

Bridgeway Christian Church , August 31/September 1, 2024
The Greatest Opportunity, Part 24

Title: Not What It Looks Like

Subtitle: Jesus Points the Way to the Kingdom

Fill-in: The path to great JOY first appears as a path of great SACRIFICE.

Mark 10:13-31

Service Times announcement:

I have a big announcement for you, and rather than keep in suspense I'm going to make the announcement then I will explain it.

Starting the first week of October, we are making an adjustment to our service times.

Starting October 5th and 6th, we will have one service on Saturdays at 5:00 pm. Then on Sundays, we will have services at 8:00 am, 9:15 am, and 11:00 am. Kidsway will be available at all services, and middle school and high school ministry will be available on Saturdays at 5:00, and Sundays at both 9:15 and 11:00.

Our services will be 75 minutes in length, except for the 8:00 am service, which will be 60 minutes in length. I'll explain that in a minute.

Big picture, why are we making the change?

-We're growing! We're seeing about 2000 people per weekend attend in-person at Bridgeway, and that is really exciting.

-85-90% full at 11:00, explain 80% rule.

-More options for parents of students

-More opportunities for connection and post-service events on Saturdays. Easier to attend for busy families.

-Saturdays are vibrant, but there is still room to grow.

-8:00 am service difference. Same songs, same sermon, same quality. Acoustic and simpler lighting. Sample next weekend.

-We want to grow because we believe that what we're doing helps people.

-Questions? We're in the lobby

-Call and response

I have a very silly story to illustrate a serious point. If my math is correct, it was the spring of 1989. I was almost seven, my brother had just turned four, and my other brother would not arrive until the end of the year. That meant we met my dad's criteria for an amusement park vacation: We were old enough to remember it. So we drove from Orangevale, California, to Anaheim, California, to experience the happiest place on Earth for the first time.

Around this time, Disneyland opened a new ride called Star Tours. I had just seen the original Star Wars movie for the first time and I was excited about the ride, but six-year-old Brian wasn't exactly the risk-taking daredevil that is standing before you today. So when we got to the ride, I chickened out. Completely. I said absolutely not.

And my dad tried *everything*. Finally, after no success using every tool in his parental persuasion tool belt, he chose the nuclear option. He offered me money. It was either fifty cents or a dollar, either way, a princely sum for a six-year-old in 1989.

So I nervously got in line and entered the ride, full of fear. And it was quite possibly the greatest thing I had ever experienced in my young life. It was late in the evening, and the lines were short, and I can still picture in my mind's eye getting off the ride and running to get back on again. I think I rode it six times. I still tried to collect the money, mind you, but my mom made it clear that wasn't going to happen.

It's a silly story, but what does it show? Even as a child, to experience great joy, I had to make a sacrifice. I had to sacrifice my idea of comfort, I had to sacrifice the grip that fear had on me. And as a result, it created a memory I can still talk about over 35 years later.

That's a silly one, but what about greater challenges? I joked last week that people run marathons because it's too easy to survive in America. I've run three of them, and I can tell you that when you start training for one, all you see in front of you is sacrifice and pain. And yet I think back to the last one I did in 2021. I had a lot of issues and it was the most physically painful experience of my life. I wept uncontrollably when I finished, not out of pain, but sheer joy for all that I'd overcome to reach the finish line.

I think about the investments I make as a husband and a father. I think about everything I put into the work God has called me to here. You can surely look at your own life in areas where you have sacrificed and given of yourself. And you can see the truth of what I want to talk about today, and it's the fill-in-the-blank on the sheet in front of you or on the app:

Fill-in: The path to great JOY first appears as a path of great SACRIFICE.

The greatest joys in our life rarely come through pure passivity and leisure. They come from what at first, looks like sacrifice. And no where is this more true than following Jesus. As we commit ourselves to following him, he will ask us for what looks like sacrifice, but it is in making those sacrifices that we find our greatest joy.

Please open your Bible or Bible app to Mark 10. If you need a Bible you should be able to find one underneath one of the seats in front of you. If you're using one of those Bibles, you'll find Mark 10 on page 846. This is part 24 of our series The Greatest Opportunity through the gospel of Mark line-by-line, and I've entitled this message Not What You Think.

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

As Jesus is going along his way, children are brought to him. Presumably it's parents bringing their children, but it doesn't say. And it says the disciples rebuked these people. I imagine them like body guards or security guards keeping fans away from a celebrity or public figure. It's as though they are saying, **“Stay back, Jesus is much too important to concern himself with such insignificant people.”**

See, children were considered more of a nuisance than a blessing. If children were considered a blessing at all, it was only male children who ensured the continuance of the family line and could eventually increase the family workforce. In a time where literal survival was constantly threatened, no one doted on their children, and they were not viewed as innocent, pure and gentle.

In fact, women and children were often victims of exploitation and abuse in the ancient world, and their place in society was derived primarily by their relationship to adult men. If you were to search Jewish and Christian literature of this time, you would not find any sympathy or love for young children that is anywhere near what Jesus shows.

So when you think of children in the ancient world, think less about Precious Moments or about the myriad ways we rightly prioritize and care for our children today and instead think helpless, vulnerable, and even unwanted

And yet, at the sight of the disciples shooing away the children, Jesus is indignant, showing a level of anger we rarely see from him in the gospels. He immediately corrects them, saying, **“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them,”** and then he says something really shocking. Children, for Jesus, are not an unwelcome distraction. Quite the opposite. He says, **“for to such belongs the kingdom of God.”**

It misses the point, somewhat, to make this statement and the one that follows only about children. I'll get to that in a moment, but this passage does serve as a reminder to us of the value of children. Children are not a nuisance, in God's eyes. They are a blessing, who are welcome at Jesus' side.

Often I'll see children running around in the courtyard after our services, and sometimes I'll see them running around and playing in our lobby. Occasionally there will be a parent, looking slightly embarrassed, chasing after them. There is nothing to be embarrassed about. The church ought to be a place where children know they are welcome, cared for, and cherished. And frankly, I don't know that I'd want to be part of a church where children aren't allowed to run and play in the lobby. For to such belongs the kingdom of God.

But I said to focus Jesus' words exclusively on children misses the point, and that is true. Because he says, **"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."**

Jesus is saying that in order to enter the kingdom, we must receive it like one who has no leverage, no rank, and no social capital. In the kingdom of God, our wealth, our social status, and all of the preening and posturing we do to appear impressive mean nothing. When we choose to follow Jesus, we're not doing him a favor. There might be celebrities on earth, but there are no celebrities in God's eyes.

God sees our desperate need for him, and he graciously and lovingly offers himself to us freely. And whether we're on top of the world or in the darkest pit imaginable, we all have the same need.

My mind works in very strange ways, and one of the weird things I catch myself doing is I'll be standing in line at the grocery store, or at a sporting event, or in some other environment where I'm around other ordinary people. And I'll look at someone and think, what if this woman standing in front of me in line and, say, Beyonce, changed bodies? Like, what if all of a sudden this woman was no longer standing in Raley's with a cart full of groceries, but she was in Beyonce's body doing whatever he's doing right now. Or what if that dude switched bodies with LeBron James?

What if LeBron was suddenly operating check stand 6, and Rick, who has been serving you since 2003, played small forward for the Lakers? They have their own consciousness, but they've switched bodies? I warned you. Weird.

But isn't it amazing to consider that these earthly differences in status count for nothing in the kingdom. I think of the lyrics from a song I listened to when I first became a Christian, and the first few lines are borrowed from Jeremiah 9.

Let not the wise one boast in their wisdom.
Let not the strong one boast in their strength.
Let not the rich one boast in their riches.
For all are equal down at the cross.

In order to follow Jesus all you need is need. But for some of us who are winning at the game of life, at least in the world's eyes, our earthly success can cause our need for grace to rest squarely in our self-made blindspots.

When Jesus says you must receive the kingdom of God like a child, this isn't a call to self-abasement or low self-esteem. Rather, it's a call to humbly receive the generosity of God, and it's a call to be generous in our inclusion of others in the same way God generously includes us.

Jesus welcomes children to him to show that only those who come to him in need of mercy and grace will find it. Those who are self-assured and proud of their earthly status will miss it. Furthermore, we are trained in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways to ignore those who can offer us nothing, and be suspicious of those we don't understand or who are different than us. This training, God help us, can even happen in Christian space by those claiming to represent

Christian values. This is not the way of the kingdom. In a world that others and rejects, we are called to love and include. We are recipients of outrageously gracious hospitality, and we are called to pass it on.

It's notable that Jesus does not say those who enter the kingdom, but rather he says those who *receive* the kingdom. To receive the kingdom is to place oneself under God's authority, where we are responsive to his rule and reign in our lives, and where we welcome both his loving direction and gracious correction.

The next story starts in verse 17, and it's a famous one.

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

So after the children, a man runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. In Matthew's version of this story we learn that he is young, and in Luke's version he includes the fact that he is a ruler, thus this story is popularly known as the story of the rich young ruler.

He runs to Jesus and kneels, which would be almost unheard of for a wealthy person and common for a servant. So it's a sign of humility and respect. And when he opens his mouth, he calls Jesus, "good teacher." This was the sort of attempt at flattery that a typical rich man might use to try to butter someone up in a negotiation. That's not to imply that the young man was evil or was necessarily trying to manipulate Jesus, but it just shows the world he lived in and how he was used to talking.

And he asks Jesus a sincere question: **what must I do to inherit eternal life?** This is not exclusively a question about heaven, by the way. Eternal life, literally translated 'life of the ages' is about a certain quality of life, not just its length. Eternal life is a way of being and living now, that extends into eternity. This man, who in an earthly sense had everything, knew that something was missing in his life and he hoped Jesus might help him find it.

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

And Jesus shoots down the attempt at flattery right away. "Why do you call me good?", he asks, and then says no one is good but God alone. With this statement Jesus is neither denying his own divinity or his moral purity. Rather, he's rejecting the flattery and in a sense asking him to get the point. It's as though he's asking, what is it that you're after, if you feel the need to address me in this way?

And then he proceeds to remind this man of the commandments, and he recites 6-10 from the Ten Commandments. But there is one change, and I want to draw your attention to it. Whereas the tenth commandment in Exodus 20:16 says "you shall not covet," Jesus here says "do not defraud." And it is more or less universally believed that Jesus uses this language because defrauding is a concrete action that results from the internal sin of coveting.

And these words serve to remind us, by the way, that the integrity of our financial lives is a really big deal to God. He's particularly concerned about ensuring that the wealthy, which from a global standpoint includes nearly all of us in this room, are not exploiting the poor.

When we come to see money as our main source of security and joy, it's really easy to fudge something here or look the other way there and convince ourselves it's not a big deal. Financial integrity, and specifically financial integrity in the sense that we aren't taking advantage of those in the tax brackets below us, is not an issue that gets talked about a lot, but throughout Scripture we see that it's a very big deal to God.

Verse 20:

20 And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

This isn't arrogance from this young man. It's his honest assessment that he has desired and lived out faithful obedience to God throughout his life. Furthermore, as wild as this might sound to us today, there is rabbinic teaching from that time period that spoke seriously about people who had kept the entire Torah from A to Z.

And it's remarkable that he's seemingly done all of the right stuff, and yet he still feels incomplete.

Like many of you, I really enjoyed this year's summer Olympics. It's incredible to watch the best athletes in the world compete on the biggest stage, with their participation, in many cases, being the culmination of years and years of hard work. And yet, I couldn't help but notice that seemingly moments after various events finished, the commentators immediately started talking about 2028. "This guy has just accomplished his lifelong dream of winning a gold medal, will he be back in 2028?"

You see this in other sports, too, by the way. You watch. The next major sports championship we'll have is the World Series in October. Go online an hour after it ends and what will you find: every major sports media outlet will have an article published about the favorites to win it all in 2025.

It got so bad at the Olympics, by the way, that Simone Biles ended up tweeting about it, saying, **"You guys really gotta stop asking athletes what's next after they win a medal at the Olympics Let us soak up the moment we've worked our whole lives for."**

And she is absolutely right. But this need to ask the question, "What's next? What's next? What's next?", in my opinion, speaks to a deeper longing in the human heart that can't be filled by money, possessions or accomplishment, as great as those things may be.

They always leave us wanting more, and that's what happened with this young man.

21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him,

And it says Jesus looked at him intently and loved him. Jesus shows love all over the place, but this is the only place where it says Jesus looked at someone and loved them. It's easy to picture

the rich young ruler like some spoiled brat running his mouth, and that just isn't the case. Sure, he had a boatload of privilege, but he was sincere. He was genuinely interested in what Jesus had to say. And yet, Jesus knew that buried in the young man's heart was an attachment that was going to keep him from his greatest joy.

and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

If you want to follow me, Jesus says, you need to first go, then sell everything you have, then give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me. And in these instructions Jesus encapsulates what, in my opinion, is one of the most challenging aspects of a life of faith. And honestly, it has almost nothing to do with the selling of possessions.

The young man is asking for another task to do. "Jesus, just give me a task and I'll do it. What commandment do I need to keep? What good deed do I need to do?" And what Jesus is asking him for is not a change of behavior, but rather a complete change of heart.

Jesus just reminded him of commandments six through ten which are, generally speaking, matters of action. Now he reminds of of the first commandment, to have no other gods before him. And that is a matter of the heart. God must truly be God in our lives, and we cannot place anything before him.

Since it's just us, I want to tell you something you may not know about me. While I'm a pastor for my day job, I moonlight as a regular human being. So that means I go home and I'm thinking about how to make sure our other bills gets paid, and how to make sure the house doesn't break and how to make sure I get quality time with my different family members, and how to serve my community, and how to generally prioritize helpful things and not get sucked into time wasters, and of course, how to follow Jesus in all of that. And I'm a doer by nature. Give me a task, and I'll get it done.

When I go on vacation, I do stuff. I come back physically tired but mentally refreshed.

And see, for so many of us, we read passages like this and our first response is, "Hey, Jesus didn't ask everyone to do this, there were plenty of people who Jesus let keep their stuff. Don't forget that part, pastor!" And our second response is, somewhere in the back of our minds, we want to know: how much is enough?

How much do I have to give so I can enjoy the rest guilt-free?

How much do I have to serve so that I can enjoy the rest of my free time guilt-free?

How often do I have to read my Bible for it to be enough? And on and on I can go.

How do I know that you ask those questions? Because I've been subconsciously asking them myself for *years*. Remember, regular person.

And we ask those questions in the same way that the rich young ruler asked what must I do? We're so sincere and we really mean it.

And they are the wrong questions. Because we're looking for a behavior change that doesn't address the underlying motivations of our hearts. And Jesus wants to change our hearts.

He wants to change the fundamental orientation of our hearts so that generosity is not this weird quasi-guilt thing that we get really awkward about.

He wants to change the orientation of our hearts so that a life spent obsessing over our own comfort loses its appeal because we recognize a greater mission for our lives together as we follow Jesus. And that sure looks like sacrifice, but it is the path to our greatest joy.

It's not a guilt trip, it's a rescue mission.

I want that to be front and center in my mind all the time, and the truth of the matter is it's not. My attachment to the things of this world sometimes feels like a bad habit I can't break. God has been really gracious toward me in helping me see some things that used to matter to me a whole lot aren't that important. But my heart still needs work. I still overestimate the joy of attaching to this world and underestimate the joy of attaching to Jesus. So, if you feel that way as well, you're not alone. There are at least two of us.

To paraphrase a Bible scholar named R.T. France, "**Only those that probably do need to see all of their possessions are comforted by the fact that Jesus didn't ask everyone to do that.**"

But understand, for the rich young man, it's wasn't about the stuff. He theoretically could have sold all of his stuff and still missed the point. You can be filthy rich or dirt poor and still find your ultimate identity and security in your possessions. It was about his heart. His heart was so attached to his stuff that for him to follow Jesus, he had to get rid of it. There was no other way.

How ironic that in the last story the child is told they lack nothing and the kingdom of God is there's, yet the man who has everything lacks something. Only when he becomes vulnerable like a child will he truly possess everything. Man, that sure feels like sacrifice. But it's the path of our greatest joy.

And it says the man was disheartened. The only other time that word is used in the New Testament it describes clouds before a storm. And he went away grieving because he had great possessions. For this man, his possessions, which he no doubt thought of as a great blessing, had captured so much territory in his heart that they became an obstacle to entering the kingdom of God.

We misunderstand and misuse this passage if we try to say that Jesus is saying wealth is bad. It's not. Like you, things often feel tight financially in my house. But I know that simply by living in this part of the world, my family has more resources than the vast majority of households in the world. I don't spend even one second a day feeling guilty about that.

But I recognize at best, that is a blessing to steward. And at worst, it is something that can cause me to attach my heart too much to this world, and I need to be careful about that. I know Jesus

said a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions. But possessions can make that easy to forget.

Jesus speaks to that in his next statements, verse 23

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 And the disciples were amazed at his words.

So Jesus says it's difficult for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of God. And his disciples are shocked by this, likely because the Jewish understanding of the day was that wealth was a sign of divine favor and blessing, and the world around them was like ours in that wealth bought you status and privilege. It would stand to reason, in their minds, that Jesus would favor the well off.

But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult 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 a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

So Jesus speaks in hyperbole to make his point. A camel was the largest animal in Palestine.

CAMEL STORY

And the eye of a needle was the smallest opening a person back then would see regularly, and that's the point. What Jesus is trying to say is that it's never going to happen.

It's like him saying, "It's easier for Pastor Lance to beat Pastor Brian in ping pong than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Again, something that just isn't going to happen. He'd crush me in foosball, but I don't know why you would bring that up. We don't need to talk about that.

Verse 26 continues...

And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man, it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

The disciples are understandably shocked. If the rich guy who follows all the rules isn't in, then who can be saved??

And Jesus reassures them that all things are possible with God. What's he saying?

Think about all the ways we try to make things happen in this world. The people pleasing, the manipulating situations, the trading favors, the showing power, all of that. It's not always bad and can sometimes be good. But none of that stuff matters to God. We don't earn our way to God through our good behavior, our accumulation of wealth, the title on our business card, our zip code, or our level of influence.

We receive the kingdom, all at the same level. Tax collectors and sinners can get it and be welcomed in. Professional religious people can get hung up on their own egos and miss it. Only

God can transform our hearts. And we can't earn it, we can only receive it. And salvation will not come through human effort, but by the death of the Son of God, who next week's passage shows us gave his life as a ransom for many.

When we lay aside the functional saviors that we rely on for our ultimate sense of security and identity and follow the true savior, Jesus Christ, the only one with the power to forgive sin and make us whole, we can be saved. That might look like sacrifice, but it's the path to our greatest joy.

Peter speaks up in verse 28, let's close this out.

28 Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." 29 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 lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Peter says, "Hold up, Jesus." You're talking about leaving everything to follow you, we actually did that. And he says, "Yeah, you did." And no one who has sacrificed anything for my sake and the gospel will ultimately regret that decision. Because the path to great joy first appears as a path of great sacrifice, but make no mistake, its end is joy.

I think about the missionary Hudson Taylor. He's an extreme example. He left all of the comforts of his life here in the states to be a missionary in China for 50 years. And at the end of his life he said, "I never made a sacrifice." I don't think that's false humility. That's a changed heart.

And I like how Jesus sneaks that little persecution phrase in there. It's like he's saying, oh, one little thing, those blessings are legit but you also might die for this. Anyways...

And he finishes the teaching by saying that many who are first will be last, and the last first.

What this doesn't mean is, "Pretend to be humble now, and you'll be on top of the world later." That's called faking it. It's not like when we tell our kids, if you can avoid asking for screen time at grandma's house you can have some when we get home. Let he who has never bribed his kid with screen time throw the first stone. It's not behave now so you can splurge later.

Rather, Jesus is showing us that in learning to be last we experience the joy of humility, whereas always needing to be first will destroy us. I've never met a humble person who wasn't happy, but those who are striving for status and recognition never have enough. I know I've been the striver before.

When we come to Jesus with nothing, we see that he is everything. When we come to Jesus with our hands full of our worldly attachments and concerns, we remain empty. That might sound like sacrifice, but it's the path to our greatest joy.

There is no guilt or obligation in this, there is only invitation.

This is not a call to a lack of ambition. In today's world, too many of us are either consumed by worldly ambition like the rich young ruler or lack ambition entirely. This is a call to a sanctified ambition where we have a rich and compelling vision to serve the Lord with gladness wherever he would call us.

I know people at Bridgeway who run companies or work at companies and they do tremendous work, but their job sites are also places of powerful ministry.

This isn't a call to inaction, it's a call to sanctified action.

This isn't a call to abject poverty, it's a call to a sanctified view of money and possessions where they are tools not gods.

Let me give you a real, practical, everyday life benefit to all of this. I love new experiences. I want to climb the mountain, go on the hike, try the weird food, visit the new place. It's part of why I love live sports, when you go to a game you might see something you've never seen before. And yet, I can very much relate to that feeling I shared earlier of always looking for what's next. There's no experience that can satisfy the deepest longings of my heart. But that doesn't bother me anymore because I know it's not supposed to. I can enjoy those things as good gifts from God, and they are reminders that my deepest joy lies in him.

So whether it's in business, or relationships, or personal accomplishment, we don't have to stress about always looking for the next thing that is going to give us eternal security and satisfaction, because we know that only comes from Jesus.

There is a real enemy in this world who Jesus said comes to kill and destroy, and he will destroy us not with fires and floods but with the lie of salvation through accumulation. But Jesus came that we might have life and life to the full. This is not a call to purposeless sacrifice but rather it is a call to lift up our gaze for the fleeting and temporary and be compelled by a kingdom vision for our lives that is purposeful, joyful, and eternal.

It may look like a path of great sacrifice, but make no mistake about it, it is the path to our greatest joy.

Prayer (Have people consider what is first in their heart)