

The famous 4 words of children on road trips: ***“ARE WE THERE YET?”***

Life is a journey. Following Jesus through life is a journey.

And often, when we think about **eternal life** and how it fits into the big picture, we think of it as something that starts down the road when we arrive at our final destination. So we itch to get there. Along the way our soul cries – *ARE WE THERE YET?*

But Jesus gives us a definition for eternal life that topples this perspective in **John 17:3** - *Now this is eternal life: that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent*

Eternal life isn't tied to a place. It's tied to a person.

Heaven isn't Heaven if God isn't there.

Eternal life is life lived with God, in relationship with Jesus.

And that means that by definition, eternal life doesn't wait down the road - you can start now.

As the philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard would put it: ***“Eternal life is now in session.”***

So when you ask, *“am I there yet?”* The answer is yes. You are, right now, able to walk in eternal life.

LIFE is the primary synonym for **“salvation”** in the New Testament.

John 10:10 – I have come that they may have **LIFE**, and have it to the full.

1 John 5:12 – whoever has the Son has **LIFE**.

Ephesians 2:5 –God made us **ALIVE** in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.

The phrases **eternal life**, **salvation**, and even the **Kingdom of God** are all used in the Bible to speak to the life that God calls us to and what we tap into when we follow Christ.

In **Mark 10**, our passage tonight, we see all three.

In verse 17, you'll see the rich man come to Jesus and ask what he must do to *inherit eternal life*.

In verses 23-25, Jesus equates this with *“entering the kingdom of God.”*

And finally, in response to the exchange, the disciples ask in verse 26, *“who then can be saved?”*

MARK 10:17-27

Proof of purchase.

TMNT toys had pizza points, GI Joes had flag points, Transformers had robot points, Pepsi had Pepsi Points, and on and on as people tried to get creative with their proof of purchases. To redeem each of the prizes you had to mail in these little pieces of cardboard as a proof of purchase.

Spiritually in a way, we all want proof of purchase. Proof that my balance before God is good.

Nobody wants to get to Heaven and hear: *“We don't have record of that payment...”*

We call this: **ASSURANCE OF SALVATION** How can I know, beyond a doubt, that I'm saved? This is the question the Rich Young Ruler wanted answered, as so many still do today.

His greeting is - **“Good teacher”**

In that culture when you flattered someone, you would have expected flattery to be returned.

He no doubt anticipated Jesus calling him something like “honored and good sir.”

But Jesus skips custom and cuts right to the heart of the matter with his reply:

“There is no one good but God.”

Why? This man appears to have considered himself good. After all he obeyed the commandments. His heart in the moment was - let me make sure I’m good enough.

When it came to the assurance of his salvation...

Jesus didn’t say pray this prayer, then you can go about your business.

He doesn’t say here’s a checklist of things to believe.

He says take money out of the center of your life and put me at the center....

The Rich Young Ruler’s question is essentially: **HAVE I CROSSED THE BOUNDARY?**

Jesus’ chief concern: **AM I AT THE CENTER?**

Bounded set vs a centered set.

In a bounded set there is a boundary you step over, a momentary transaction... vs. a centered set where there is a center you never stop working toward.

This was about money being at the center for this man, but it could be a number of things for people. It could be other people, even own families. Our image. Platform. Social media. Work. Career. Materialism. Things that sit at the center of our life where God should be.

Psalm 62:10 - *and if your wealth increases, don’t make it the center of your life*

“to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.’”

He speaks to the five that pertain to neighbor but not directly to God.

A “good person” can do all of these and still live separated from God, now and eternally.

The man replies - **“All these I have kept.”**

If that’s the minimum requirement for salvation, then I’m good. There’s my assurance.

“Jesus felt genuine love for him...”

It reminds us that love challenges others for **their** good.

Not to scratch the itch of our self righteousness. Not to put anyone in their place.

Like a doctor who has to prescribe a radical surgery or life change for the good of the patient, this man needed a radical transformation.

How many of us, how many people in our materially blessed culture, need the same?

Jesus speaks on it in 16 of his 38 parables. In Luke alone, he teaches on money 18 separate times. It wasn’t just to this man. It was to many.

Paul brings it up as well, and makes a profound statement in **2 Corinthians 8:7**:

But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

Faith. Speech. Knowledge. Authenticity. Love. All measures of spiritual maturity. Then he adds giving. We should grow in all 6.

If we aren't growing in giving, we're often shrinking back.

Jesus talks about the **“deceitfulness of wealth”** It's not neutral. It's toxic. How? It deceives us into thinking that we are self-sufficient.

Accumulation of assets without Biblical context creates a “god-complex”

Hosea 13:6 -*When they had pasture, they became satisfied; they were satisfied, and their hearts became proud. Therefore they forgot Me.*

But over the course of our lives, we find out the same thing the Israelites did: Our self-sufficiency is insufficient. Jesus alone is all sufficient.

But... the man wanted something he could do to find sufficiency. So Jesus complies with a request that tested his heart:

Jesus gives the command to go sell everything give it to the poor and follow... the rich young man turns away... Jesus remarks how hard it is for the rich to enter into eternal life... finally giving us the image of the camel and the eye of a needle.

In all this Jesus exposed the true issue:

A reluctance to give all of himself to God and place God at the center of his life.

God doesn't give tickets to Heaven. He gives himself.

We aren't called to purchase tickets to Heaven. We're called to give all of ourselves.

We want something transactional. A proof of purchase. But God is relational.

Again, the Rich Young Ruler's question: **HAVE I CROSSED THE BOUNDARY?**

Jesus' chief concern: **AM I AT THE CENTER?**

You want assurance of salvation? What's your relationship with Christ like?

Salvation and saving faith has been transactional - about the minimum you need to believe or act on so that God has to let you into Heaven when you die. A kind of minimal effort needed.

Try this with your spouse...

What is the minimum amount of dating we can do to keep the flame alive?

*What is the lowest level of commitment I can walk in?
What's the minimum exclusivity in terms of interacting with other women?
Where the line I cross and then I'm good? And where are the lines I can't cross?*

We grasp this with others, the reality that **minimal devotion ends relationships**. Relationships thrive and survive when we never stop pursuing the other person. It's not crossing the line at the altar and that's the finish line. That's the start!

In the same way, salvation isn't a one time moment or exchange (for many also at an altar) that we then walk away from. It's a posture of repentance and faith that you begin in that moment and continue in for the rest of your life.

There was a Barna study in 2011 that found nearly **half** of the adults in America had prayed a prayer of salvation. A prayer many of them had moved on from, as a small fraction of those attended church, read their Bible or led lifestyles any different than others in their world.

To these people salvation was a one time transaction they'd walked away from, and eternal life was something down the road that didn't effect the way they lived today.

Salvation comes not due to a prayer prayed correctly, but because we have put the full weight of our lives on the finished work of Jesus and the cross.

Here's the thing: God *wants* us to have assurance. He wants it to come through loving relationship and pursuit. The young man was seeking it and Jesus doesn't mock him, he looks on him in love.

God is a good father. The same way I want Raj to be fully, 110% assured that I love him, God wants the same for us. You'll never live in radical obedience until you're radically assured of your father's love.

Jesus is our proof of our Father's love. He is our proof of purchase. We don't redeem ourselves. Jesus did that at the cross.

If I was saved by my good works, then I could attempt to put limits on what God asks of me. But if I'm saved by grace through faith – at the infinite cost of God's son – there's nothing he truly can't ask of me.

What does God ask for? The same thing Jesus asks from the Rich Young Ruler - **everything**. It's funny, if we hear that God wants a vaguely stated "everything" and we're cool. We hear Jesus say that about material things, and in our materialistic culture, we flinch.

Mark Twain allegedly said - *It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.*

We're bothered. So we respond in two ways.

First, we **deflect the demand** by shrinking the camel (I'm not really rich like *those* people). I'm no camel. We think rich equates to people on the Forbes list.

Only 8% of the world HAS a car. 92% of the world would see somebody driving a 92 Honda and think, "must be nice to be rich"

One billion people in the world do not have access to clean water.

- The average American uses four hundred to six hundred liters of water a day.

Every seven seconds, somewhere in the world a child under 5 dies of hunger.

- The average American household throws away 14% of the food it purchases.

Americans spends more annually on trash bags than half the world does on all of its purchases.

We are richly blessed, and in the broader scheme of things – rich.

We can't deflect this challenge Jesus makes of the rich man to other people. We are the rich.

Jesus' words are aimed at us. So when Jesus talks about how hard it is, we should pay attention.

This exchange should be one that challenges us.

Since we can't deflect the demand, we make **the radical reasonable** – we enlarge the eye of the needle. Jesus can't really mean everything.

The rich young ruler was focused on the cost. What he would lose.

He was focused on what investors would call the **ACTUAL COST**

An expenditure. It's easy to recognize. It's easy to account for.

Jesus tells his followers to count the cost. He's laying out the cost for the Rich Young Ruler.

The Rich Young Ruler is counting his actual cost. That's the easy calculation.

But he's missing the other side of the coin.

But do you know what faith does?

It counts the opportunity cost. It sees the unseen. The hidden cost.

What is **OPPORTUNITY COST?**

The loss of potential gain- often due to inaction. Failure to invest.

Some of the worst financial decisions people make are failures to invest.

The man walks away downcast... as if already aware of the opportunity he passed on.

How long would he walk that way, looking back after Jesus died and rose, thinking I missed my opportunity?

The door to salvation is never locked on us. God is the father of the Prodigal, already on the porch looking toward the horizon waiting for reunion. He never goes inside and locks the door.

But on the other side of salvation, as we follow Christ, there are moments God calls us into, and often we balk because we are focused on the actual cost, and we miss the opportunity cost.

Sharing the gospel and we're focused on what will happen to me and my rep if I do, rather than what will happen to them and their eternity if I don't.

He asks us to share our five loaves and two fishes and we're focused on missing out on lunch and we miss out on the miracle.

Moments of generosity were we're focused on the cost instead of the promise.

The promise?

Those that sow sparingly reap sparingly. Those that do so generously reap generously.

That it is more blessed to give than receive.

The actual cost is what we give.

The opportunity cost is the blessing that waits on us if we do.

All of this boils down to trust.

God knows this. It's exactly why he tests us in this way.

One test Jesus gives, especially for the rich who live effected by the deceitfulness of wealth that preaches security in self sufficiency, is **GIVING**. The goal isn't to empty our bank account, but to empty the throne of our heart of anything that isn't Jesus.

Zacchaeus –an example of somebody who later passes the test, continues to own resources.

He wasn't saved because he gave away a certain amount of his wealth.

He was saved because what he gave was a **testament** to putting God at the center.

We don't like tests. But in the same letter, 2 Corinthians, where Paul says see to it that you grow in giving, he says later on to "**test your faith.**" (2 Cor 13:5)

Your faith will be tested 100 different ways in life. The tithe lays a foundation of trust in God. Wealth is deceitful. And tithing is a test. A test that sets us up to excel in **the grace of giving.**

It's **not the law of giving**. It's a grace.

Generosity and giving is the overflow of God's grace and blessing in our lives.

It's not some minimal entrance cost.

It's not dues paid to maintain membership.

It's an overflow of the grace that's already saved us, the eternal life we're walking in.

2 Corinthians 8:9

When Paul is exhorting the Church in Corinth to walk in generosity, what does he point to?

The Gospel. Jesus. Why? When you keep him at the center, generosity flows.

see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, (again - not the law of giving but the grace of giving)

but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Not rich in possessions, but rich in spirit, life, and salvation.

Does that mean there won't be rich or shouldn't be rich?

No. Paul doesn't just assume there will be materially blessed people, he directly addresses them.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

*Command those who are rich in this present world – [again that’s the face in the mirror for most of us, so let us heed these words]- not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of **the life that is truly life.***

Life and life abundant. Eternal life. Not just quantity. Quality of life.

A relationship with Jesus strengthened by trust at its core.

This is the **opportunity cost** with generosity.

The life that is truly life.

In this way we lay up treasures... which points us back to the words of Jesus in Mark 10

How quickly we note the actual cost and miss the opportunity cost in this passage.

When you truly count the cost, the actual cost in this life versus the opportunity cost in both this life and the next...

You realize Jesus’ call is more than a call to just sacrifice.

It’s a call to satisfaction.

He isn’t calling him away from treasures.

He’s calling him to the ones that don’t rust and fade.

The ones we can take with us. The currency of eternal life and the kingdom.

Jesus gives us so much to live for.

In our culture we settle on **plenty to live on with little to live for.**

The actor Jim Carrey once said: *“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer”*

That’s like Ecclesiastes in the modern context.

That’s like the Rich Young Ruler coming from Hollywood.

This young man **lacked nothing** and yet **lacked everything** because he **lacked the trust** to put God at the center. He left downcast, because the assurance of salvation he wanted crumbled.

You want assurance of salvation?

It’s rooted in Jesus, not an arrangement he’s made for you.

Assurance isn’t based on a distant arrangement, but present relationship.

“blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.”

Not Heaven. Not life after death. Jesus.

Jesus is mine. To call someone “mine.” To be able to call someone yours.

That’s the kind of relationship that is **deep**. Your spouse is yours. You kids are yours.

Eternal life isn’t just measured in length.

It’s depth.

Depth of relationship.

God gives himself.
He doesn't give tickets to Heaven based on our proof of purchase.
He gives himself. Jesus Christ.
Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ who he sent.
We want a transactional faith.
But God is relational.

We make giving about the transaction. But it's about placing God at the center.

Maybe you've been approaching salvation like a bounded set instead of a centered one.
You've crossed some boundary and now you're set.
You prayed a prayer, but you've sputtered in your pursuit.
When Christ is at the center and you're pressing in, there's always a next step.

12 PATHWAYS – Generosity and giving is the last on the list. Sometimes it's the last one we walk in in our materialistic culture, living with the deceitfulness of wealth all around us.

Which do you need to step forward in as you press toward God at the center?