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Title: *Asking for a Friend - What Do I Gain?*

Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30

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If you've ever been on a trip, maybe to another country, one of the things that are common is somewhere on the trip you'll end up in some kind of an open-air market. And while you're there, it's expected that you will negotiate for a price. There are some people who walk in, and they tell you a price and you just say, oh, sure, I'll buy that. But generally, how it works is when you get there if you pay that price, you're an American tourist who doesn't understand how that all works. Because what you are expected to do is to negotiate, where you're expected to go back and forth. And so, you have this moment where you have to go back and forth.

And the only way that you really know that you get your best price is if you do the walk away move. Does anyone know what I'm talking about here? This happens in our country, too, in some negotiated open-air markets. But the walk away move is where you come to that moment, and you're like, no, I'm not doing that. And you start to walk away, and the vendor will say, no, no, no, I will give you the best price. And then they'll try to give you a better price and you'll have that moment, okay, maybe I'll do it now. Maybe when you get to that moment, you may or may not actually say that that's the best price. You may actually have a walk-away moment where you say, I'm not going to pay that.

And in any negotiation, there are times when you have a walk-away moment. If you go to buy a new house, you buy a new car, you go to the grocery store and you see what the price of eggs was a few months ago. You have maybe a walk-away moment and say I'm not paying that for that. That's too much of a price.

Jesus tells the story, and we've tabbed it, the story of the rich, young ruler. And when I say we, I mean people who read the Bible because of the stories told in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and in different accounts, he's called the rich man, a young man, a ruler. So, we call him the rich young ruler.

He comes to Jesus and he says, Teacher, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life? In Jesus' response, He says, you need to keep all of these commands. He goes through and lists a few commands. And the man basically says I've done that. And so, Jesus says, well, there's one other thing that you need to do. You need to sell everything you have. Give the money to the poor and then you can have eternal life. And this man has his walkaway moment. He says that price, that's too high. I'm not doing that. In fact, the text tells us that he went away sad because he had great wealth. So, he came to Jesus thinking I can negotiate my way to the kingdom of God.

Jesus hones in on his one area and says, here's the thing that you need to do, and the man goes away, and he's sad because he has great wealth. Now commentators have written about this and said Jesus was not making a universal for all time saying you have to sell everything and give away in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

And as a result, most people who read that in our day and age read it and say, well, that's just a metaphor for whatever your one thing is. And there might be truth to that to say we might all have a place where we want to walk away and say that's too much God. For some of us, it might be money. For some of us, it might be around our sexuality. For some of it might be around our time. It might be around an issue of obedience in some other area where we say, I just simply will not do that, but whatever it is, we tend to go there.

But before we go there too quickly, let me just push on the issue of money for a moment, and here's why I want to do this. Jesus honed in on money because money is often one of our greatest rival allegiances to the things of God. What we tend to do in our day and age is we tend to say whoever is richest, whoever has a little more than me. And so, I'm not rich. This person over here is rich because they actually have a lot of money. Therefore, I'm not really in this category of the rich person here that Jesus is talking to. I'm not in the same group.

But according to history, if you live in America, in the era in which we live, you are wealthier than 95% of the people who've ever lived in the history of the world which means you and I probably qualify as rich people, even if in most rooms you're in, you say other people have more than me. And what we tend to want to do is to make our money something that brings us happiness.

And here's a little research that was done recently. This was told about in an article in *The Atlantic* and they had an article "Does Money Buy Happiness?" And they cited a bunch of different sources. One of them was a poll from the *Wall Street Journal* and the University of Chicago. And what they said is that in the United States, there has been a steep decline in the last quarter century. So, in the last 25 years, the percentage of American adults who view patriotism, religion, parenting, tolerance, and community involvement is very important. So, what that means is 25 years ago, people said these were important. Now they say they are less important, and they went through a whole host of things.

Here's what they concluded. The only priority that tested that had a perceived importance that grew during the last 25 years was money. So, when they surveyed people, everything else went down, but money went up in terms of people saying it's important. And then they cited another study from Kellermann and Deaton that found that quadrupling of a person's income had an effect on well-being roughly equal to a mood boost of a good weekend. Think about that. You can get four times your income, and it'll basically have about as much of a mood boost according to this as a really happy weekend. Now, I don't know about you,

but I kind of think I'd rather try the four times income boost than the good weekend and see if I could fit the stat because money does make life easier.

But what this is teaching us or telling us, at least in part, is that money is not the be-all and end-all that we want it to be. And for some of us, it can be the walk away moment, the negotiating moment, where we say I'm not sure I can believe. And then the authors explain this. They said the difference between the median happiness and household incomes of \$15,000 and 250,000 is about five points on a 100-point scale.

So, Jesus challenges this man. He says you think your money's going to be everything. And so, he goes away sad. And the disciples are amazed, we're told. So, you have the emotion of sadness and the emotion of amazement. The disciples are amazed because they say how can it be? How can you raise the bar like this Jesus? So that it seems impossible.

And then Jesus says this, He says, with people it's impossible, but with God, all things are possible. And this isn't a statement of God can make a rock so big that he can't move it kind of a thing. This is a statement of saying the attempt to come to Jesus with a transactional mindset that says if I do certain things then God owes me eternal life, makes it impossible because you'll never be strong enough on the good side of that transaction that you can say now God owes me eternal life. Eternal life, the Kingdom, is a gift that God gives. It's not a transaction that we somehow make our way into.

Sometimes people hear that, and they say well, does that mean then that I can do whatever I want if it's a gift, and I can't meet the standard anyway, so it doesn't matter? But First Corinthians chapter six lists several different ways of living that aren't in alignment with God, and then it says, such were some of you. And what that means basically is that grace is not a free pass to do whatever we want. Grace is the reality of knowing that we haven't earned our way and yet, at the same time a recognition that God's way is ultimately better.

And I mentioned that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this story, and they don't actually give us the name of the man. And throughout the New Testament, there are often stories Jesus tells about encounters with different people. And when He tells the story, sometimes he gives a name and sometimes he doesn't. And I don't know if you've ever wondered why that is. And there might be a variety of reasons, but there's one account in Luke eight where two stories are merged together there.

There's a man named Jairus whose daughter has died, and he comes to Jesus asking Jesus to intervene. And then there's a woman whose story is intertwined with this, and she is a woman who's simply known as the woman who has an issue of blood. She's never given a name. And she had this issue of blood for 12 years. And what that would have meant, if you know somebody who's been sick for a long time, at some point your sickness becomes part of your identity. And her issue with blood would have meant that she would have been

socially unacceptable because she wouldn't have been ceremonially clean in her culture. So, she would have been ostracized socially, she would have had health issues, and she would have had economic challenges. This became part of her identity in many ways.

So, why doesn't Jesus give us a name for her? Well, after she touches him and she's healed, Jesus turns to her right before she's healed, maybe, and he says, daughter, your faith has made you well. What he does is he says you're my daughter. See, I think that part of the reason that we don't get names all the time in the stories is God wants us to know that the things that we build our identity on aren't our ultimate identity.

Here, the rich young man who had all this money, He wants you and me to read this and say that this man should not ultimately be identified by his money. The woman with the issue of blood is not ultimately defined by her disability. Her challenge is her hardships. And what that means is that you and I, as we come and think about our relationship with God, our best definition of ourselves is not how much money we have, how successful we are, how married we are, or how available we are, how many kids we have, if we're a dad or not a dad, if we are somebody who's sick, or somebody who has an orientation that we say this defines me, that you're not defined by any of those things, but you're defined by how God defines you. And what that means in part is that if you accept his identity, as you see, the rich man didn't accept Jesus' identity, then that was how he ultimately was defined. But the woman got a new identity - daughter. So, God, I believe is showing us something about our identity even in this passage. And as I said, the disciples came along and were astonished that Jesus didn't just say yeah, you make it.

And so, we've been in this series that we've called *Asking for a Friend*. We've been looking at these different accounts of Peter interacting with Jesus. And Jesus, after He does this, Peter comes up to him and he says basically this, we've left everything to follow you. What do we get now? I don't know about you, but if I had been in Jesus' shoes, I think I would have said are you kidding? Is that really your question right now? Seriously, Peter? Because I would have had that moment of my whole point here is that ultimately you don't make a transaction with me.

And yet Jesus answers the question. Oddly, this question is only asked in Matthew's gospel. Luke and Mark don't record the question. Now, sometimes that bothers people because they say the gospel accounts aren't the same. I actually think that adds to the credibility of the gospel accounts, because what it means is you're getting the story told from different points of view, and they include details that the other one doesn't.

And it's a little bit like this. Those of you who were at the Taylor Swift concert last night, if you were at the Taylor Swift concert, you're probably not here today. But if somebody were at the concert and they said, oh, there were 75,000 people there, and somebody else said, oh, there were probably 70,000 people there. That's not a discrepancy. That's people just kind of

saying, this was my experience. And I'm saying what it was. Or if somebody said, oh, she did this song, and it was included in the song list and somebody else doesn't mention it. It doesn't mean that that song wasn't done. It's just different points of view. And so, Matthew, by saying, here's what Peter asked, is probably saying here's what struck me in the conversation.

Peter basically said what do we get? And at this point, Jesus answers the question. And he talks about the kingdom of God here. You know, basically, what do we get to inherit the kingdom? And we see is that faith and action are not separated. But yet, Jesus goes ahead and answers and talks about these amazing benefits.

And here's what we see. The first benefit is this, of following Jesus. And this, I think, is a question that whether you've been a long-time person of faith, you're somebody who's trying to decide where you are in faith, or maybe you aren't sure you believe, that you have moments where you say is it really worth it? I mean, I have these walkaway moments.

And here's what Jesus does. He answers Peter directly, verse 28. He tells him about a great future renewal that he gets to be a part of, says this truly, I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the son of man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones and judge Israel. And this word "renewal" is the Greek word "paliggenesia." It appears here and in Titus, and it means to be, in a sense, born again or renewal.

And it has this idea of taking something and making it just spectacularly beautiful, renewed in completion. If you've ever watched one of those shows, that's the before and after show, the Property Brothers fixing up the property. And you get hooked on the moment of, look at that, that place isn't very nice. And then you see the transformation to the after, and you say look at how great that place is now. It's unbelievable. Those don't look like the same thing. And yet they came out of the same thing. That's the idea of this word. That God will take something and bring it to its original or even better than original splendor.

And here's the promise in the Scripture, and that is, if you follow Jesus Christ, if you don't make a transaction to say I'm trying to get from you, but you say God, I know you've given a gift and I will follow you, that you will participate in the renewal of all things, the new heaven, the new earth, the time when God will take what is and make it beautiful in our lives. So, there's that.

There's a second thing here, and that is there's a promise of a great future reward. Verse 29 says, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." The Bible's not shy about talking about future rewards. Sometimes what happens is we get in a mindset that says, well, I don't want to talk about the future. I just want to talk about now and what God does now. And I understand that. But notice that the Bible is not at all

apologetic about saying there will come a day when whatever you've entrusted to Jesus Christ, you will receive a hundred times as much. And notice it says, everyone. This isn't just some. Anybody who's trusting God with any part of their life, He says, I will give to you something that will be 100 times as good.

And that is not something just to gloss over because in the Bible, there's not this idea that we're all equal in the Kingdom of God, but that there are crowns. In fact, there are five different crowns mentioned in the New Testament. You can look that up and study the idea of the rewards of God.

And here's why I think this is important. Sometimes when you're in the middle of life, whether it's around money, whether it's around time, whether it's around obedience to an area that seems irrelevant, whether it's about an attitude, whether it's about saying, I will be positive about God's hand even in the midst of my suffering, what happens is you can get in a place where you say, this doesn't feel worth it. Maybe it's staying in a relationship that's been tough or working toward reconciliation in a relationship that's been hard. And what we need to do is we need to say there is a promise.

I remember when I was in high school, I got hired once by a farmer, along with a couple of my friends to pick rocks out of his field, and I thought this is a pretty easy gig. I think at the time he said, I'll give you \$100 for two days of work. And that was about right at the time for how much we were going to work in terms of hours. But what he didn't account for was how hard the work was. The rocks were heavy, it was sandy, it was dirty, and it was hot.

And so, we were picking rocks and carrying these rocks across this field all day long. And after about an hour or two, I quickly realized that I had miscalculated the reward of \$100 for those two days of work, and I wanted out of the gig very quickly. And so, I'm there working. I think the farmer realized it was disproportional, and so he ended up giving us, I think, an extra 20 for the two days, which wasn't enough.

And I had that moment where I thought, there is nothing that you could pay me that makes this worthwhile while I was doing it. But that's not true. It wasn't worth \$120. But if he had said, you know what, if you guys do this for the next two days, I'll pay for your college. I would have carried rocks for three days, four days, or weeks, because I would have said, that is worth what I'm going through today.

I think the picture in the Bible, of saying there's a future reward to those who serve God's purposes, is also saying know that whatever hardship you're walking through, whatever sacrifice you're making, whether it's with time, whether it's with your spouse, whether it's with resources, whether it's with faithfulness, that there's a sense in which you can say, I know that not only will I participate in the great renewal of everything, but I will be rewarded.

And then third, there's a great reversal that's coming. This is verse 30. This is almost an added odd phrase, it seems, it says, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." If you read through the Psalms, sometimes the psalmist asks the question basically, why do people who seem not to follow God seem to get ahead? And why do people who seem to follow God seem to suffer? And here Jesus just simply says, here's what I want you to know. Those who are first will be last and those who are last will be first. There is a reversal that is coming. So, every time that you have that moment of saying, has this been worth it? Where is God in this equation? You can say, I know that God not just will reward me in the future, but there will be a reversal.

There was a missionary couple that had served in anonymity in poverty overseas for their entire adult life, and they came back to America for their homecoming. And they were coming to New York. They'd come back by ship and had some of their stuff come with them. And when they arrived, one of the main parts of the city was shut down for a parade for a dignitary. And it inconvenienced them to have to go around, and they came back home, and nobody welcomed them. Nobody seemed to care. They had to fend for themselves to find a hotel.

And one of the one spouses said to the other, you know, it would be nice if somebody would have even cared if we were coming home. And the other one said, back to the spouse, we're not home yet. We're not home yet. You see, sometimes people will be exalted, and God says, I want you to know there will come a day when those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last. So, there will be a great reversal.

But there's one other thing I mentioned that this is told in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and they all include little different parts of the story. Well, in Luke's version of this, Luke says something that adds another benefit. And this, I would simply say, is that there's a great right now. That it isn't just a future thing talking about the renewal or the rewards or the reversal. But there's a great right now. Here's how Luke describes it in verses 29 and 30 of Luke 18. He says, "No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God..." Same as Matthew but here's the difference. "...will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come."

So, what does Jesus say? He says, not only will there be something in the future, but there's something in the right now for you. And here's what that means, I believe, and that is what do most of us want? The reason we want money is because we think money buys us security and it buys us opportunities for happiness. And to be certain, money can help with those things. I'm not suggesting that it doesn't, but as those surveys suggest, it isn't everything. What we want is what we think money can give us, which is love, joy, and peace. And in Galatians five, we're told that the fruit of the spirit is love. It's joy and it's peace.

I mean, think about this. Today is Father's Day. Here's something I can almost guarantee you about your dad. Wherever your dad is, if your dad's still around, your dad will gladly receive the spatula that goes on the grill or the extra polo. But that isn't really what he wants because he can go buy himself a spatula. What he wants is he wants to have his kids around him and appreciate him and to feel loved and to have kids to love. And Father's Day isn't unique. What we want is to say, I want to have a relationship with people who love me, know me, and that I can love. I want joy. I want peace. Those are things that come from the spirit of God and give us life in this age. And not only that, what we want is we want to know that God is at work in our lives.

One of the things that happens here at Orchard Hill is we have this prayer email that goes out. And if you're not on it and would like to be, just contact the church office and the prayer email just takes any prayer request that somebody has, and it sends it out so that everybody can pray about it. And if you haven't been on that, one of the things that's overwhelming in this church is how many intense needs there are. But sometimes when I get that and I pray through it, every time I get one of those emails, I stop, and I pray for the people who are on there and their situations. But one of the things that overwhelm me is how do people face these kinds of situations without the divine knowledge of God and without God's help.

See, the kingdom isn't just a future thing. It's a present thing. And inheriting the kingdom means that as you live with love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, and self-control, in this age, you help bring about the reality of the kingdom to people now and give them hope and bring the reality of the kingdom, not just individually with our behavior, but to every place where we have influence and every industry in which we work.

And when Peter says, we left everything, maybe he was right, maybe he was wrong. Jesus didn't try to judge whether or not Peter did. Notice that was to the rich young ruler where he said you need to give more. For Peter, it was let me give you some words of assurance. In another place, Jesus tells the story of the parable of great treasure. And that's where the treasure was buried, in a plot of land. It says one man went and sold everything he had so that he could gain that treasure. And he says that's what the kingdom is like for many of us. The kingdom is something that we say that's a nice add-on. But what I really need is I need my world right here, right now to go well. This is when you really get the kingdom, it will become all-consuming. It will become everything.

Jim Elliot, who is a missionary a couple of generations ago, was killed on the mission field. The people he was serving killed him. A few years before that happened, he wrote in his journal these words. He said he is no fool who gives the things he cannot keep to gain, what he can never lose. It's a little bit of what Jesus said to Peter. He says you may give up a lot now, but even now you'll receive 100 times as much in this age and in the age to come. You're not foolish. It's not ridiculous to say, I'm not going to walk away because there's nothing that I can give to God that he won't give back a hundred times as much.

Sometimes it seems like we're just picking rocks, carrying them across a hot, dusty field for a long period of time. But what the Scriptures teach over and over is that whatever you commit to God, whatever you give to Jesus Christ has been given to the safe place. You're not foolish to give what you can never keep, to gain what you can never lose. So, when Peter asked this question, Jesus affirms Peter basically and says you won't outgive me in your life.

You know, I don't know where all of us are here today. I'm guessing that for some of us, our challenge is money. The idea of giving a portion of our money to God, for God's purposes, seems daunting, and we make excuses. We say I have too many bills, too many loans, or too many challenges. I can't. For others of us, it may not be that. It may be a private habit, that it feels like it doesn't hurt anybody, doesn't affect anybody. It might be something around the way that we invest our time. It might be reconciling a relationship that's broken. But we have this place where we say, I think I'm going to walk away. It's too great a price. And Jesus just comes around and says, it may seem that way today, but it isn't because you're not foolish to give the things you cannot keep, to gain what you can never lose.

I just want to say, if you're here today and you've tried to approach God as a transaction, meaning God, I'll give you an acceptable thing so that I can get eternal life. I just want to reiterate that Jesus' teaching is you can't give enough, and the price is too high, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ. And you can receive that by acknowledging that you don't have enough to give. And Jesus has done for you, what you can't do. And if today you have realized that even though maybe you've from an eternal standpoint, been able to say, I know that Jesus has died for me, but you want to go back into that market and try to keep negotiating specifics. Maybe today is just your day to say, God, I am going to trust you with the things that it's been hard to trust you with because I know it's not foolish to give it to you.

Let's pray. Father, I asked today that you would help each of us to see what you were teaching to Peter and the disciples in this moment, that our deepest, best identity will be in you, not in the things that we cling to. And that when we give to you what we want to cling to, you give it back in ways that exceed our expectations. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.