

Session 5



Speaking Truth

THE POINT

*When we invite others to follow Jesus,
not everyone will say yes.*

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On December 23, 2001, during a UCLA college basketball game, UCLA's "Mistletoe Cam" zoomed in on a young couple seated in the stands. As in-game entertainment, the Mistletoe Cam put couples on the jumbotron and prompted a mistletoe kiss. This young man had more in mind than a kiss. With all the fans in the stadium watching on the big screen, he pulled a ring from his pocket and asked his girlfriend to marry him. When the fans understood what was happening, they began to cheer but there was an awkward silence from the girlfriend. After asking, "Are you kidding?" she abruptly stood up and walked away, making her answer obvious.¹

We'll probably never know if this was staged or the real thing, but it does illustrate an important truth regarding proposals: Not everyone will say, "Yes." Sometimes the response is "No," and we might hear it when we invite people to put their faith in Jesus.

QUESTION 1:

What's the most interesting wedding proposal you've seen?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

LUKE 18:18-23

¹⁸ A ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor your father and mother.” ²¹ “I have kept all these from my youth,” he said. ²² When Jesus heard this, he told him, “You still lack one thing: Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²³ After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich.

Luke told us of a conversation Jesus had with a rich ruler, and we are put on notice from the very beginning that this might not turn out well. Previously in Luke 18:15-17, Jesus made it clear that we receive the kingdom like a little child rather than taking possession of it by doing something. The rich ruler’s question, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 18, emphasis added), seems to indicate he missed Jesus’s point. His question about eternal life isn’t a new topic; the kingdom and inheriting eternal life are one in the same. Even so, the question opened the door for Jesus to speak truth to him in three specific ways.

Jesus knows the dangers associated with a good reputation and so He made it clear that “no one is good except God alone” (v. 19). Obviously, Jesus is God and He is good, but the rich ruler had yet to affirm Jesus’s divinity and mission. By responding this way, Jesus confronted the rich ruler’s understanding that he must do something, presumably good, to inherit eternal life. Today, we use Romans 3:23 to state this truth: “For all have sinned and fall short of

the glory of God.” Doing something good won’t change our status as unredeemed sinners.

Jesus emphasized the importance of obedience to God’s covenant with His people by referring to the commandments. We might wonder why Jesus mentioned the commands that dealt with our relationships with others instead of the commands that dealt with our relationship with God, but the reason is simple. The ruler’s obedience to these commands wasn’t the problem and Jesus knew this. The ruler’s problem was with the other commandments. So, Jesus wasn’t surprised by the ruler’s response, “I have kept all these from my youth” (Luke 18:21).

Jesus’s supernatural discernment was on full display when He said, “You still lack one thing: Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (v. 22). Jesus made it clear by speaking truthfully. Essentially, he was saying to this man, “you have to give up your worship of riches and make worshiping God your first priority.” The way to eternal life is by becoming a

follower of Jesus. There is no action we can perform that makes us good enough to be allowed entrance into the kingdom. Eternal life is the gift we receive when we follow Jesus in faith.

QUESTION 2:

What are some common beliefs people hold about how to have eternal life?

Jesus invited the rich ruler to “come, follow me.” It was an invitation that had the power to change this man’s life forever—an invitation for the very thing this man was seeking—eternal life. But it was also an invitation for this man to leave behind his wealth and possessions.

Speaking the truth of the gospel can be challenging in our culture. The religion of “Me” is strong. Our emphasis on self gives us permission to choose what we want to believe. The issue of truth is secondary for some because truth seems to violate their freedom to choose.

Truth will invariably demand yielding and adjusting one’s life to it. It is for this reason that believers must be willing to speak the truth about such an important issue. The truth is that eternal life can only be found in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It’s not something we acquire; it’s a gift we receive because of God’s grace and forgiveness.

Is there a more tragic verse anywhere else in the Bible than verse 23: “After he heard this, he became extremely sad, because he was very rich”? For some of us, it may be hard to connect tragedy with riches, but this verse portrays it clearly. Jesus had asked the rich ruler to assess the location of his true allegiance. Was it in the richness of knowing God, or was it in the richness of the world? His sadness portrayed his answer. He would not give up his earthly wealth to become rich in the kingdom of God.

QUESTION 3:

What have you seen others give up to follow Jesus?

LUKE 18:24-27

²⁴ Seeing that he became sad, Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For 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.” ²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ He replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Here’s an uncomfortable truth: wealth can hinder us from receiving God’s grace. It’s important for us to understand why. The Bible makes it plain that wealth by itself isn’t the

problem. In 1 Timothy 6:10, it says “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” It’s the love of money that causes problems rather than money alone. What is it about the love of

wealth that gets in the way of receiving God's grace? Simply stated, wealth can make us believe things that aren't true. Here are just a few examples.

- **Wealth can give us a false sense of security.** To be sure, wealth can assist us in meeting our needs and taking care of ourselves and those we love. But it can also cause us to believe that wealth can meet every challenge and defeat any threat that intrudes upon our lives. In reality, wealth can't bring hope to someone diagnosed with ALS or change an unrepentant heart.
- **Wealth can give us a false sense of freedom.** For many, this is the attraction of wealth. Wealth can feed that desire to satisfy self, but unfortunately the desire is insatiable. In addition, we've seen too many people who have ruined their lives simply because they had the wealth to satisfy any whim or desire.
- **Wealth can give us a false sense of validation.** Wealth for some is the proof that they are somebody. It validates them as a person of value and a credible voice to listen to. Sadly, wealth can be acquired in unscrupulous ways and is not a guarantee of wisdom and character.

When wealth deceives a person to believe that they can fix any problem, do whatever they want, and are a force to be reckoned with, the need for grace is diminished. Wealth isn't an obstacle to God's grace when we simply possess it; it's an obstacle when wealth possesses us.

So serious is this issue that it caused Jesus to say, "For 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" (v. 25). Let's not fool ourselves here. Jesus was saying it is impossible for a rich person possessed by and trusting in wealth to enter God's kingdom. When wealth has become a person's god, everything else takes a backseat, including the one true God. God has made it clear—He must be first. He demands total allegiance and loyalty.

The disciples understood what Jesus meant, which prompted the question, "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26). It was common to view wealth as God's blessing on a person, which was equated to proof of a right standing before God. If this rich man, who was obviously blessed and favored by God, can't be saved, then what chance did the disciples have? Then who can really be saved?

What man cannot accomplish, God can. It is impossible for man to negotiate, buy, or earn entrance into the kingdom, but God can grant it to the one who is willing to leave behind any and all false gods that compete for the worship and honor that belongs solely to God, so that God takes His rightful place on the throne of the heart.

QUESTION 4:

How can wealth hinder our relationship with God?

Engage

SPEAKING TRUTH IN LOVE

Using the following activity, apply “speaking the truth in love”
to the way we share Christ:

Identify two truths regarding the gospel of Jesus:

1. _____
2. _____

Identify two ways we can share these truths lovingly:

1. _____
2. _____

**Explain how you think you would react if the person with whom you
share refuses the gospel. How should you react?**

LUKE 18:28-30

²⁸ Then Peter said, “Look, we have left what we had and followed you.” ²⁹ So he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come.”

I’m sure there were times during Jesus’s earthly ministry when His words confused the disciples, and this was one of them. Peter said what the others were probably thinking: “Look, we have left what we had and followed you” (v. 28).

The act of choosing plays a key role in the process of salvation. God has chosen humanity to be the recipients of His grace and forgiveness. He gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice that removes the debt of our sin. In turn, through conviction of sin and hearing of the forgiveness found only in Jesus Christ, we choose to follow Jesus. We choose Him above all worldly things, making Him King and Lord of our lives. Our response must be something we choose—not coerced or driven by lesser motives.

This is where many non-believers falter in their understanding of following Jesus. In their view, following Jesus means memorizing a list of dos and don’ts—and the don’ts far outweigh the dos. They see following Jesus as a burden, embracing a lifestyle that requires sacrifice and service. And it certainly couldn’t be fun. With that view in mind, they logically ask, “Why would anyone choose to live their life that way?”

Jesus wanted His disciples to know that their choice to follow Him would not go unrewarded. These were assuring words for ears eager to hear them. Jesus was assuring them they had made the right choice by following Him.

Following Jesus today can cause us to make the same choices as the disciples. As a pastor, I know this personally. Having pastored in four different cities, I’ve left houses, family, and friends behind. It wasn’t easy, but in each destination, God provided surrogate parents, brothers and sisters, and a place to live. My life has been enriched by all these relationships, yet I would have never known them without deciding to follow Jesus. By leaving a house, parents, brothers and sisters to follow Jesus, I have received “many times more” in this life. But that’s not all.

Jesus mentioned a specific benefit: “eternal life in the age to come.” I’ve reached the age when “benefits” have taken on a greater meaning. Every year I review the costs and benefits of our Medicare plan, looking for any changes. I’m also keeping track of the Social Security benefit I hope to receive. But as important as these benefits are, they pale in comparison to the benefit Jesus offers us. He offers eternal life in the age to come, and when I receive that benefit, these others won’t matter.

QUESTION 5:

What have you gained by following Christ?

LIVE IT OUT

Choose one of the activities below to increase your awareness of the benefits that are available when we choose to follow Christ.

- **Pray.** Pray and thank God for giving you the gift of eternal life. Humbly praise Him for it.
- **Record.** Reflect on the many ways God has been good to you as a believer. Write these blessings down and keep the list handy. In the future, whenever you remember an instance of God's goodness or He blesses you again, record it.
- **Replace.** What do you need to leave behind to follow Jesus? Identify those things that can easily take God's rightful place in your life. Develop an action plan to put them aside and replace them with a godly discipline.



1. Yahoo Sports, "Video: Marriage Proposal Gone Wrong at UCLA Basketball Game," *Yahoo Sports*, <https://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/ncaab-the-dagger/video-marriage-proposal-gone-wrong-ucla-basketball-game-210823619.html>.