

Good morning! Do you ever find following Jesus to be challenging? If you're doing it right, you probably do. Following Jesus often means *not* following something else. Jesus often offers us uncomfortable choices. He goes places we don't want to go. He wants us to spend time with people we don't like. He makes us choose how we spend our time and our money, sometimes in ways that are inconvenient. As my friend Bill Beers said many years ago, "Jesus doesn't want to be the icing on your cake---He wants to *be* the cake." This morning, let's look together at a familiar scene in Matthew's Gospel account that may help us to put this into perspective:

Someone came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" "Why ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" the man asked. And Jesus replied: "you must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself."

"I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?" Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. **Matt. 19:16-22**

You know this story. I believe that this young man was sincere. He believed he had kept all of the commandments. He was clearly living on the surface of his life, though, and was not in touch with his own heart. By the way, this is much like you and me. We are doing what we can to "keep the rules" and yet our deceitfully wicked hearts betray us. Jesus told this young man to go deeper. First, he had to dispose of his wealth (his main idol). Then comes the most interesting part (to me) of the conversation: Jesus invited him to join the little group of disciples who traveled with Him and depended daily on the generosity of others for food and shelter. Jesus wasn't asking this man to become more active in his home congregation or do something religious---He was asking him for a complete life change. In the Gospels we see Jesus, seemingly spontaneously, invite people He encounters to come with Him and they do, becoming the group we usually think of as The Twelve. This young man, when faced with this life choice, did not. I wonder how I would have responded to this invitation. Would I drop everything, sell everything, quit my job, and travel with this itinerant group that was traveling with Jesus? What about my retirement pension and my health insurance? What about my family? What about you? What would you do?