

# THE GOSPEL REQUIRES A PASSIONATE ABANDONMENT TO SIMPLICITY REQUIRING A SHIFT IN THINKING

I am pretty sure the adversary does not want us to be focused on the right things. I believe he would like us to be focussed on the wrong things, and to distract us and to tempt us with the way we think and respond to His word. So I want us to guard against that in 4 ways...

## 1. AVOID COMPARISONS

Christ's life is our standard. We don't compare, we don't judge because Christ's life is our standard.

I believe there's a dangerous tendency in this series, and the application of these truths to begin to look at each other in an unhealthy way.

This is something the disciples were familiar with. You go to John 21, and Jesus says some hard words to Peter about how he's going to die, some very radical words. And the first thing Peter does is he turns around and he sees John standing there, and he says, "Well what about him?"

Comparison!

Jesus looks at him and says, *"If I choose to let him live until I return, what is that to you, Peter?"* And He says these two words, He says, "Follow me." In other words fix your eyes on me. Focus on me and follow me.

## 2. HANG ON TO HOPE

Jesus' presence is our hope. We do not despair, because Jesus' presence is our hope. Here's what I mean by that. I think there's a tendency, when we look at some of these passionate truths in scripture. There's a tendency to hear these tough words and to walk away and think, "I've so far to go. Where do I even begin? I don't think I'm ever going to be good enough." These words start to creep in, and this is where I want to remind you that that kind of despair is not coming from Christ.

It's coming from our adversary, satan, because Christ has never called you to be good enough. He said, "I'm the only one that can make you good enough," and He's not called any one of us in this room to hear these words and to figure out how to put them into practice on our own. This is the beauty of His presence as our hope. He lives in us. He lives in you. He says, "Here's my word, and I'm going to show you what it looks like in action. I'm going to change your thoughts. I'm going to change your desires. And I'm going to transform everything about you so that you are enabled to put all of this into practice. So trust me."

Pray long, pray hard, pray together, pray alone. Seek Him and ask Him to bring these truths to life in you, and He's good for that. He's honoured with that kind of praying. This is not a time for despair. Jesus' presence is our hope.

### **3 CLING TO CHRIST AND DODGE APATHY**

We avoid apathy because Jesus' words are our authority. Apathy is one potential reaction, and I fear it's likely a common reaction across our faith family when we hear words like we're looking at in the gospels. There is a temptation to become indifferent toward these words.

I want to urge you to avoid becoming indifferent or apathetic toward what Jesus is saying. As a Christ follower it's simply not an option to be indifferent to the words of Christ.

To be a Christ follower means we have become aware of our sinful rebellion we've seen in Jesus the only substitute for our sin. By His grace we turned trust in Him as the Lord and Sovereign King of our lives.

When this is the case, what Jesus says determines how we live.

### **4 DODGE LETHARGY**

Apathy is indifference to what Jesus says. Lethargy is laziness in applying what Jesus says. I want to be careful here, because I believe this is a dangerous temptation for even the most devout follower of Christ in this room.

I want to be honest with you and say that this is something that I struggle with. I think there is a dangerous temptation to look at words like we're looking at in this series, and to look at our lives, and look at the culture around us, and to think, "I just don't want to deal with these words."

So we can think it's just not worth fighting the battle. However, it's worth fighting against materialism and consumerism, and professionalism, and even legalism. It's worth fighting against the self-saturated and self-indulgent culture that surrounds and consumes us. It's worth fighting against hypocritical, nominal, un-biblical Christianity. It's worth fighting, struggling, wrestling.

Nowhere in the New Testament does it give a picture of Christianity like you're going down a hill and the wind is just blowing through your hair, and it's just an easy ride. The words are we're in a race, a battle, a war and a wrestle.

We need to wrestle with this because it's worth Jesus' glory. He's our goal. We want the lost and the poor to experience His glory. So it's worth it!

### **ALAN HIRSCH CLIP...**

Challenging eh?

I want to remind you that it doesn't matter at all what I am telling you to do. What matters is what the Spirit is telling you to do. My responsibility, God helping me, is simply to be faithful in representing His Word clearly and accurately and to lay His Word before you. Then it's for you to take the word and say something like "Spirit of God, show me what this Word looks like in action in my life."

We are doing this together.

Don't take 1 week in isolation to another - look at this teaching as a package... My desire is that we'll experience more of the Glory of Christ and the presence of Christ and the Power of Christ in our lives and our church.

*Mark 10: 17–31 (NIV) As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>18</sup>"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. <sup>19</sup>You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" <sup>20</sup>"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." <sup>21</sup>Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup>At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup>Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup>The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>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." <sup>26</sup>The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>27</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." <sup>28</sup>Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!" <sup>29</sup>"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup>will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. <sup>31</sup>But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*

## **LETS PRAY...**

Father, we pray that You would, by Your Spirit, help us to understand this Word today. That You would, by the power of Your Spirit, take this Word and bring it to our minds and our hearts and lives, that you would bring this story of the rich young man to life in this room and in our lives. We know, God, that by world standards we are a rich people and so we pray that You would help us to put aside our preconceived ideas and help us to hear Your Heart on the matter. I pray that

You will help us not only to hear but to apply what You say to our lives. We pray this for the Glory of Your name, Amen.

In this passage, I think there are two primary errors in interpretation that we need to avoid.

One common error is to universalize this passage. Oftentimes people will take this passage and say "What Jesus said to the rich man is applicable to every follower of Christ in all history. And so when Jesus says to the rich man, "go sell everything you have and give it to the poor" then that means he tells every person that follows to do so!

But the reality is even in this story right here, you've got disciples who as the New Testament shows still had a home that provided a place for them to stay at points and probably still had a boat or two! The disciples hadn't sold literally everything they had. So this passage is apparently not teaching us that you can no longer have any private property or possessions. So it's not a universal command for every follower of Christ to go sell everything you have and give to the poor.

So you may now be thinking "Okay, good. I was wondering if this was something we all had to do." But don't be misled! The second error of interpretation is not universalized in this passage, but minimized in this passage. What happens is people say "Well this is not for everybody. This is only for a few people, and a few people definitely doesn't mean me."

What we need to realize is this is a very serious passage where Jesus addresses a rich man and tells him to renounce everything that he has. The reality is that Mark 10 teaches us that **Jesus does in fact tell some of His disciples to go sell everything they have and give to the poor.**

I suggest that it's really possible that Jesus would say exactly these words to US!

Remember, we are rich people in terms of the world. Even with some of the financial uncertainty that obviously has affected our country the last few months, and that some of you have faced tough financial situations; the reality is, we have water and food and plumbing and roofs over our heads and cars to drive in and medical care. We are still very rich compared to the rest of the world, in this room, all of us.

So, this text has huge implications for us and we don't want to minimize it.

We have to take our lives and adjust them to the teaching of God's word.

In order to do that, we're going to dive in again to our text in a new way... We're going to see some truths emerge and we're going to spend some time turning to some other places, especially in the Gospels, to see some other things that Jesus says that helps us understand some of the things that are going on in this passage.

So over the next 3 weeks I want to outline 10 Passionate truths... Just 3 today...

# 1. A PASSIONATE APPROACH

Jesus' call to salvation demands total surrender.

What did Jesus say to this guy? He said "Go sell everything you have and give it to the poor."

We have seen this is not how you pull people in but this is how they were introduced to Jesus. It's no wonder that when you get to Acts 1, there's only 120 people that actually stuck around and did what Jesus told them to do. The real Christ followers.

This is so counter our contemporary Western Christianity.

Jesus breaks through to the core, He goes right to the heart of the matter and says *"Renounce everything if you want to follow me."*

How he does that? He takes this eager seeker and He shows him that salvation demands total surrender. That's got to be a Passionate Approach!

## **SALVATION IS NEVER A MATTER OF EXTERNAL REFORMATION**

It's never a matter of external reformation.

This man comes up and says "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The first thing Christ does is point him to Old Testament commands. He says "All of these I've kept since I was a boy." What Jesus does now is take the commandments that he knew a step deeper, deeper than he ever could've imagined - "Go sell everything you have and give it to the poor."

So, is Jesus promoting a works based salvation? Absolutely not and I want to show you why. This is what Jesus is doing all throughout the Gospels. He takes the commands of God that were understood by so many Jews from the Old Testament and he takes them to a whole new level.

A great example is

*Matthew 5:43–44 (NIV) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

What Jesus is saying is "You have to be perfect in order to inherit eternal life." Now obviously, that's not possible and what Jesus is doing is showing this rich young man, just as he shows all kinds of other folks throughout the Gospels that they cannot merit eternal life because they can't be perfect, yet that's the standard.

Why?...

*John 6:28–29 (NIV) Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

Jesus is saying very clearly, "Salvation is never a matter of external reformation, instead salvation is a matter of internal transformation. You've got to believe me."

Please get this! Based on what we've just seen, if this man goes and sells all he has and gives to the poor, it will be clear evidence that he believes Jesus. It'll be the natural overflow, him believing in Jesus and trusting in Jesus and embracing Jesus and following Jesus. He's not going to sell his possessions and give to the poor in order to earn salvation. This is heart transformation.

This is what we were talking about last week with Lazarus and the rich man. There is a huge difference between caring for the poor being necessary evidence of our salvation and caring for the poor in order to earn salvation.

## **INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION LEADS TO EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION!**

Something happens in our hearts, God changes our hearts. We begin to care for what He cares about and the result of that, the overflow of that is we begin to obey Him, begin to follow Him.

This is what we talked about last week.

Let me try and illustrate this another way - sexual sin - we are always clear about that eh?

*1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (NIV) Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men <sup>10</sup>nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

*1 John 2:3–6 (NIV) We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. <sup>4</sup>Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. <sup>5</sup>But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup>Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*

Well now, let's bring this over to caring for the poor.

What about a people who day after day, week after week and month after month and year after year indulge in more and more and more stuff while they ignore the poor, or at least throw scraps to the poor? Is there a reason to wonder if there is a heart problem here?

*1 John 3:17 (NIV) If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?*

You see if our lifestyles are such that we are indulging ourselves and ignoring the poor in the world, then there is reason to look inside our hearts and the most fundamental question we always need to ask is, "Is Christ there?"

And if He is there, then what should be the natural outworking of this in my life? Shouldn't Christ change me and transform me so that my life looks different?

Not so that I can earn salvation. I would not tell a person struggling with sexual immorality, "Get things right so that you'll be accepted before God." That would be horrible advice, unbiblical counsel to give to them. I would offer "Go to Christ and ask Christ to change your heart so you don't desire these things anymore, so you desire Him." Lets look at some of the practical things we can do as well.

Now, its not go out start caring for the poor so that you can earn salvation. If that were the case, when will we know when we've given or done enough? That's obviously not the case. That's not what scripture's teaching, but scripture is teaching us go to Christ. Repent and run to Christ and ask Him to change our hearts about how we spend and how we live.

So we are going to Christ and we spend time with Christ and we're asking Christ about these things and how they apply to our lives. I believe He's honoured in that.

Let's ask Him to bring an internal transformation in us that will take care of the external manifestation. We need transformed hearts on a day by day, week by week basis. The only place we can find that is in going to Christ. That's the key here for the rich young man. There was a fundamental flaw in his perception of Christ.

Back to our text...

In verse 17 the man says... *"Good teacher."* This young man has no idea who he is talking to!

**Please see this truth:**

**The rich man was willing to have Jesus as a teacher to respect, but not to have Jesus as a Lord to obey, and there is a huge difference.**

I'm convinced that many people in the western church today are more than glad to have Jesus as a respected teacher who will give advice on how to live life but it's another ball game when He is a Sovereign Lord who determines everything in our lives.

Christ Followers, you have sacrificed, lost, given up the right to determine the direction of your life. That is no longer in your hands.

Jesus is not an advice giver.

He is the one who determines your steps.

Jesus decides what house you live in, not you.

Jesus decides what car you drive, not you.

Jesus decides what clothes you wear.

Jesus decides what you spend your \$'s on.

Jesus sets your budget.

Jesus decides what you invest in.

Jesus decides what lifestyle you live according to, not you or me, Jesus makes these calls.

He is Lord who determines everything, every single bit of our lives including our finances. This is a passionate practical way to live. And let's be honest. It's not an easy way to live in this culture, but this is the passionate approach that is called for. A Passionate approach and now...

## **2. A PASSIONATE AFFECTION**

This is where it gets really good. Passionate affection. Truth number two.

Jesus calls us to give sacrificially because he loves us.

Jesus calls us to give sacrificially because he loves us. This is verse 21. It's a hard command. Let's be honest. Imagine, put yourself in his shoes. Go sell everything you have, give to the poor. Can you imagine hearing that right now, all of your assets, all of your money, everything you have, go now, sell everything you have and give to the poor.

That's a hard command. It's hard for us, even as we think about it. Even if Jesus doesn't call us to give everything, to sell this or to give this away. These are hard commands and not always easy.

For Jesus to say "Let go of this. Sacrifice this. Give this away. In your life, get rid of what you don't need and give to the poor." Those are hard words.

*<sup>21</sup>Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>22</sup>At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup>Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"*



Here's the beauty. Jesus calls him to do this, not because he hates him. Not because he wants the worst for him, not because he wants to make this rich young man's life miserable in this world.

**Christ calls him to sell everything he has and give to the poor  
because he loves him!**

Here's the beauty of what scripture is teaching here and all over the Gospels when it comes to some of these passages we're looking at. **Jesus loves rich people.** Jesus loves rich people enough to tell them the truth.

*Luke 12: 15 (NIV) Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."*

He's addressing possessions among the wealthy, religious again. List to what he says.

*Luke 12: 16–19 (NIV) And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. <sup>17</sup>He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' <sup>18</sup>"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. <sup>19</sup>And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '*

Isn't this a picture of the Australian Dream. It's as clear as it gets.

*Luke 12: 20-21 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup>"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."*

Talk about right between the eyes. These are tough words and what Christ does now is He begins to talk about not worrying.

Don't worry. You don't have to store up because I'm going to take care of you. My Father's going to take care of you.

*Luke 12: 32-34 (NIV) "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." <sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

You hear the affection there, the endearment there? One thing I wanted to do as our Children grew was to shepherd them, protect them. Snakes at Forestdale our property. On more than one occasion - I would say it's ok, Dad's here we'll get this sorted.

Jesus knows that for anyone in this room who responds to His call to sell stuff and give to the poor. He knows there will be insecurity. He knows there will be hesitancy. He knows there will be some fear and anxiety in some of you and He looks at you and He says *"Don't forget, God is a shepherd who will protect you."*

**I suggest the least that we can do is pray about selling all the stuff that we don't need and give to the poor.**

You do that with confidence when you know you got a Father in heaven who is ready to care for you. It's a no brainer at that point. It makes sense. There's even kind of a tinge of self serving motivation here because you know that your Father is going to give to you and so it's okay to let go of these things because you got a Father who's giving to you.

This is the whole picture back in Mark chapter 10. What must I do to inherit eternal life? What does a Father give his sons and daughters? An inheritance.

This is the whole picture we saw in Matthew chapter 25.

Romans 8 teaches us that we are joint heirs with Christ...

What do you have in this world that is that beautiful, that is that wonderful, that is that valuable? Absolutely nothing. What do you have that you will sell or give away? Can you compare it to the kingdom of God?

We have a God who protects you like a shepherd and delights in you like a Father does his children. And you have a God who is the King who promises to give you a kingdom. Jesus calls us to give sacrificially, not because he hates us or wants things bad for us. He calls us to give sacrificially because he loves us. There's great confidence there. Earth shaking confidence there.

1 A PASSIONATE APPROACH, A RADICAL AFFECTION & ...

### **3 A PASSIONATE COMMAND**

**Jesus gives commands, not considerations.**

Come back with me to Mark 10...

*Mark 10:21 (NIV) Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Can you count with me how many commands there are in this one sentence. Count how many commands there are.

Five different commands.

Go

Sell everything you have

Give to the poor

Come

Follow me

Now, remember this is where we come back to these two errors that we need to avoid going into the ditch on. Not universalizing this, but these commands are binding on every single follower of Christ in this room. You will always hear an interpretation that comes up at this point. And it sounds something like this: Jesus is not calling this man to give everything and sell everything. Instead, he's calling him to be willing to give everything, sell everything he has and give to the poor. The only problem I see with that interpretation is that it's not true. Why did he go away sad?

This is my main beef with this. If Jesus meant *"be willing"* to sell everything you have and give to the poor I think He was quite capable of saying *"be willing to sell everything you have and give to the poor."*

Why do we twist it? Well let's think about it in this man's shoes. Do you think this rich man could've said "I'm willing"? Sure. It's pretty easy to say "I'm willing." Every single follower of Christ in this room has renounced everything to follow him and so yes, we're willing to do whatever he calls us to do. No question. That's automatic. It doesn't need to be said.

We need to be careful that we don't take what Christ is telling us to do and turn them into considerations. As followers of Christ, we do not consider options. As followers of Christ we obey. Full Stop!

**Jesus required obedience here, the same way he requires obedience from you and me today.**

When we started Passionate Disciple series, we spent some time that morning and we took different passages of scripture and we answered some questions based on this. I want to bring back a couple of those questions. We were looking at this particular passage on that first Sunday, and these were a couple of the questions.

"Do you think Jesus was literally telling this man to sell all he had and give it to the poor?" We established this was a command from Jesus.

The follow up question was this: "Do you think Jesus would say the same thing today to you if you were to see him?"

If the first thoughts coming to your mind are the reason why he would not say that to you, be cautious.

Then the follow up question is: "If he did say this to you, how would you respond?" And the reality is, it would be very easy to say "I'm willing." And we all know

there's a huge difference between being willing to do something and doing something!

So here's what I want to encourage you to do.

I want to invite every Christ follower in this room to go to Christ and to ask...

"What do you want me to give away? What do you want me to sell? There is a blank cheque on the table. From my cheque account to my saving account, to my house, to my car, to my clothes, to my spending this way or that way, to my TV, to my entire lifestyle. What do you want me to give away? What do you want me to sell?"

Ask him that and wait for him to speak. Your answer may not come the first day. But ask him and what you'll probably find yourself doing (I say this from personal experience), you'll probably find yourself immediately grabbing onto this and grabbing onto that and trying to move things off the table gradually.

This, okay. Okay, I can see this. Yes, okay this makes sense. No, not that one! Be very careful. This is internal transformation. Only Christ can do this in us.

But what happens when a Faith Family like Lifestreams Christian Church full of a 1,000 people goes to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Universe, who cares about the lost and the poor more than we can even begin to fathom and says "In this community, what do you want me to give and what do you want me to sell?"

I'm convinced the resources of heaven are opened up and poured out on the people to make the Glory of Christ known in this community and among the nations in ways we never could've fathomed before. God made it be so. Sound risky?

It is a passionate command, but next week I want to share the passionate reward.