



Sermon Title: Hard Sayings

Mark 10:13-45

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Hello. Great to see all of you here. Thanks for joining us. Whether you're in the room or joining us online, thanks for being here.

Today's scripture comes from Mark chapter 10. And if you've been around church a lot, you've probably heard this story many times. It's the famous Bible story of the rich, young TikTok influencer, or at least today that might be who does the equivalent of who this person was back in Jesus day, and it says this, "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?'. "

And I'll stop there, but just because what you need to remember is that in the Bible, eternal life never means just going to heaven after we die. Eternal life also means living the eternal kind of life here and now, full of meaning, purpose, hope, and joy. It's also for a here and now thing.

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "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."

"Teacher," he declared, "all these, I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him.

So I'm going to stop right there. Imagine, if you know the end of the story, pretend for a minute that you don't know what happens next, okay? Just pretend for a minute. You don't know what happens next. And then imagine, if you were Jesus and this young man came up to you and asked you this question, what would you say? And you wanted Him

to feel loved by you. What would you say to Him? I don't know. I might say things like, "Oh man, dude, you're crushing it. Way to go you. Seize the day. Live your best life now. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." All that sort of thing, right? "Well done, you."

Whatever I might say, I know what I would not say. I would not say what Jesus says. 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'll have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me."

Wow, that is a hard ask, right? That is a hard saying. That is a hard thing to do. "Jesus, you got to cut this out. This is not going to make people want to go to church, Jesus. I'm just saying. Bad marketing. Bad marketing, Jesus. Tell them what they want to hear."

This text is what Bible commentators refer to as one of Jesus' hard sayings or hard words, places in the Bible where Jesus gives a difficult command, one that sounds really hard, one that maybe we don't really want to do.

And then the text says, when this young man heard it, at this, the man's face fell and he went away sad because he had great wealth. We're doing a sermon series on how the most important characteristic of a follower of Jesus is to be marked by His love. But we can't give away to other people what we don't have ourselves. So we have to first experience Jesus' love in order to be marked by His love. And we've been talking about how do we do that? Because Jesus' love is strong, right? Jesus' love is strong and it makes us brave and it makes us protectors and it makes us defenders and it makes us more loving. We've been talking about how do we experience this strong love that makes us brave and all of those things and what keeps us from experiencing God's love that way.

I think this text points to one of the reasons we don't sometimes experience Jesus' love. Because in our culture, we equate love with being nice. And if you love me, you're going to be nice to me. You're going to tell me what I want to hear. You're always going to approve of everything I'm doing. You're not going to call me out if I'm doing something that you don't think is good for me. If you love me, you'll be nice.

Now, intellectually, we know that's not true, right? Intellectually, we know that if you really love someone, you may sometimes have to tell them hard truths for their own good. We know that, but we don't live that way. And increasingly in our culture, love means you're nice to me and you approve of everything I do. Otherwise, you're being judgmental. You're being unloving. So more and more, we are unable to feel loved when someone gives us a hard word, because that's our culture.

It's the same with this man and his story. He couldn't fathom that Jesus hard word to sell everything he had and give it all away. He couldn't fathom how that could possibly be loved. It sounded so hard, so onerous, such a big command. But it was love in a couple

of ways. First, the hard saying shows that Jesus sees us for who we are. The text says Jesus looked at him and loved him. He gives this hard command because He loved him, because He loved him and wants the best for him. And He knows this man. When it says Jesus looked at him, what that's getting at, it's not just like He looked at him and saw him. It's like Jesus understood who he was, looked all the way down to the bottom of his soul, saw him in all his uniqueness, saw him accurately for who he was. And because of that, Jesus doesn't give this man a one size fits all answer to His question.

Sometimes pastors will try to soften this text down, kind of soften what Jesus says to this man, water it down. And they'll say things like, "Well, when Jesus said sell everything and give it to the poor, He didn't mean everything. I mean that was kind of a metaphor. Or Jesus was using hyperbole. He didn't really mean sell everything and give it all away." Do you buy that? I don't. I think Jesus meant what He said. Sell everything you have. And don't just sell it. Don't just sell it and then put the money in your retirement account. No, sell everything you have. Give it all away so you have nothing left so that you can't go back. "Burn that bridge and follow me."

This is why it's a hard saying, because it's a really hard command. It's a hard thing to do. But it also needs to be said. This is the only time in the Bible that Jesus says this to anybody. He doesn't say it to Zacchaeus. He doesn't say it to Joseph of Arimathea, both of whom we're very wealthy. This is not a one-size-fits-all answer that Jesus just says to everyone. No, Jesus sees this man in all of his uniqueness. It is tailor-made for him.

When someone accurately sees you, when you feel seen, you feel loved. That's one of the reasons we're asking you to wear name tags because God knows you as an individual, knows you by name, and we want to know you by name as well.

Second way this hard saying is love is it shows that Jesus knows what we want even more than we do, what we really want deep down. This man is rich, which means he probably thought he wanted money because money promises many things, right? Money promises safety, security, comfort, pleasure, fun. And it even delivers on some of those, not all of them, but delivers on some of those promises. You can do a lot of really cool things with money, right? As the fashion designer Coco Chanel said, "The best things in life are free. The second best are very, very expensive."

Sometimes money does deliver on its promise. The problem is when it does, it doesn't satisfy us for very long. And that's the problem. Jesus says to this man, "One thing you lack." Lack? What? He's a rich young TikTok influencer. What does he lack? He's the last person in the world you would think lacked anything. He's wealthy, he's influential, he's young. Oh, let's just throw in good-looking because he probably was, right? So let's just put it all there, right? He's like, he's got the best life. And he's even a good man. He's obeyed all of the commandments. He's a good man. He's just confused on what the good

life actually is. He has everything he's ever wanted, only to discover it's not what He actually wanted. He's searching for the bigger life, the more meaningful life, the life with deeper purpose and joy.

My oldest daughter recently went to Paris with some of her friends, and she loves ballet. And so she did a kind of a bucket list thing and got tickets to the Paris Ballet for when she was there. She was super excited about it because she loves ballet, looked forward to it for months. So they went. And the night of, she got all dressed up, went with her friends to one of her favorite ballets, Swan Lake at the Paris Ballet. This is like a bucket list kind of thing for her. But when they got there, the usher showed them to their seats, but then when they got there, they didn't see any seats. All they could see was the floor. So they asked, "Where are the seats?" And the usher rolled His eyes and sighed and looked disgusted, "Ugh!" which was good. It is good that he did that because if you go to Paris and nobody's rude to you, you have missed the Paris experience. So it's not a bug, it's a feature of Paris.

Well, the seats had to be pulled up from the floor. So He did that, and then He wrestled with Him to give them open and all that stuff. And then they sat down, but the seats wobbled from side to side. It was like they were on some kind of spring, so you had to sit perfectly still. But then a little bit in, one of her friends leaned a little too far to one side and ended up falling into the people next to her. So now they're rolling their eyes and disgusted and annoyed [foreign language 00:09:28] these stupid Americans and all that stuff, right? And then a few minutes later, one of my daughter's friends dropped her metal water bottle and it hit the floor with this loud clank that everyone could hear, and the seats were teared. So the water bottle rolled down and fell clank, clank, clank all the way down to the bottom in the Paris Ballet.

So the Paris Ballet did not turn out to be the dream come true that my daughter had imagined it to be. And life is like that, right? You get what you want, only to discover it's a little bit disappointing. You want something deeper, and that's what's going on with this young man. We don't actually know what we want way deep down inside. We think we know what we want, but deep down inside, we don't know. We really don't know what will give us lasting meaning, purpose, and joy. We don't know that. But the one who made us does. And because of that, He'll lead us to it if we follow Him.

Jesus accurately saw this man and could see the thing that prevented him from having what he wanted was all the things that he had. And so often, what prevents us from having what we really want deep inside, all the things that we have. His problem wasn't he had riches. His problem was that riches had him, and he wanted something bigger and deeper, which Jesus offers him. When Jesus says, "Follow me," that is an invitation to be one of Jesus' disciples. And in that culture, that is a huge honor. Basically, Jesus is saying, "I'm accepting you as one of my sons." But he walks away and he's like, "Well, I don't want to be your poor son." Right? "Maybe your rich son, but not your poor son."

Jesus is offering him a much bigger life. And if you just flip through the rest of the book of Mark, you see everything he misses out on because He didn't follow Jesus. If he had trusted that Jesus loved him and that the hard command was for His good to give him what he really wanted deep down inside, if he had done that instead of walk away, he'd have seen a blind man healed, he'd have seen Jesus clear the temple, he just sees Jesus raised from the dead. Really exciting stuff. But he misses all of that because all He hears in Jesus command is the hard. He doesn't hear the love.

Jesus said, "Go. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me." This man only heard the first part of that first sentence, right? All he heard was, "Go sell everything." He missed the next bit, "And then you'll have treasure in heaven." There's a promise in the hard.

And a few verses later, Jesus reiterates the promise to His disciples, it says, "Then Peter spoke up. 'We've left everything to follow you'."

"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 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, not just in heaven, here and now, a hundred times as much homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children." Some of you may be thinking, "Whoa, whoa. I don't want any more mothers. I don't want a hundred mothers. I don't want a hundred children," right? But it's meant to be a good thing. And fields along with persecutions, there's a cost, but there's some huge rewards. And in the age to come, the eternal life. Every command that Jesus gives contains a promise of a bigger, more abundant life no matter how hard the command, because He knows what we want even more than we do.

I think of some of the Muslim refugees that I've met in Europe, and I've told you some of their stories. They've left their homelands to try to get away from that. They've become followers of Jesus. And for some of them, they have heard Jesus call them to go back to their native country and start talking about Jesus and telling people about Jesus there, which could get them thrown in prison. It could even get them killed. It is a hard command that they have heard, but it leads to such a bigger life.

There's something about them that I envy. I envy how brave they are, how courageous they are. There's this freedom that they've got. And they're seeing miracles. They're seeing people healed, miraculous provision, tens of thousands of people becoming followers of Christ. At the current rate, it is not inconceivable that the Middle East will be majority Christian by the end of this century. And they get to be part of this huge movement. So yes, it was a hard command to go back to their native country, but it's one that they are happy that they are following because it's leading to such a bigger life. The

question is, do you trust Jesus, the one who made you to know what you really want more than you do?

In the text, this man approaches Jesus, and he says, "Good teacher." And Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." And sometimes people think that right there, Jesus is saying that he's not God. No, no, no. That would contradict everything else in the Bible. He's saying the opposite. He's saying, "I'm more than a teacher. And yes, I am good. And only God is good, and I am God in the flesh, come to die to pay the price for your sins and be raised from the dead so that you can be forgiven and reconciled to God because I love you and I want what's best for you. I am your Savior and your Lord. I'm not just a teacher. I'm your savior and I'm your Lord."

Jesus has no right to be our Lord unless He's our savior, but He cannot be our savior unless we make Him our Lord. He cannot save us, cannot lead us to the eternal kind of life here and now unless we obey Him as Lord. So the question is, is Jesus your life coach or is He your Lord? Because He loves us and knows what we want more than we do, He will sometimes give us a hard word to lead us to the bigger life we really want deep down inside. And when we understand that Jesus knows us deeply as individuals and knows what we want even more than we do, then we experience Jesus' love through His hard sayings.

As I said, increasingly in our culture, love means you're nice to me and you approve of every single thing I do. Can you imagine if we approach sports like that, right? If an athlete said to a coach, "Hey, Coach, I don't want you to point out what I'm doing wrong. I don't want you to challenge me or make me practice. That's all uncomfortable. Just say nice things to me. Always tell me I'm doing great and always make me feel good. Oh, oh, oh, but I still want to win a national championship. Can you do that, Coach?"

I mean, if athletes said that to their coaches, they wouldn't be very good athletes, right? No.

I don't know. Maybe that's what's going on with the Mariners. I'm not sure, but... I know. That was mean, right? You know I love them. Sometimes we don't experience Jesus' love because we think that when He calls us to turn from sin and obey Him that He's keeping us from having fun. No, He calls us to turn away from sin to lead us to a deeper joy. Real love means seeking the best for the person we love. And because Jesus saw this man accurately and knew what He really wanted way deep down inside, that what He really wanted wasn't all that money and stuff. He wanted connection to God, meaning and purpose.

And that's what we're chasing when we chase money and reputation and success. What we're really looking for is connection to God, meaning, and purpose. And Jesus loved this man enough to say, "You're looking in the wrong places. Leave it all behind and follow me."

So action steps for this week, the first two, the same as they have been the last couple of weeks. First, if you don't have one, there's a sticker at the welcome desk that reminds you that God loves you. Get it. Put it somewhere that you're going to see it every day. Second, attend worship in person. When you can't be here, online is great. So keep joining online when you can't be here. But worship really is one of the ways we experience God's love, and that's what this sermon series is about. And worship is just more powerful when we are surrounded by other believers. So attend in-person worship. And not out of guilt, okay? I had some people last week said, "Well, you made me feel guilty, so I'm here in person." No. No. Thank you, but no, right? No. It's for you because it's better in person.

And then third this week, set aside some time and pray this, "Jesus, what hard word do you want to say to me? I'm listening." And then listen for those thoughts, those memories, those scripture verses, those song lyrics, whatever it is that come into your head. That may be Jesus talking to you, knowing that His hard word is His love. Maybe it's to leave behind a habitual sin. Maybe it's to forgive someone you're mad at or go out of your comfort zone to serve somebody or give money for the joy of seeing people's lives change. Or maybe there's an attitude you've got that is keeping you from experiencing a deeper joy and Jesus is going to call you away from that attitude to experience His abundant life. Whatever it is, pray that prayer and listen, knowing that the hard word is Jesus' love, because He loves you enough to lead you to deeper joy.

One of the most powerful moments I've ever had in a worship service was a long time ago in my former church, this was long before I was a pastor, I was teaching at the time at Stanford. And some of you may have heard me tell this story. Back then, I was very critical of modern worship songs. I was kind of a worship snob. Anything that wasn't a hymn with a choir and an organ, in my opinion, had no place anywhere close to a church. Now, I don't think that now. I love what we do here. But back then, that's what I thought, just hated anything having to do with modern worship.

Now, I want to be clear. It is okay to have a preference. It's okay to prefer modern over traditional or vice versa. It's okay to have a preference. It was my attitude that was the problem. My disdain for other forms of worship, my arrogance in thinking that mine was the better way. So that was what was going on.

Well, Jesus changed that. So one Sunday, my wife and I were in church, and there was, we had back then it was called blended worship. So some traditional, some modern. So we called it something to offend everyone kind of worship. And so, one Sunday, my wife and I were in church, and there was a modern worship song we were singing, and I hated it. So I rolled my eyes and I said, "This song is so stupid," just loud enough so the people around me could hear it. And just loud enough so that my wife could hear it. She

just ignored me and kept singing. It's often how she deals with me. Just ignore it and maybe it'll go away, right?

And I was irritated and I was agitated and all that stuff, and feeling kind of fussy. And then I saw two rows ahead of me, a man in his 70s, hands in the air, tears coming down his face, clearly lost in the presence of Jesus. And in my mind, heard Jesus say very clearly, "If this song helps that man enter my presence in a way that is healing for him, what's that to you? Are you really so selfish that you can't stand to have a few minutes of music that you don't like in church, even if it's helping other people connect with me?" I knew that was Jesus, because that wasn't the kind of thing that I was going to think. And I realized in that moment that I was experiencing bad worship, but not because the music was bad, but because my heart was bad. And in that moment, my heart broke and I said, "Lord, I am so sorry. Please forgive me."

It was one of the most powerful moments in worship I've ever had, and it came as a rebuke because worship doesn't always make us feel warm and cozy. No, no. If we're doing it right, worship is sometimes going to challenge us. It's a dangerous act to worship. And this is crucial. This is crucial. But I did not feel shame. Because sometimes, not every hard word is from God. Sometimes we hear a hard word and it's not from God. And one of the ways you know if it's not from God is if it's shaming. I did not feel shamed at all. Quite the opposite. God was trying to give me a gift. A beautiful thing was happening in church that day. People experiencing Jesus' presence in ways that were healing for them, but I wasn't part of it because I was clinging to my little cultural preferences that I thought were better than everyone else's.

And now, now I like it all. I like it all. I love what we do in traditional, I love modern worship. I love African Pentecostal worship. I can even worship to country music. I'm a healed man. I've been transformed. He's expanded all the ways that I can worship God. It's not less. It's more, it's bigger. I can worship God anyway, in any kind of style. Jesus loved me enough to correct me, love me enough to help me see the beautiful things happening in that church so that I could be part of it, loved me enough to expand the ways that I can worship Him.

He gave me a hard word, and the only thing it felt like was love. Because see, here's the thing. Jesus dreams bigger dreams for us than we dream for ourselves. And He loves us enough to call us away from anything that is going to steal those dreams away. So what's His dream for you? And do you trust Him to lead you there? Even when the command is hard to do, will you follow Him and discover what you really want deep down inside and experience your deepest joy in Him?

Jesus, I thank you for every hard word you've ever given me because there were times I didn't want to hear it. There are times I didn't like it when you said it, but Lord, I know it

came from a heart of love. So Jesus, we're here and we are saying together, this week, Jesus, give us a hard word. Give us a hard word that we need to hear so that we can follow you into that deeper life of meaning and purpose and joy that you died to give us. Lord, and when we hear that hard word, help us at the same time feel loved, because we know you only say it for our good. So, Lord, help us to experience your love this week, even through your commands, and know that they come from a Father who loves us more than we can ever imagine. I pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Mark is strategic about how he arranges the stories in his gospel. How do the stories of the little children, rich young ruler, and the request of James and John found in chapter 10 relate to each other? How do they help interpret each other?
- Why did the rich young man ask the question in verse 17?
- Why is it so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven?
- In choosing to walk away from Jesus, what does the rich young man gain? What does he lose?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.