



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

July 10, 2016

"Jesus Loves You Anyway" (Encounters With Jesus Series)

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**G**ood morning! I'm Chris Pan. I'm on staff here at First Prez as the Executive Director. I handle finances, facilities, and personnel. I'm the guy who signs the checks! Thank you for the privilege of allowing me to serve you and this church. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak today.

We are continuing in our "Encounters with Jesus" sermon series, where we are examining Jesus' encounters with various people in the Bible. Today, we will be looking at His encounter with a rich young ruler. The title of our sermon is "Jesus Loves You Anyway."

If you were here last week, you heard an amazing sermon from Pastor Steve Peich. Pastor Steve preached about the dangers of busyness and the importance of ruthlessly eliminating hurry from our lives. He shared some great wisdom, and if you missed it, you can watch, listen or read it on our website.

You know who I wish had a chance to hear Pastor Steve's sermon? The rich young man in our Bible passage for today. He is often referred to as the rich young ruler, and his account appears in the three gospels written by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Our passage for today is from the Gospel

of Mark, chapter 10, verses 17 through 22. If you are able, could you please stand, as I read this passage:

*<sup>17</sup> As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*<sup>18</sup> Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.*

*<sup>9</sup> You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother."*

*<sup>20</sup> He said to Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth."*

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."*

*<sup>22</sup> When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions."*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God! Let's pray. "Jesus, may You be glorified today. Please reveal Yourself to us. May we love

You and may we know Your love for us. In Your name we pray, Amen."

I really like the rich young ruler in today's passage. I appreciate how sincere he is. This rich young ruler, seemingly has everything—youth, status, money, power—but he knew he was missing something in his life. So he seeks out Jesus for the answer. He comes running up to Jesus and then kneels before Him. He asks Jesus a sincere question that shows his desire to connect to spiritual truth.

Do you know who Mark Zuckerberg is? Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook at age 22. He is now 32 years old and is the fourth richest man in America, worth approximately \$51 billion dollars. He is a rich young man. Wouldn't you be impressed, if you heard that after church some Sunday, out in the parking lot, as Pastor Dan was walking to his car, Mark Zuckerberg came running up, got on his knees before Pastor Dan and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to for eternal life?"

The rich young ruler in our passage does just that. He runs to Jesus, kneels before Him, and asks that question. Jesus answers the rich young man's question by reciting back the second half of the Ten Commandments.

**T**he commandments that have to do with what not to do to your neighbor: don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery. The rich young ruler says, "I've kept all those commandments."

Then Jesus looks at him and tells him: "Go, sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then, come, follow Me."

The text tells us that the rich young ruler goes away "shocked and grieving," because he had many possessions.

I love the rich young ruler, because he encounters Jesus, is invited to join Jesus, and he FAILS!

Throughout our current sermon series, we've looked at lots of inspiring stories of people's encounters with Jesus. Disciples being called. People being miraculously healed. Lives transformed. But this is not one of those stories. This encounter doesn't have a happy ending and a transformed life. The rich young ruler refuses the invitation, and goes away sad. He fails. But hang in there with me because there is good news in this story. However, you'll have to wait until the end of the sermon.

I used to work in Silicon Valley... and Silicon Valley loves failure. It loves failure because in a land of start-ups, failure is synonymous with learning experience. If you listen to TED talks, there are whole playlists devoted to learning from failure. Michael Jordan, arguably the greatest basketball player ever said, "I've failed over and over and over again in my life, and that is why I succeed."

Failure is a great teacher. So let's

learn from the rich young ruler's failure. Let's learn why he fails, and what it means for us.

Why does the rich young ruler fail? Well, there are two reasons. One, he is a lousy investor. And two, he asks the wrong question.

First, he's a lousy investor. A few years ago a friend invited my wife and me to her parent's house for dinner. Her parents, like mine, are immigrants to the U.S. And as we walked around the house, we noticed that there was a flat screen TV in every room. Not just the living room, or a bedroom, but every room, on almost on every surface—hanging in hallways, in the kitchen, in the bathroom. So we asked, "What's up with all the TV's?" And our friend says, "Yeah, my parents think that they're a good investment. So they bought a lot of them and put them all over the house."

Let's be clear before we continue. Flat screen TV's are NOT a good investment.

Warren Buffet does know good investments. He is the second richest man in America. He said this: "Price is what you pay. Value is what you get."

Warren Buffett made his money by investing in companies. He distinguishes between price and value. He sometimes pays a high price for the companies he buys, but it's because he thinks the value of the company is even higher than the price he's paying.

The rich young ruler is a lousy investor. Jesus gives him an opportunity. Here's the price you pay: your material possessions.

Here's the value you get: treasure in heaven. Come, follow Me.

And the rich young ruler says, "That price isn't worth it. I want to keep my material possessions."

The rich young ruler could only see the price to be paid, and it was high. He couldn't see the value of what he would get, which was infinitely higher.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes the Kingdom of Heaven as a great treasure, something of high value, that is worth the price to be paid.

Jesus says: "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*"

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."*

Jesus makes a subtle shift in responding to the rich young ruler. The rich young ruler asks for eternal life—he wants to live forever. But Jesus offers treasure in heaven. Eternal life and treasure in heaven are different.

But treasure in heaven and Jesus' invitation to follow Him are the same thing. The treasure in heaven is JESUS. Friendship with God Himself; walking with God Himself. And the rich young ruler says no. The rich young ruler thought that his possessions were of higher value than treasure in heaven. He's putting his money in a house full of flat screen TV's.

**S**o, that's the first way the rich young ruler failed—**he sees the price to be paid, but not the value of what he gets.**

How's our investing? Are we good investors? Do we have a house full of ten-year-old flat screen TVs that we think are more important than treasure in heaven?

As the person who oversees the finances of the church, let me take this moment to point out the many opportunities to invest in things of great value here at First Prez.

- If you have never given to First Prez before, please consider giving something.
- If you are an occasional giver, consider giving regularly.
- If you give regularly, consider giving courageously.
- If you're already an adventurous giver, thank you for your faithfulness!
- By the way, we'll be having a capital appeal next month so that we may continue advancing the Kingdom of God. Thank you.

Now, back to the rich young ruler. Here's the second way the rich young ruler fails. **The rich young ruler asks the wrong question.**

Albert Einstein said : "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask."

As you know, our parking lot gets very full on Sunday mornings. We post signs asking hikers to please park elsewhere, and 99 times out of 100, hikers are very gracious and comply.

Last year, when I was still new to the church staff, a security guard pulled me aside on a Sunday morning

and told me that a group of hikers refused to listen when informed that parking wasn't available. They were incredibly rude and just laughed at him and continued up the trail when he told them that we would tow their car. They said, "Fine, tow our car!"

So, we asked the question, "Should we tow their car?" And we discussed it for a while, and thought of all the reasons for and against, and ultimately concluded that we had to tow their car (if our security guard was to have any credibility). So the tow truck came and towed the car out of the lot, and we waited for the hikers to return.

It turns out, "Should we tow their car?" was the wrong question. The right question was, "Is THIS their car?" The answer to that question, it turns out, was no. The car we towed was not their car. After many apologies to the actual owner of the car and a ride to the tow yard with a lovely family, I learned first hand about: (1) the value of learning from your failures, and (2) the importance of asking the right question. You cannot get the right answer if you ask the wrong question.

This rich young ruler fails because he asks the WRONG QUESTION. He asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's the wrong question, and it's wrong for three reasons.

Before I get to why it's wrong, doesn't it sound like the right question? Weren't we super impressed earlier with hypothetical Mark Zuckerberg, kneeling and asking Pastor Dan this question just a few minutes ago?

It's the wrong question because it gets three things incorrect. As we go

through them, ask yourself if WE get the same things wrong.

#### 1. First, What must I **DO**?

This is the biggest incorrect assumption in the rich young ruler's question. That there is something to DO to get eternal life. We often have this incorrect picture of God as a heavenly bookkeeper. We incorrectly think that He tallies up our good deeds on one side and our bad deeds on the other. We incorrectly think that If the good outweighs the bad, we go to heaven. We incorrectly think that all we need to do is live a life of decent respectability. Don't dance, don't drink, don't smoke, don't swear. Or in the parlance of the rich young ruler, don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery—I've kept all these commandments since I was a youth.

That is where the rich young ruler is coming from: relying on living a life of decent respectability. I think this is where many of us are coming from. Is there anything else I need to DO? Jesus says, "No, that's not how it works."

Why is "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" the wrong question? Because there is nothing we can DO to inherit eternal life. It is a gift of God.

The Message translation of the book of Romans, chapter 10:9-10 reads: "Say the welcoming word to God—"Jesus is my Master"—embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation.

**W**ith your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!"

This is the fundamental message of the Bible and the startling truth to Christianity. There is nothing you can DO to earn your way to heaven. It is God's gift, through Jesus.

Mark, the author of our passage today, put this into stark focus. The passage immediately preceding this encounter with the rich young ruler is Jesus' encounter with a number of young children. The disciples try to shoo the children away, but Jesus says this in Mark 10:14-15:

*"Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not RECEIVE the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."*

The Kingdom of God must be received, like the gift it is. It cannot be earned by doing.

Let's tackle the second and third way the question is the wrong question:

2. What must **I** do?
3. What must I do to inherit

### **Eternal Life?**

The rich young ruler's question was self-centered, and entirely focused on him. That's the second reason it's the wrong question. And the third reason is that he is focused on eternal life as some future-oriented time. The rich young ruler wants to live forever. He wants the secret to immortality.

You know who else wants the secret to immortality? Villains in

superhero and action movies. That's what Voldemort wants in Harry Potter; it's what the bad guy wants in the new X-Men movie. It's the Mummy, the witch from Tangled, Gargamel from the Smurfs. They all just want to live forever!

We see in Jesus' response again, No, that's not how it works. Jesus says, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." Jesus points the rich young ruler beyond himself, to the needs of others. To think of those in need in his community. To enrich the lives of people beside himself. And not in some future tense, but today, right now.

Jesus could have said, sell your possessions, and take the pile of money and set fire to it in the middle of the town square. And if the problem was just the rich young man's reliance on money, that would have been a good solution. But the rich young man's problem was also that he was blind to the needs of those around him.

Dallas, St. Paul, Baton Rouge. The world is broken. It is full of broken people, you and me included. It is broken out there, and it is broken in here. Shootings of police and by police. Elections in the U.K. and in the U.S. It's easy to think that the world is going crazy, but it's not going crazy; it's broken, and in need of God's redemption.

Here's what a commentator writes about our passage today: "If we would find eternal life, if we would find happiness, joy, satisfaction, peace of mind and serenity of heart, it shall not be by piling up a credit balance with God through keeping commandments and observing rules and regulations; it shall be through

reproducing God's attitude of love and care to our fellow-people."

Our invitation is not to think self-centeredly and narrowly about our own eternal life, like the rich young ruler does. Our invitation is to actively cooperate with God in the redemption of the world. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." We are agents of God's peace, God's shalom, in this world.

We had a Celebration of Life service yesterday in this room for Janis Loo. Janis loved Jesus and Jesus loves Janis. And there is not a better antidote to the rich young man's self-centeredness than the selfless life and legacy of Janis. For those of you who did not have the privilege of knowing Janis, I'll share just two facts.

One, Janis read in the newspaper that people were dying waiting for kidney transplants, so she called up the National Kidney Foundation of Hawaii that day and signed up to donate her kidney to whomever was next on the list. She donated her kidney to a complete stranger. If you think the price of selling all your possessions and giving to the poor is high, how about giving away one of your organs?

Two, Janis spent every weekend making and handing out peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to homeless teens in Waikiki. Her sister estimates she handed out over 50,000 sandwiches!

Janis was a peacemaker. Her favorite verse was from Chapter 2 of the book of Ephesians: <sup>9</sup> "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing.

**I**t is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

<sup>10</sup> For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The verse highlights again that salvation is a gift of God, not a result of works. And even though works don't earn us eternal life, God has created us for good works, for it to be our way of life. We were created, like Janis, to be peacemakers in a broken world.

So, those are the three reasons the rich young ruler's question was the wrong question. 1. What do I **DO**? 2. What do I **do**? What do I do for **ETERNAL LIFE**? Do we get the same things wrong? You may be thinking, "Okay, then what is the *right* question?"

My college roommate Carl and I attended a wedding of a friend a few years after we graduated. And there were lots of people there that we didn't know. Friends of the bride and groom from high school, from their lives after college, family. We spent the Friday night before the wedding at the rehearsal dinner, meeting new people, awkwardly making small talk by asking the first question that inevitably comes up: What do you DO? And we realized that we didn't really learn all that much about people, or get to know them in any meaningful way.

So on the drive to the wedding the next day, Carl proposed, instead of asking new people that day, what do you DO? We should all ask, "What do you love?" "Hi, my name is Carl. Your name is? Oh, that's great. So... what do you love?" I was not brave enough to do this, but I should

mention that Carl met his future wife at that wedding, and they have been married now for over 16 years.

You, like me, may not be brave enough to ask strangers, "What do you love?" instead of "what do you DO?" But the difference in the question points us to what the RIGHT question is. Not what do I DO to get to heaven, but WHAT and HOW should I LOVE?

Jesus has an answer to this question. Someone asked Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment?"

And Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

The rich young ruler's failure was that he couldn't give up his possessions to follow Jesus. But his bigger failure was that he was focused on obedience to the law, instead of LOVE.

The right question is "How can we love God and love people? " How can we love God and love people?

You know, that's our mission statement as a church! "Love God, love people, and reach the world for Jesus Christ."

To love God and love people is why we as a church have sponsored over 1,600 children through Compassion International—to release them from poverty. You can see their pictures in that hallway over there.

To love God and love people is why we wash the clothes of the homeless, once a month.

To love God and love people is why we're building a house in Waimanalo for a family in need.

To love God and love people is why we provide supplies to teachers serving the neediest students in Hawaii.

To love God and love people is why we partnered with 16 other churches last month to help baptize over 220 women at the women's prison.

To love God and love people is why 32 high school students and adults are headed to the Tenderloin District on the mainland next week, to serve there and to learn how to serve and love our community here better.

So, we've had some investing tips, we learned from the rich young ruler's wrong question, and we now we know the right question.

One last question, "Who loves you?"

The key to this passage, and to Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, is in verse 21. In the middle of the passage, it says: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him."

Jesus looks at the rich young ruler, and loved him, not in the abstract, but in his particulars. Jesus loved the rich young man before making any requests of him, before the rich young man fails. Jesus loves him after his failure.

Jesus doesn't love him because the rich young ruler did anything.

**J**esus saw the rich young man's struggle and sadness and failure. Jesus looking at him, loved him.

Jesus, looking at us, loves us. Because we, like the rich young ruler, will fail. And then we will fail again. Sometimes, we'll tow the wrong car. We'll have a house full of flat screen TV's. Or we won't ruthlessly eliminate hurry from our lives or practice solitude. We won't be courageous givers. We won't sleep more, or eat more vegetables or practice gratitude.

We fail. We fail like the rich young ruler. And that's the gospel, the good news, and the title of this sermon, "Jesus Loves You Anyway."

His love does not depend on what we DO.

Have you failed? Jesus, looking at you, loves you. Are you ashamed of something you did? Years ago? Yesterday? Jesus, looking at you, loves you.

Are you in mourning for a loved one or in despair about a diagnosis? Jesus, looking at you, loves you.

Are you struggling, with faith or loneliness or doubt? Jesus, looking at you, loves you.

If you go today, sell all your possession, and give to the poor. Great! Jesus looking at you, loves you. And if you don't? Jesus, looking at you, loves you. Jesus, looking at us, loves us.

Let's pray: God, in these few moments of silence, reveal Yourself to us. Reveal Your love to us. Thank You that Jesus, looking at us, loves us. Amen.

We'll close after one more song. At the end of the service if you want to someone to pray for you, or pray with you for our broken world, we'll have members of our prayer team in the front.

Now, please stand and receive this blessing.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

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*Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at [fpchawaii.org](http://fpchawaii.org). The audio version can be down-loaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: [fpchkoolau@gmail.com](mailto:fpchkoolau@gmail.com)*