

September 17, 2017

The Radical Sayings of Jesus
Sell Your Possessions
Mark 10:17-31

Opening words: Today, I continue my new sermon series called *The Radical Sayings of Jesus*. You know the truth. Most people read the Bible selectively. There are certain things we have read in the Bible countless times. We love those passages because we find comfort in them. However, there are other passages in the Bible we have never read because we find them hard to understand or harsh to our ears. It is true of the entire Bible, including the Gospels. We try to ignore certain words from the Master. The truth be told, there are certain things we wish Jesus had never said. They are just too radical. This is the problem. We can't dismiss those words, because they came from Jesus. We must not just understand them. We must apply them to our daily lives. Today's radical saying of Jesus is a fine example. Today, Jesus tells us to sell our possessions.

In 1991, Kathryn and I bought a cottage in Lakeside on the Marblehead peninsula. We bought it because we never thought we would own our own home. We sold it about two years ago. Lakeside is a great place to go for the weekend; we stayed there for twenty-five years. It is safe to say, I never felt the magic of Lakeside. For me, it was like going to Annual Conference every day, with a gate fee. If you would ask me what the greatest days in my life were, I would say the best day was my wedding day. The next best day was the birth of my children. The third greatest day in my life was the day I sold the cottage. Every day in my life is a good day because I don't own the cottage. Sometimes selling your possessions is a good thing. Today's message is called *Sell Your Possessions*. Our scripture reading is Mark 10:17-31.

Mark 10:17-31 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Billy Graham once said, "*The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith.*" I think the great evangelist is right. If you find some wisdom in that quote, say, "**Amen!**"

Today, we find ourselves in the tenth chapter of Mark. It is a story we know well. It is recorded, with minor variations, in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Combining all three gives us the whole picture. According to the three Gospels, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he is confronted by a rich young ruler. In other words, this man has everything this world has to offer. He is rich, so he can buy anything his heart desires. He is young, so his health is good. His calendar is not filled with doctor's appointments and funeral home visitations. He is a ruler, so he has influence. He has friends in high places. He has everything this world has to offer, but he doesn't have everything. His soul is restless, so he goes to Jesus to obtain spiritual peace. Verse 17 is key. The rich young ruler asks Jesus clearly, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus answers the question with a question. The Master asked him if he was guilty of murder or adultery. Had he ever stolen, given false testimony or defrauded someone? Had he always honored his father and mother? The man had kept all those commandments because the man had been sincere from birth. He was a true child of his faith. Jesus must have been impressed. However, this is the problem: Salvation is not obtained by what we have not done. Salvation is obtained by what we do. What does Jesus want this young man to do? The Master wants the young man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. That way, he will be free to follow him. Why would Jesus say such a thing? This is the answer: Jesus knows our possessions are often damaging to our spiritual health. If that sounds a little familiar, say, "**Amen!**" Can I be honest with you?

It is my experience that we *know* the story of the rich young ruler, but we don't *like* the story of the rich young ruler. The words of Jesus are too radical. Is anyone here willing to sell all your possessions and give all money to the poor? If you sold all your possessions and gave your money to the poor, you would find yourself both bankrupt

and homeless. Jesus's words seem to be insane, so we dismiss them. Many believe this story is reserved for the truly rich, not us. It is reserved for the 1% of the American population that controls 38% of our nation's wealth. He can't be speaking to the 90% of the American population who own 78% of our nation's debt. This is the problem: Jesus *is* speaking to us. I don't want to sound like a preacher, but in comparison to the majority of the world, we are rich. We don't consider ourselves rich because we compare ourselves with people who live at the same standard of living. You know the truth. We are much better at seeing the things we want and blind to the things we have. It isn't just true of the youth going on a mission trip, it is true for all of us. Sometimes, we need to experience someone else's world so we can appreciate our lives. We need to step out of our worlds to learn something about our world.

Last Friday night, I had planned on going to the Harding-Massillon football game. I have been following Harding football since 1965 so I know the routine. Before the game, Kathryn and I go to the Buena Vista restaurant for all-you-can-eat fish. That night, we got a late start, so the restaurant was full when we arrived. We had to wait for a table and once we got a table, the service was a little slow. When we got done eating it was almost time for kick off. I hate to rush, so I looked at Kathryn and said, "Do you still want to go to the game?" She answered honestly, "No. I am only going for you. However, I do want to drive by your old house and through your old neighborhood." It is not the first time we have made that journey. I always liked driving through those east side streets. We drove by the location of my old elementary school, which has been torn down. We drove by the location of my Junior High School, which has been torn down. (All the school buildings I attended are now torn down. They are trying to destroy the evidence ☺) We drove by the homes of my childhood friends. Some are boarded up. We drove by my childhood home. My parents bought that house as their starter house and didn't leave it until I was out of college. The room that was my nursery later was the same room I slept in the night before I left for college. I do not want to sound critical, but the old neighborhood had seen better days. When we got back to our home, Kathryn said to me, "Sometimes, I forget how nice our house is." Sometimes, when we step out of our world we learn something about our world.

In 1996, my wife started making her trips to Russia. Perhaps, you feel like you have heard too much about those trips. Those trips changed me and the way I look at my life. One of the people we met during those trips was an orphan named Vlad. He lost his legs below the knees in a train accident. Kathryn brought him to America several times to get, and maintain, his prosthetic legs. We never legally adopted Vlad, but we did emotionally adopt Vlad. We communicate with him regularly. He is now twenty-seven years old and lives in the city of Dmitrov, one and a half hours north of Moscow. Vlad lives with his girlfriend, Yulia. We took them out to dinner when we were in Russia in May. Yulia has had jaw surgery since that dinner in a Russian hospital. Things did not go well and she ended up in a Russian Intensive Care Unit for a month with pneumonia. She is an English teacher, but in Russia there is no unemployment insurance. In other words, if you don't work you don't get paid. Vlad and Yulia are going through a difficult

time. They didn't ask for help but we are going to send them some money. If you would like to help us help them, that would be great. If you asked Vlad if Kathryn and I are rich, he would say, "Yes!" When I'm with Vlad, I feel rich. Sometimes, when we step out of our world we learn something about our world.

Several years ago, Kathryn and I were in Russia and stayed behind. The rest of the team flew back to the United States. We stayed behind to visit a United Methodist missionary, Matt Lafferty. He showed us his work and took us to a free medical clinic. The Russian medical clinic was filled with Africans. Their dark complexions caught me off guard, so I asked why they were there. Matt explained, Russians are extremely prejudiced against anyone of color. The Africans go to the clinic not just for their medical needs but for their social needs. I said, "No! What are these Africans doing in Russia?" He told me, many Africans have come to Russia because in Russia they have more opportunity than in their home land. They see the Russians as rich. Sometimes, when we step out of our world we learn something about our world.

I want to offer you a challenge this morning. I challenge you to discover just how rich you are. Sometime today go to a website called "How Much Can You Give." If you go to that website and punch in your net income, it will tell you where you are among the world's rich. I will be honest with you. I punched in my net income and I won't tell you where I rank because I am too embarrassed. If you punch in the median household income in Ohio, \$51,075, you find we are in the top 3.8% of income in the world. I know, I have gone on too long to make this point, but I want you to get it. When Jesus speaks to the rich young ruler, he is speaking to us. He is speaking to you! Like it or not, you are rich. If you will admit you are rich, say, "**Amen!**" Let's look at the text one more time.

The rich young ruler walks away sad because he couldn't sell his possessions. You really can't blame him. Is anyone here willing to sell all your possessions? The disciples are trying to understand what just happened. It is hard to comprehend. In verse 23, Jesus tells us why he said such a radical thing. Jesus says, it is hard for a rich man to get into heaven. Listen to what Jesus said again. The Master said, it is hard for the rich to get into heaven. He did not say it was impossible for the rich to get into heaven. Jesus knows what we want to ignore. While money is a good thing in this world, money has a way of frustrating our spiritual growth. Spiritually speaking, how you handle your possessions and how you view your possessions are extremely important. They won't just influence your time in this world. They will influence your eternity.

The Bible tells us four ways our money is retarding our spiritual growth.

- 1. Money often leads to pride and arrogance.** God hates pride and arrogance. God loves the humble.
- 2. Money gives us a false sense security.** Money can eliminate some of life's problems but not all. It is God who has the final say.

3. **Money drains us of our compassion and mercy.** We often think we deserve our money and judge those who don't. Your money doesn't make you right, but your money may make you hard-hearted.
4. **Money has a way of dividing our loyalties.** Is money the driving force in your life? Or is God the driving force in your life?

Your possessions are a great test. If you promise to be aware of the influence money has on your spiritual life, say, **"Amen!"**

John Wesley (1703-1791) was the founder of the great Methodist movement. History tells us, he was aware of the influence of money on his spiritual life. He believed in making all you could so you could give more of it away. When he was a student at Oxford, his annual income was thirty British pounds. He lived on 28 pounds and gave away 2 pounds. Thirty British pounds then is worth about \$6,500 today. Through the years his income grew. At one point, he made 60 pounds. Then, it grew to 90 pounds, then it grew to 120 pounds. What didn't change was his living expenses, 28 pounds. He just gave away more all the time. Wesley was aware of the influence of money on his spiritual life. How aware are you?

Here is the good news for today: You are rich! Here is the bad news for today: You are rich! The way you handle your money, the way you view your money is a great challenge to your spiritual maturity. Remember, what Jesus said, "It is hard for the rich to get into heaven", not impossible. Remember, what Billy Graham said, *"The greatest legacy one can pass on to one's children and grandchildren is not money or other material things accumulated in one's life, but rather a legacy of character and faith."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**