

Living Outside Yourself-Rich Young Ruler

by Dennis Kinlaw

We often miss God's signs and presence in our lives because we are too focused on our own desires and needs, and we need divine help to submit to God's will.

Duration: 45:02

Scripture: Matthew 19:16-22, Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 10:2-22, Luke 9:23, Luke 18:18-23

Topics: "Rich Young Ruler"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a little boy in church who couldn't see what was happening and kept standing up despite his father's instructions to sit down. The speaker then connects this story to the sequence of events in Mark chapter 10, where the first paragraph discusses divorce, the second paragraph focuses on children, and the third paragraph tells the story of the little boy. The speaker suggests that God designed human life to be connected to the next life and that our current life is preparation for the next. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of trust, love, and marriage in our relationship with God and encourages listeners to let God be in control of their lives.

Transcript

Last week we spoke about the fact that when Jesus came, we missed him, because he didn't come the way we expected him to come. And so the church and the state and all missed him. And when God himself came, we thought he was one of us, and so we lost him.

Today I want to turn that and speak about the fact that when God works in our lives and does his signs, we oftentimes, we usually miss his signs as well as himself. The sign posts may be all around us, and we think they're just a natural part of our horizon, and so we don't read them. There's biblical basis for this in that you'll remember that Jesus, when he took the five loaves and two fish and fed the multitude, the Jews were very responsive to that, and they did what we would have done.

They said, We'd like to have him around all the time. We'll make him king. We would elect him president.

You will remember that he looked at them and said, You ate the bread, but you missed the sign. Because what you really want from me is not the physical. What you really want from me is the eternal, and except you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will miss it.

I am the bread of life. Now, what about these signs that are in your life and mine that we miss? I suspect they are really so obvious that that's why we miss them. And when we stand in his presence and he says, How did you miss it? We're going to be humiliated as well as astounded.

The biblical story that I want to use as the basis for this is the very familiar one to you, the story of the rich ruler who came to Jesus and said, Good Master, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life? Here was a young man who had a problem. Now, the amazing thing in the story is that he had a problem. He had most of the answers to what we think are the problems of life.

He was young, he was wealthy, he had extremely high social position, and he also had power and authority. Now, most of us spend our lives looking for those things, and we think if we had them, we'd have all that we needed. That would be life itself.

But the interesting thing is that he not only had them all, but he had them all at the same time. It's an exaggerated story. All of us have youth at one time or another, but it's a little unusual to have youth and wealth and youth and wealth and social position and youth and wealth and social position and power all at once.

He had them all, but he came to Jesus and said, There must be something more. Now, that's very significant because God has built life so that if you get all his gifts and miss him, there will be something inside you that says, Isn't there more? And that's the reason man is so lonely, and that is the reason man searches so. God's gifts are so good that they're almost a substitute for him, and we enjoy them so much that for a while we think they will be enough.

But there is a deep hunger. The wise man in the Old Testament, Kohelet, said, God has put eternity in our hearts, and nothing less than the eternal will ultimately satisfy your heart and mind. So with his wealth, his youth, his social status, his power, he came to Jesus and said, Is there something more? What about this eternal life bit? And he said, What do I have to do to get it? And Jesus said, Why do you call me good? There's only one good, and that's God.

Now, I missed that for years. I thought that for the moment it was a disavowal of his deity. He was saying, Only God is good, and I'm just a man.

But if you'll read the story and come to the end, you'll find that the end of the story is, he says, you'll get me. You remember last week he said, I am the bread, I'm the one you need. Now, if you want to understand the story, I think you have to link passages in Jesus with passages in Jesus.

He made a mistake that you and I make. One, we think that eternal life can be earned, and the Scripture says that eternal life is a gift. You'll never deserve it.

God gives it. But the other thing is that we think it's a thing, and if we can get it, we can bank it until we need it. And then when we get before God, we can drag it out and say, See my past? Let me in.

But Jesus said something very revolutionary, and we've missed it. He said, This is life eternal, that they might know you, the one true God, and me, Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. So that according to Jesus, eternal life is knowing God.

It's not being a member of the CNMA church. It's not being a Christian by identification as you identify your religious preference. It is to know God, and to know Jesus Christ.

So you see, when Jesus said to him, You've got plenty of goods, there is one supreme one who is better than all the goods, the good God, and you need him. And if you know him, that will be eternal life. Now, the young fellow looked at him and said, Okay, what do I have to do to get eternal life? He said, There are only two things you need.

Now, I've come to like that. I hate complicated sermons. If I've got more than three points in a sermon, I can't even remember my sermon.

But here is one, most of us have at least three usually on Sunday morning, but here is one, the teacher of all teachers and the preacher of all preachers, he said, There are only two things you need to know. Now, I can, at least I can remember two things. So what are these two things that you have to know to have eternal life and to know God? We get lost in the details.

Back off from the story and look at the story from a distance and notice the two things. The first detail, or the first one that gets lost in detail is this. He said, You know the law.

Keep the commandments. And the young man said to him, Which commandments? So Jesus started rattling off. Now, why did Jesus say to him, If you want to know God, you have to, you have to know the law and keep the law.

We make a mistake there. The same way we think that eternal life is something you can earn. If you work hard enough, you can get it and then you'll merit life eternal.

Or else we think it's a thing that you can get in deposit. We tend to think that the law is a ladder to be climbed. And if we will just set that ladder up and climb it may be tough, but if we keep working at it, work hard enough, the higher we climb, the more worthy we are.

Now, I think that's a misunderstanding of Exodus, of Moses, and I know it's a misunderstanding of Jesus. What's he saying? I've come to believe that if you back off from the trees and look at the woods, what he's saying is this. Can you live happily under an authority outside yourself? Because, you see, laws are to be obeyed, and the law is to be obeyed, and God's law simply makes God, God and lets him be who he is.

And that's the last thing we want to do. You will remember that the serpent said to Eve in the garden, If you eat that fruit you'll be like God. You'll be in charge of your own destiny.

And that's the great tragedy. We get what we wanted. He gives us what we wanted, and then we find it's death.

We become God. I make my decisions. I make my choices.

I run my life. I'm God. But there's something about it that you take one look and say, He can't fill those shoes.

So Jesus says to the rich ruler, You've been running your life. Now, are you willing to let God be God in your life? There's the law. Will you keep it? Will you establish God is God? That's hard.

You will remember the rich ruler looked at him and said, These are tough. Can anybody be saved? And he said, Well, it won't be easy, but God can even save you. And that's the beauty about it.

God can save anybody if you let him. But it won't be easy because it's counter to our sinfulness and our self-centeredness. You see, I want to run my own life.

Lee Fisher at Asbury tells a story about, at least he used to tell the story, about the little boy in church who couldn't see what was going on, and he stood up to the embarrassment of his father and gaped. And as he did, the father said to him, Sit down. And the boy sat down and in a minute he was standing up again.

And the father said, Sit down. And the boy did, and in a minute he was standing up again. And the father reached over and put his hand on his head and pushed him down and held him.

The kid sat that way for a moment and looked up and said, I'm standing up inside. And it isn't natural for us because of our sinfulness. There is something passionately forceful within us that causes us to want to clutch our lives and hold on to them and push God away so he can't even be God in our lives.

But you see, if God can't be God in your life, you don't have God. And if all life comes from God and you don't have God, you cut off the connection with life. And how can you have eternal life if you shut out the source of life? So the first thing you've got to do is let God be God, Jesus says.

And the fellow deceptively said, I've kept those from my youth. That's what we tend to say. I'm not doing such a bad job.

I'm a pretty good guy. That isn't the question. The question is, do you have God? Do you know God? But the fellow said, what do I lack yet? And Jesus said, if you want to be complete, go, sell what you've got, give it to the poor, come take up your cross, follow me.

Now if we get hung up on the law and think it's a ladder to be climbed, and if we obey it we'll merit it, merit salvation, we get hung up on this one. Because he said to this particular young man who was rich, he's not going to say to me what he said to the young man, because I'm not rich. He's going to hit me somewhere else.

He's not going to hit me at my money. I'm a preacher, he wouldn't get very much. Why fiddle with my money? He's going to fiddle with something that's more significant in my life.

He may fiddle with something much more significant than money in your life, but he's dealing with a rich man. He says, go sell what you've got, give it to the poor, come take your cross and follow me. And do you know what we do? We get involved in talking about lifestyle.

Now I believe there is a simple lifestyle as a Christian, but don't base it on this passage. There's nothing wrong with money. The problem is in the university with you and me.

What's wrong with the people that have money? So money is not an evil in that sense. But he says, go sell what you've got, give it to the poor. And we say, ah, if you give everything away and if you do a lot of works of charity, see, we're back to working and earning it again.

You know, every time you do charitable work, you feel good. Feeds your pride. We're earning it.

Jesus said to him, sell what you've got, give it to the poor. That's not a way to get saved. That's a way to get the obstacles out of the way so you can be saved because wealth can be a substitute for God.

Go sell what you've got, give it to the poor, pick your cross and then come follow me. You remember what we said last week? And because he says, if you get me, you remember that first question you asked, fella? You wanted to know how to get eternal life. If you get rid of the obstacles and get me, you'll have eternal life.

But now it isn't easy to follow that. But let's get away from the trees and look at the woods on that one. The forest.

That second part about selling what you've got. Do you know what I think he was saying? Can you come to the place where you can live joyously for somebody outside yourself? Isn't that interesting? Sounds radical, doesn't it? And it is. It's as radical as Christ.

Can you live joyously for somebody outside yourself? So you've got two questions. Can you live joyfully under an authority outside yourself? And can you live joyously for somebody outside yourself? You see, what's being dealt with here is the whole doctrine of creation, that God is God and we're not ends in ourselves. We should let him be God, and our fulfillment is not here.

Our fulfillment is in another. You remember what one great man said, Lord? Augustine, he said, You've made our hearts too big, so big that they're discontented until they find themselves in you. We're made for you.

Hungry for God. Can you live for somebody outside yourself? Now, if it's hard to bend the knee and let him be God and rule us, it's tougher to come to the place where you can joyously live for somebody outside yourself. If we had time, I'd digress a moment and say that's following him, because you'll remember he said, I'm the good shepherd, and the good shepherd came to lay down his life for somebody else.

That's what Christ did. He lived his life and poured it out for others. And Jesus says, If you want to know me, you need to know what I'm like.

I want to know, can you live joyously for somebody outside yourself? Now, that runs counter to all of our self-centeredness, doesn't it? If the law hits our self-will, then the second one hits our self-interest and our self-centeredness. It's amazing how self-centered we are, isn't it? When you say he loves another person, what you think is that he gets joy in seeing that other person happy, don't you? If I love you, I ought to love to see you happy. I'll never forget when it dawned on me what I meant when I said to Elsie the first time, I love you.

And then when I got up the courage to one day say, I love you so much, I'd like for you to marry me. And since I love you, you ought to consider it. Now, what did I mean when I said to her the first time, I love you? It took me years to realize.

You know what I was saying? The realities behind that statement were, you know, I like the way she looks, the way she walks. I like the things that happen to me when I see her. I like even better the things that happen to me when we get close together.

And I like it even better when she smiles at me. And when we get real close, man, I'd like for that to last forever. You see, when we get real close, I'm happy, and I like to be happy.

And that's what I was telling her when I said, I love you. It's appalling, isn't it? When you look at the realities behind what seems like such a nice verbalization, and then come to the place where your joy is in

another's well-being, radical, isn't it? Now, you know, the wonderful thing is, I've decided he realizes how radical his claims are, and how disrupting it will be for the likes of me if I ever get his patterns working in my life. I'm going to have to have help.

You notice what the rich fella said? Who then can be saved? And Jesus said, with man it's impossible, and it is impossible. You'll never, on your own, without divine help, submit to God. You'll fight him all your life.

You'll hold on to your life. You'll clutch it. Without divine help, you'll never surrender and say, God, you run this show.

Now, the second thing is, without divine help, you'll never get turned outward, because we're turned in this way. Martin Luther called original sin to be said original sin meant that we're curved in on ourselves. You see, Elsie, when I first fell in love with her, became an object of pleasure for me.

I was thinking about myself. I believe God's given us two helps. He's given everybody one, and he's given everybody the basis for the second one.

And guess what they are? It's interesting that the first paragraph of Mark is about divorce, and the second paragraph is about children, and the third paragraph is this story. I read it for forty years before I saw the sequence. But do you know what I've come to believe? That God said, when I put the universe together and human life together, I'll put it together in such a way that this life hooks into the next life, and this life is preparation for that one.

And if a person will keep his eyes open while he's living this one, he'll be ready when the next one comes. And I believe he's built two institutions into our lives to get us ready so we can't miss it. Do you know what the first one is? It's the family, the parent-child relationship.

You know, one of the things that interests me about human life is, everybody ever bumped into has a mother and a father. There aren't any exceptions. God never permitted a single exception, except Adam and Eve.

One of the educations to me was that God permitted a single exception, except Adam and Eve in the beginning, and then he took care of that. But all the rest. It's interesting when you see one person, you know they're three.

Somewhere there was a mother and there was a father. And it's interesting that the supreme name used for God is Father. Not Judge, not King, not even Healer, nor Savior.

Because you see, before there was anybody to heal or anybody to save, or before there was anybody to judge, or before there was even any world to rule, there was God. And in the bosom of eternity, they didn't wake up in the morning and one person of the Blessed Trinity say to the other one, morning Judge or morning King, but one of them did say, Father, and the other one said, Son. Do you know the incredible theology in that? That the parent-child relationship is not something that can be used to say, God's like that.

But if you look at God, you'll find that you can say, funny, we're put together the way they are. So this is put together so we'll know how to live with that, with Him. And do you know the one thing that you can learn in the family that you will never learn anywhere else in society, certainly not as well, is that law and authority is not necessarily an enemy to your well-being.

That law and love can go together. Do you know nowhere else in human life do you see law and love sit in the same chair and incarnate in the same person? Isn't it interesting that the first person that ever says no to you is the person either who endangered her life to bear you, or it's the fellow who goes out and works foolishly 40 hours a week to feed your stomach and put clothes on your back. Both of them live their lives for you, and their fulfillment is in your well-being.

Their love, they're the first ones that look at you and say, no. Do you know the reason we fight God when He said, this is what I want you to do? We feel He's a threat. And we feel He's going to deprive us of something good.

And when God puts the screws on us, we say, if you loved me, you'd leave me alone. But do you know something? One thing I found out about real love is, it won't leave you alone. Many a time I wished Elfie would have left me alone, but she wouldn't, and she zeroed in and watched.

She loves me. I'm glad I had a Christian family. My father was a lawyer.

When I was about five years of age, six or seven, somewhere in that stage, those were early depression days, pre-depression days. I remember my father came in one night from work, and he had five brand-spanking new mint-conditioned silver dollars. Now, you never see those now, but they were huge things.

Shiny, bright. I was a little tight. Man, I hardly knew what a nickel was.

But to see a silver dollar, and I was, my eyes bugged on those. So I said, could I see one of those? So he put that big thing that was about as big as the palm of my hand in my hand, and I held that and looked at it and thought, man, I'm a millionaire. And then suddenly I got an inspiration.

And I looked up, and I closed my hand. And then I took another step and I put it behind me. And I looked at him.

And he caught on real fast. And he put his hand out and said, give me a dollar. I said, it's mine.

I got my first lecture from my lawyer father on property ownership rights and the implications. And before he got through, man, my hand was stretched out like this, and it was hot as could be. I was glad to get rid of it.

But you know, I didn't understand why he wouldn't let me have it. I remember the last time I saw my father. I was 20 years of age.

I was a senior at Asbury. It was Christmas time. And right before I left Lumberton, North Carolina, he handed me a check for \$500.

He said, will that pay you out for your A.B. degree? I said, yes, it will. And in those days it would. Don't you wish they'd come back? But anyway, I said yes.

He said, good. You know, when I looked at that, I knew something. I had never known my father to borrow money until I was a junior in college.

He was an old Scot and paid his way on everything. We lived economically. We had, there were five kids in our family and between 1929 and 1943, he financed 21 years of college.

And that 20th year, he started borrowing money to keep me in school. Handed me a check for \$500. Six weeks later, February 10th, a night watchman came to get me about 5 in the morning.

He said, you have an emergency phone call. It was my mother. When I heard her voice, she spoke and simply said, honey, dad's gone.

He was dead. I sat there at that telephone in Glyde Crawford dormitory at Asbury. That's the only phone on the campus that a student could get to and there weren't many in those days.

And when she said, dad's dead, something inside me said, first thing I remembered was the \$500 check. Do you know the next thing I thought? He's finished his work. His work's done.

I've got an A.B. degree in Prospect. Boy, that's egotism, isn't it? But do you know why I felt that way? He lived his life for me and four other kids and his wife. He lived it so totally that my first reaction was, he's finished his work.

I'm almost educated. That was ignorant, wasn't it? But that's the way some of us are. But you know, I knew something.

I learned in my home that no could come out of a heart of love. I never had any great problem getting in the kingdom. Do you know the people I pity the most now are the people who've never seen love and law in one person? Because the person who's never seen love and law in one person, when he meets God, will say he's the enemy.

And so when God begins to zero in, we'll fight him. Because somehow or other we believe they love us, they leave us alone, let us do our own thing. So God runs everybody through the family process.

You see, he wants everybody to be so much a part of his family and his sons and daughters that he makes them all. Before we become sons and daughters with a capital S and a capital D in the family with a capital F, he runs us through the little family, the family with a little f, where we're sons with a little s and daughters with a little d. And everybody you've ever met was a son or a daughter. Could it be that God was saying to you, everybody in the world is a son or a daughter because I want them all to be sons or daughters of mine? And this should get them ready for that.

Because law is not your enemy. When God's God is because he loves you. And if you make him anything but God, you're done.

You're without hope. He is our hope, our security, our savior. You go on with it.

Isn't it interesting? Now a person in this crowd is not either a son or a daughter. God says, I want you to be my son. I want you to be my daughter.

And that family should have gotten you ready for this one. Do you know there's a tragic corollary to that? I've seen some kids who came out of some Christian homes that had a rougher transition getting in the real family than some kids that came out of non-Christian homes. Because do you know I've seen some non-Christian homes that were more Christian at this point than some Christian homes? I'd like to ask you if your home's getting your family ready for the real family.

There's no magic in the gospel. And when the Bible says, train up a child in the way that he shall go, when he's old he won't depart from it, there's no magic in it. You notice it says, train and the way that he should

go.

That's God's pattern where the family is structured. Earlier this morning I was reading Peter Berger's book on The War on the Family. He said there are two things every person needs in order to be a mature, stable human being.

One of them is a stable family structure. He says the enemies of the family call it authoritarian. But a stable family structure and the other is love.

Now that brings us to the second thing. One is, can I live happily under an authority outside of myself? Can I mean it when I say, Lord? Or when I say, God, I'll let you be who you are. The second is, can I joyously live for somebody outside of myself? Do you know, let me shortcut it, that's the reason I suspect that everybody in this crowd this morning is either male or female.

And I doubt if there's an exception. Most people seem to come in one class or the other. Now, I used to think that masculinity was macho independence.

Do you know what it means to be a male? It means you're not quite all there. It means the same thing as it means to be a female. You're not quite all there.

Do you know there's not a human being in the world that you can take and explain human beings? There's no typical human being. You've got to have two to get a typical one. Because half of us come in one type and half the other.

Do you know why I think he made us that way? I think he made us that way to let us know that our fulfillment is not in here. Our fulfillment is in another. Isn't it interesting how even in our day of anti-family, anti-marriage, pro-divorce and pro-free love and pro-alternate lifestyles, you can't get rid of marriage? I suspect Elizabeth Taylor will get married for what, the eighth time? And when she does, do you know what she'll say to the reporters? You don't have to be a prophet.

She'll say, this is forever. Because there is something in us that says our fulfillment is in another. And there's something in us that would like to believe it's in one other.

I'll never forget the first time I laid eyes on Elsie and thought about her, realized who she was, and heard her give her witness for Christ. I liked the way she looked, I liked the way she talked. I didn't realize she was a Yankee.

I was on a Monday night. Tuesday morning I went to work in the bakery at Asbury. Five o'clock in the morning.

I got through about eight, and I knew they'd put up the mail at eight o'clock during chapel, and chapel was over at 8.50. So about 8.40 I headed for the administration building. I leaned against a radiator in the administration building. I think about it when I walk down that hall now.

I leaned against it like I was part of the fixtures. And sure enough, there she came with all the rest of the students coming through that door, coming to get her mail. I can remember her walking straight toward me, and I acted like I lived there all the time.

She walked past me, turned to the left, walked down to her mailbox, leaned over, opened her mailbox, got her mail out. I can still tell you what she was wearing as she walked on down the hall and as she walked

around the corner out of sight. And you know, the ridiculous thing is, I'm sixty-four and I've been chasing her ever since.

I was eighteen years of age. How do you account for that? Do you know where my greatest joys in life have been? There, and in the byproducts that have come from it. One of the educations to me was, it slowly dawned on me it was more fun to give her gifts than it was for her to give me gifts.

That's ridiculous, isn't it? But it's true. I'll never forget what a shock it was when I found out if she was unhappy, I was miserable. And if I could make her happy, that was better than her making me happy.

And when she's happy, I'm happy. And when she's not, I'm in torment. Our peace is in others.

Could it be that God built us that way so that we would know that it was natural for our joy to be in him? Do you know what the scripture says the end of human history is? It's not a church service or an atomic disaster. It's the marriage supper of the Lamb. The scripture says we're headed for a wedding.

That's an interesting philosophy of history, isn't it? And that thing that oriented me toward Elsie is a parable of something within me that cries out for God. And what I know with her is symbol and what I know with him is the reality. Sometimes I hesitate to preach that when I know there are single people in the crowd.

But the beautiful thing about single people is they don't even have to fiddle with the symbol. They can go straight to the reality. Because the one our hearts cry for is God.

The same way there is built into your body yearnings which we call physical, there is in your psyche a hunger for God. That's where our fulfillment is. It's interesting the first miracle Jesus performed was a wedding.

That's the way he began his ministry. He ought to be interested in weddings. Most people are either members of one, by-products or all-today.

So God runs us through these patterns so we can understand his ways. That brings me to my conclusion. I have three or four questions I want to ask this morning.

One of them is, do you see the signs that he's built into your life? You see, Jesus came and they said, He's one of us. And we look at these signs and say, That's part of the scenery. Jesus said, You ate the food, but you missed the sign.

What about it? I'd like to ask you. Everybody here is a member of the family with a little f. Have you become a member of the family with a capital F? Are you a son of God, a daughter of God? Can you really call him Father today? It's through Jesus Christ and through Christ alone that we know him as Father. And when you come to know him, there will be something in your heart that will be an echo out of his heart.

And you will find your own spirit crying out, Abba, Father. The second thing I'd like to ask is, if you've got children, is your family conducted in such a way that your kids are going to move from the family with a little f to the family with a capital F? That is your solemn responsibility as parents. Is your family Christian? Are you enough like God that your kids will say, Yeah, faith makes sense.

I've seen somebody I could trust and count on. Thirdly, have you felt the movings of love in your own heart at the human level? Have you ever known the movings of your own heart at the divine level to where you

know that the one, the parable, is not the great thing, there is a greater? And do you know the one who is the lover of our souls? The fourth thing is, are you married? Is your marriage relationship of husband and wife such that you as husband teach your wife to love in such a way that it will be natural for her to love him? And you as wife, do you love your husband in such a way that he'll understand how Christ loves him? Our fulfillment is not in us, it's outside and preeminently in him. When we stand before him, is he going to look at you and say, How did you miss it? I'm sure that Pilate got his report on Friday afternoon.

They said, He's dead, and we buried him. And Pilate said, Well, we're through with him. But he wasn't.

And you and I will not be through with him. It may be that there's somebody here who says, I haven't come to the place where I've let the Lord make me a captive. But Lord, I want you to make me that today.

I want to let you be God. You become God in my life, even if I fight you. Don't let me win that one.

You win. Somebody here who says, I've never let God really become Christ, become the love object of my life. I never realized that my fulfillment was in him.

I'm willing to let him be the bridegroom of my life. That's what I want. So you want to say, Christ, become that.

If you want someone to pray with you about your covenant, the altar is here. Take advantage of it.

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