

Series: Jesus Changes Everything

Simplicity—Life with Less

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Matthew 6:26-34

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, February 2, 2025

Dawn: Good morning, everybody. It is so good to see your faces and to worship alongside you this morning. My name is Dawn Gonzales, in case we have not met before. I have a thought that I want to share before I jump into the whole point of why I am up here this morning, but I was having a thought around the conversation of the fruits of the Spirit as Maddie was reading that scripture verse, and it got me thinking about one of the songs that we sing from time to time here at Waterstone called New Wine. In that song it talks about the crushing and the pressing, and I think often when we consider how the fruits of the Spirit are developed, maybe we do not take into consideration that there might be a crushing and a pressing that takes place in the production of that fruit, and so that leads to the whole point of why I am up here. Paul asked me if I would be willing to share a little bit of my story with you and then of course, read a scripture verse with you, so there are lots of different seasons, of course, of my life that I could talk to you about, but if I did share all of them, then Paul would not have a sermon to share. There would not be time for that today, so obviously I am just going to take you through bits and pieces.

I think one of the things I wanted to focus on was to talk about dependence. There have been lots of various seasons in my life where I have had to greatly depend upon the Lord, and I would say probably one of the most important of those was the day that I accepted Jesus in my heart and proclaimed Him as my Lord and Savior. I was only a teenager then. In fact, I was seventeen years old. I was a senior in high school, nearing graduation, and of course facing the start of my adult life. Like many teenagers, maybe at that season of time I thought that I was incredibly mature, but of course there was no way that I could truly know what the journey was going to look like between the Lord and me. Some of the seasons, of course, in the beginning were one simply of just growing up in my relationship with Him, going to Bible college and learning more about the Lord, maturing, navigating independence as a new adult, and also embodying roles like that of a worship leader, later becoming a wife and a mother, growing a family of my own. I became a church-planter and a homeschooling mom. One of the moments I did not anticipate was becoming a divorcee in my mid-thirties at the hand of infidelity, becoming a business owner, a mentor, a coach in my profession, becoming a new bride in my late thirties. One of my favorites was becoming a grandma, and in recent years becoming a widow. The truth is, each season and each role has been mixed with times of great joy, but also great sorrow.

I would say that my seasons of greatest dependence and may I even be brave enough to say joy, have been ones where I have persisted in the cultivation of gratitude, even in the midst of deep pain and loss, waiting and trusting in the God whom I have put my faith in for nearly thirty-one years. I have been in God's weight training program a few times in my life. Do you want to know the truth? Waiting is not for the faint of heart, and I have certainly felt both faint in my body and faint in my heart, trusting that when life completely falls apart, maybe even like me multiple times, it can be incredibly difficult, but there is one verse that I have clung to in these deep, dark spaces, and that is from Psalm 27, verses 13 and

14, and it says, “I would have lost heart had I not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living,” and here is the encouragement: “Wait for the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord.”

Jesus changes everything. He certainly took my separation from Him when I was lost in sin and drew me near to Him. He forgave me, washed me clean, gave me a new life, a future, and a hope. He even gives me a companion in his Holy Spirit. He has given me courage in the face of pain. He fills my heart again and again with unexplainable joy, even in the darkest of valleys. He has been a father to the fatherless daughter. That is me. He has been a refuge for the rejected wife. That is me. He has been a defender of the widow. That is me too. His grace is sufficient for me, and for you. His power is made perfect in our weakness. Perhaps it is there, in the midst of the waiting, in our darkest moments, that He gives us a heart and a vision for heaven, for all of the hardship and the loss that this life has provided to me, his blessings have far surpassed. He faithfully restores. Like we sang earlier, my cry is that with every chance I get, I will bless his name, for He is worthy of all of our praise. Jesus does not just change everything. He is everything.

Now a reading from Matthew chapter 6, verses 25 through 34: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they are? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, will He not much more clothe you, you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘What shall we wear?’ for the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own,” the word of the Lord.

Paul: Dawn, thank you so much for sharing, and I think everyone here agrees we would gladly trade whatever I am about to do for more of you, so yeah, thank you. Thank you for your vulnerability. Thank you for sharing your story. We have been in this series with this idea that Jesus changes everything, and as we have been going through this series, for some of us, that statement is a proclamation, as Dawn just shared. For others of us, that is a question, “Does Jesus actually change everything?” and we have been grounding this series in the idea of our mission statement as a church, that we want to become like Jesus and live for others, and so how do we do that? How do we become more like Jesus? How do we see Jesus change our lives and transform us to become more like Him? So, over the last few weeks, we have looking at some of the practices that I think God is calling us to as a congregation, as a church, a local expression of what it means for us to become like Jesus and live for others. Some of the practices that we have looked at have been presence and community. We are looking at simplicity today, generosity, and hospitality, but the important thing about these practices, this idea of becoming like Jesus and living for others, is that it all flows out of this idea of presence with God, that no matter what we do in life, no matter

how hard we try, no matter what we think we can do to change our lives, if we are not infused by the power of the Holy Spirit, if we do not experience a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, if we do not attach ourselves to the vine of life, which is Jesus, then none of it really matters, and so we have to keep coming back to this idea that we as Christians are called to be in life with Jesus, and so with that in mind, I would actually like to start the message today with a little bit of a different posture than we often have at Waterstone. I would like for us to pause for a moment and just to invite Jesus into this space. Now here is the thing. Jesus is already here. He has been with you every step of your week, every moment of your week, but sometimes we are not aware of his presence. It is we who is not aware of where Jesus is in the world, and so I would just like to take a moment to be still, to breathe, and to open our hearts, and so what I would encourage you to do now in this moment is just to take a second, and in the stillness, turn your attention to Him. If this is unfamiliar to you, I would offer just a simple prayer that you could say right now, and that is this: “God, I am here, and I want to be with you,” so take a moment to pray, and then we will jump into the message.

Lord Jesus, we do not want to gather together today and simply talk about you or even sing about you. Jesus, we want to encounter you. We want to be a people of your presence, not just in this room, but in every moment of our lives, and so we now say together that ancient prayer that Christians have said for centuries, “Come, Holy Spirit, come.” Lord, would you speak to us? Would you move in us? Would you awaken our hearts to you today by the power of your Spirit? and in Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

All right, so I would make the argument that as a society and the world we live in, that there has never been a more complicated, cluttered society than the one we live in today. The good life, if you will, what we are told in our culture, is defined by how full, busy, and complicated your life is. The modern life is anything but simple. It is always about adding one more thing to your plate, to your schedule, to the stuff that you have, and we are told that the good life that we are longing for, that we want, is in the accumulation of other things, that more is better, and we are constantly bombarded with this message, “Do more, be more, experience more, have more.” I mean, even Nike, one of the most famous brands in the world, their whole slogan is, “Just do it.” What is it? None of us know. You do not know. I do not know, but you are not doing it, and you need to be doing it, so just do it, right? Like, that is the whole thing. It is like you just need to be doing more, and this is the constant message, that we are not doing enough. We do not have enough, and here is the reality. It is that this idea, this culture of excess that we live in, does not end up causing us to have the fuller life that it promises. It leaves us feeling emptier, and we can see this in all sorts of ways.

I mean, consumerism tells us that if you can just buy more things, and if you can have more stuff, then you will find the life you are looking for. Then it turns out that no matter how much stuff we have, we still feel the need for more and feel like we never have enough. Or we are overloaded with information and this never-ending stream of news and social media and e-mails and things that are placed in front of us that try to find our attention. We are told again and again and again in this culture of comparison, that there are certain people who have the life you are looking for, and if your life could just look a little bit more like their curated picture that they have presented on Instagram, then you would be happy. We are told that the way to find happiness is overindulgence, whether that is food or experience or entertainment,

and we are told that satisfaction comes from indulging or cravings, and yet, for so many of us, over-indulgence does not fill us. It leaves us feeling emptier.

This culture of excess that we live in promises something to us. It tells us that if we lean in, the more we lean in, the more we have, the better we will feel, and yet for so many of us, the more we have, the more we try to experience, the more we find ourselves feeling restless, distracted, and disconnected from each other. We feel the tension of wanting to experience more and feeling like we never have enough, and I would suggest to you that this tension we live in is wreaking havoc on your soul, that it is causing a sense where you keep searching for something to fill you up, and you come up empty, and it leaves you feeling miserable, and the question before us today is, “Is there a practice from the life of Jesus, is there something Jesus teaches, some way of living that He calls us to that can help us to escape from the delusion and the dissatisfaction that we find in this culture of excess? Is there something in the character and person of Jesus, in his way of life, that can actually produce the life that we are all looking for, the life we are longing for, one that is full, so that we experience margin and connectivity and relationship and the true joy and life that Jesus promised? Can Jesus change that part of our stories?” I would like to tweak the question a little bit for us today. It is not just, “How do we become more like Jesus and live for others?” It is, “How do we become more like Jesus and live for others in a culture of excess?” and I think what Jesus offers us is a radical, transforming, countercultural practice of simplicity, a way of life that says happiness and joy in life are not found in the accumulation of things, but in simple relationship with Him. I think Jesus is calling us as a community to become a people of simplicity in a culture of excess.

So, does anyone remember the old TV show, *Myth Busters*? Does anyone know about it? All right, we got one right there. You got, okay, awesome, teenagers know *Myth Busters*, but I am like, cool. I am not thinking like, way out of line. Teenagers know *Myth Busters*, that is awesome. All right. What I want to do today is you know the show, right? They take something from TV or culture or whatever, and then they try to see, “Is this true, or is this fiction? Is it a myth?” So, they try to bust the myth. We are going to do that today with materialism, okay? There are three myths of materialism that I think our culture asks us to believe in. We are going to look at the way Jesus’ teaching busts these myths, because here is the reality. We are constantly feeling this pull of attention from the eternal to the temporal, and we recognize that it is not good for us, and if we are honest with ourselves, we know this intuitively, that this pull to more and excess and finding more things, we know that it is not going to produce what we want. There is a reason why the minimalist movement is such a huge thing, right? There is a reason why Marie Kondo became a verb, right? The idea of decluttering and organizing your home is a twelve-billion dollar a year industry. We all feel like we have too much stuff and not enough at the exact same time, and so we do not know what to do, and so it is this myth of more. This is the first myth of the day.

The myth of more basically says that the more stuff you have, the more happiness you will experience, and the world tells us that stuff is the key to you finding satisfaction in life. It is this lie that if you could just have just a little bit more, you don’t need all of it, but if you could just have a little bit more, then you would find the life that you are looking for, but Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6 challenges this idea directly. He says in verse 25, “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life or what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about your body or what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?”

Now let's pause here for just a moment with these words on the screen. Jesus here is not really talking about excess. I mean, He is talking about the basics, food and clothing. He says you do not even need to worry about the basics, much less the excess. He says, "Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or stow away in barns. They do not scramble up their lives trying to get all of the things they need, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them," and listen to this: "Are you not much more valuable than they? Can anyone of you by worrying add a single hour your life?" Jesus' teaching here stands in stark contrast to the myth of more, because in the myth of more, where we think if we could just have a little bit more stuff, then that will lead to happiness, what we intuitively know is ultimately sometimes the more stuff we have, it actually produces more worry, more anxiety in our lives. It does not satisfy us the way that we hope it will.

Now hear me so clearly. In this teaching it is so important that you get this. Jesus is not saying that stuff is bad. Jesus is the creator of all things, and when He created the world, he said what? "It is good," so Jesus is not one of those people that says you just need to escape the material world. What Jesus is saying is that if you are looking for the material world to find satisfaction, to give you the life you are longing for, you will come up empty every single time, and here is the reality. It is these are not just words from Jesus. This idea is being proven out in social studies that people are doing. There was a study done by Princeton a number of years ago, 2010, where they essentially found that, spoiler alert, Jesus was right, okay? What they did was they took a survey of like thirty-thousand people in our country, and they tried to scale happiness and figure out how much life satisfaction people had based on the income that they have, and what they found in this study is that essentially the poorer you are, the more you begin to have happiness in life. There is a correlation to happiness up to a certain point, and what they found in 2010 is that this correlation, this rise, plateaus around \$75,000 a year, and so basically, once you can send your kids to school, pay for groceries, make sure you can cover the rent or the mortgage, then your happiness begins to plateau, and beyond that, as people begin to make more, there is actually a diminishing return, and when compared to things like community or hobbies, that those have a much higher correlation to our satisfaction and happiness in life.

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking "Paul, that was almost fifteen years ago. Have you seen inflation? Like \$75,000 a year, like, really? That is what you're trying to tell me?" Sure, we can adjust the numbers for the years, and they actually redid the study, and what they found was a very similar thing, that even if you adjust the numbers for inflation for the different places and locations that people live in, it still has a diminishing return after a certain point. After a certain point, the amount of stuff that we have does not actually produce more happiness. It does not correlate with more happiness in our life. Again, this is not technically new information. All of us know this, but what we have talked about in this series is knowledge does not always result in transformation. I mean people have been saying this for years. The philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau said that money can't buy happiness. That was like three-hundred years ago, so we have known this, and here is one of the key points of Jesus' teaching. What He is saying is not that stuff is bad, but that if you are looking for it to find value, if you are looking for it to fill your life, you will come up empty. What Jesus is saying is that our value is not in what we own, but in who we are to God. Jesus says that it is in our value, simplicity, this practice of simplicity flows from our identity and value with God.

It takes us back to the very beginning part of the series, who you are in Christ, the identity you have, the worth, the value inherent to you is because of who Christ says you are and what He says about you. That is where we find our freedom, not in our possessions. Jesus even compares it. He says look at the birds. They do not toil. They do not spin. They do not stir things up. They do not try to figure everything out for themselves, and God still takes care of them. You are infinitely more valuable than a sparrow, because you have been created in the image of God, and so your worth and your value does not flow from what you have, but whose you are. That is the heart of Jesus' teaching, and so He busts this myth that the more we have, the happier we will be. He says no, your happiness, your satisfaction, the life you are looking for is in understanding who you are in Jesus.

There is another myth that our culture bleeds. If there is the myth of more that says more happiness comes from more stuff, then there is also this myth of control that we believe in, that the more stuff we have, the more secure we will be, and so this myth essentially says if you can figure out how to save enough, if you can get a good enough job, if you can make enough money, if you can plan enough for your future, if you can take care of the things in your life, you can come to a place where you will feel secure. You no longer have to be afraid of your future, and you can have a worry-free existence if you just plan enough, and Jesus has something to say about this, too. He says in verses 28 through 32: "Why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin," again, they do not work themselves up trying to figure out how to provide for themselves. "Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all of his splendor was dressed like one of these flowers. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and gone tomorrow, thrown in the fire, will He not much more clothe you, you of little faith? So, do not worry, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' for the pagans run after all of these things, but your Heavenly Father knows what you need." This passage challenges this illusion that we can control tomorrow, and that the more we have, the more we can find our security and the sense of peace that we are longing for, and what Jesus says is it is not in the way you can drum up security for your life. It is in trusting in God's provision, understanding that God is faithful in the life that you are living, that more stuff will not make you more alive, and worrying about all the stuff you need will not add anything to your life. What God is saying is that the freedom we are looking for is not found in our possessions, but in his provision.

I want you to think about a time in your life when you made a major purchase, a new car, a new home, maybe you upgraded your phone, whatever, and I want you to think about the kind of thoughts that went into that purchase: "If we can get into this neighborhood, then maybe that will get us into a good enough school where our kids will have a good enough education and we will not have to worry about whatnot." Or "If we have this car and so like a little nicer trim than we would usually do," and you go through the exercise of, "Hey, we want this, and this will solve some problem," right? This is how we go about making purchases so often, but I want you to think about those things. You get the new house, and then you find out the school was not as good as you hoped for. You get the new car, and what happens? Your kid missed the garage door, and you are like, "I just parked it in the driveway for the first time." You get the new phone, and you drop it in the toilet, and you have to go back to your old phone. Never happened in my household. I'm just saying I have heard that that happens, okay? We get all this stuff that we think

will fill us up and all the control we try to have in our lives. What Jesus is saying is that ultimately it is just the stuff that you end up worrying about.

Has anyone ever buried a family member and had to go through a house to decide, “What do we keep, and what do we get rid of?” The stuff that feels so important to us, the stuff that we feel like we cannot let go of, we cannot take with us, and stuff that we think will fill us up ends up leaving us empty. The control we think we have does not actually produce the life we are longing for. Oftentimes it produces more anxiety and worry in our life. As the philosopher Biggie Small said, “More money, more problems,” right? Like, that is a real thing. If that went over your head, do not look him up. It is okay. You do not need to. Simplicity, it flows from trust in God’s provision. This passage calls us, Jesus’ teaching calls us that instead of chasing after more, we need to believe, we need to trust, we need to know that the father knows what we need and that He will provide. Living simply is not then just like some random act or some sort of thing that just makes us feel better about ourselves. It is an act of faith, a declaration that we do not control our lives and that we find everything we need in Jesus, that we do not have to control our days, because we trust that God is in control and that He is good and kind and will take care of his children. The question is, do you believe that? It is one thing for me to say from the stage, but do you actually believe that you find everything you need in Jesus? The myth that our culture tells us is that you just need more, and that is where you will find the security that you are longing for, and Jesus says it is a fool’s errand. The only place you will find what you are longing for, the life that you want is not in the control you have in the world, but trust in God’s provision.

So, Jesus has this radically countercultural teaching that busts the myth of more, and it is this idea that we can have control, but He also busts the myth of materialism. We have bought into this lie that we become convinced that we need more in order to feel fulfilled. The myth of materialism is that more stuff will lead to life, and that if we can have enough stuff, the more we accumulate the possessions we have, the things that we find in our life, then it will lead us to fulfillment and that we will not be empty anymore, but what we often find is the opposite, that the more we have, the more it depletes our energy and distracts us from living with purpose. It strains our relationship. Has anyone ever had a fight about figuring out how to clean up the house that you live in? Stuff causes us to be distracted from what really matters, which is really the heart of this teaching. Jesus says to conclude this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, after He says, “Do not worry about the things,” He says this, “But instead seek first his kingdom,” God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and then all these other things that you worry about, that you spend about, that you care about, that you think will satisfy, those things will be taken care of. “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself, and each day has enough trouble of its own,” and everyone said “amen” to that, right? In a culture that bombards us with these messages about what we need, Jesus tells us to seek first his kingdom, not possessions. It is about radically redirecting the focus of our lives and putting Jesus at the center of our lives.

Now you need to hear this. This is so important. When we talk about this practice of simplicity, you need to know what it is not and what it is, and what it is not is it is not Jesus saying you cannot have nice things, and it is not Jesus saying that you need to never eat good food that tastes great and only eat beans and rice, that you need to live in a cardboard box, and that you need to dress in a potato sack that you got from Goodwill, okay? Jesus is not saying that. He is not saying that stuff is bad. He is simply

saying that when we think things in our lives will satisfy us, that they will not, and that we need to have a singular focus. So, it does not mean that you can't have a car that is nice and does not have problems. It does not mean that you can't have an iPhone, but I would argue it probably means you should not have an Android, because it makes things less simple for the rest of us. It makes it a little more complicated. I thought I would get some amens on that one, and then there are five people in the room who are saying, "I am never coming to this church again. He does not like my Android." Simplicity is not saying that you just have to give up on the stuff, but to quote Tyler Durden from the movie *Fight Club*. What he says is, "The things you own end up owning you. They steal your focus. They distract you from what matters." What Jesus is saying is that the spiritual practice of simplicity is not about stuff is bad, but it is that living in a world of excess, excess is not good for our souls, and the practice of simplicity helps us follow the example of Jesus by giving up the things that we do not need, the things that are not necessary, the clutter we all accumulate in our lives, and it says we do not need that to create more space for loving God and loving our neighbor. So, what Jesus says is simplicity flows from our commitment to his kingdom, and that if Jesus changes everything about our lives, then that means Jesus changes how we view our time and our possessions and the money that we have accumulated in our bank accounts and how we engage with the world in those things. Jesus has something radical to say about the lie that we believe that more stuff will give us the life that we are longing for. Spiritual simplicity is this practice of intentionally letting go of the non-essentials to follow after Jesus.

Two weeks ago, I felt very confronted by this, because the place where I feel this pull of simplicity versus what the world offers is in my phone. I came home from work one day, and I had picked the kids up from school, and Landon was taking a nap, and Camden went downstairs, and she was playing with Legos, and I sat down on the couch, and I started scrolling and going through apps, and it was probably fifteen minutes to half an hour. You know how you get sucked in, and you do not really know how long you are there. I just heard the Holy Spirit break through so clearly in this moment, and I am so thankful, but I just felt the Holy Spirit say to me, "You will never get this time back," and then I felt like the Spirit gave me an image of my daughter downstairs in her den, playing with her Legos, and from that vantage point, seeing her dad just on his phone, and my heart broke, because that's not what I want for my daughter, and so I could have thrown my phone in the trash at that moment. I was just so upset, and I put it away, and I went downstairs, and I began to play Legos with Camden, and I was so grateful, because it is such a moment, but that is what Jesus is talking about, that there are these moments in our lives right where we become so consumed by the possessions and the material and the things that are in front of us that we lose sight of what really matters and what is really important.

I was so upset, so displeased that I was like, I do not know what to do, because I keep getting sucked into this routine where I feel like I clear out my phone, and I get rid of stuff, and then just I open the door a crack, and then it comes back in, and I do not know how to live in the world we live in today without a smartphone. I would love to, but it feels like we are so dependent on it for so much, and so I started trying to look for a solution, and I found, some of you might know this. I am not getting anything for promotion, but it is a tool that I want to recommend to you. It is called Brick. It is a little device. You tap your phone on it, and it shuts your phone down and shuts the apps down on your phone that distracts you, and you know what? The whole purpose of this whole product is the tagline for it. This is not, "Just

do it.” The tagline that they say is this, “Life is better when phones help us do more of what matters, instead of constantly distracting us with things that do not,” and I was like, “That is it. I need something to help with this.”

The reality is that life has a way of distracting us from what really matters. Does anyone else feel like, this is a little bit vulnerable, that January was just like seventy-five days long, anyone else here? Okay, yes, and if you, if that is not your experience, like the Lord bless you. I am so glad that January was great, but January has been like it has been a lot. We started with strep, then we got flu for like two weeks. Then we had a clogged kitchen sink that I could not get on top of, so we did not have a sink for two days. By the time we got the plumber out, he fixed it, but when he fixed it, he broke a pipe, and then we found out our basement flooded, and so I was dealing with that. Then our church offices flooded the next week, and I was like, “Wow, what did I do?” Like what sin did I do in high school that brought this on?” Have you ever had those moments like, “Where do I need to repent?” Now here is the thing. There have been a lot of really great and beautiful things this last month as well. It is not like it is all bad, and I am not saying that in any way to try to get sympathy. I know you have those moments too. Here is my point. Life has a way of just distracting us anyway, without all the clutter and stuff that we add to it. I mean things just like, life happens. I do not know who said that, but it is a true statement. I should probably quote them, life happens, and it is hard, and that can distract us from the things that really matter, and yet then we add things to it, like stuff and possessions and our phones, and we can get sucked into this place where we are living a life distracted from the kingdom of God, distracting from what has eternal value. We think it will provide us with the life we are longing for, and it just leaves us feeling empty and disconnected and frustrated.

I think it even compounds for those of us who believe in Jesus, because I think we have this idea like I am doing the Jesus stuff. I am going to church. I am praying. I do whatever the Jesus stuff is, and it is supposed to produce the life that equates to the good life. It is supposed to be the thing that leads to the full life, and yet, even though we are following Jesus, we still feel this emptiness. We still feel like something is a little bit off, and I feel like it comes down to so much of what Jesus is talking about in this passage, so much of Jesus’ call to simplicity, that we can follow Jesus and still have a heart divided. We can follow Jesus and still be distracted from the things that matter, and this is not a new problem. Jesus encountered this all the time in his life.

In fact, one of the greatest stories, one of the most familiar stories in the gospels is Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler. He was a man who had it all, right? I mean, he was wealthy. He had good standing in the community. Everybody saw him and thought he was an incredibly moral person. He had status. He had everything that people could dream of, and yet we are told that he had this ache inside of him, that he was living for God, and then he was curious, “Is this really all that there is, or is there something more?” So, then this rich young man, he hears this rumor of Jesus. He hears that Jesus is a rabbi who is going around and turning some of the teachings on their head and saying things that people have never really thought of and challenging the status quo and the way people engage with the world. He thought to himself, “Man, maybe this is a teacher who can help me understand what I am missing in my life.” The gospel of Mark tells us that he was so overcome, so desperate to find out what it was that he was missing, that he ran to Jesus and fell at his feet and said, “Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal

life?” and we sometimes miss this. We think he is asking, “How do I get into heaven?” but in that day, eternal life was not at all about the afterlife. Their whole belief was that whatever awaits us in the afterlife, life with God there, is available to us now, and so his question is very much one about his life now. “Jesus, how can I have the quality of life that I am looking for? How can I have the fullness of life that I think God has promised, that I think I have been trying to do, and I still feel empty? What do I do?”

Have you ever felt that before, this desire to live for God, and yet you still feel like something is missing in your life? He is desperate at this moment. This has been eating and gnawing away at him, and Jesus responds by doing something that makes no sense at first. Here is the guy who says, “I have been doing all the rules. I have followed all the things that I am supposed to do. What am I missing?” and Jesus gives him a list of commandments. He goes to the Ten Commandments, and He says, “You know what you are supposed to do. Do the commandments. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. You shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, and you shall honor your father and your mother.” He says, “You know what to do if you do this.” He gives him a list of things to do. The man responds, “I have been doing that. I have been following all of those things. Why do I still feel empty?” Jesus responds. He says, “There is one thing you lack, one thing.” He says, “I want you to go, I want you to sell everything you have, not just some of your stuff, not just a little bit of your stuff, not most of your stuff. I want you to sell everything. I want you to give it to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven, and then I want you to come and follow me.”

Jesus says that you have been great about following the rules, but did you notice which rules he left out? There is this understanding of the Ten Commandments that several of them are about loving God, and several of them are about loving your neighbor, and Jesus very intentionally gives him the list about loving his neighbor, do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not do all the bad stuff that people do to each other. Jesus does not say anything about loving God, like anything about the commands about loving God. He intentionally leaves them out. Why? Because I think Jesus is essentially saying the reason your life is empty, the reason that you feel like you have been doing all of the things, it is because your heart is divided. The one thing you lack is a singular focus on God. This teaching was not at all about the money, although giving to the poor is great, but just a couple of stories later, Jesus encounters a man, Zacchaeus, who is far worse than this man. He was not moral at all, and Jesus says, “Salvation has come to this house,” when he only gives away half of his stuff, so it is not about how much we give away. It is about what has gripped our heart. Jesus invites him into a life of freedom and a life of simplicity, a life where this man could release the things that had a grip on his heart that were clinging to him, so that he could let go of them for something greater, Jesus Himself. Jesus is essentially asking him, “Do you love me more than all of the stuff that you have?” It is one of the most tragic moments in the gospels, because when Jesus says this, the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, because he was very wealthy, and more accurately, he had many possessions. Possessions clutter the stuff of life and distract us from what matters most. He rejected this invitation that God had for him. He rejected following the way of Jesus, because he loved the stuff and thought that would give him the life that he was longing for, even though he knew it was leaving him empty.

So, the question from the story, the question from this message, the question from this idea of simplicity is, “What would cause you to walk away from Jesus in sadness? What is competing with your

undivided devotion to Him?” Jesus says whatever that thing is, whatever it is that keeps you from fully chasing after Him, giving your heart fully to Him, you need to get rid of that, because you think it will produce the life that you are longing for, and it will leave you empty every time. You can only find the life that you are looking for in Jesus. Jesus calls us to a simpler life, a life free from the weight of what we own, the anxiety of all the stuff we have, and the endless striving for more, and He calls us to treasure up what lasts. He calls us to the eternal, and like the rich young ruler, you stand at a crossroads. You can make the choice. Will you hear his call to let go and follow Him? Will you continue to cling to the stuff that you think will produce life in your life? So, Jesus says that we can walk away sad, clinging to our excess, or we can choose the harder, better road of saying that Jesus is enough.

One of the beautiful things about this passage is that when it comes to this kind of teaching about simplicity, it can often very quickly go to a place of guilt and shame. “I need to do more. I have not done enough.” Do you what Jesus says to this man when he asks Him, “Why do I not have the life I’m looking for?” It says that Jesus looked at him and loved him. This was not an invitation of guilt or shame. This was an invitation of love, that Jesus loved him enough to say the things that you think will give you the life you are looking for will not. It is an invitation to us, a reminder to us that the things in this life will make us feel empty, but the love we can find in Jesus will fulfill us.

So today, as we come to the table, Jesus looks at us with that same love, and this meal is an invitation not just to remember his sacrifice, but to align our hearts with what truly matters. In Jesus we see one who did what the rich young ruler could not. He gave up everything. He emptied Himself. He became poor so that we might become rich in Him, and in this bread and cup we taste the depth of that love. The question for you as we come to the table is, “What are you willing to give up, to follow Jesus?”

Around Waterstone, when we do communion, this is the last thing I will say. Communion is always a bit of a mess. It is like family. We are like all over the place, and we are moving, and we want you to talk and be connected to each other, but what happens, and what I have noticed is so often when it comes to the table, we just hop right out, receive, and go. What I am encouraging you today in this moment is to pause before you go to the table and ask yourself this question, “What is it that has divided your heart from Jesus? Where do you need to turn your singular focus back to Him? Where do you need to repent?” and then come to the table, where Jesus looks at us in love.

“On the night he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and He said, ‘This is my body, which is for you, and do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, ‘This is the new covenant in my blood, and do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of Me,’ for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes,” so as you come to the table now, I would encourage you take a beat. Take a pause. Have a conversation with the Holy Spirit and then come forward to receive the love and grace of Jesus Christ through the table. Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, God, as we come before you today, God, I just pray as we begin that if there is a place in our lives where you need to wake us up, if there is something in our lives that you need to expose, I pray now that your Spirit would do that. I pray that our hearts would be softened, that God, we would recognize that in you and you alone is the life we are looking for, and may we have the courage, the

boldness, and be empowered by your grace and love to give up the things that distract us from you. In Christ's name we pray, amen. As you are ready, we come to the table.

48:29 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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