



JESUS ON MONEY, IDOLATRY, AND COMEDY

Part 75 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 18:18–30 | May 29, 2011

LUKE 18:18–30

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? 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 And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, “How difficult 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 it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ But he said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” ²⁸ And Peter said, “See, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹ And he said to them, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.”

INTRODUCTION

Alrighty, Mars Hill. Hey, what book of the Bible do you think we're in? If you're new, we're in Luke. And we've been in Luke for a few years. We knew the Rapture wasn't gonna happen. We still got people to reach, churches to plant, stuff to do, babies to make. We got things we're working on. So we picked a long book of the Bible, knowing for a fact we'd have plenty of time to work through it. And today we're in Luke 18:18–30, where Jesus talks on idolatry, money, and comedy.

And the big idea is this: that everyone has something to teach us, that everyone has something to teach us if we have the humility to learn and the discernment to figure out what the lesson is. Some people come into our life and they serve as a positive example where, because of God's grace and the wisdom that they enjoy, they've got some great lessons to teach us. Other people, it is not positive, it's negative. They operated out of folly, not out of wisdom. And as a result, we can learn vicariously through some of their tragic decisions and experiences. And so Luke teaches us this way vicariously letting us eavesdrop in, look at Jesus having conversations and relations with various people. And today we're gonna see Jesus have a conversation with a rich ruler, and we're gonna learn vicariously through his own sin: idolatry, foolishness, and sadness.

And we'll just read it all and then unpack three big ideas. Luke 18:18–30, “And the ruler asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And he said, ‘All these I have kept from my youth.’ When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘One thing you still lack. Sell all you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, ‘How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 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.’ Those who heard it said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ But he said, ‘What is impossible with men is possible with God.’ Peter said, ‘See, we have left our homes and followed you.’ And he said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.’”

THE RICH RULER

Here is a man, here's what we know of him: he is rich and he is a ruler. So he is wealthy and powerful, two things that you and I probably all, to some degree, aspire to. If someone came to you and said, “Would you like to be powerful or powerless?” I vote powerful. “Do you want to be poor or rich?” I vote rich. He has attained success. He's the kind of man in that day and our day that is widely admired. What a successful person. What an achievement his life is. He's the kind of person who becomes a celebrity, becomes famous, becomes looked up to and admired and emulated.

He has this conversation with Jesus. In it, he reveals his own estimation of himself. He comes to Jesus and he asks a question that is not a bad question, but it's asked in a bad way. He doesn't ask, “Jesus, what must I experience, receive to inherit eternal life?” Instead he says, “Lord Jesus, what must I do to inherit or receive eternal life?” His question is basically, “How can I save myself? How can I save myself? What religious work, what large check, what sacred pilgrimage do I need to commit myself to so that, in addition to all the other fantastic achievements and accomplishments of my life, I can add to my resume, ‘He saved himself. He merited, earned his salvation. He was pleasing in the sight of God.’”

He starts with arrogance, not with humility, and he starts by not coming to Jesus empty-handed to receive a gift of salvation. He comes with his hands full of his achievements and accomplishments, asking Jesus what else he could do to show how fantastic and worthy he was. And that's his view of himself. Because Jesus says, "Well, let's start with the Ten Commandments." There are 613 commandments in the first five books of the Old Testament alone. They're summarized in Exodus 20 in the Ten Commandments. So Jesus runs through some of them. Don't murder, don't steal, don't lie, honor your mother and father. Jesus runs through some of the commandments. And the guy says, "Well, I know them. Thankfully, I've obeyed them fully since I was a little boy." What he's basically saying is, "I'm not perfect, but I'm pretty close. I'm not sinless, but some might think I am. That's how close I have come."

JESUS IS NOT A GOOD MAN, HE'S THE GOD-MAN

What's his view of Jesus? His view of Jesus is a "good teacher," that's the language he uses. Some of you would want to put Jesus in that same category, good teacher. Many do, many other religions, philosophies, and spiritualities put Jesus in the category of good teacher. "He's like a Mahatma Gandhi "or he's like a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or he's like an Abe Lincoln or he's like a Mother Teresa or he's like a George Washington. He's a good leader. He's a good teacher. He lived a good life. He helped people. He's a fantastic example. Not a Savior, but an example."

This man looks at Jesus and says, "You're a very good teacher." And Jesus rebukes him, as Jesus would rebuke you. Friends, don't do this, don't do as he did, try to reduce Jesus to someone that he's not. Jesus is a good teacher, the finest, most extraordinary teacher in the history of the world. But he's far more than just a good teacher. He's also God become a man. And Jesus says, "Don't call me good unless you think I'm God because only God alone is truly good."

We tend to think on a scale from really bad person to really good person. And that somewhere along that continuum there are people that are really bad, pretty bad, sort of bad, sometimes bad, not too bad, pretty good, really good. The rich ruler looks at Jesus and he says, "You're good." Jesus says, "Only God is good." 'Cause see, God has a different category. God doesn't have a sliding scale from really bad to really good. God has two categories: sinner, sinless. Two categories. Jesus says, "The only person in the sinless category, in the really truly good category is God. So don't say I'm good unless you think I'm God." Jesus Christ alone is without sin and he is in a category unto himself.

Here's the big idea: Jesus is not the best among us. He's not the supreme of our kind. He's not the most achieved and accomplished in our category. He's in a category unto himself. He's not just a good man, he's the God-man. He didn't just live a good life, he lived a sinless life. He's not just better than most, he alone is perfect. Jesus makes this strong claim, and he makes it so that we wouldn't fall in the same tragic error as the rich ruler. And some of you would. Just want Jesus to be in the category of one of the best among us, a fantastic teacher and moral example. And Jesus says, "I reject being categorized, rather, in that way. I'm God or I'm not God, but don't just disrespect me, dishonor me, disregard me and call me a good teacher. It's not like I'm a philosophy prophet at a university. I'm here to atone for the sin of the world, not just throw out good moral truisms." So they're having their conversation. And his question is, "What must I do to save myself?" Had he come to any other religious leader but Jesus, he would have gotten a very different answer. He would have been told, "Do this, don't do these things, "obey, make sure you give, take a sacred pilgrimage to a holy place, do these things and you could save yourself."

THE IDOLATRY OF THE HEART

Jesus doesn't have that kind of conversation with him. Jesus instead moves into the conversation about idolatry, which is the first of our three big ideas. Idolatry. And so Jesus says, "Well, you know the commandments. 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your mother and father.' What about the commandments?" And the man says, "All these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus then proceeds. He says, "One thing you still lack." And what Jesus is doing here is he's getting to the heart of God's commandments. Some of you say, "I haven't stolen." But have you coveted or become jealous or petty or bitter when someone has something you don't? Then you're guilty in your heart. Some of you say, "I've never committed adultery." Ah, but Jesus says in Matthew 5, if you lust in your heart, you've committed adultery by intent. God cares, yes, about our actions, but also about our motivations. Here Jesus sees his heart and his mind as Jesus sees your heart and your mind and my heart and my mind. Jesus says, "Outwardly you've kept the commandments, but you've not kept the spirit of the commandments. You've not kept the essence of the commandments." It's like a guy who would say, "I take my wife on date night every week." Yeah, but you don't love her. And she knows that. You check the dutiful box, but you don't have the emotional commitment.

Here's the key about the Ten Commandments. Martin Luther, one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the world, has phenomenally helpful insights on the Ten Commandments. He speaks of them in places like his "Heidelberg Catechism." He says, really, there are two commandments and then implications and applications of those two commandments. And the first two commandments are these, Martin Luther rightly says, and again, we're speaking from Jesus who here mentions roughly half of the Ten Commandments. The first commandment is there's one God alone. The second commandment is you are to only worship that God alone. Martin Luther rightly ascertains, if we obey the first two commandments, we will not disobey the rest. This is very important for how we do counseling at Mars Hill. We want to do counseling the way Jesus does it. Because were Jesus to walk into the office today of a behaviorally based moral psychologist, the counselor would ask him, "So tell me about your life." "Well, my business is going very well. I don't have any addictions. I don't have any sexual sin. I don't have any gambling problems. My health is good. I'm very rich and very powerful." The counselor would say, "I don't think we need a follow-up appointment. You have a fantastic life. You have no addictions. You have no sinful, wicked, destructive proclivities, compulsions. You're not harming anyone. In fact, you should be the counselor."

IDOLATRY IS WORSHIPPING THE WRONG GOD

Today, all we evaluate people based upon is their outward moral behavior. And if they're not behaving rightly, we want to change their behavior. And the issue here is Jesus isn't trying to change the man's behavior, he's trying to change the man's God. So it's far deeper. Yeah, the man doesn't have addictions and proclivities, but he worships the wrong god, which is a bigger problem.

Here's how it plays in the Ten Commandments. If you commit adultery, your problem is not sexual, your problem is that you're worshipping the wrong god. You're worshipping sex or pleasure or convenience. And as a result of worshipping the wrong god, you committed the worship act, idolatrous worship act, of adultery. If you're someone who overeats and you're a glutton, your problem is not food and gluttony, your problem is worship and idolatry. You worship food. When you're sad, you go to food for comfort. When you're happy, you go to food to rejoice. When you've done something good, you reward yourself with food. It's all worship act. And so food is idolatry. Your god is your stomach, Paul says in the New Testament. So you don't have a food problem, you don't have a refrigerator problem, you have a worship problem, you have an idol problem. If you worship God, you won't worship food. If you worship God, you won't worship sex. If you lose your temper, you get violent, you're angry, mean-spirited, perhaps it even escalates into murder, you don't have an anger problem—you have a worship problem. The issue may be control. Your issue may be selfishness. Your issue may be that you worship your anger. You feed it and stew on it and through bitterness you empower it.

You could look at someone and say, "We want to modify your behavior. So we're going to give you principles of anger management," which could be helpful. But then all we might do for you is change your idol. So, "Oh good, you don't worship anger anymore, now you worship control. And because you now worship control, you don't lose your anger. Oh, this is so good. We've exchanged idols, but at least now we found an idol that the rest of us prefer." This is where John Calvin says rightly that the human heart is an idol factory. We'll give up one idol to get another idol or we'll pick one idol to control our other idol. But at the end of the day, it's not about behavior modification. It's about worship alteration, that's what it's about. So Jesus is saying, "Let's find your idol. Let's not look at your behavior." Some of you would walk in here and say, "I feel like I'm a pretty good person. I don't have any massive behavior problems that are out of control." And I would say, well, let's lift up the rock of pride. There may be something there. But furthermore, is there one God and do you worship him alone? For this man, he was his own god, and that is the god that most of us worship. "Look at my success. Look at my achievements. Look at my accomplishments. Look at my possessions. Look at all that I have done. Look at who I truly am. It's pretty fantastic." And it was all for his glory, not God's glory. His whole life was to glorify himself, not to honor the God who made him. He's an idolater. And he also idolizes his status and his success.

A GOOD THING THAT BECOMES A GOD THING

So let's talk a little bit about idolatry. Idolatry is often a good thing that becomes a god thing. Idolatry is usually a good thing in a bad place. It goes from something that the Lord gives to functioning as a substitute lord. It becomes the most person, thing, experience, possession, achievement, accomplishment that we have in our whole life. It becomes central, preeminent, paramount. And here's the truth—we all worship, all the time. Everyone is made as a worshiper. We all worship unceasingly continually. We're pouring ourselves out to someone or something that is essential, central, preeminent, prominent to us. Usually a good thing. And worship acts are sacrifices. We sacrifice our time, we sacrifice our health, we sacrifice our money. We say no to some things because we idolize one thing. And here's the truth about idols: they lie. They promise something that only the kingdom of God can ultimately provide. That's where Jesus transitions the discussion here to the kingdom of God. He's saying, "If you give up your idols, I promise you what you're seeking will only ultimately be satisfied in the kingdom." See, this man is worshipping his possessions. Why? Because it gives him status.

Jesus says, "Let go of your idol, let me give you status that lasts forever." He worships his success. And Jesus says, "It's not about success. It's about God who loves you and adopts you and cares for you, so let go of your idol and receive the love of God." See, idols lie to us. They give us an identity. "I'm pretty. I'm smart. I'm funny. I'm successful. I just don't care." Those are all identities. See, idols want to give us comfort, peace, security, meaning, value, purpose, fun, identity, and community. And they lie because they over promise and under deliver. This man worships himself and he cares about his status, his comfort, and his convenience. When Jesus looks at him and says, "You don't think you've broken any of the Ten Commandments?" "No, I don't think I have." "Okay, then sell all your stuff and give it to the poor. You can have me as your greatest treasure or you can have all your stuff and your standard of living. You willing to go down to a smaller place to live, simpler lifestyle, and downsize to follow me, your homeless God?" It says, "The man left very sad because he was extremely rich." Jesus found his idol.

What would you be unwilling to give up to follow Jesus? What would you cling to as you walk away from Jesus, grieved because ultimately your idol had been exposed? Let me tell you this, friends. We oftentimes do not know what our idol is until we face the prospect of losing it. Some of you say, "I don't have an idol." You may. In fact, I would say, you do. And because your idol is safe and secure, you're unaware that it's an idol. But as soon as there is the prospect of losing it, that's when everything changes. And that was the situation in this man's life.

He comes to Jesus, "I don't have any sin and I don't have any idolatry that is motivating my sin." Jesus says, "Well, then give me your stuff. Or rather, sell it and give all the money to the poor." Today the equivalent would be, "Take your car, take your clothes, take your technology, take your furniture, put it all on eBay, throw it on craigslist, and give all the money to someone who's poor. Hand it all to some single moms to help them out. Downsize your standard of living. Upgrade your standard of giving. Take the bus. Sell your car. Follow me." How many of you say, "Yeah, that would be hard." Some of you say, "No, I could give up most of my stuff. But there's a couple things that, you know, if the house was on fire, I would grab them. The rest I could live without." And that is probably where your idol lies.

IDOLS CONSUME AND KILL

Let me tell you a few things about your idols. Number one: idols consume our life as we pursue them. They become all-consuming because idols need to be worshiped like God and they replace God. This is why some people can't stop working, can't stop eating, can't stop drinking, can't stop gambling,

and/or can never be single, have to always be in a relationship. It's all-consuming, all-consuming. Number two: many of us seek to manipulate God to give us our idol. There are even theologies that'll teach this. "You're broke, you want to be rich, you worship money? Come to our church, come to Jesus. Jesus is an idol giver. He makes people rich." Right? Or "you want to be healthy and you're sick? Well, come to Jesus, he'll make you healthy. He's an idol giver." "You're single, you want to be married? Walk with Jesus, he's obligated to give you not just a spouse, but a fantastic one." "You're struggling with infertility? You really want to have a child? Well, you know what? Jesus promises if you walk with him faithfully and you pray to him earnestly and you believe in him whole-heartedly, he will give you a child." Usually an idol is a good thing that becomes a god thing, and we seek to manipulate the real God and he cannot be manipulated to give us our idol.

Number three: if we get our idol, we become consumed in keeping and preserving it. You're the student who worships your grade point average, you have to get a 4.0. You're consumed by it. You don't have friends. You don't have a job. You don't have time for church. Why? "I'm going to get a 4.0. I worship success, accomplishment, achievement." You're consumed by it. "God, please help me. God, please let me. God, please assist me. I got it. I got my report card: 4.0, yes!" But now you're obsessed in keeping it. Now you got to get a 4.0 the next quarter 'cause your identity and your righteousness is tied to your grade point average. Same with a mother. Is it a good thing or a bad thing to have a child? Covered it last week. It's a good thing. Children are a blessing. Can a child become an idol? Absolutely. You have to have a child. You have to get pregnant. Children are a blessing. But infertility, miscarriage, it's not just grievous, it's devastating. And all of a sudden you're very angry at God. "God, how could you? How dare you? You took my idol, called spouse or child."

Those who are present, including Peter, they move from the idol of money to the idol of family. Let me tell you, these are the two most popular idols and they're often at war. So dad can't come home from work because he's worshipping money and he's got to keep the family on the altar and sacrifice them to the god of forward progress at the job. Peter comes along and says, "We sold our houses, we downsized our standard of living. Some of our family members think we're crazy." He's exposing his idol. "Jesus, we really, really, really, really, really love our family. Please tell us that it's not in vain that we are following you." You get your idol, now you're obsessed to keep it. You finally get married. You become so obsessed with a relationship that you choke it out. You get a child, you become so controlling, so fearful that ultimately you destroy the child and/or the child grows up, the child leaves home, and the marriage collapses. Why? Because the idol left. And the husband and the wife were worshipers of the child. They lived for the child. They worked for the child. They went to church for the child. They stayed married for the child. And once the child is gone, the marriage is over.

This is why marriages have crises and meltdowns and breakdowns. Some of you are older, you're feeling it. Some of you are younger and your parents are experiencing it. You say, "What happened? Everything was fine. Oh, the idol left." Because number one, idols consume our life as we pursue them. Number two, we even seek to use God to be our idol giver. Number three, if we receive our idol, we become consumed with keeping it. And number four, if we lose our idol, we become devastated and destroyed. Not just grieved, devastated and destroyed, possibly even with God. "How dare you? You took my treasure." And Jesus here is saying to this man, "Give away your treasure." And the man says, "I am grieved." And Jesus says essentially, "I am grieved as well because I'm supposed to be your treasure." See, we should have a treasure. Our treasure should be Jesus. We should worship our treasure. And that treasure should be Jesus.

IF YOU IDOLIZE ONE THING YOU DEMONIZE THE OTHER

Jonathan Edwards says this in his book called, "The Nature of True Virtue"—he's one of the greatest theologians America's ever produced, arguably the greatest—he says, what happens is if you idolize one thing, you demonize the other. So if you idolize your spouse, it's only a matter of time before they disappoint you because your spouse is not a good god. If you idolize children, if you idolize a dating relationship, if you idolize a job, if you idolize a home, if you idolize a car, if you idolize a standard of living, if you idolize peace, comfort, security, if you idolize fun and pleasure—eventually it's going to fail you because idols what? Idols lie. And you'll end up demonizing them. You'll hate your spouse. You'll hate your kids. You'll hate your job. You'll hate everything that has disappointed you. And the problem is not in the things, the problem is in our heart. We worship someone or something that is not God and then we want to destroy it when it fails us rather than repenting of turning a good thing into a god thing.

This is the hard conversation that Jesus is having with this man. The man walks up smiling, "Jesus, I am so glad to meet you. I've heard you're a good teacher." Jesus says, "Well, how are you doing at keeping the Ten Commandments?" "Well, since I want to save myself and I want God to be pleased and I want to have a moral, compliant, obedient life, I am happy to report I have kept the commandments since I was a little boy. My life is fantastic. You want to see my car? You want to see my house? You want to see my friends? I really appreciate the life God has given me." "Then sell your stuff." "Oh, well now I'm very sad, because you're talking about me driving up in a beater car or a bus. People aren't gonna look at me the same. And if I can't live in that house, I gotta downsize. I'm gonna be with a different class of people. I really like the food that I eat and I really like the drink that I drink and it just seems like you're asking a lot. After all, I've worked hard, I've accomplished it, I've achieved it, and I feel like I deserve it." Jesus says, "Me or your stuff. You can't have both. Pick one or the other." And the guy says, "Yeah, good luck with that. That's funny. You're a homeless guy. You don't understand."

WHERE YOUR MONEY IS, THERE YOUR HEART WILL BE ALSO

Is Jesus your treasure? Now, we move on to money. One of the surest ways to find your idol is to follow your money, right? 'Cause where you put your money, Jesus says elsewhere, that's where your heart is. So you can't say, "I love the Lord, I just don't give to him. I love my family, but I don't feed them," right? "I love single mothers and I really feel for them. But you know, I've got to have a bass boat and I've got to have a golf game and I got to have tools in my garage and I got to have a flat screen TV, so I mean, I love them. I just, you know, I don't have any extra. I just can't, you know, show it. But don't judge me. You don't know my heart." No, I do know your heart 'cause I followed your wallet. Your wallet is an indicator of your

heart.

So a couple things: if you want to find your idol, follow your money. Number two, everyone thinks that someone else is rich. I've met a lot of people. Every person I've met pretty much thinks when the Bible says rich, it's somebody just above them. And when it says poor, it's them. Okay, so you're like, "Oh, yeah, the rich, yeah. Pfft, totally the rich. Yeah, I watch "Robin Hood," I vote Democrat, I agree with Jesus, stick it to the rich. Yes, I hate the rich. Stick it to the rich." Everyone thinks someone else is rich. And you know what? Somebody thinks you're rich. Like had we met this guy, he would think you're rich. "What is that?" It's a toilet. "What is that?" It's connected to plumbing. "Unbelievable. Where does it all go?" It goes somewhere else. "You don't have to live with it?" No. "That's amazing right there." Would you like something to eat? "Sure, what's the really cold box filled with food?" We call it a fridge. "Wow." Would you like to sit in the chair and watch the TV? "Your paintings talk. That's amazing! And you can change them. And you don't even need to get up. You could just do this or this or you could—it's amazing!" Would you like a pizza? "What's a pizza?" A high school kid'll drive it to the house. We don't even need to get up. "Really? I thought I was extremely rich. It's getting dark out, we should go to bed." We don't have to. We have electricity and lights. "Wow. It's magic. It's amazing." If you don't like it here, we can get in a car and go somewhere else or jump on an airplane. It's a seat in the sky. "That's amazing." You know what, friends? He lived a rich life in his day but it's nothing compared to what we enjoy. In the history of the world, we're the rich. On the earth right now, we're the rich. The biggest medical problem in our country is obesity. That's really never been a huge issue, right? There's never been a group of people like, "We have so much food and so little space for it that we're dying of malted Milk Duds and Chiclets." We are a people who are going to eat until we blow up just like the Monty Python skit. We're the rich. Right? Go to a Third World country. We're the rich. We're the rich. So as we read this story, don't say, "Yes, yes, I love it when Jesus sticks it to the rich." We got to say, "Okay, Jesus, I raise my hand, I'm rich." And somebody somewhere thinks I'm rich."

This is an underlying problem for us. Alexis de Tocqueville, a sociologist and cultural observer who visited the United States of America a long time ago, had some brilliant observations that have stood the test of time. And he said, "The love of wealth is therefore to be traced as either a principle or an accessory motive at the bottom of all that Americans do." He came to America and he said, "I understand Americans. It's all about the money. Everything they do, it's about the money." It's not just the money, it's the comfort, security, identity, and community that it affords. It's all about the money. Which is why Jesus' words are timeless and, for us, they are simultaneously timely. Roughly twenty-five percent of Jesus' teaching is about money, finances, wealth, and possessions. He keeps talking about it because we keep failing to understand it. And so here he does it again.

Let me tell you a few things about money. Number one, you don't need to be rich to have money as your idol. You could be poor and obsessed with money, consumed with money, playing the Lotto, gambling, making foolish investments, trying to get rich quick, doing things that are illegal to get more money. Always thinking about money, stewing over money, not being generous with money, and coveting the money of others. You don't have to be rich to have money as an idol. You just don't have to be rich to have money as an idol. And Jesus is not here saying, "Everyone should sell everything because the less you have, the closer you are to God." This is not asceticism. Asceticism is if it's physical, it's bad. If it's spiritual, it's good. So get rid of everything that's physical. That comes from Platonic dualism in ancient Greek philosophy. It doesn't come from the teaching of the Bible. "God gives good gifts," James says. What would have happened had this man said, "Okay, Jesus, that's it. I'll sell everything and give my money to the poor." I don't know, maybe Jesus would have allowed him to because it was his idol. It was between him and God.

JESUS NEEDS TO BE YOUR TREASURE

Here's the big idea: whatever is between you and God, you need to get rid of it. I don't know what it is for you, the Holy Spirit can highlight that. I know what it is for me, right? For each of us, it's something different. For some of us it's money. For some it's, "I always need to be in a relationship." For some it's, you know, "I have to have that job. I have to drive that car 'cause when I drive up in that car, everybody thinks that I'm a certain kind of person. So I work overtime and neglect my family and my health to drive my car so that everybody thinks that I'm somebody that I'm not." Whatever your thing is, if it's between you and Jesus and following him, which is the whole point of the story, you got to get rid of it. So maybe Jesus would look to the guy and say, "I need you to get all your stuff, put it on craigslist, eBay, give all the money away, downsize, simplify, follow me." Maybe he would have allowed him to do that. Or maybe he would have looked at him like Abraham looked at Isaac when he was gonna sacrifice him and said, "You know what? Now that we see what's in your heart, no need to do that. It's not about the stuff, it's about me and I am your treasure." I don't know.

How about you? What is between you and following Jesus faithfully, whole-heartedly, consistently? What is it? It needs to go. And if you say, "I can't let go of it," it's an idol. So you say, "Well, I can't let go because I'm married to him or I birthed him," okay. Then they need to be in the right place. Jesus needs to be your treasure, and they need to be a gift that he gives, but not a god that you worship. Here's what the Bible says about money, wealth, finances, possessions. It says a lot. I can't get into all of it. If you want, probably the easiest thing to do is read the book of Proverbs which is all about practical wisdom. As you read Proverbs, you see things about saving, spending, investing, money, stewardship. With a pen, keep it simple, just make a dollar sign next to those verses. Read Proverbs through and you'll just, "Oh, here they are. They're right there."

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT MONEY

The Bible says to work hard and honest for our money, not to be thieves or crooks. The Bible says, as well, that we should first of all tithe. It's not necessarily a percent. 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 says, cheerful, regular, sacrificial. It's firstfruits. That means it's off your gross, not your net, to the Lord. So you give to the Lord, give back to the Lord and the cause of the gospel. The Bible says, as well, spend. Pay for your place to live and something to eat and, you know, pay your bills. You've got to live. That's okay, don't feel guilty about that. The Bible says as well to save some. 'Cause you know what? Times are gonna get hard or your car's gonna blow up or you're gonna get sick or you're gonna get laid off. So save some. The Bible also says to invest, to think long-term because a wise man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, Proverbs says. So you're thinking, "Okay, how can I invest my money" so that there's something for my kids, my grandkids, "my great grandkids? How can I be a blessing generations into the future?"

Invest. The Bible also says to give generously. That can be like Jesus' request of this man here to the poor. Oh, this person needs help, this person's sick, that single mom's having a hard time making ends meet. Being generous to the poor.

The Bible says to not do certain things with money. Number one, the Bible says, "Don't love money 'cause that's a worship act. That's an idolatry issue." The Bible says not that money is the root of all kinds of evil, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. The Bible says not to put your hope in money 'cause sometimes it goes away, right? Real estate market crashes, your 401(k) blows up. The Bible says, as well, not to be enslaved to money. The Bible says the borrower is slave to the lender, meaning, if you spend more than you have and you go into debt and you try to play the credit card game, you're gonna lose. And some of you say, "No, I'm not a slave, I'm free. And I live in a free country." There are two kinds of slavery. One is imposed, the other is selected. Imposed slavery is where someone overtakes you against your will. Selected slavery is where you choose someone or something else to master you, to rule you, and to control you. As soon as you sign up for a credit card and as soon as you spend more than you have, all of a sudden, you're in slavery. Where you work, how much you work, what you tithe, how you spend, where you live, how much time you give with your family, all of a sudden all of that is dictated by interest rates and debtors. And you're not free, you're in slavery. You're in slavery. And we don't see it as slavery because we choose it. This man is a slave. He doesn't own his stuff—his stuff owns him. When it comes down to whether he would rather have his stuff or his Savior, he chooses his stuff as his savior. That's the problem.

CHARITABLE GIVING IN THE U.S.

How's it going for you? Don't you love this sermon? Aren't you so glad you're here? Aren't you all filled with joy? It's gonna get worse. I'll share with you some statistics. Here's the U.S. median household income. In the Seattle area, it's about \$59,000 a year. In Bellevue, where we have a campus, it's about \$80,000 a year. And down in Albuquerque where we have a campus, it's about \$45,000 a year. The closer you get to the urban center, it tends to be more single and fewer children. The further you get away from an urban center, there are more families, children, and dual incomes. That's the average median household income. Charitable giving in the U.S. The average U.S. household, Christian and non, gives \$1,620 a year, that's \$3 a day. The average American gives 3.1 percent of their income, usually off the net, not off the gross.

Here's the curious stat. Households earning under \$10,000 a year give 5.2 percent of their income. That's the largest percentage of any other income group. Isn't that interesting? Percentage-wise, the people who make the least give the most. That's interesting. We see that, right? In Luke's Gospel, there's a widow. She gives percentage-wise far more than anyone. And some of you live under this myth. "When I make more, I'll give more." No, you won't. Because it's a heart issue, not a money issue. Again, if you don't give, you don't have a generosity problem, you have a worship and idolatry problem. Everyone I've ever met thinks that their life would be fine if they made ten percent more. And when they do they're in the same place because they have the same heart. Those who are poorest tend to be most generous.

Statistically, the more you make, the less you will give. And this is an important and timely word for us at Mars Hill because many of you are young, many of us are young, and you've not hit your peak earning years just yet. And some of you think, "Yeah, but when I make more money, I'll give more money." Not if you don't have one God and worship him alone. Little more encouragement and joy. You're welcome. Charitable giving by U.S. Christians. Twenty percent of U.S. Christians give nothing every year. The vast majority of U.S. Christians give about three percent. And twelve percent of U.S. Protestants give ten percent or more, that's non-Catholics. So when we read this story, we can't say, "Yes, the rich, young ruler loved his stuff more than the Lord." We have to say, "And his followers are many. And perhaps I am among them."

How about Mars Hill? We talked about Americans, Christians, certainly Mars Hill. It is estimated that our collective income, for those who call Mars Hill Church home this year, will be \$300 million. And I'll tell you this, Mars Hill, in the coming years, it is only going to increase. Many of you are young. Many are getting married. Many are starting their families. Many are starting their companies. Many are still finishing their education and internships. Our income escalator is only going up. And roughly half of adults who attend Mars Hill give anything. That means, the other half don't give anything. Last year, zero. This year, zero. And I tell exactly what's gonna happen. Some of you guys are going like, "I knew it. "The megachurch pastor talking about money. "I'm never coming back. I'm not giving anything. Me and my idols, we're gonna leave very sad." And I would say, "Kind of the big idea of the story is that you don't know that you have idols until you face the prospect of losing them." And people tend to defend their idols. "Well, I have a good reason. I have a lot of excuses and I have a lot of motivations and you don't know my heart and you can't judge me and you can't spend my money and I don't believe in organized religion." And all of that is, theologically speaking, hoey. It's a Greek word. All we've done is found your idol.

JESUS WAS FUNNY

Now my third point: we've talked idolatry, money, now comedy. This may be unexpected. Comedy? Okay, I want you to hang in there with me. There was a Canadian researcher, Marshall McLuhan, some years ago he said, "The medium is the message." Meaning, how you say something is really what people remember. The question is, how did Jesus say this? Do you think he said it furrowed brow? "Idolatry, money, sell all your stuff! I know your heart." You think he was angry? You know, furrowed brow, pointed finger, Mr. Burns-kind-of-looking guy. Was he like that? Was this like an IRS audit and he showed up with his shirt and tie, saying, "Hello, I'm from the kingdom of God. I know you tried to hide some of your assets. I happen to see and know all. And I'm here to collect," right?

How do you think Jesus said this? Do you think he did it shaking his head, "I can't believe you." You think it was shame and guilt and condemnation? "Look at all you have, you don't help anyone. And when I give you an opportunity, you don't do anything. You don't care. What good are you? All that the Father has given you, you've totally, recklessly squandered. You've spent it on yourself. How dare you?" Do you think he yelled at him? How did Jesus say it? What did his face look like? What was his disposition? What was his presentation? He was witty. He was funny. He was clever. He says it this way: "You want to go to heaven? Well, I've got my work cut out today. It would be easier for me to slam a camel through the eye of a needle than

get you into the kingdom. Look at my to-do list. Save you, slam a camel through the eye of a needle, and then have lunch. Look at that, that's a very tough morning for me."

And see what happens when Jesus says, "Oh, it's gonna be easier to get a camel through the eye of the needle than to get you into the kingdom of heaven," religious commentators don't think Jesus had any sense of wit or humor or irony or sarcasm. So they all sat around in committees, and I see 'em with suits on. Just sort of, "Hmm, okay, what could this mean?" There's somewhere a guy with a hat and he's ultimately gonna render the final verdict. I kind of see it like that. So then commentators come up with things. They say, "Oh, well, perhaps there was a needle with a hole and a certain particular kind of unusual thread called camel thread. And perhaps," I'm not even making this up, "perhaps camel thread was thicker than normal thread and it wouldn't fit through the hole. Perhaps that's what the Lord was speaking of, was camel thread." There's no evidence of camel thread. It's like flying unicorns and honest politicians, right? It just doesn't exist. So then others come along and they say, "Well, there was this wall around the city of Jerusalem and then there must have been a little doorway called the eye of the needle and then perhaps the camel would shimmy through a little hole in the wall—shimmy, shimmy, shimmy, shimmy, shake—and that's how you got your camel through the wall into the city. It was the eye of the needle." There's no evidence of that at all. Not at all. How many of you have heard that? It doesn't exist.

Jesus here is telling a joke. He's telling a joke, he just is. He's making a funny. In that day, they would have understood it. We've got our own cultural colloquialisms, and humor tends to be very culturally contingent. So sometimes because of the difference between our culture and that culture we don't get the irony, the sarcasm, the wittiness, tanned he cleverness. Jesus wasn't making fun of the guy, but he was inviting the guy to take himself less seriously. I see them like some of you. You're like, "You're talking about my money." I could see it. You look like someone shot your dog and all of a sudden you got both your hands on your wallet 'cause you know we're gonna take an offering in a moment. You're like, "There is no way. There is no way—it's not gonna happen. I'm not even standing up for worship in case they take it out of my pocket. I'm gonna sit down for all the singing." Jesus here is making a little joke. He's like, "Come on, man. Laugh a little. It's just your junk. It's all gonna burn, you know? I'm just checking your heart. You've got a serious idol problem. I love you. Let's deal with this. Let's have a little fun. Lighten up. Laugh a little."

How many of you have a hard time seeing Jesus in that light? Part of it is that you think of the movies, right? The first pictures of Jesus. I'll give you a couple examples of Jesus and other religious leaders that are in the Bible. You can't watch any old movie about Moses where he ever smiles. I mean, he's always looking like somebody just slapped my mother. He always looks like that. He's never smiling, man. And then we get to the movies of Jesus, originally made by guys like Cecil B. DeMille and it kind of set the whole trajectory for how we view Jesus culturally. Cecil B. DeMille, I think he loved Jesus, he claimed to be a Christian. But first of all, Jesus always looks weird. Kids are watching it. "Hey, mom, which one's Jesus? Is he the nuclear one who's glowing?" "That would be him, yes. That's how we know it's the Lord Jesus. He's nuclear, you know." "Oh, with the halo?" "Yeah, that's him." And in the movies, Jesus, he always has two looks. One sort of very sad like, "Oh, someone has died. This is anguish." And other times, more just like longing... And he's never laughing, he's never fun, he's never telling a joke, right? He's never having a good time. And so we tend to think, "Oh, well, Jesus is very serious. Certainly this can't be a joke. Certainly this can't be a joke."

There are even books that teach that Jesus wasn't funny. There's a great author named G.K. Chesterton. He wrote a fantastic little book called, "Orthodoxy." But here's how he ends the book: "There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when he walked upon the earth. And I have sometimes fancied that it was his mirth." Chesterton said, "When we look at the whole life of Jesus, the only thing missing is a sense of humor." No, no. There are roughly 17,000 books written on Jesus that are in the Library of Congress catalog. There's one that I found on biblical humor called "A Serrated Edge," by Doug Wilson. I've only found one book on the humor of Jesus out of the 17,000. It's by an older guy named Elton Trueblood and he says there are at least thirty passages in the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, where Jesus is telling a joke, making a funny, being witty and interesting in a way that religious people don't get. Here's what Elton Trueblood says, "There are numerous passages which are practically incomprehensible when regarded as sober prose, but which are luminous once we become liberated from the gratuitous assumption that Christ never joked. Once we realize that Christ was not always engaged in pious talk, we have made an enormous step on the road of understanding." Jesus didn't joke all the time, but sometimes he did. The "Dictionary of Biblical Imagery" says, "If there is a single person within the pages of the Bible that we can consider to be a humorist, it is without a doubt Jesus. Jesus was a master of word play, irony, and satire, often with an element of humor intermixed."

TWO WAYS TO FIND YOUR IDOLS

Here's two ways to find your idols: follow the money and figure out what's not funny to you. So I want you to see Jesus—now I got to be careful with this, very careful. I need to get my camel through my needle. He's kind of like Stephen Colbert or Jon Stewart. Do they tell the news, yes or no? Yes. Do they tell us about what's going on in the world? Yes. Do they have a very serious point? Yes. Is it hilarious? Pretty much. Are they witty? Totally. When really serious guys in suits show up and sit down, is it gonna be fantastic? Yes. And some of you have struggled, thinking, "Why do I want to go to heaven and spend forever with Jesus?" Imagine if Colbert called. "So you know, I'm passing through Seattle. And I happen to have a lunch meeting with a Kennedy at a Taco Bell." All right, just think of the most awesome thing ever. "And I'd like you to come." Would you go? Yeah, you'd be there early. You'd eat your chalupa in advance just to ensure you didn't miss any of the banter and dialog. "This is gonna be so fun. He's gonna say something, do something very funny, hilarious, crazy." Jon Stewart, same thing. Right, if Jon Stewart called and said, "You know, Rush Limbaugh and I," 'Cause I'm trying to think of something ridiculous, right? "Rush Limbaugh and I, we're gonna be talking about Jesus and the poor and politics. And we're gonna be doing it at a McDonald's and we can only have a certain number of people. And we were wondering if you would like to join us and be part of the cast?" You would say, "Oh, I'm McHappy. Yes, I would love to." Why? Because those men, they're witty, they're smart, they're engaging. I think Colbert says he loves Jesus. Jon Stewart, pray for him. But at the end of the day, the way they tell the news and the way they interact with people and the way they interview their guests and the way they're compelling and witty and funny and insightful and clever—and you're never sure exactly how they're gonna say it or where it's gonna go.

Jesus was and is like that. Perfectly, sinlessly, but like that. That's why crowds come around. You sort of get the picture. He sits down and then he sits the Pharisees and lawyers down, "Why don't you guys sit on my couch? Ha, ha!" You're like, "Oh, this is gonna be fantastic. This is gonna be hilarious." And they walk away going, "That was not funny. That was not funny." Friends, there are only two choices. We laugh at ourselves or God laughs at us. God laughs at us if we take ourselves too seriously. If we laugh at ourselves, we get to laugh with God. Idolaters should laugh. "Right, yeah, what am I thinking?" So then the question is asked, "Well, who could possibly be saved if we're all idolaters who take ourselves too seriously?" And Jesus says, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." Jesus says, "Have a good, deep, hearty laugh at your silly idols because I do the impossible. I get camels through eyes of needles. I get people," —like us, you and me— "into heaven." Jesus does that. He goes to the cross to pay for sin. He rises to give new life. The one thing the rich, young ruler could not obtain, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, Jesus gives as a generous gift. And he invites us to get rid of our idols and have a good laugh, amen? Good news. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says as a result we could be what kind of giver? Cheerful. Jesus makes that possible.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you so much for the Bible. We love your Word, Lord God. Not that we worship a book, but we worship the Son of God who's revealed in the book. And so we thank you for the book. And Jesus, we thank you that you stopped and had a conversation with a rich ruler and that we get to eavesdrop in on it. We're like guests sitting at the set of your show. And Jesus, we thank you that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we even get to sit on the couch next to you, that you ask us some questions, that you reveal our idols, and that we see that we're a lot like the rich ruler. In fact, just like the rich ruler. We've got our idols. We waste our money. We take ourselves way too seriously. And so God, we come to you acknowledging our idolatry which undergirds and motivates our sin. And we repent of it, we thank you Lord Jesus that you died and rose for it. And we ask that we wouldn't laugh at you, but that by your grace we'd laugh with you as we see ourselves as silly sinners who need a sinless Savior. And God, I think you that there's some comedy and humor in the Scriptures. Not only are you true and just and kind and good, you're fun and enjoyable. And we look forward to your kingdom, when Lord Jesus I'm sure you're gonna give us something to laugh about every day as we have some fun with you. Until then, reveal our idols, help us steward our money, and enjoy our life in your good name. Amen.