

You Can Change, Part 2 | Identity Change

Sunday, January 19

Matthew 19:16-22

Book recommendation: "You Can Change" by Tim Chester

Introduction

- Levi's trip to the hospital
- Levi had to muster the courage to face the path of pain in order to become whole.
- Last week, I proposed that perhaps a better word to use than change is strength. After all, when we talk of our desire to change, what we mean is that we want to grow strong in areas where we are weak. Areas in which we compromise. Areas in which we are prone to collapse under the weight of temptation. Areas in which we give in far too easy.
- Another word I'd like to add to the concept of change - that further develops the idea of strength - is wholeness. In the same way that my son had to embrace momentary pain in order to walk in wholeness, so do we with our habits and negative emotions.
- I submit to you that maturity - one of the signs of growth that you should be looking for in your life - is whether you are willing to embrace pain in order to experience enduring wholeness.
- **Mature people discern whether their lives are heading towards health or dysfunction and make changes accordingly.**

Prayer

Text: Matthew 19:16-22

16 "And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

- From the outset we see the mentality of this young man.
- The good life is achieved by good behavior.
- And he is focused on himself. Jesus is a way-shower rather than *the way*.

17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

- Watch Jesus’ response to him, how he walks this young man through the gospel.
- And watch how he seeks to change this young aristocrat by changing his assumptions about the good life.

18 He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

20 The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”

- Now go back and consider his initial question, ““Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”
- This wasn’t the question asked by a spiritually lethargic person attempting to do the bare minimum to please God. He was a very religious man. He was honorable and noble. He would have made the perfect son-in-law. He would be a fantastic church member, probably a very generous one, at that.
- Now put yourself in his shoes. Can you imagine being the kind of person that can actually say, “All these I have kept?” Many of us think that if we could put together the complete life that we would be satisfied. “If I could balance my home-work schedule...If I could be kinder with my words...If I could replace my overabundant intake of entertainment with more reading and outdoor activities with my family...If I could stop, once and for all, visiting explicit websites...then I would be whole.”

- The truth is that this young man couldn't say that he was satisfied. There was a hollow pit deep down in his stomach that ached. Every righteous act, healthy habit, and charitable deed...disappeared.
- And this is Matthew's first lesson as he communicates the gospel to you and me:
Being a well-rounded, charitable, obedient, disciplined person with good habits does not satisfy a deeper, God-ordained longing in our souls.

21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

- As a young aristocrat, he probably inherited his wealth and status, which made it that much harder to deny. He didn't know any other life. His wealth, privilege, and social status were his identity. And Jesus told him he had to leave it.
- Does Jesus direct him to sell his many possessions because he is harsh and wants us to suffer? Because Jesus is *against* wealth? Because Jesus simply doesn't want us having a good time? Or, because, as we all know, Christianity is predisposed against excitement of any kind? Of course not.
- Jesus is our Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). And he, the Messiah, was attempting to shepherd this lost Jewish lamb away from the death that blinded him back into the fold. And in his case, this death was his status. More particularly, his love of his status.
- Some people say that he was simply materialistic or greedy, but I think that's an oversimplification. We've already seen he was scrupulous at keeping the Law. But as a young aristocrat, he probably inherited his wealth and status, which made it that much harder to deny. He didn't know any other life. His wealth, privilege, and social status were his *identity*. They were his comfort. His safety.
- What is your identity? It's what you identify with - or, better said, what identifies you? Your identity reveals whose you are, who you belong to.

- **If your life had a “made by” tag on it, what would it say?** This young man did all the things that a good, Jewish boy should do. Yet, his heart was far from God. Remember his first comment to Jesus had nothing to do with love for God, but rather how God could serve him in making his life better. This young man was already living the dream and he wanted to keep living the dream after he died. Besides showing him how to achieve this, Jesus was inconsequential. Could the same be said of you?
- It’s true to say that our churches are filled with people just like this wealthy young aristocrat. But its helpful to remember that none of us are not better than such people because, due to our sinful natures, we all have an innate tendency to betray Christ by allowing this world to mold us in its image.
- Before we can talk about change, we have to talk about identity. A change of identity. **Change is less about different behaviors and more about a new identity.**
- How do we know what our identity is? Our identity is whatever we run to when we are hurting. Our identity is whatever we run to when we are emotionally fatigued. Our identity is whatever we run to when we are rejected. Our identity is whatever we run to when we need healing. To calm us, to restore our peace, to bring order to our world when it is in disarray. Our identity is what helps us cope. **Our identity is found in the things that we can’t live without.**
 - Why do I run to overeating?
 - Why do I run to explicit websites?
 - Why do I run to alcohol?
 - Why do I run to codependent relationships?
 - Why do I run to all-consuming hobbies and activities to the detriment of my spiritual life?
 - Why am I so relentlessly unforgiving?
 - Why do I have a tendency to form ugly alliances with and against people at work or at school?
 - Why do I run to profanity and perverse conversation at work or school no matter how often I pray to God for forgiveness?

- Why does my mother or father have so much psychological power over me?
- Why do I keep going back to abusive relationships?
- Why am I so impatient with the ones I love the most, like my children?
- Why do I carry such powerful bitterness towards those who wrong me?
- Why do I always assign evil motive to the most inconsequential actions of others?
- Why do I run to shopping and spending money to the detriment of my marriage?
- Why can't I stop fighting with my spouse in front of my children?
- Why am I obsessed with what people think of me?
- Why do I have to always have to have a new car? A new phone? New clothes?
- These are behaviors that we all want to change, but if we don't figure out what feeds our identities, change is unlikely. **If we can't stop a bad habit, it's because we are still convinced that we can't live without it.**
- You see, when Christ called the rich young ruler to change his allegiance and begin following him, he was calling him to a life of wholeness. **When Christ calls us to lay down our idols, he is calling us to a life of healing and wholeness.** Jesus was trying to rescue him. But the rich young ruler couldn't wrap his mind around Jesus' command. He interpreted it as death rather than life. He was blinded by his idols.
- At the end of the day, it was a faith issue for him. And it's a faith issue for each of us. Will we choose to believe that, despite the momentary pain, Christ's way leads to enduring life? Or will settle for momentary happiness, naively deceiving ourselves into thinking that it will last forever?
- When it was all said and done, this good church-boy walked away from Jesus.

Closing

- Romans 8:29-30: **"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."**
- The reason we are to be conformed into Christ's image is because God wants to save us! That may seem obvious if you've grown up in the Bible Belt, but when I say he

wants to save us, I don't mean only that you may go to heaven. When the Scriptures speak of our salvation, they speak of life that begins now (note John 17:3). What God has in mind by conforming us to Christ's image is restoring us, making us whole and healthy people.

- This is why we say that change that isn't Jesus-centered isn't real change because it's me-centered. And this is why we say that we should preach the gospel to ourselves.
- Illustration: My words to my kids, "Remember who you are."
- Jesus wants you to stop interpreting this life and making life-decisions through the filter of brokenness and sin. He wants you to stop living out of the black hole of spiritual death and, instead, live for him.

Lord's Supper: Psalm 17:13-17

"13 Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!

Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,

14 from men by your hand, O Lord,

from men of the world whose portion is in this life.

You fill their womb with treasure;

they are satisfied with children,

and they leave their abundance to their infants.

15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;

when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.