

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon: 'ALL IN' ISN'T CONVENIENT

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Well, have you ever noticed how much feedback from businesses or restaurants or everyone else that were being asked to give? "Complete the survey. Fill out this form. Tell us how we've done." Even Seatac has placed little stands with smiley faces or frowny faces in front of the bathroom to rate your bathroom experience. Really? Well, I recently read some feedback some hikers gave when asked about their wilderness park experience. And here's what some of the comments were. "Reflectors need to be placed on trees every 50 feet so people can hike at night with flashlights. Places where trails do not exist are not well marked." Hm, imagine that, trails need to be wider so people can walk while holding hands with one another. "Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spiderwebs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests. Please pave the trails so they could be snowplowed during the winter." And my favorite that, "Coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals."

Well, how awful for these hikers, right? Imagine finding bugs or coyotes in the wilderness. That's so inconvenient. They want all the beauty and joy of being in the wilderness without the pesky creatures and the difficult trails, all the stuff that actually makes it a wilderness experience. We can do the same thing with our faith with Jesus. We can want all the good stuff with Jesus without the things that make it hard or inconvenient for us to follow him. Now, this pandemic has caused immeasurable harm. We have lost a lot. Lost jobs, lost health, lost income, lost vacations, milestone, life events like graduations, you here, worshiping in this place, all gone. 2020 will forever be remembered as the year when the world went into isolation and lockdown. It's the year when everything changed.

And I read a tweet last month that said, "What if God, in his strange providence, is downshifting the American church into a mode of simplicity, stripped of its non-essentials, renewed in its fundamental identity as the people of God? What if, what if God is doing that to you and to me, downshifting us into this mode of simplicity and stripping our lives of the non-essentials so that we can be renewed in our fundamental identity as disciples of Jesus Christ? What if? Now we're going through a sermon series called New Normal and we're asking how God can use this COVID crisis to make us better people, make us a better church, make us, and give us a better way. And in the story, we just read, we are introduced to this rich young man and his question. Jesus brings him to three crossroads that every all-in Christian faces. Each crossroad involves a decision to make, and depending on the decision, we'll either step more into the life that Jesus has for us, or we will step farther away from it.

They are the crossroads of a person to trust, a price to pay, a treasure to store. Now, this young man is a good guy, he really is. He's faithfully kept the commandments, he's sexually pure, he's morally and ethically sound. He has everything going for him, so it would appear. He's the kind of guy that if your daughter brought him home for you to meet, he'd be hard not to like, even though you might try. But his question betrays a deep concern that he doesn't have it all. What, he wants to know, what must I do? What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life? Now Jesus immediately directs his conversation away from the good things he thinks he must do to the only one who is good. A first crossroad this young man faces that we all must face, which separates all in disciples from convenient Christianity is the crossroads of a person to trust.

Now, this man had built his life on the assumption that by being good and doing good things, he could save himself, and lots of people believe some version of that these days. Good things happen to good people, bad things happen to bad people, that's karma. Or if we do more good things than bad things in this life then we'll get to go to heaven, that's Islam. Well, Jesus smashes this young man's assumption by taking masterfully through the commandments and by asking him to sell his possessions what Jesus is really doing here is Jesus is asking this young man to examine his heart around the first commandment. That's the one that says, "You will have no other gods before me." And basically what Jesus is saying to him is, "How's that going for you? Not so good, huh?"

Christianity is not about doing good things, it's about a relationship with Jesus. And it's not just something you add to your life to make your life better. No way. It's an explosion. Jesus is basically saying, "Your life as you know it, get rid of it. Start all over again but this time with me at the center of it." You see, we are the ones who suffer when our convenient lifestyle stands in the way of a relationship with Jesus, when our lives are just so complicated and full and busy, that it's hard to fit Jesus in when praying or worship or being with other Christians in community is more inconvenient. And when we lose out on the fullness of his life working in us, and we do lose out on the fullness of his life working in us when we ditch the parts of our Christian faith that are hard and just don't trust Jesus in those moments to help us.

Recently, I was talking with a couple who have three children and one of the kids started showing some signs of some underlying medical condition. So they took him to the doctor for some tests and the initial results showed that there's a strong chance that this child will end up with some significant disability. Now, more tests are needed and they're waiting for the results so they're in this season of great uncertainty. No parent ever wants to hear news like that, right? And there's lots of ways that they could respond in this situation. They could panic, they could be afraid, they could grieve, they could throw their faith out the window and say, "Thanks a lot, God. This just isn't working for me." But they didn't do any of that. Instead, they had a surprising piece about the future.

So I asked them about that and they said that they have followed Jesus a really long time and they have experienced his love and received his faithful provision so many times in their lives that they cannot doubt now. So they're confident that no matter what the diagnosis, Jesus will provide again. They told me, "We're good. We know God has a plan in all of this and so we trust him. He is good." That's how all-in Christians trust, trusting Jesus to guide your children and your family, trusting Jesus to show you the job or the profession where you can bring his healing, trusting Jesus to provide the money to pay your bills, or trusting Jesus enough to be vulnerable and to let us know here at the church how we can help, what, what you need, ways that we might be able to help you in these moments. You see, being a receiver is a lot harder than being a giver sometimes, isn't it?

Or maybe trusting Jesus to show you what to do with the money that he's given you. You might very well be the answer to somebody's prayer for help. Well, that's the first crossroads, the decision we all must

make about who or what to trust. Christianity is centered around a person we trust and his name is Jesus. Well, turning back to the text, the rich young man tells Jesus that he's kept all his commands, but this nagging in his soul continues. So he asked Jesus, "What do I still lack?" Now Mark's gospel tells this next part of the story best. Mark says, "Looking at the man, Jesus loved him." And this word that is translated as love in the Greek is *agape*, and what it means is radical self-sacrificing love. So, a better translation would be that Jesus, looking at the man, loved him with the kind of love that would rather die for him than lose him. What an amazing savior we worship. Amen.

Well, what happens next is totally unexpected. Jesus doesn't shame him or give him some additional command that he must keep to get that eternal insurance policy that this man is looking for. What Jesus does next is for the young man's own benefit. Jesus tells him to go and to sell his possessions. Now, Jesus doesn't have anything against money and he doesn't really tell us that we should or shouldn't have it at all. The issue here isn't about how much wealth this man has. It's about attachment, that we not become so attached to our lifestyle that it ultimately owns us. God isn't concerned about how much money we have or the possessions that we own. God's concern is about how much those things have of us, how much they have of our devotion, of our time, of our loyalty, because loyalty is another name for worship and we will serve what we worship.

If we're loyal to money, if we're worshipping money, well, then we will serve it in all kinds of ways and ensure that we have that money in our lives. Then if it's power that we serve then we will love and serve whatever it is that's bringing us that power. So Jesus is literally saying to this man, and to you and to me, "Get rid of it all. It's wrecking you. Those things that are possessing you, that have hold of you, that have allegiance in your life, they're wrecking you. So get rid of it all." And while the rich young man wasn't expecting that, not that answer, he didn't want to give up as attachment. How inconvenient is that? So the second crossroads that we all come to, which separates all-in Christians from convenient Christianity is a crossroads of a price to pay.

Following Jesus will cost us. You see, the Christian faith is essentially inherently inconvenient and the price of anything is the amount of life that we're willing to exchange for it. And Jesus here is uncompromising. He just simply wants it all. That's the thing about Jesus. He's always meddling in our lives, disturbing us, breaking us free from the things that have a hold of us and are wrecking us, stretching us and squeezing us so that we need more faith or more trust in him, calling us to love in ways that will cost us, forgive in ways that other people won't understand, or imitate his life in ways that others might reject, just like they rejected him. There is a price to pay. Now C.S. Lewis once said, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port would do that for me. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

You see, following Jesus always appears or can appear harder than it seems. But when we obey Jesus, we receive so much more than we can even ask or imagine. One of the refugees I met during one of my first trips, a number of years ago to Athens was a man. I will call him Manous. Growing up as a Muslim in Iran, Manous was a successful businessman who knew the cost and the dangers of renouncing Islam and professing Jesus as savior. He could be killed. But Islam had few answers for the questions that he was wrestling with and Allah seemed more like really a God to be feared and nothing like the forgiving, merciful, loving God the Christians worshiped. And then one night, Manous had a dream where Jesus came to him and said to him in the dream, "Manous, Manous, I am the God you are searching for."

Well, Manous felt love like he'd never felt before, and that's all he needed. He immediately surrendered his life to Jesus and he told his family what had happened because he wanted this for them. Well, some of his family grew angry and within a few days Manous had to flee Iran. He went to Athens and had

nothing when he got there. He had no food, no job, no housing. He learned to become absolutely dependent on Jesus for everything, and Jesus provided his every need. But what Manous wanted most was to share the love of Christ with Muslims who were coming from Iran. And he told me, "I could have gone to Europe. I could have got a job. I could have made lots of money. I could have settled down and been very comfortable. But these Muslims have been lied to, and I feel so badly for them. I want them to know the love of Christ in their hearts."

So he started a Bible study and it quickly grew bigger than the room that they were meeting in, in his house. He didn't know what to do so he did the only thing he knew how to do, he just started praying. Well, a church heard about what God was doing in Manous and through Manous, and so they gave him a room in their building to use. But the Bible study kept on growing. Manous kept on praying and God brought some people into Manous' life who became financial supporters of his ministry and soon he had enough money to rent a building big enough to start a church. And now, this former Muslim refugee now turned Christian pastor has been feeding, housing, and sharing the love of Christ with Iranian refugees for years. Jesus has taught him dependence, Jesus has consistently provided. And during my last visit there Manous told me that he never could have imagined that God would do this in his life, that God would use him for such a purpose as this. He said he felt so blessed.

And then he said, "Look, look, I had to leave my family in Iran, but God has given me so many new brothers and sisters right now." See, following Jesus was harder than Manous originally thought. He has paid a constant price, but the rewards for his obedience had been far greater than he ever could have asked or imagined. That's the upside down nature of the Gospel. When we die, we live. When we lose our life, we find our life. And that's Manous' story. That brings me to the third crossroads that this young man faced and that we all face, which separates all-in discipleship from convenient Christianity. It's the crossroads of a treasure to store. Now while Jesus calls this man to sell his possessions. And then following that, he gives him a promise that if he does this that he will have treasure in heaven. But it's an exchange that the rich man does not want to make and so he walks away.

Storing up treasure in heaven is Jesus' call to you and to me to live our lives now with eternity in mind, to use your wealth on earth in ways that will make a heavenly impact rather than use your time on earth to make more and more money. Make heavenly investments and earthly withdrawals rather than earthly investments and heavenly withdrawals. Build God's kingdom here on earth in ways that will populate heaven with people who found Jesus because you did. Jim Elliot, who's a martyred missionary in South America once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose." I've traveled many places representing BelPres in many parts of the world, been here 21 years, and so it kind of all adds up.

One trip that I will never forget was a trip to Rwanda when we were first starting the Center For Champions. And the Center For Champions was built to provide education and housing for kids who were living on the street and were orphaned because of the genocide. Well, one night we took our friends from African Evangelistic Enterprise, which was the organization we partnered with, we took them out to dinner. And during dinner, there were these young teenagers who were fully dressed in Rwandan garb and they danced for us. Afterwards, one of the dancers shared her testimony with us. She told us how she'd been orphaned and how she had to live on the street. She shared how she was forced into prostitution because that's the only way that she could survive. But then she told us she went to a meeting where there was a team from this church leading a worship service.

The preacher there that day extended an invitation for the children to come off the streets and come to faith in Jesus as Lord and savior. So she did, and she was there that day to thank us, to thank you, to

May 17, 2020

thank me, to thank this church, because now she has a new identity. Now she has a new hope. Now she has a new future. Now she has been living a life full in Christ and has not been on the street ever since. Bell Press, that's just one of hundreds of stories like that. Even now, even though some of you have lost your jobs, you're providing diapers and groceries for families who've been made vulnerable because of the pandemic, even now and especially now, you are an all-in church. You and I, we will have all eternity to enjoy the riches of heaven, but we only have this life, we only have this life, to invest in them.

The most under stated part of this story is where the rich young man walks away from Jesus. Matthew tells us he walked away sad. But this word translated actually means more than sad, it means grieving. He was deeply grieving. This man walked away from Jesus grieving. And I think he was grieving because in that moment, as he was there with Jesus, he caught a glimpse of how his life could be with Jesus. Jesus' deep love for him, a life free from the endless pursuit of the one more thing he needed to have. He saw what could have been, but he chose not to receive it. Instead, he turned and he walked away grieving. He was grieving what he lost.

God is always giving us the opportunity to grow, and when he does, he's always inviting us into something new, something better. But sometimes you and I, we miss those opportunities and maybe it's because we just don't recognize that it's coming from God or maybe it's because we're telling ourselves and we're telling other people around us that we can't when the truth really is we just don't want to. "Jesus, no thanks. I'm not going to trust you on this one. The cost is too much. I like my treasure here now." So we don't take that road, that crossroads, and instead we choose convenient Christianity. We could have experienced much more of God, but like the rich young man we turn and walk away. And the problem with that is we're the ones that miss out. We miss out.

There is more that Jesus wants for you than what you have right now. It has nothing to do with money, it has nothing to do with success, it has nothing to do with recognition. It's more of Jesus' life in you now, more of his love and his courage in you now, more of his compassion and heart for justice in you now. It's the all-in life you were meant for breaking in and filling you now. Great bold prayers you have yet to pray, abilities and gifts you have yet to cultivate and deploy, exhilarating risks Jesus will invite you to take, sacrificial gifts, he will ask you to make, intimate, honest conversations he will want you to have and lives you will change because you did. You see, when it comes to the wilderness experience, it really is the bugs and the coyotes and the up and down trails as much as it is the scenery that makes it the wilderness, right? And it is a person to trust, a price to pay, and a treasure to store that makes discipleship all-in.

So Jesus, we thank you for this grace, for this love, for this fierce pursuing love that you come after us with, a love that desires to set us free, to break away from us idols and all the things that wreck us, a love that desires to capture us and use us for your kingdom purposes here now. Lord, it's an experience with you that can be challenging. But Holy Spirit, you do more in us than we can even ask or imagine. So would you give us your grace? Would you fill us with your power? Would you make us more like you, Jesus. And we pray this in your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Read Matthew 19:16-22

1. Why does the rich young man come to Jesus? What is he looking for?
2. What commands does Jesus tell him to obey? Why these? (See Deut. 5:6-21)
3. What does Jesus ask the young man to do in v. 21? Why this?
4. What's the man's response? What does this say about his faith?
5. How might your life in the "New Normal" look different if you shape your lifestyle around your faith in Jesus rather than shape your faith in Jesus around your lifestyle?