

November 9, 2025
Paul Purdue preaching

"What good deed must I do to have eternal life?" is the kind of question church folks ask.

Did you notice, Jesus does not answer with a creed or confession of faith? Jesus answers *"if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."* It is a little thing but, did you notice that Jesus said *"If you wish to enter into life"* not *"eternal life"*? The rich young ruler asks about eternal life, but Jesus answers: *"if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."* The Apostle Paul believed that our life with God begins on earth as we open our hands and our hearts to God. Over and over again, Paul speaks of *"Christ living in you- the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1)

"If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Keep the commandments. The rabbis identified 613 laws, so aren't you glad the rich young ruler asked *"Which ones?"* Jesus cites 4 of the Ten Commandments, *"You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother."* Jesus leaves out *"do not covet"* but adds Leviticus 19:18 *"you shall love your neighbor as yourself."* In a few weeks, as you pass around the turkey and the pumpkin pie, someone may tell you that *"you can't pick and choose which scriptures to apply"*. You can- Jesus did. Jesus picked 5 commandments from the 613 ignoring bans on cross-pollination, pork barbique, worrying over unmarried folks kissing on the mouth, and 608 other rules. I am not sure what to make out of Jesus not mentioning the first 4 commandments: *no other gods, no idols, treasure God's name, and keep the sabbath.*

The rich young ruler answers *"I have kept all these; what do I lack?"* I sympathize with the rich young ruler. They are following the culturally prescribed methodology to achieve happiness. They keep all the rules. They are active in their congregation, work at the food bank, give generously and try to do right by neighbors. They show up early, stay late, and out hustle the competition. They're truthful, faithful, respectful, ethical, honorable, decent: model members of the church and the chamber of commerce. And yet they feel empty: *I have kept all these rules; what do I still lack?* Are we so courageous as to ask God and ourselves: What do I lack?

Jesus said, *"If you wish to be complete, whole, perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."*

Connie and I were the third owners of a 16 foot trihull boat. Old Blue had a 75 horsepower motor that drug me a half mile before I could get up on one ski. 15 years in the driveway dulled Old Blue's once sparkling gloss coat. Dad helped me patch a 3 inch crack in a hull seam with copious amounts of Bondo. Thirty years ago, long before children, Connie and I shared a lifetime of laughs on Kentucky's rivers and lakes behind Old Blue. One Saturday, after skiing all morning we headed to the marina. As we pattered through the no-wake zone, Connie and Ruth lounged on the front deck somewhere between sunbathing and sleeping. A group of young guys came boogeying past throwing a small wake. Their boat cost more than our first mortgage. The guy driving my dream boat pointed and chuckled "nice boat". I hung my head, but my cousin Tom hollered out:, *"Hey, fellas, I noticed something about your boat"* All 7 guys looked our way as Tom torpedoed their bravado *"I noticed there are no girls in your boat"*. Their flex faded and they moved on..

Despite winning that round of class warfare, let me confess that too often I longed for a better boat instead of enjoying the one I was in. Craving 75 more horsepower kept me from completely enjoying Old Blue. Would our memories have been better in a bigger boat? I doubt it! However, carving more kept me from knowing how privileged I was to even own a boat and how blessed to have one with no boat payments!

"If you wish to be complete, whole, perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." I suppose we could have sold Old Blue, given the money to the poor and followed Jesus. The rich young ruler could literally follow Jesus. In 2025 our following Jesus is more figurative. None of us are literally going to walk the Via de la Rosa with Jesus. It is very difficult to live without any possessions. So how do we take this scripture seriously if not literally? What seems clear is that Jesus is telling us that our possessions will never complete us. If you want to be complete, if you want to be whole, know that titles, trophies, trips or anything will not fill the lacking, the void, the empty spaces in our souls. Do not live for possessions or just your people.

The Hindu Bhagavad Gita teaches that material possessions are the chains of the soul dragging us down towards hell. The things we strive to hold onto can steal our life- or at least our living. Our constant craving of bigger-better-more keeps us from being present. Our desire for our dream boat can keep us from enjoying the boat that we are in. Jesus invites us to divest, to release, to stop living like things can satisfy our souls' deeper longings.

In Luke 6, Jesus proclaims *"happy are the poor"*, perhaps because they (already) *"possess the Kingdom of God"*... Jesus continues *"But I say to you who are listening,*

do the right things even when mistreated. Treat all people in the same way that you want to be treated. If you only take care of people who are good to you, that does not make you a good person. Instead, do right by your enemies, lend- expecting nothing in return. Be like God's children, giving without expecting anything in return. God is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate because God is compassionate. ... Give, and it will be given to you. A good portion—packed down, firmly shaken, and overflowing—will fall into your lap. The portion you give will determine the portion you receive in return."

Jesus' words shake up the marketers and the markets. They cut against our cultural creed that if we could just get 25 more horsepower, if we could just win a few more games, if we could just get that next next-thing, if we could make that next level we would be complete. That is the lie the devil told Jesus in the wilderness, but it works on most of us, most of the time. (Matthew 3)

Our Old Testament teaching is a commandment, a series of laws, but more than that it is an appeal to our hearts. We know how to navigate the law with loopholes, so God appeals to our hearts, our soul, our humanity.

"Every seven year forgive all debts"

Imagine how debt forgiveness might change America?

Every seven years forgive all debts

open your hand generously

don't be hard-hearted

Don't be tightfisted

To the contrary!

Open your hand wide

generously lend whatever people need

But watch yourself!

Make sure no wicked thought crosses your mind

Don't look for legal loopholes to avoid debt forgiveness.

give generously to needy persons.

Don't resent giving to them

You must open your hand generously to poor people

We become generous by giving: giving is the only way we become generous. Perhaps we only find life when we begin to give it away, when we change the goals and orientation of our hearts from competitive consumption towards helping healing the

world. Now, giving out a sense of shame, guilt or duty may not release us from the hooks and chains of materialism, but when we open our hands and hearts, when we release our tight grip on things, we find God, neighbors, community, completeness and life.

"If you want to be complete" I'm pretty certain I'm not complete. I love shoes a lot and we are looking at a car to replace one that has a quarter of a million miles. If I was free from guilt and spiritually complete, I would not feel the need to justify car shopping by telling you about 225,000 miles and I have regretted many purchases, but I am pretty sure I have not regretted one penny that we have given away. In fact, I hope to give away even more. Jesus tells us that if we want to be complete most of us are going to need to give more things away.

Jesus invites us to be complete, to step away from the market's lies and live with open hearts, open hands, and unclenched wallets. Let us learn to give, to release our pursestrings, trusting God to use our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness to help heal our worlds. Amen