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Sermon 27 SEPT 2020

JSW 8: Jesus Says WHAT About Sacrifice?

- Matthew 19: 16 Then someone came to him and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' 17 And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' 18 He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; 19 Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' 20 The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' 21 Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' 22 When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.
- 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, 'Then who can be saved?' 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.'

- AUDIO: (announcer) It's time to gather your friends and family, get out your Bibles and your sermon notes, and open your hearts and minds, because this is another Sunday sermon in a series called "and then, Jesus says what?"
- Good morning church family and church friends, and welcome to the LargsNaz online service. We are so glad that you have joined us today, from wherever and whenever you're joining us, you are welcome here—if you're part of our church family we hope that you are making an effort to gather with others as you are able and as the guidelines allow. We know that the guidelines have gotten tighter lately--and it looks like they may continue to tighten--but we continue to be the church and to worship together and build the Kingdom together. If you're new here, we are glad to have you with us -- take some time to listen to some previous services, and get familiar with what's there, and we hope that you'll become a regular and continue to join us each and every week.
- I believe that today, as always, God has something profound and life-changing to say to each of us if we have ears to hear.
- Today is the EIGHTH Sunday in our sermon series called "and then Jesus says WHAT"-- the final Sunday-- we'll close out this series today and then tonight at 6pm on ZOOM, we'll have a Second Helping Bible Study that will review today's sermon and all that we've heard over the past two months.
- If you've been following the series, you know that what we've been doing each week is considering some of the things that Jesus says in the gospels-- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John-- things that Jesus says that can be a bit

confusing, or easy to misinterpret--statements that might make us say "and then Jesus says WHAT?"

- And as we have been considering the answers to that question--we've been demonstrating ways that we might respond when we come upon a passage in the Bible--particularly one that comes directly from the mouth of Jesus--that might not be easy to understand, things that are challenging—even difficult.
- And over the past two months we have heard Jesus say some surprising things. Things like "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," and "if you want to be my follower you'll have to hate your parents, your family, and even your life"--that you'll need to take up a cross to follow me--
- We've explored what Jesus meant when he told Judas that the poor would always be with us, and when he said that he speaks in parables in order that people would not understand or repent and find forgiveness
- And then Pastor Tasha interrupted the alliterative pattern that we had going--we had talked about peace, parents, the poor and parables--and she explored with us what Jesus said about the Syrophenician woman--the Gentile whose daughter had an unclean spirit and who had come to Jesus for help--and who had gotten an unexpected response from Jesus.
- So continuing with s-words, the next Sunday we talked about what Jesus said about stress--and how he could describe following him in two very different ways-- as "taking up your cross," on the one hand, but then by saying his yoke is easy and his burden is light, on the other.

- And then last Sunday we asked the question "Jesus says what about sin?" because we looked at the passage from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel where Jesus says if your eye causes you to sin, pull it out and throw it away, and if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
- And we saw that while amputation might be an EFFECTIVE method of avoiding sin, it was not a SUSTAINABLE solution to the problem of sin, because eventually a person is going to run out of body parts to get rid of, and we saw how the real problem, and the solution, involved the condition of a person's heart.
- We saw how righteousness, or holiness, was about more than simply doing certain things, or about avoiding certain things, because a person can do or avoid certain actions and still not be righteous or holy.
- We also heard Jesus give the startling command at the end of Matthew chapter 5, to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," and we asked how that could possibly be something that anyone could be expected to achieve--like all of the standards Jesus proposes in those antitheses, that sounds like an impossible goal. Be PERFECT?
- Perfect--The Greek is *teleios*, and we learned that Jesus only uses that word one other time in the gospels, and that it means "complete in all its parts." Nothing missing--nothing cut off-- nothing that needs to be cut off and thrown away
- Today we're going to look at the one other place in the GOSPELS where Jesus uses the word *teleios*--perfect.

- And it's also in Matthew's gospel, but you have to go way ahead to chapter 19, where in verse 21 Jesus says: 'If you wish to be perfect (*teleios*), go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'
- Now we know that Jesus says "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" back in chapter 5, and here in Chapter 19 he says "if you want to be perfect, sell everything and give to the poor."
- Could this be then the answer to the question that we might ask: What do we have to do to be perfect? Answer: "if you want to be perfect, sell everything and give to the poor."
- Sounds easy enough.
- And it would be nice if "being perfect" were as straightforward as donating our entire net worth in a cheque to charity--just sacrifice all your wealth--but as we're going to find, it isn't that simple.
- And so today's "Jesus says What?" question, our FINAL question in the series, is this: Jesus says WHAT about sacrifice?
- And as we explore Matthew's story about the exchange between Jesus and this rich young man, in which Jesus tells him to sacrifice all that he has, we're going to ask--and answer-- 3 other questions: they're in your sermon notes
- First, what does the rich young man LACK?
- Second, what does the rich young man HAVE?
- And finally, what is possible?

- And as we consider these 3 questions, we're also going to discover 3 other places in the New Testament--outside of the gospels-- where the word "*teleios*"--perfect-- is used.
- Let's jump right in.
- We read in the scripture that a rich young man has come to Jesus with a question. His question is: 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?'
- And we know right there that this young man is on the wrong track. We saw just last week how a person--the Pharisees are a great example of this--how a person can DO good deeds--things that a righteous and lawful person SHOULD do--and still miss the mark--and still be guilty, still be a hypocrite, still be unrighteous--because eternal life is not simply about doing good deeds, it is not simply about works--you'll remember that Paul looked back on all his works as so much *skubala* insofar as they earned him his salvation--because they didn't--and here we find this rich young man coming to Jesus and looking for the one good deed--the one accomplishment--that will grant him eternal life. But he is asking the wrong question. He wants to know what HE can do to earn his salvation--and we all know that the answer is nothing--but he asks anyway.
- And Jesus' answer lets him know that it's problematic to talk about deeds as good--because two people can do the same deed with different motivations, for different reasons

- And so Jesus asks him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good (as if deeds themselves were "good" or not)? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.'
- And of course, that's much too general for this young man--he wants specifics--well which ones? he asks.
- And so Jesus gives him a few commandments--we recognise these from the 10 Commandments: You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother;
- And then Jesus says something interesting in Matthew's gospel that he doesn't say in the same account in Mark and Luke's gospels (that's Mark 10 and Luke 18)--Jesus adds to this list of commandments, saying, "Also, you shall love your neighbour as yourself"
- Jesus just slips that one in there at the end
- And you may recognise that as the second part of the greatest commandment, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength--AND your neighbour as yourself--that 2 part commandment that encompasses all the other commandments, and contains only one single verb, only one thing to do--and that's LOVE--to be specific that's *agape*--that is that Godly love, that perfect love that Jesus exemplifies by giving himself up for humanity, taking on the very form of humanity, becoming a slave, by emptying himself out even to death on a cross.

- And so Jesus, in the same way that he added to those commandments in chapter 5 that we looked at last week in those antitheses, here he adds to these commandments: also, LOVE your neighbour AS yourself-- *agape*--
- And what's interesting about Jesus adding this here is that a person cannot of their own ability or power exhibit perfect, Godly love-- you cannot love your neighbour AS YOURSELF--you can't do it by yourself--because it is not simply something YOU do, it's something you have to have been given-- that's because
- The second part of the greatest commandment flows out of and requires the first part--the only way you can love your neighbour as yourself is if you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and if you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, you will love your neighbour as yourself
- And so, by adding, "also, love your neighbour as yourself," Jesus is encapsulating all the commandments and shining a light on the one requirement needed to obey all of them in their entirety--and that is *agape*, love for God and for neighbour.
- And the rich young man hears Jesus' answer and responds: "I have kept all these--what do I still lack?" Another word for "kept" there is "observed." I have "observed" all these.
- And this is where Jesus responds "if you wish to be perfect"--you'll remember that the word there is *teleios* --complete--missing nothing--and so in Mark and Luke's gospels we find Jesus saying to this man "one thing you lack" --you're missing something--you're incomplete--imperfect--but here in



Matthew Jesus says if you want to be *teleios*--perfect-- then go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

- Here is an ironic thing--Jesus tells this rich young man that if he wants to be perfect, *teleios*, complete, lacking nothing, then he needs to sacrifice everything--give it all away--why is that?
- Because what he is lacking is love--*agape*--without which he cannot be perfect--*teleios*--complete
- Back in chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel, as we saw last week, Jesus says "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," and it's no coincidence that the verses that precede that command are all about love--about *agape*. Jesus commands his hearers to love their enemies--to love not only those who love them but also those who hate them--and then he says "be perfect."
- And here Jesus says to the rich young man, "if you wish to be perfect"--love your neighbour as yourself--not just conceptually, not just theoretically-- don't just say "oh yeah, I observe that, I keep that command"-- but practically, in reality, doing it, living it out--because it's one thing to SAY "oh yeah, I love my neighbour as myself" but it's quite another to DO it--to give all YOU have to the poor
- While the rich young man SAYS he observes the command to love his neighbour as himself--to exhibit *agape*--when the opportunity, and the challenge, to practice it arises, he goes away grieving, because he had many possessions.

- And let's keep in mind that giving everything to the poor isn't ALL that Jesus commands of this young man--Jesus says sell all that you have and give the money to the poor AND THEN come, follow me--In and of itself, the act of giving everything to the poor is not enough--and the fact is that the rich young man could have given everything to the poor and STILL not be righteous, and STILL not be holy, and STILL not be ready to follow Jesus--because what he lacks is not some deed, it's love--it's *agape*, the self-giving, sacrificial love that comes only from God
- And so the Apostle Paul can say to us in 1 Corinthians 13 verse 3 : If I give away all I have, but have not love--*agape*-- I gain nothing.
- Paul follows that up by saying in verse 10: when the perfect (the *teleios*, the complete) when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.
- If I have not love, love for God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, love for my enemy, love for my neighbour as myself, then I can do all the good deeds in the world and still fall short, because I'm doing the deeds for the wrong reason, with the wrong motivation
- The rich young man may have wealth, youth, power, obedience, discipline and accomplishment-- but he does not have love; he does not have *agape*-- that love that is a gift from God and not an ability within ourselves.
- The rich young man lacks *agape*.
- Now let's ask our second question. What does the rich young man have?
- The fact that he is described as a "rich young man" tells us some things--he has wealth, he has youth, he has the privileges associated with his gender

- But the scripture tells us in verse 22 quite clearly that he goes away from Jesus grieving because he has "many possessions."
- The Greek that is translated as "many possessions" there in verse 22 is "*polla ktemata*." The word *polla* is easy to understand--it's just like the prefix poly- in English--it means many, or a lot of--like polygamy or polytheism or polyglot--but the word "*ktemata*" that is translated as "possessions" is not familiar at all--but what it means is pretty simply "possessions" or "property." *Ktemata* is "stuff that I own." Anything about which you could say "that is my property"--whether it's a car or a pencil or a country home with 100 acres of land--in fact, especially "real estate"-- is described as "*ktemata*."
- And so we know that what this rich young man HAS is "*ktemata*." And we also know that he has *polla ktemata*--a lot of property--you might say he has a "lotta *ktemata*."
- But he grieves because of it. Because Jesus told him to sell it and give to the poor.
- But that's not exactly what Jesus said--Jesus didn't say "sell your *ktemata*."
- I want us to back up to verse 21, where in ENGLISH we read that Jesus says sell your "possessions," and then in verse 22, we see that the young man grieves because he has many "possessions"--but the word that is translated as "possessions" in verse 21 is not the same as the word that is translated as "possessions" in verse 22.

- That word that Jesus uses in verse 21 is *hyparchonta*--and it can indeed be translated as "possessions"--and that's why it is translated that way, but it carries a whole lot more meaning than "*ktemata*," the word used in verse 22.
- The root of the word *hyparchonta*--is a verb that means "I begin, I am, I exist, as well as I am in possession of"-- and so *hyparchonta* is
- All that you control, all that belongs to you, that you are identified with
- It's all you are, all you ever have been and all you're ever gonna be
- And so when Jesus calls the rich young man to part with his *hyparchonta*, he is calling him to sacrifice his very self, his very identity, for the sake of others--and then and only then can he follow Jesus--the rich young man is being called to say I am crucified with Christ--I no longer live but Christ lives in me
- But the rich young man grieves because he has a lot of property--*ktemata*--he has a lot of stuff he doesn't want to part with
- And so I would suggest that not only does the rich young man have many possessions, what he also has is FEAR, because he will not sacrifice what he has, his property, his *ktemata*, even in response to the command of the one who could restore it all a thousand times over in an instant--the one who fed the five thousand, the one who raises the dead and commands the winds and waves--because the rich young man is afraid of what the future might bring
- The rich young man is operating from a worldly, an earthly, a mortal perspective--it's just common sense to know that we need to hang on to what we've got--that times are uncertain, and we have to store up treasure on Earth and be prepared because we never know what the future holds.

- Well we may not know what the future holds, but we can know who holds the future, and if the God of the universe commands us to sacrifice treasure on Earth in order to store up treasure in heaven, we ought to do so
- But this rich young man is afraid of losing his possessions--his *ktemata*--apparently he is unaware that the day is going to come when one way or another he's going to have to realise that he can't take them with him--that he will one day cross the line of worlds and someone else will lay claim to all that he leaves behind
- And the same is true for each of us--one day when the great equalizer of death reconciles our accounts we will find to our dismay or our great joy that only those treasures we have laid up in heaven will follow us into eternity
- The rich young man has fear--but do you know what casts out fear?
- 1 John 4:18 tells us: There is no fear in love, but perfect love (did you hear that? perfect love--*teleios* and *agape*) perfect love casts out fear.
- And finally, our last question--what is possible?
- After the rich young man leaves Jesus, Jesus says to his disciples that it's hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven--in fact, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.
- Now I've heard the explanations of the eye of the needle being a part of some wall into some city or whatever, but the point Jesus is making is that it's difficult --if not downright impossible--to have great wealth and to enter the Kingdom of God--and this is an astonishing statement--and Matthew tells us

that when the disciples heard it, they were astounded, and asked, "then WHO can be saved?"

- Now you might think that Jesus' answer would be something like "only the poor" or "people who aren't rich," but it isn't--Jesus says "for mortals it is impossible." It is impossible. For mortals to be saved. To save themselves.
- When we looked last week at those antitheses--when Jesus said, "you've heard it said 'don't murder' but I say even if you're angry with someone you're guilty" or "you've heard it said 'love your neighbours and hate your enemies,' but I say 'love your enemies'"--I suggested that the standards that Jesus was decribing were impossible to live up to--and today we hear Jesus say "Love your neighbour as YOURSELF" --as yourself--can you imagine what that looks like? Loving those around you with the same love--the same concern, the same care, the same dedication with which we love and take care of ourselves? That's impossible!
- And indeed it is impossible. For mortals.
- But look what Jesus says next. But for God all things are possible.
- What is possible? All things.
- How is it possible to have eternal life--how is it possible to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength--how is it possible to love your neighbour as yourself--how is it possible to BE PERFECT?
- For God all things are possible.
- As Paul writes in Romans 12, when we are not conformed to this world, but present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, when we

are transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable--and PERFECT--*teleios*--perfect--then all things are possible.

- In our church's 2020 vision statement--we talked about it in our sermon on the 12th of January and in the sermon series that followed-- one of our areas of focus for this year is holiness--what John Wesley called "Christian perfection"-- and in our vision statement we describe holiness by using two phrases that are often used in the Wesleyan tradition: "heart cleansing" and "perfect love." We talked about "heart cleansing" last week and today we talked about "perfect love."
- And I want to challenge you this week and every week to look out for opportunities to show God's perfect love--that *agape* in your life each day-- look for ways to love your neighbour as yourself --turn the conceptual into the practical--turn the theoretical into reality
- If you're hungry, maybe your neighbour is hungry--feed them; if you're lonely, maybe your neighbour is lonely--call them; if you're feeling anxious and weary, maybe your neighbour is feeling the same way--encourage them, pray for them, show them that you love them, in whatever way God calls you to--let's be the body of Christ that is broken and spilled out for the salvation of the world--let's take up our cross, let's not walk away grieving when Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven.
- Do you want to be perfect? For God all things are possible.

- Join us tonight at 6:00pm for our Second helping Bible study. It's going to be a good time of fellowship and discussion and review--we hope to see you then.