Just Jesus Stories…Love Jesus More Than…

1. I have quite a few favorite Jesus stories. This one isn't one of them. It has always seemed awkward or out of place. If I'm being honest, this is one of those times that Jesus doesn't sound…like Jesus. And, yet, if we carefully watch what is going on, the story makes a lot of sense…

2. …but we are still uncomfortable with where this is going. Mark 10 is a treasure house of stories. We looked at two of them two weeks ago in the snowstorm weekend worship – the stories of James and John wanting top places in the kingdom and the blind beggar, Bartimaeus.

3. Today's story comes after Jesus has had run-ins with a variety of groups and issues. He has thrown out a demon that refused to come out when his apostles tried, and then run into another argument among his apostles as to who was ranked where in their group (an argument that would continue to the end of this chapter when James and John tried an end run around the rest of them).

4. As Mark 10 opens, the Pharisees came at Jesus with trick questions, trying to get Jesus to take sides in a theological/political argument going on in Palestine.

5. There had been a very awkward situation where children wanted to come up to see Jesus and his own followers were blocking them…

6. And then we come to this story, starting in verse 17. Because this is a strange story, people have come up with all kinds of motivations driving this young man. Every word he said and every word that Jesus said in reply has been scrutinized thousands of times. The different versions of the same story have been examined to see if one Gospel writer could shed light to make the story more understandable. IMatthew 19 and Luke 18)

7. Again, context is everything. What do the stories in front of this and behind it deal with? Power and status. These are very human concerns but we see them in the animal world as well (dogs, primates, Jerry's longhorns). The Pharisees want to be seen as the smart ones, the experts in theology and law. The apostles want to be

ranked in order of importance. The followers of Jesus want to be more important to him than a bunch of noisy kids.

8. And then this young man comes up. Mark 10:17-20. I'm not that upset by the young man's claim that he has kept the commandments since he was a boy. In fact, I have no doubt that he was a good man. He wasn't claiming perfection, only dedication. (In Matthew, when Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, he asks "which ones?" Jesus refers to the ten commandments and it is only then that the young man replies. He might have been concerned about the other 601 or the countless other ones added in by the Pharisees and their ilk).

9. Then, Jesus says it. Mark 10:21-22. All three accounts tell the same story. And now, we have to wonder: is Jesus telling us to give everything away, too? The answer is: no. He told THIS person to sell what he had because it was the single most important thing to him. It was the thing he held higher than his faith or duty to God.

10. The scripture says that "he had great wealth" but it might be easier to understand the story if we phrased it "his great wealth had him." Is there anything you own that keeps you from following the example of Jesus? (guitars stolen in Detroit, white carpets and furniture, a new car kept from church use)

11. I want you to think about what it is that may be standing between you and full service and devotion to Christ. For some, it is entertainment, money, security, politics (which often effectively hides the Jesus in a person). We'll come back to this.

12. Mark 10:23-28. So much here! First, let us address the elephant that is not in the room. In other words, the myth. I have heard stories about a tiny gate called "the Eye of the Needle" where camels would have to get on their knees to enter. This is a myth that originated in the 15th century and maybe as early as the 9th.

13. It is a metaphor that was well known to the people of Jesus' day. It just meant a lifetime of devoted, determined, focused effort. It meant to do the difficult, hard thing. Natural talent is a real thing, but even natural talent needs to train and do the hard work before it

elevates the talented individual. A lot of geniuses are washing cars and a lot of potentially great football players are hanging around the pool. If a rich man wants to enter heaven, he or she will have to be an athlete, spiritually speaking. They are going to have to work at it relentlessly. This isn't salvation by works, but a constant clearing of the path between you and heaven. (just like any addiction)

14. Peter pops up in verse 28 and says "we have left everything to follow you!" Jesus assures them that all of them will be rulers and that anyone who leaves anything will have a hundred times more given to them. You can't outgive or out-love God.

15. He also warns them that they will face persecutions and pain as they leave things behind…but that greater rewards will come.

16. And that brings us to a story that happens later, after the resurrection. Jesus comes to the shore of the Sea of Galilee and sees his apostles out fishing on their boats. Wait…what? Peter said they left everything, and they did…but that doesn't mean they sold or gave away anything. To Peter, it felt like he'd given up everything but he hadn't. And so…

17. John 21:15. This is a very eccentric passage. The Greek is very difficult to nail down with precision. I believe that J. Harold Greenlee got it right in the Journal of Translation, volume 1, Number 2 (2005). The word "these" could refer to three different things – all easy to resolve had John used a slightly different tense or voicing of this or that word. The weight seems slightly favor the "these" to mean his boats and nets and lines. "are you really ready to give up everything for me?"

18. Remember that Peter had not covered himself with glory before or after the crucifixion. But after a private meeting with Jesus and after this event, we see him stepping up to face the assembled nation of the Jews at Pentecost in Acts 2 and deliver the first gospel sermon of the Christian era.

19. Something may be in your way. If you are like most people, it has something to do with comfort, status, power, or security. As the Psalmist said, "make level paths for your feet." Don't make life harder

than it has to be by carrying around things that aren’t going to get you where you want to go.