you would get an "F" for your answer.

The correct answer would be something like this: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). We know that this is right, because Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Do you want eternal life? Believe in Jesus Christ.

So, why did Jesus answer the question this way? Was Jesus wrong? May it never be. Jesus was never wrong. In some regards, this is the right answer. If you keep all of the commandments, you will have eternal life. The problem is, nobody has kept all of the commandments, because, "No one is good except God alone" (verse 18). With the exception of Jesus.

The Bible is clear: Jesus committed no sin. In Jesus, "there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Jesus, "committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22). Jesus was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15). That's why Jesus can be the "Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). But, Jesus is the only one who has ever lived who hasn't sinned.

I believe that Jesus answered this way because He wanted to expose the man's sin. And there's no better way to do this than to put the law before him. After all, "through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The law shows us our sin, because it shows us how much we are lacking in the keeping of God's standards.

I love the ministry of Ray Comfort, and "The Way of the Master." [\[4\]](#) They have embraced this concept of letting the law show you your sin. They have trained many to use the law in doing evangelism, so a typical evangelistic conversation might go something like this:

Would you consider yourself to be a good person?

Your Answer: Yes, I consider myself to be a good person.

Let's take a look at a few questions and see if this is true. Have you ever told a lie?

Your Answer: Yes, I have told a lie.

What is someone who tells a lie called?

Your Answer: A Liar

Question 2: Have you ever stolen anything?

Your Answer: Yes, I have stolen something.

What is someone who has stolen something called?

Your Answer: A thief

Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." - Matthew 5:27 & 28

Question 3: Have you ever looked at another person with lust?

Your Answer: Yes

We have looked at just a few of the Ten Commandments. You have admitted that you are a liar, a thief and an adulterer at heart. When you stand before God to be judged will you be guilty or innocent of disobeying God?

Your answer: God will find me guilty of breaking His laws.

Will you go to heaven or hell? (If the person responds with "heaven" then give the following illustration), ...

Whether in a civil court or when you face judgment by God, if you break the law there is a penalty that must be paid. Imagine that ten years ago someone robbed, tortured, and killed your mother. Now that person is standing before a judge and says, "Judge I have not broken the law for ten years. You are a good judge. You will forgive me and let me go free." Will the judge let him go free? Would justice be served if the man was set free? No, the judge will not set the man free.

God, who is perfectly just, cannot let you go free. There must be justice, which means you are heading for hell. You admit you've broken God's laws. That's very serious and you must pay the penalty. The penalty is death and hell.

But Here's the Good News! Someone has stepped in and paid the death penalty on your behalf. Jesus Christ died on the

cross, taking all of God's punishment for your sin (breaking God's laws), so that you can go free. Jesus died so you don't have to. He paid the penalty you owe in full.

What do you need to do? Nothing. If you repent and trust that Jesus has paid the penalty you owe for sin... it is done. You are free from your sin and will join God in heaven.

Now it's time to make a decision. Will you trust Jesus and His sacrifice upon the cross? Will you try to get to heaven on your own?

It's a very effective way to share the gospel, especially for Americans (like this rich young ruler we are looking at in our text). I encourage you to be familiar with these things. Check out Way of the Master online and read up on it.

Now, please understand that this isn't the only way to share the gospel. Jesus approached Nicodemus differently (John 3). Jesus approached the woman at the well differently (John 4). Jesus approached the sinners and the tax collectors differently (Matthew 9; John 8) than he did the Sadducees and Pharisees. And so, be encouraged in your evangelism. There's not one way to share the gospel with people. Some people need to be loved before they will listen to anything you say, as they are suspect of the "religious type" of person. Some people are so depressed in their sin, that they need only to hear the good news. But others, like the man in our text, need to have their sin exposed.

I do believe that Jesus' goal was to expose this man's sin, so that he might realize that he needed a Savior. But, such was not the case. We read in verse 20, ...

Mark 10:20

And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up."

This man didn't see his sin. He claimed obedience to the law. He claimed obedience to the 6th commandment: You shall not murder. He claimed obedience to the 7th commandment: You shall not commit adultery. He claimed obedience to the 8th commandment: You shall not steal. He claimed obedience to the 9th commandment: Do not bear false witness (do not defraud). He claimed obedience to the 5th commandment: Honor your father and mother.

In his defense, this man was certainly a righteous man. He had grown up in a Jewish home. He had been educated in the ways of the Scripture. He hadn't ever committed any overt sin. He thought just the apostle Paul thought before he was converted. Paul said, "as to the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless" (Phil. 3:6).

That was true on a surface level. But, Jesus could have penetrated deep into any of these commandments to show this man his sin. Hatred in the heart is the essence of murder. Lust is the essence of adultery. Stealing anything is still stealing. Even a white-lie is still bearing false witness. But, Jesus goes for the 10th commandment: You shall not covet. This is right where Paul's sin was exposed. He said, ...

Romans 7:7-8, 10

I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said, "You shall not covet. But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead. ... and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me.

Verse 21 brings us to Jesus addressing the 10th commandment.

Mark 10:21

Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Obviously Jesus knew a bit about this man. Jesus knew that this man was wealthy. Jesus knew that this man loved his material possessions. So, Jesus called him to sell everything.

This man was Wanting Eternal Life (verses 17-21). However, in verse 22, we see that he was ...

2. Wanting the World (verse 22)

Mark 10:22

But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

This is the reality of many Americans. We own "much property." Jesus calls this man to "sell all" (verse 21). Jesus calls this man to "give to the poor" (verse 21).

But, "he went away grieving." He wanted eternal life. He wanted the world. Jesus said, "You can't have both."

If you want to have eternal life, "one thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (verse 21).

One of the questions that often comes to mind at this point is this: do I need to sell everything? Let's listen to David Platt once more, ...

I think there are two common errors people make when they read this passage [of the rich young ruler]. First, some try to universalize Jesus' words, saying that he always commands his followers to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. But the New Testament doesn't support this. Even some of the disciples, who admittedly abandoned much to follow Christ, still had a home, likely still had a boat, and probably had some kind of material support. So, obviously, following Jesus doesn't necessarily imply a loss of all your private property.

This cause many of us to breathe a sigh of relief. But before we sign too deeply, we need to see the other error in interpreting Mark 10, which is to assume that Jesus never calls his followers to abandon all their possessions to follow him. If Mark 10 teaches anything, it teaches us that Jesus does sometimes call people to sell everything they have and give it to the poor. This means he might call you or me to do this. I love the way one writer put it. He wrote, 'That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom he would issue that command.'

So what about you and me? Are we willing to ask God if he wants us to sell everything we have and give the money to the poor? Are we willing to ask and wait for an answer instead of providing one of our own or justifying our ideas of why he would never tell us to do this? This seems a bit radical, but isn't it normal and expected when we follow a Master who said, 'Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple'?

Once again we find ourselves back at what it means to follow the Jesus of the Bible, not the Jesus we have created and are comfortable with. The rich man in Mark 10 didn't see Jesus for who he was. The rich man perceived him as a respectable religious figure, calling him 'good teacher.' However, Jesus was not, and never is, interested in being seen as a respectable teacher. He is the sovereign Lord. He doesn't give options for people to consider; he gives commands for people to obey. [\[5\]](#)

The fact of the matter is this: you cannot have Jesus and the world at the same time. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). John said, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

You may want both. But you can only have one.

It is interesting to see that this man left, "grieving." Why was he "grieving"? (NAS, KJV). Why was he "sorrowful"? (ESV, NKJV). Why was he "sad"? (NIV). Because he really wanted eternal life, but the world was holding him back. The tie of the world was too strong. And he was unwilling to let go of the world and take hold of Christ.

Now, the fundamental reason why he couldn't obtain eternal life is because, he was ...

3. Lacking God (verses 23-27)

Notice where the conversation goes in verse 23 and following, ...

Mark 10:23

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!"

We understand this statement of Jesus. Because, we understand that, "those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9). We know that "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

But, the Jews had a different perspective. In their way of thinking, the rich in this world were those who were especially blessed of God. In their minds, it was the rich who will certainly enter the kingdom of God!

Abraham and David are examples of this. That's why Job's situation was so troublesome. He was a righteous man. He was a very, very wealthy man. Why would God bring such tragedy upon such a blessed man? This is why we read in verse 24, ...

Mark 10:24

The disciples were amazed at His words.

So, Jesus again repeats what He said, ...

Mark 10:24-25

... But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Whenever something in the Bible is repeated, you should take notice. Because, it is repeated for emphasis. Verses 24 and 25 say exactly the

same thing that verse 23 said, "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Here in verse 25, Jesus gives an illustration of how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. "It's easier to take a camel and shove it through the eye of a tiny needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

There are those who have toned down Jesus' words here by talking about a "needle gate" in Jerusalem that was so small that camels had to kneel in order to get through the gate. But, there is no evidence that such a gate ever existed.

Some have claimed that a translational error has been made. They say that Jesus wasn't talking about a "camel," but was talking about a "rope." "It is easier for a rope to be threaded through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Which may be possible if you have a very large needle and a very small rope.

But, such explanations miss the entire thrust of the passage. Jesus is making a point: if you are rich, it is hard to enter the kingdom of God. After making this bold statement again, ...

Mark 10:26

They [i.e. the disciples] were even more astonished

After Jesus made his first statement in verse 23, "the disciples were amazed" (verse 24). After Jesus made his second statement in verses 24 and 25, the disciples "were even more astonished."

Mark 10:26

... and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?"

They full-well understood what Jesus was saying. Getting a camel through the eye of a needle is impossible. And if the rich can't get in (those particularly blessed of God), then who gets into the kingdom?

Mark 10:27

Looking at them, Jesus said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God."

Here's the point: salvation isn't just hard for the rich; salvation is impossible for the rich. You can't take a camel -- that weighs in the neighborhood of 1500 pounds -- and place him through the eye of a needle. But, Jesus gives hope. He says, "for all things are possible with God."

And that's what the rich young man in our story needed. He was Wanting Eternal Life (verses 17-21). He was also Wanting the World (verse 22). He was unable to let go of the world, because he was Lacking God (verses 23-27). The man had religion, obviously. But, the man didn't have God.

For a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, God needs to work. God needs to change the heart. It is easy for the rich to set their hearts upon the things of this world. The poor? They have nowhere else to turn, but to the LORD. That's why Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 6:20). Those without resources cannot look to their own strength. They need help, and they often cry out to God for help.

But the rich don't need God. So, why would they cry out to God? Now, we in America ought to take notice. Because we are all rich.

If you make \$25,000 a year, you are in the top 10% of the world's wealthiest people. In other words, \$25,000 a year means that you make more than 90% of the people on the planet. If you make \$50,000 a year, you are in the top 1% of the world's wealthiest people. In other words, \$50,000 a year means that you make more than 99% of the people on the planet. [\[6\]](#)

It is hard for an American to enter the kingdom of God! All you need to do is go out and talk with people. Many are living comfortable lives, just fine without God. What do they need God for? They have a safe place to lay their head. They have their television and internet. They have an abundance of food. They have access to easy transportation. What more do they need in this life?

It is like this in Nepal, too, more recently. I remember having breakfast with some pastors when I was in Nepal. I told them how fortunate I thought they were to have the gospel so readily accepted by people. It seemed to take off like wildfire. They told me that it used to be like that. Now, though, since democracy has taken over in recent years, the gospel is less attractive to Nepalis. The government is no longer oppressive. They are finding hope in the government. Things might actually change. So, they aren't quite as desperate as they were before. They don't feel a great need for God any more.

Many Americans are like those in Laodicea, who say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17). And when you don't need anything, you don't need Jesus. And when you don't think you need Jesus, you can't be saved. And in our wealthy society, it's impossible for many to be saved.

And so, let me ask you, "How will a rich man ever be saved?" Only when he sees and acknowledges that his wealth and riches won't be able to buy him everything. Only when he sees that before God, he is a ruined, undone sinner, who desperately needs the mercy of God in his life. Jesus told the church in Laodicea, "You do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

They think that they have it all. They are self-sufficient. But, they don't know that they are really sinners. They don't know that before God,

they are poor and needy. And since they have no clue of how "poor and blind and naked" they are, they don't seek to change anything. There is no cry for mercy. There is no cry for help. There is no salvation. For such people, it is impossible for them to enter the kingdom of God. Unless God works.

I love how Eugene Peterson translates these verses, ...

Mark 10:23-27 (Message)

Looking at his disciples, Jesus said, "Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who 'have it all' to enter God's kingdom?"

The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: "You can't imagine how difficult. I'd say it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for the rich to get into God's kingdom."

That set the disciples back on their heels. "Then who has any chance at all?" they asked. Jesus was blunt: "No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do it."

And if God acts, even wealthy Americans can enter the kingdom of God! But, only when God works in their heart -- granting repentance, granting faith, opening eyes to the greater realities of heaven and hell, and softening hearts to believe in Christ.

Here's the great reality with salvation: But, apart from God's working, we are lost. Oh, may God come and work!

This man came to Jesus, ...

4. Needing Perspective (verses 28-31)

Look at what Peter says in verse 28, ...

Mark 10:28

Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You."

Peter recalls the time when Jesus came to him

Mark 1:16-20

As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. Immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.

What a commitment! When Jesus called them, they didn't even take in their nets and fold them away. They left them in the sea, wet. James and John even left their father "in the boat with the hired servants."

I think that Peter is saying here, "We have given up all of our riches! We have left everything to follow you! Are we worthy to enter the kingdom of God?"

Mark 10:29-31

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first."

Such is the perspective that the rich young ruler needed. Such is the perspective that all of us need. There is nothing that you leave in this life, that you will not receive back in abundance.

These disciples sacrificed everything. They willingly gave up their professions. Fishermen and tax collectors became preachers.

They willingly gave up their reputations. The Jewish leaders excommunicated from the synagogue all who confessed Jesus to be the Christ (John 9:22). When they chose to follow Jesus, their social lives were over. They weren't welcomed into the synagogues. They weren't welcomed into the Jewish social circles.

They willingly gave up their lives. Of the eleven apostles that remained faithful to Jesus, ten of them were martyred. I don't think that they ever regretted their decision to follow Christ.

Jesus tells us that everything we give up will be rewarded many times. Our reward will be "a hundred times" what we give up. If you give up a house for the sake of the kingdom, you will receive a hundred houses. If you give up a brother, you will have a hundred brothers. If you give up a sister, you will have a hundred sisters. If you give up a father, you will have a hundred fathers. If you give up a mother, you will give up a hundred mothers. If you give up a child, you will have a hundred children. If you give up two children, you will have two hundred children. If you give up a farm, you will have a hundred farms.

Of course, this is a metaphor here. It is impossible to have a hundred mothers. The point ought to be clear. Whatever blessings you forsake in this life, God will make it up to you. He will make it up to you in abundance! One commentator said, "God takes nothing away from a man without restoring it to him in a new and glorious form." [7]

I believe that many of the blessings that we receive come in the context of the community of the church, where spiritual relationships transcend the natural relationships we have. In the church we have many more brothers and sisters than our family has. In the church, we have many others who can deal with us as fathers and mothers. Paul tells us to think of our relationships in the church in terms of family relationships (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

Regarding farms and houses, we may not own a hundred homes and a hundred farms. But, the collective church has many homes and much property that are available for our use. One man in our church loves to share his farm with those in the church. He and his wife often host groups of people there to enjoy the quiet, open spaces. What a deal for us! They take care of the place and we get to use it! In that way the church is a way to have many more possessions than we own.

Indeed, in the church we have received much more than we have ever given up.

We simply need perspective! Following Jesus is worth it in this present life as well as in the life to come.

Here, the going may be hard. We may face some persecutions (verse 30). Do you remember the story of Christian, who left his family and the city of destruction to go to the Celestial City? His wife and children considered him mad! Obstinate and Pliable both considered him to be foolish. He had little good reputation in the city he left behind. He faced many troubles and hardships along the way, but there were always faithful believers to help him along. Men like Evangelist and Interpreter and Faithful and Hopeful. Women like Discretion and Piety and Charity and Prudence.

Notice what Jesus says at the end of verse 30: "in the age to come eternal life." With this statement, the story of the rich young ruler comes to a close. We have come full circle. The rich young ruler came to Jesus, seeking "eternal life" (verse 17). Jesus called him to give up everything that he owned (verse 21). But, he refused (verse 22).

Now Jesus says, in verse 30, that those who do give up everything for the sake of Christ and His kingdom, will never lack in the ages to come. They will overflow with blessings. The sacrifices that they make will seem small in comparison to everything that God will give them. The persecutions that they endured will seem as nothing. And God will give to them eternal life! This is life forever, enjoying God and his pleasures.

The blessings there will be abundant! No one will ever get to heaven and say, "Boy, did I get cheated. I gave up my earthly family to get this awful family in heaven? I gave up my house on earth, and all I get is this tiny apartment? I give all my property to the church on earth, and I have to rent this little place here?" Nobody will ever say these things. Rather, your heart will be blown away by all that will be given to you."

I think that that's the idea of Jesus, when he says in verse 31, "Many who are first will be last, and the last, first." In this life, it may be that the rich are always first. It may be that the poor are always last. But, in the age to come, things will be all evened out. There are many who are last in this life, who will be first in the life to come. May God give us perspective this morning.

I finish with one last quote from David Platt. He writes, ...

Amid the many facets of the American dream that contradict the core of the gospel, one ideal Americans have embraced coincides subtly with the words of Christ. As James Adams was coining the phrase 'American dream,' Franklin Roosevelt was emphasizing how Americans will postpone immediate gratification and even endure hard sacrifices if they are convinced their future will be better than their past. Americans are willing to take great risks, he said, if they believe it will accomplish great reward.

In similar words Jesus said to his followers, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Jesus clearly acknowledged that following him involves risking the safety, security, and satisfaction we have found in this world. But in the end, Jesus said, following him leads to a radical reward that this world can never offer. This begs a question from each of us: do we believe the reward found in Jesus is worth the risk of following him? [8]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 9, 2012 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] David Platt, "Radical". p. 65.

[2] http://www.rvbc.cc/Sermons/2010/2010-09-26_-_Grace_and_Glory.htm

[3] David Platt, "Radical". pp. 45-47.

[4] <http://www.wayofthemaster.com/>

[5] David Platt, "Radical". pp. 119-121.

[6] <http://www.globalrichlist.com/>

[7] Lane, p. 372, as quoted in Expositor's Bible Commentary, p. 717

[8] David Platt, "Radical". pp. 161-162