

# Discovering Gravity

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Date: 08 October 2023

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning. Today's reading is from Luke 18, verses 18 through 30. A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
- Why do you call me good? Jesus answered. No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder.
- You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. All these I have kept since I was a boy, he said.
- When Jesus heard this, he said to him, You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.
- Then come, follow me. When he heard this, he became very sad. Because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.
- [ 1 : 08 ]     Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. Those who heard this asked, Who then can be saved?
- Jesus replied, What is impossible with man is possible with God. Peter said to him, We have left all we had to follow you.
- Truly I tell you, Jesus said to them, No one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.
- This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So friends, let's pray together. Almighty God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment and this time.
- And as we come before you now, Lord, with our hearts open, please plant a seed in each of us. A seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray.
- [ 2 : 17 ]     Amen. Amen. So you ever notice how many of our childhood heroes fly? So we tell these stories all the time.
- Somebody's headed off. You know, we got the Superman story, the Wonder Woman story, Peter Pan, all kinds of others, right? And when we're a kid, we almost all like trying to fly or at least pretending in some way.
- There's something about that. Maybe it's how we just break free of the powers of earth, right? And we get to see things from a different perspective.
- We get to travel faster. Whatever it is, there just seems to be something about it that draws us. Because we just feel too trapped. A little too earthbound sometimes.
- We're going to spend some time talking about that feeling of being trapped. Feeling like we just can't shake off some of these things. Because what we're dealing with here is, of course, gravity.
- [ 3 : 22 ]     Now, when we get all science-y about it, most of us remember the basics from school. And we have some folks in here who do science for a living, so we're not going to try and out-science them.

But the key here is to understand what we're really talking about. Because gravity is something that we can't escape. I know we see pictures of astronauts and all of that, and we think that, well, you know, they've broken free.

And then technically that's not right. I mean, because that's not how gravity works. Gravity actually is a force that every single thing that has a physical component called mass has.

And it actually will go all the way to the end of the universe. It's just that what happens is, the further and further you get away from that thing, the less and less its gravity can impact you.

I want you to keep that thought in mind. That the further and further you get away from a thing, the less its gravity can impact you. Because this is a helpful way for us to try and understand some really important spiritual lessons.

[ 4 : 32 ] And that's why this is a series. You see, what's going on with us is we're headed into a conversation about stewardship and generosity. And immediately, folks' necks start to tighten.

People's stomachs start to get a little harder. It's because folk don't like talking about money in church. And I get that. There's reasons why folks don't like talking about money in church.

Because we love God a whole lot until God starts messing with our wallet. And we have so many images in our culture of churches that have been corrupt and churches that seem to put emphasis on the wrong things.

Pastors with private jets. That's not me, by the way, in case you were wondering. No, we don't do that here. But we also know that there's a real world out there.

And when we hear some of these things about how we could be more generous and we hear churches appeal for greater giving and that sort of thing, it hits people kind of in the gut.

[ 5 : 41 ] Because people are like, well, I'm doing the best I can and I love God. And none of that is being challenged. But I think we want to hear it in a fresh way. I think we want to think about this from a different kind of perspective.

Because when we start to think of this in terms of what we're going to call gravity, maybe we can understand why God calls us the way God calls us.

And that's what we're talking about today. You know, see, this gravity thing is kind of weird. Because even though we can put it in big science-y terms, the challenge here is that we really don't understand a whole lot about how gravity works.

I mean, gravity goes all the way back to Isaac Newton. Now, he didn't discover gravity because certainly gravity was around before Isaac Newton. But he's the person who actually put it into some science terms that started to make it make sense.

Some of you probably heard the legend. Anybody heard the legend about how Isaac Newton discovered gravity? It says that it was an apple that hit him in the head. Now, he said it like this.

[ 6 : 52 ] That he had told a guy who wrote one of his biographers. He'd actually told the story this way. And this is in 1752. It says, After dinner, the weather being warm, we went into the garden and drank tea under the shade of some apple trees.

He told me he was in just the same situation when formerly the notion of gravitation came to mind. It was occasioned by the fall of an apple as he sat in a contemplative mood.

Why should that apple always descend perpendicularly to the ground? Sounds like 1752 English, doesn't it? Why should that apple always just keep falling straight to the ground?

And thus, the whole conversation was born. Now, he had actually thought of this a few years before that, but this is when he told the biographer about it. Now, what does this have to do with us?

Because when we start thinking about this gravity deal and the impact of gravity on our life, how it holds us on place, how it keeps us where we are and we don't get to fly the way we'd like to fly, the challenge for us is what is it in your life that has you in its grip and keeps you from getting to where God hopes you will go?

[ 8 : 13 ] That's the force that we want to talk about. Now, that can be different for each of us, but what we're going to talk about is an idea called financial gravity.

This is part of a book called Defying Gravity, which is where we get this series from. It was written by a pastor named Tom Berlin. Tom is pastor of a very highly vital church outside Washington, D.C. in Virginia for many years.

He was recently elected a bishop in the United Methodist Church, so I need to call him Bishop Berlin. But that being said, it's the idea of how these things keep us in place, how these things attract us.

And as we said, remember, everything has some of this, right? So there's a pull that's taking you one way. And then on the other side, you got God who is trying to draw you another way.

And the question is, how will you respond? How will you respond? See, when we think of it this way, we got the perfect story.

[ 9 : 31 ] Jesus teaches us about this and talks about this, and you heard it this morning. This story of the rich young man is one in which we see the power of financial gravity.

Now, most of us are familiar with this story. And we have this guy who comes up to Jesus, depending on which version of the story you get, because it's in multiple gospels. He's either a ruler of some kind, but they all agree that he's rich.

And so he comes up to Jesus and he asks, good teacher, what must I do to have eternal life? That's an interesting question in and of itself, right? Especially when you hear the rest of the dialogue, because Jesus says, well, what's in the law?

You know the law, right? And he says, yes. Jesus says, okay. And he says, I've done all of that stuff since I was a boy, which kind of makes you wonder why he has to ask the question. I mean, if you've got this and you've been doing it since you've been all these years, then why do you even need to ask?

Here's why. It's because even in his own heart of hearts, he's probably aware that something's missing. The obedience matters.

[ 10 : 45 ] The understanding the rules and following the rules is important. But there's something else to this. And that's important for us.

Now, Jesus, in Luke's version, it's an interesting thing. He says, you still lack one thing. You notice he never actually says what the one thing is. He says, you just lack one thing. What he does is he gives them a very clear set of instructions and then the one thing kind of becomes obvious.

Go take all you have and sell it. Give the money to the poor and then come and follow me. Now, that story hits hard.

And the reason why we can sort of look at that story and then get all the way to the end and kind of just go, can't even imagine why he would walk away from Jesus. Right?

But the problem is we all face the exact same thing all the time. It's just hard for us to admit it because we can kind of separate ourselves from this story because, A, we're not living at the actual time.

[ 11 : 56 ] B, most of us don't think Jesus has said, we'll sell everything you have. So we don't really hear the story like it's directed at us. But in many ways, it's still the exact same problem.

Because this young man, when he's confronted with this, despite his desire to figure out what's missing, his desire to know how he can be certain that he's got eternal life, when he feels that this is what it's going to take, he just says, I can't do that.

And that's why Jesus says what most of us are familiar with. How hard is it for the rich to enter into the kingdom of God? Indeed, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Now, of course, Jesus is using a ridiculous example there. Ridiculous in the sense that he wants it to be an exaggeration. He wants everybody to get that. But that's his point, though.

Now, here's where we get this story wrong. We get it wrong in a couple of different ways. We get this story wrong because we think, we hear the word wealthy, we hear the word rich, and most of us go, well, that ain't me.

[ 13 : 17 ] Therefore, he's not talking about me. When, in fact, he's talking to all of us.

Because, whether you see yourself as wealthy or not, you are subject to financial gravity. Because whatever it is you have, whether it is you feel you have a lot, or whether you don't feel you have very much at all, the challenge is, how generous can you be with it?

And that's not about having millions in the bank. That's about what are you willing to do with what's in your hand? That's the rub.

And when we hear the question that way, because if Jesus had said, take all you have and give it to the poor and then come and follow me, how many of you would make the same choice as this rich young man?

And that's where it hits a little hard. because the lesson of the story isn't hard to get, right? Because Jesus is pretty clear.

[ 14 : 47 ] The problem for us is not thinking that he's talking about us. So how do we make sure that we get this?

That's where this notion of financial gravity comes into play. because this idea is, well, we got the real world, Pastor. I can't not buy groceries.

I can't not put gas in my car. I can't not heat my home, which everybody's feeling a little more cutely than usual today, right? But here's the reality, guys.

Jesus isn't asking you not to do those things. That's the way we've kind of just felt it land on us, but Jesus never said that. What Jesus is getting at is this, is that we love God.

We profess it. We sing it. We believe it. And in many ways, we put our lives to it. We love God. And we want to do the very best we can for God.

[ 15 : 57 ] The challenge for us is, are we in fact doing our best from God from God's point of view? See, where this gets weird is that we can say we love God and we will give what we will give.

But what Jesus is saying is, do you love me more than this thing? not, do you love me at all?

But do you love me more than that? And that's why it hit that rich young ruler square between the eyes. In other words, give that stuff up.

If you can give that stuff up and put it down and then come and follow me, fine. Because that shows that your heart's in a particular place. he wasn't willing to do that.

And the question is no less relevant, no less challenging, and no less real for all of us. Do you love me more than you love that?

[ 17 : 19 ] Whatever that is. And all of us have to wrestle with it. And see, and that's where that gravity thing comes in.

Because on the one hand, here's Jesus over here saying, hey, you can fly, you can be with me, I can take you to the very place you say you want to go. And then there's this other thing that's pulling on you, that's just got you in its grip.

And you're like, oh, you may want to, but you feel you can't. And that's the conundrum.

That's what we're fighting. How do we get there? How do we break free of the pull of those things?

That's what we're going to be talking about over the next couple of weeks, but I want you to hear a couple of things now. Because this is not a bad news or a less than hopeful message.

[ 18 : 26 ] Because it is a very hopeful message. Because the thing that we want to get away from is thinking about our stewardship in terms of guilt. We want to get away from the idea of thinking about our giving in terms of some big bad burden we just have to endure.

love God. Because that's the other way we get that story wrong. When Jesus says you lack one thing, the thing that's missing is that sense of how much this rich man really does love God.

God. And that's what we all have to get more in touch with. We do love God.

Nobody's questioning that. And we love God the best way we know how to love God. But when it comes to this idea of saying can I do more with my resources to show God my love, we get stuck.

And the thing is, the reason why this is still a message of hope is the fact that we know what love really looks like. We know what sacrificial love looks like.

[ 19 : 45 ] And that's the key. Because if somebody whom we love called us and said, hey, my car broke down and I need somebody to come and pick me up, we would stop doing what we were doing, no matter what it was.

And say, here, I will come and get you. That if somebody that we loved said, I need your help with this, we would give up something else and go and help them.

So we're not unfamiliar with this idea. We know how to do this. The hard part for us is actually thinking about Jesus the same way.

In other words, when Jesus says, look, I want you to help me with this. I want you to do this for me. And we go, uh, that's where we get stuck.

that's the one thing pulling us in this direction when Jesus is calling us in this direction. So how do we learn how to defy gravity?

[ 21 : 11 ] we've got to tap into a few different things. But one of the things I want you to sit and think about is this, as we come to the end of this message.

Is when most of us think about the people who have poured themselves into our lives, the people we love, the people who have loved us, and why they mean so much to us in our lives.

when we think about the legacies they left behind, the ways in which we go and wow, they did this and they did that and they did this and they did that. How do we make our stories like those stories?

I'll tell you one way we don't make our stories like those stories is by thinking that we have to hold on to everything. the more that we grip it in our two hands, do you think that we tell a story that other people go, man, she was so generous, she was so kind, it was amazing the way she would just spend time with you, or she was always here doing this, or she was always helping someone.

Do you think that's a story that's rooted in this, or a story that's rooted in that? we know what this looks like.

[ 22 : 39 ] How do we help ourselves do more of it? Because it's not that you're not doing anything. The question is can you do more of it?

That's what we're working on. We need to learn how to defy gravity. and because we have received it, because we know what it looks like, let us indeed help the world understand.

Remember I told you why people just have a problem with this so much? It's because people have these images of churches and they have these images of folks who wear that jewelry around their neck and wear those t-shirts.

It's because we say all these things and we do some other stuff, but imagine what would happen when the world saw us being known for how much we were doing for others, how much we were giving away, the ways in which our love was tangible in other people's lives.

That's who Jesus is calling us to be. notice in the story, he didn't just say sell what you have. What did he say? He said sell what you have and give it to the poor.

[ 24 : 08 ] That's what this is about. So let us get ready to take this journey together. Let's get ready to figure out how to defy gravity because you serve a God who is more than abundant.

you serve a God who is more than generous and he's inviting you to do the same. Amen and amen.

Loving and gracious God, we thank you that you have shown us what the meaning of love is, that you have given and given and given time and time again. You know how we struggle.

You know how we will put ourselves first. You know how we think that we have these needs that we have to hold on to our things for. But Lord, you have shown us that the truth is that by giving away we become rich.

The truth is that by being generous we show love. Lord, help us to work our souls and our hearts and our spirits into that place.

[ 25 : 17 ] that we can love like you love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen and amen.

It is important that we let God reign in us, not only in our time, not only in our talent, not only in our efforts, but also in our giving.

When you think about how you might live the reign of God in your life this week, we have several things going on. Of course, we have more fish fry need, as you heard me talk about during our prayer time.

There are the clipboards in the back. There are also other opportunities to serve besides the cleanup crew, the breakdown crew. So please pay attention to those sheets, talk to Mary, and find out other ways you can be in service.

And even if it's not this Friday, think about the other Fridays we have coming up. Also, as you spread the word, we're doing something new this week for the first time, that we're also going to be able to enjoy some incredible music as part of our fish fries because the band will be playing for us.

[ 26 : 18 ] And so spread that word as well. So we also have Bible studies coming up this week. So if you are interested in our question, Jesus asked Bible study, you don't have to have been to previous weeks in order to jump into the middle of this one.

So if you're interested, please check with me and now we can talk about making sure you have what you need. There's also a feeding hope meal this week. Sandy's got some stuff in the bulletin that she's looking for and also folks who want to come out and help on Wednesday.

So if you are able, be a part of that great ministry as we help feed some unhoused people downtown. There's plenty going on. Your bulletin and the website are resources for all of it. So please use those sources of information as they will help you figure out how God is calling you to be of service.

Now let's receive our benediction. Lord, help us to defy the gravity of this world that we might break free and fly closer to you as you draw us to that place you would have us be.

And now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer, may God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

[ 27 : 30 ] Amen.