**KINGDOM TRUTH FROM THE KING**

**(Matthew 19:23-30)**

I got a phone call this past week. It turned out to be a message rather than a real person. The message told me that if I want to be able to put $10,000 or more every 10 to 14 days into my bank account, I should press #3. I chose not stay on the line because I have entered the Publisher’s Clearing House Sweepstakes, and I’m expecting big things. If all goes well, my tithe check will be going up considerably.

Most people have wondered what it would be like to win a substantial amount of money suddenly. Some people don’t have to wonder because they have experienced it, and they discovered it wasn’t quite as wonderful as they thought it would be.

Consider the story of Jack Whittaker. He was a 55-year-old president of a construction company. He was already a millionaire when he won $315 million in the West Virginia lottery in 2002. At the time, it was the largest undivided jackpot in history. He said that within 4 years he went broke. He lost both a daughter and a granddaughter to drug over-doses that he blames on his Powerball win. He told ABC News, “My granddaughter is dead because of the money. You know, my wife said she wished that she had torn the ticket up. Well, I wish that that we had torn the ticket up, too.” He went on to say, “I don’t like the hard heart I’ve got. I don’t like what I’ve become.”

Jack Whittaker’s story is not an isolated one. Don McNay is a financial consultant to lottery winners. He has written a book entitled, *Life Lessons from the Lottery.* He tells of winners who went on to commit suicide, who filed for bankruptcy, who divorced, and how upheaval invaded their lives. He calls it the curse of the lottery, how it makes their lives worse, not better.

One author claimed, “Every time a state lottery agency has a big payday, it’s tantamount to clearing an untrained pilot for takeoff.”

Unfortunately, many of those pilots are unable to land their plane safely. Of those who crash, some are able to walk away, and some are not.

We should not be surprised of what we find in the Bible. Not quite 2000 years ago, Paul wrote two letters to a young minister named Timothy that appear in the NT. In the first letter he warned:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

I know God loves me, and because He does, I am thinking that the Publisher’s Clearing House Sweepstakes thing may not work out, and I’m okay with that.

Last Sunday morning we met a young man who was rich, and it was his riches that kept him from pursuing a close relationship with Jesus. In today’s passage Jesus discusses the difficulty that young man faced, and He did so in the context of describing certain truths about the Kingdom. This morning, we are going to look at “Kingdom Truth from the King.” I invite you to look at Matthew 19:23-30. There are two truths I want to highlight.

1. **THE KING TELLS US THE TRUTH ABOUT ENTERING HIS KINGDOM.**

Matthew does something in our passage that He only does a handful of times in his gospel account. Most often he refers to the Kingdom of Heaven. He uses that phrase 33 times. He is the only author in the NT who uses that phrase. A full 17 times He shortens the phrase and just writes, “the kingdom.” Five times, however, he does what the other gospel writers do and He mentions, “the Kingdom of God.” One of those five times shows up in our passage. It is found at the end of v. 24.

Why does Matthew use “Kingdom of Heaven” while the other gospel writers call it the “Kingdom of God?” Matthew was a Jewish writer writing to a Jewish audience. The Jewish people so revered the name of God that they were more than hesitant to use His name in speech or in writing lest they somehow use His name in a disrespectful way.

There were, however, just a handful (five times) that Matthew thought this subject warranted him to invoke God’s name. This was one such time. Here, Matthew draws a contrast between the Kingdom of money and the Kingdom of God. If you choose the first, you will not be able to choose the second Kingdom.

Such was the case of the rich, young ruler. Money, wealth, and possessions had become his god. That money god demanded his complete allegiance. He found himself unable to part from that god to serve the true God.

Let me summarize two things Jesus says about entering His Kingdom.

1. *Wealth Is Inadequate.*

Wealth and money will open a lot of doors from you, but there is one door that riches cannot open, and that is the door of heaven. Wealth is completely inadequate to get you into the Kingdom of God and heaven.

Wealth is inadequate in other ways. Money will buy health insurance, but money can’t insure you won’t get sick. Health insurance is a misnomer. Health insurance doesn’t insure your health; it just insures the doctor is going to get paid. That’s what it insures.

Here are some other things money can and can’t buy:

* Money can buy a bigger house but not a home.
* Money can buy adulation but not respect.
* Money can buy companionship but not love.
* Money can buy education, but it can’t buy knowledge, wisdom, and experience.
* Money can buy someone’s services, but it can’t buy their loyalty.
* Money can buy thrills and distractions, but it can’t buy serenity and inner peace.
* Money can buy expensive watches but not time.

Just a few ago, I was reading the Enid News & Eagle, and it reported that Kendra Horn, who is a U.S. Representative from Oklahoma, has recommended that a post office in OKC be named after Clara Luper, who was a civil rights leader from OKC. It just so happens that Mrs. Luper was also my American History teacher in 10th grade. She was a great teacher, and she made history come alive. I remember, more than once, Mrs. Luper saying to our class, “Money doesn’t talk; money screams.”

She was right. In our noisy world, money is able to get and hold the attention of otherwise distracted people. But even when money screams its loudest, God turns a deaf ear to the insistent and persistent claims of money.

Jesus understates His position in v. 23. He says that it is “difficult” for a person of wealth to get to heaven. Then, in v. 24, He shows how difficult. He says that it is easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get to heaven. Think about that for a moment. A camel was the largest land animal in Israel. Had Jesus been in Asia or Africa, He would have said an elephant, but He was in Israel. The people hadn’t seen elephants, but they had seen camels. He mentioned a needle which is the smallest man-made opening. I have a hard-enough time getting a slender thread through the eye of a needle. Can you imagine trying to thread a camel through the eye of a needle. It is impossible. In v. 26, Jesus uses the word *impossible* after listening to the disciples shocked protest.

The disciples were indeed shocked. In their culture, a person who was wealthy was believed to have been blessed by God. It was generally believed that a wealthy person was ahead of the average person on God’s favorite list. So, if a wealthy person isn’t going to be saved, the disciples figured they had no hope of gaining God’s approval.

While wealth is insufficient, Jesus tells us a second truth.

1. *God Is Omni-Competent.*

There is a children’s song that boasts:

My God is so big and so strong and so mighty  
There’s nothing my God cannot do.

Not only can rich people not save themselves, neither can the poor or any other group of people. God, however, can do what we can’t do.

I think of that time when an angel came to see a young lady named Mary. The angel announces to Mary that she is going to have baby, and that baby is going to be the Son of God. We find the story in Luke 1. Mary says to the angel, “I think you have overlooked a small detail. I’ve never been with a man.” The angel tells Mary what is going to happen and adds in v. 37, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Mary gives a verbal thumbs up, and the angel leaves.

Years ago, Pastor Ralph Sockman preached a message in which he asked, “Which is the real world: the one that is or the one we see?” He went on to say:

New York’s Museum of Natural History [once] arranged [a room] in accordance with the way it was supposed to look to a dog entering the door . . . In this particular room . . . the legs of the table were made to resemble large pillars, the chairs were lofty thrones, and the mantel above the fireplace appeared as an unscalable precipice, high overhead.

Which was reality: the room as it looked to a dog, or the room as it looked to a [man or woman]? Being [men and women], we say, of course, that the room as we see it is the real one. But may there not be a divine eye as much above ours in perception as ours is above the dog’s? And may not our little worlds as we see them seem as grotesque to the God above as the dog’s room looks to us?

God never faces a moment of self-doubt. God never comes across an obstacle or a problem and wonders whether He can overcome it. He never faces a threat to His competency.

You and I may excel in one or two areas, be okay in some others, and then in still others, be just terrible. Individually, we are not omni-competent. God is. God doesn’t have any weaknesses. There are no areas that God needs to work on.

That means you can trust Him.

1. **THE KING TELLS US THE TRUTH ABOUT SACRIFICING FOR HIS KINGDOM.**

Peter often acted as a spokesman for the disciples. He would ask a question, and then Jesus would use the plural when answering because He knew this was a concern of the group. We find this happening in v. 27 and following. Peter’s question was likely prompted by the promise Jesus gave the rich, young ruler in v. 21. Jesus said to him, “If you do what I say, you will have treasure in heaven.”

You might consider Peter’s question to be improper. He seems a bit brash. He should be serving God and sacrificing for Him just because God deserves it. It is true that we should not serve God for purely, mercenary reasons. Still yet, God is not timid about offering us promises of great reward. When the going gets tough, when we are about tor throw in the towel and call in quits, we can remember what God has promised, and He will use that to strengthen our resolve.

Look at v. 28. Jesus’ uses the term “new world.” He is not talking about the discovery of the Americas. There are two worlds. There is this world as it is, marred by sin, and there is the world that will be when Jesus returns. It will be a world that is remade without sin and without rebellion. I believe the remainder of v. 28 was for the disciples, those original, first century followers of Jesus.

When we get to v. 29, I believe we are back to all the followers of Jesus, and that includes you and me. You might think that all of v. 29 is future. I think not, and I’ll tell you why. What Jesus says in this passage is repeated in both Mark and Luke, but those two gospels render it a bit differently.

Let’s look at Mark 10:29-30 and also Luke 18:29-30. I don’t know that there are any here who have left family and all you possessed in order to follow Christ. We have certain freedoms in this country that are not afforded to believers in other parts of the world. In some places still today, to follow Jesus involves a great cost. You can be disowned by your family. You can be thrown out of your house. You can be fired from your job or much worse.

How does God replace those things in this life? He does so through the Church. Whatever relationships you have lost because of your commitment to Christ, He will replace through the people in the Church.

When I was a young pastor and a young parent, my parents were several hours away, but my kids had so many grandmothers and grandfathers in the church to love on them and spoil them.

I don’t own my own home. My family and I live in a parsonage provided by the church. If the church parsonage burned to the ground, is there anybody here who would let us stay a night or two on your living room floor?

God is going to bless you through the Church in this life, and then in the next one, He is going to give you eternal and abundant life the likes of which you have never dreamed.

Did you notice those two words that Mark included that neither Matthew nor Luke did? Mark added, “with persecutions.” Have you ever thought of persecution as a blessing with which God wants to reward you? Jesus saw persecution as a blessing. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5:10-11. Persecution is a great blessing because those who undergo persecution will be greatly rewarded.

One of my favorite books is a slim little volume written by Bruce Wilkinson. It is entitled, *A Life God Rewards.* He tells a story in that book that I want to retell.

Bruce was speaking at a family conference in Kentucky. During a coffee break, a 9-year-old boy named Will walked up to him and asked if he would donate to a mission’s project.

Bruce asked, “What would you use my money for?”

The boy held up a radio and explained, “This radio runs by sun power. It’s for people who live in the jungles. People can listen to this radio to learn things and hear about Jesus.”

Bruce made Will an offer. He said, “I’ll give to your project, but I have a rule that says you have to give money first.” Bruce wrote out his proposal:

Will,

If you give $1 to $5, I’ll give double.

If you give $6 to $10, I’ll give triple.

If you give $11 to $20, I’ll give 4 times what you give.

Bruce signed his name, and Will read the card. By the time he finished, his eyes were big as saucers. But then, Will’s face fell. He said, “I can’t give. I already gave everything I have.”

Bruce began to feel badly for Will. He said, “You mean you put all your money in your own fund drive?”

Will nodded.

“So, you can’t buy any more snacks for the rest of the conference?”

Again, Will nodded.

Bruce said, “Actually, Will, I also have a rule that if you give everything you have, I will give everything I have, too.”

It just so happened, that Bruce had been to a bank and had withdrawn a considerable amount of cash for his trip. Bruce reached under the table, opened up his briefcase, and pulled out a bank envelope filled with bills, and he handed it to Will.

Bruce said that now he and Will both had eyes as big as saucers, but they were both grinning happily.

Bruce wrote:

My experience with Will has come to illustrate a truth for me about giving that’s so surprising it hardly sounds possible: Whatever I give to God on earth, He will more than give back to me in heaven.

Our text says that Jesus promised we would receive 100-fold. That is a 10,000% return. See if you can find a bank that will promise that kind of return on your savings.

We can selfishly hold on to what God blesses us with in this life, or we can invest it in His service. It has been said, “You can’t out give God.” Let’s go ahead and try and see what happens.