The Tragedy of Idolatry, part 1

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Date: 22 October 2023

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Looking specifically today at a very well-known passage, but I hope one that will have a very clear and helpful meaning and application for each of you this morning.

I was talking to a young pastor a couple of weeks ago, and he was asking questions about what we would call expository preaching, where you just preach book by book, verse by verse, word by word, and let the word just stand and just proclaim what it says.
And he asked me what book I was teaching when I told him I was in Mark. And he said he had recently read through Mark, and he said, what do you do if you're preaching verse by verse when you come to passages about divorce and hell?
And I said, you preach them. And our model for that is that we simply want to say what Jesus said. We want to say what the word says. And our conviction behind that is that there is nothing in myself that should demand your attention.
[1:31] My thoughts, my opinions, my ideas are not inspired. I have nothing more than the same Holy Spirit in me that every believer has, nothing more than the same Bible that you have.

And so to come to church and to just hear the thoughts or opinions of a person would really give us very little profit. But our conviction is that the Bible is the word of God.
That when we read the Bible, we are reading the very revealed heart and mind of God for us. And we believe the Bible when it says that all Scripture is inspired by God, all of it profitable for us, helpful for us.
And as I mentioned in the last several weeks while we've been walking through the end of Mark 9 and the beginning part of Mark 10, there are some parts of Scripture that may hit us individually a little more strongly.
There are some passages that maybe touch a specific nerve for you that's not as hard for somebody else because we're dealing with your sin, not theirs.
[2:49] And then a few weeks later, it may be that Scripture confronts the other person on their sin. And what we want to do is just be faithful to just say what God said.

And as you do that, it's just staggering to me how timely God's word always is.
That because the Bible is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, that when you read the word and study the word and seek to rightly divide the word, what he has for us is just always right on time.
And so, as we look at this text today, one of the dangers of studying a text that for most of us we're quite familiar with is that we can approach it and assume, I've read this, I've heard this, I've studied this, I've taught this, whatever it may be, and to think that there's nothing here for us.
Now, I assure you, though, today in our text, there is something vitally helpful, important, and critical for every one of us.
[4:12] Jesus, just to remind you of what we've been looking at at the end of chapter 9, deals with the severity of sin, the reality of hell. Chapter 10 dealt with very personal things like divorce and remarriage.

Verse 13 to 16 dealt with the Lord, not only giving honor to children, but really it's more than that. It's a picture of how we come to Christ.
Just as we just have sung, we come to Christ with our hands empty. We're not saved because of our status or because of our resume.
We're not saved because of anything in us. We're saved simply by His grace. We come to the Lord with nothing in our hands, needy and helpless, and in grace find the salvation of God to meet our every need.

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And then we come now to verse 17. The rich young ruler. It says, He was setting out on his journey, and a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
[5:31] And Jesus said to him, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery. do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.
And he said to him, teacher, all these I have kept from my youth. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, you lack one thing.
Go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.
And disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. I want to walk you through this brief but deep conversation Jesus had with this man, and try to show you all that is happening here in this man's heart, what Jesus says, why he says it, and why what he says is so important for us to consider.
[7:00] First, we look at a question from a curious heart. A question from a curious heart. We see it in verse 17, as he was sitting out on his journey.

So Jesus has been here, as we've been looking at it in chapter 10, he's sitting out on his journey.
Remember, at this point in Mark 10, we're just right on the precipice of the events of Calvary.
In fact, when you get to Mark chapter 11, it's a triumphal entry. So we're just a couple of weeks before the crucifixion in the timeline of the life of Jesus.
Jesus is on this journey to Jerusalem for the events that will lead to the crucifixion. And as this happens, the text tells us a man ran up and knelt before him.
Now, you and I may read that and find that just kind of inconsequential detail, but it's actually quite an important part of the story to consider.
[8:01] We know from the other Gospels that this man is known to us as the rich, young ruler. Now, where do we get that description?

Well, Matthew 19 tells us that he was young. Luke 18 tells us that he was a ruler.
Now, what that likely means is he was a lay leader, a lay ruler in the local synagogue here in this area. He would have been likely one who would have overseen on their worship, who was reading the Scripture and what Scripture was being read, and he would have helped to be in charge of selecting who was going to come in and teach that day.
So we know that he was young, and we know that he was a ruler. And Mark here tells us in verse 22 that he had great possessions.
Luke tells us he was extremely rich. So when you put Matthew, Mark, and Luke together, we know he was very wealthy.
[9:14] We know that he was young, and we know that he was a ruler. He was a leader. He's the rich, young ruler. And as such, again, for us, we don't really see it.

But in the culture of the first century, for a man of his status, he does two things in verse 17 that were highly unusual. One is he ran to Jesus.
In the first century in the Middle East, dignified men did not run. For one thing, you would have to take that outer garment and lift it up and tuck it into the robe, and so you were exposing the bottom part of your leg.
That wouldn't be something you would typically do. For another, someone who had status and clout, they didn't run. The reason they didn't run is in their culture, if I am running to you, or running to an appointment, or running to an event.
But what I'm saying is that I need to change my schedule and my gate to accommodate you. And that's not how powerful leaders operated.
[10:34] They weren't in a hurry. You waited for them. For one who was wealthy and one who had power and one who had status and clout, they would not run, because that would be to say, I need to accommodate your schedule, your timing, and it would have been the other way around.

You wait for me. Incidentally, in Luke 15, on the parable of the prodigal son, it's part of why Jesus tells the story of the father running to meet the son.
It is an extravagant measure of grace. That's a parable. This is not. This man runs up to Jesus.

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That in itself is a bit strange. And now, not only does he run, but he kneels down before him. Now, this man, let's just, let's give him the benefit of the doubt.
I have no reason to assume that his motives aren't pure in as much as we can discern them at this point. He comes up to Jesus respectfully.
[11:49] He comes up humbly. Running and kneeling down before him was a tremendous act of humility. And I agree with others who have said that this man is not only an honorable person, he's the kind of person that you would be happy for your daughter to bring home to you.

He's successful. He's well regarded. He's influential. And we know from his brief encounter, even just in verse 17, he's eager, he's humble, he's respectful.
And he comes to kneel down before Jesus and he says, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?
And we can say this for him. If you're going to ask that question, if somebody came up to you and said, hey, I have a question about eternal life.
Who should I ask? You would say, ask Jesus. So, he's going to the right person. And if somebody says, I have spiritual questions, what do you think I should ask you?
[13:10] If I could ask him just one question, what's the best question I could ask him? Well, you couldn't do any better than to say, how do I get eternal life? He is asking the right person, Jesus, the right question.

And I think sometimes because of our familiarity with the passage or familiarity with some exchange in the Gospels, we can maybe be a little too quick to assume because we know the ending before we study it, that we may be too quick to judge them or condemn them.
But as such as we know so far, here is an honorable person coming to Jesus in humility, asking a question that you would want everyone to ask.
How do we find eternal life? And some want to press in verse 17 a little firm on what must I do, as if he's simply asking for something he can do in his own, and that probably has some merit to it.
But regardless of how we ask it, the question's a good question. What do I do? What needs to happen? Now what we know about this man is he's got some awareness, some understanding that no matter what he has, and no matter what he's done, something is missing in his life.
[14:41] I suspect that could be true for many here this morning. You're a good person. You're an honorable person. You're a kind, respectful person.

You're even a religious person, perhaps, because you're here. But something's missing.
Something's just not right. Something's just not fulfilling.
And maybe on your heart today is a similar question to what this man asked Jesus, what do I need to do to find real peace?
What do I need to do to find real salvation, real forgiveness? This is the question that the man asked, and it comes from a curious heart.
Something's missing. He knows something is missing. Now the question, though, is a bit interesting, at least at this level. When he says, good teacher, what must I do?
[15:44] The issue is, whatever this man thinks or believes about Jesus, if he sees him merely as a mere mortal man who is smart and wise, he's missing on who Jesus really is.

I suspect a lot of what's going on in this man's mind is whatever he knows of Jesus, he knows there's something unique.
He knows there's something different. Nobody has ever seemed to live with such peace and fulfillment, and Jesus had such a freedom. He spoke the truth.
And I think at least we can discern this, that this man looks at Jesus, and whatever he knows about him, and whatever he's heard about him, I think he realizes this man has a certain peace about him that has escaped me.
And this is a good man, and this is a good teacher in his mind, and maybe he knows some secret I don't know. Maybe he knows some kind of hidden path to peace, some kind of hidden thing to do that I don't know about, because he seems to have what I want, and no matter how wealthy I am, and no matter how much leadership I have, this man knows in his heart he's not fully fulfilled.
[17:14] Maybe Jesus knows something, some wisdom saying, some knowledge, some secret thing maybe that I don't know about, and if he's good, and I want what he has, maybe I can ask him, and he'll reveal to me something I'm missing.

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And so he says, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? That leads us secondly, to a response from a misled heart.
There is a question from a curious heart, and now we're going to get a response from him from a misled heart. But before you see that, Jesus' answer in verse 18 at first is a bit perplexing.
Jesus said to him, Now, at face value, I think we can admit together, that's a bit of a shocking response, not what we probably would have expected Jesus to say.
Good teacher, tell me, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says, why do you call me good? Only God is good. Now, let's be clear, and the context will help us to see this.
[18:33] I'll show it to you for yourself, but there are two things Jesus is not saying. Make sure you're clear on this. Jesus is not saying that he is not good.

When Jesus says, why do you call me good? Jesus is not saying, I'm not good. And we know that from not only the testimony of all the Gospels.
Let me just give you a couple of verses. John 8, 46, Jesus says, Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? In other words, he's saying, there is no sin in my life.
Jesus' own self-testimony is that he was sinless. So, when Jesus says, why do you call me good? It's not because Jesus is saying he's not good.
It's also a testimony of the Scripture. 1 John 3, 5, You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.
[19:37] So, Jesus is not saying he's not good. Secondly, Jesus is not saying he's not God. When he says, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. He's not saying that he's not God. The testimony of Mark makes that clear. Mark 1, verse 1, This is the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Mark 2, Jesus forgives sin, something only God can do. Mark 8, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the one of God, and Jesus affirms that.
So, Jesus is not saying he's not good, and he's not saying that he's not God. What he is saying to the man is, if your view of me is that I'm just a teacher, I'm just a good teacher, I'm just a prophet. If that's all you think I am, why do you call me good? Because the only one who is perfectly, completely, intrinsically good, the only one who is without any sin is God alone.
[20:58] So, if to you I'm just a man, even in your mind a good man, if I'm just a mere mortal man, if that's all I am, a teacher, a rabbi, a prophet, a miracle worker, whatever, if to you I'm just a man, why do you call me good?

Because at the essence of all things, only God alone is truly good. I think Jesus is trying to help this man to understand that you need to know who I am, not simply as a means to try to get something you want to do to be like me.
You need to understand that I am God and if you don't know who I am, then you can't know who you are. We can only understand who we truly are as people when we understand the holiness and the perfection of God.
God. Otherwise, we're going to go through life thinking that the world is about us and it's not. And the reason it's not is because you're not God and there is a God and that God who created all things, that God who is perfectly holy and perfectly pure, He is the one that everything in this universe revolves around.
And so, Jesus is trying to help this man to think not only about who Jesus is but also about this man's own inadequacy.
[22:35] Now, we have an idea of why that's necessary because this man's own testimony is He says, I've kept all the law.

He is quite confident in His own record. But when Jesus says first, why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. What He's wanting this man to understand, everyone else who would ever hear this or read this to understand is that you cannot be neutral about Jesus.
If you think Jesus is just a man, then when He claims to be God and claims to forgive sin and claims to be the judge of all things, He has misled you.
If He's not really God, He's just a teacher, He's just a man, then He has misled you when He claims to be God. But if He's right and He really is the Son of God, He really is the Godhead bodily, then He's no mortal man.

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[23:49] And He is someone that you must worship and follow. And what Jesus is doing with this man is saying, if you come to me with affection and admiration but not worship, you've missed who I am and because of that, you've missed who you are in your own need and inadequacy.

And so Jesus says in verse 19, you know the commandments. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and mother. Jesus loads up the law on this man. And what the law does is it reveals to us our own sin. It reveals to us our own weakness.
The problem is this man, the rich, young ruler, has everything that the world adores. Wealth, youth, and power.
This is everything the world craves. Everybody wants more money. Everybody wants to be young and healthy and strong.
[25:05] And everybody wants power and control. people. And this man seemingly has it all. I mean, we don't know his name. What we know is his description and his description is everything this world wants.

The rich, young ruler. What more could somebody want? And he's very confident in himself.
That's the problem. He says in verse 20, Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth.
I think it was C.S. Lewis who described people as being lost in their niceness. that's this man.
Humble, at least to an extent.
Humble in the way he approaches Jesus. Respectful, clearly striving to keep the law. Now, maybe he has overshot how faithful he's been to it, but this is a nice, noble man, and he is lost, spiritually speaking, in his niceness.
[26:27] And that may be true of you this morning. I mean, after all, you don't kill, you don't steal, you're at church on the Lord's Day, you check on your neighbors, you volunteer at school, you give some money to the church, you teach your kids to be respectful, and you too may be lost in your niceness, in your politeness, in your good neighborliness.

He was moral, he was kind, but moral, kind, benevolent people can often be the very hardest people to get to understand their need of salvation, because they are so convinced what they have done will surely be enough.
And you know where lost people who are lost in their niceness often are found?
In church. because that's where many nice, kind, benevolent, honorable people go.
And some of the hardest souls to reach with the gospel are people who hear it all the time.
[28:36] And they're lost in their niceness. Now, it may be that there's some of you here today who just hate the things of God, who despise the church, who have no interest in this at all.

That may be, and maybe you're here because somebody made you come. That's possible. That's possible. But I'll tell you what's highly likely is that today between our two services we'll have hundreds of people here, many of whom I suspect don't hate the church and don't despise what we're doing.
and actually are grateful for the contribution our church has made to your life and family. And so, in turn, you want to be a part of helping to repay that in some sense.
But it would be very possible that you are relying on what you've done to think that's going to atone for your sin.
And for a non-believer, an unconverted person, what you have to understand is the testimony of Scripture is that without faith, Hebrews 11 6 says, without faith it is impossible to please God.
[30:11] So, how nice does an unconverted person have to be to gain salvation? salvation? Well, it's a question with no answer.

Because without faith, it would be impossible to ever even get started on attaining that. And it may be this morning that you're a lot like the rich young ruler.
Maybe you don't feel wealthy, and maybe you don't feel real powerful, and maybe you don't even feel real young, but you do feel respectful, and kind.
And it may be that you have found yourself convinced that in your kindness, or in your niceness, surely that will be sufficient.
I take this man at his word that he's done his best to keep the law. The problem is he doesn't see his own weakness, and because he doesn't see his own weakness, he doesn't see his own need.
[31:26] And so his response comes from a misled heart, thinking that in himself, he can do whatever is required for salvation. And that leads us third to what we'll call a look from a pure heart.

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A look from a pure heart. Verse 21, and Jesus looking at him loved him.
Now, we need to consider this for a minute. because in our quest to be clear doctrinally and strong in biblical convictions, in our quest to teach theology and have sound doctrine as a part of our church and as a part of our families, it is possible to love theology and not love people.
And that's not the example we get from Jesus. This is an unconverted man, and Jesus looked at him and loved him.
He understands the religious system this man is tangled up in. He understands the situation he's in. He understands that he lives in a time where people have become very self-sufficient and self-reliant and very proud of their own spiritual achievements and accomplishments as far as they sense them to go.
[33:18] But the reality is this man is lost. This man is in trouble. This man is in serious danger. And Jesus sees this man, talks to this man, responds to this man, and he looks at him, and he has love for him, compassion for him, care for him.

Mark is writing his gospel, and his source is Peter. And if you think about the life of Peter, how many times did Peter mess up?
How many times did Peter say the wrong thing? How many times was Peter quick to speak in boldness and slow to walk in humility before the Lord?
If there was any disciple who knew the gracious, patient, compassionate, loving look of Jesus when you've missed it, it was Peter.
And by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Mark records this. No doubt in my mind, the human source that the Holy Spirit uses to make sure these words are recorded is Peter's experience as he tells Mark all that took place and says, you should have seen how Jesus looked at him.
[35:08] Because I know that look. Because I disappointed him too. too. Because I was quick to rely on my flesh too.

Because when the heat got dialed up the hottest, I denied, I even knew him. And I've seen his look. It's a look of compassion. compassion. It's a look of grace. And Jesus looks at the rich young ruler. Make no mistake, Jesus will cut him no slack. He will call sin sin, and he will expose this man's sin for exactly what it is.
But as he does that, here's what's in his eyes, and here's what's in his words. He loved him. And I can't help but wonder, and I ask this for my own heart, and I ask this for your heart, could it be that one of the reasons we are so slow to speak the truth in evangelism, if we're honest, could it be because we just don't love lost people the way that we should?
[36:33] could it be that there's a little bit in our life of, I've got it figured out, you should too, or you don't believe the truth, you'll get yours when you die.

Could it be that part of what we need to do is simply pray that we would love lost people more, and then we'd be willing to say whatever needs to be said, and then we'd be willing to engage in conversation, people we otherwise would just let pass by, then we would speak the truth, yes, but as the Bible tells us, speak the truth in what?
In love. This is a look from a pure heart, the heart of Jesus, looking at him, he loved him.
Now, if you think true love means only saying what somebody else wants to hear, then you've got to hear what Jesus says next.
We'll look at this next Lord's Day, Lord willing, but Jesus, who loved this man, had compassion on this man, is going to put his finger right on the raw nerve in this man's heart.
[38:06] So, if your idea is that if you love somebody, you just tell them what they want to hear, then you don't understand biblical love.

Biblical love does not fail to speak the truth. but if your idea is that biblical love means you only love people like you, and you have no compassion for those who are without Christ, then that's not biblical either.
Jesus loved this man, and because he did, he speaks the hardest truth this man has ever heard.
And I just want to remind you today, if you're a Christian, that if you really want to follow the example of Jesus, you need to look with compassion on those who don't know Christ.
Not hatred, not a sense of anger, but love and compassion. And the most loving thing you can do is expose their sin and remind them of their need for salvation.
[39:38] And if here today you're not a Christian, and you think for one second, that what you've done, or what you've accomplished, or what other people think about you, or how sincere you've

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been in trying to live a good life, if you think there's any hope in that at all, you need to understand that your greatest accomplishments done, if not with faith in Christ, Isaiah says, are as filthy rags.

of no use. Which reminds those of us here who are believers, that the only glory for our salvation goes to Christ alone.
And that if we've been saved by God's grace through the work of Jesus Christ, let's be quick to love those who need Jesus, quick to serve those who need Jesus, and quick to give them the truth they must know that God is holy, they are sinful, and only in Christ can we find salvation.
Next week I'm going to show you what Jesus says to him and why it's actually much, much deeper than you may suspect it to be. salvation. But before we gather back next Sunday to finish this conversation, let's leave for just a moment the rich young ruler, and let's consider our own heart.
If you're a Christian today, it's because God in grace has saved you and made you alive. we should be the most humble, thankful, grateful, obedient people on the planet.
[41:38] And if love is lacking in your heart, pray that you would begin to see people with the love and the grace and compassion that Christ did.

And if you're not a believer, I want to remind you today that there is no salvation anywhere else except the Lord Jesus Christ.
That if you would turn from your sin, believe in Jesus Christ, believe he is who he says he is, the son of God, the one who died for us, the one who was laid in the tomb, the one who was raised back to life on the third day, the only name under heaven whereby man can be saved.
If today with faith you would believe on his name and trust in him alone to be your savior, you will be saved. You know what I think the greatest error churches have made in the last 50 years, maybe more, is giving assurance to people who aren't Christians that they're converted.
if this man had gone to most churches in our country, they would, he would have been assured, you're in, you're good, you're nice, you go to church, you keep the law, you're good.
[43:20] And if this man had gone to most churches, he would have been just as lost, but now convinced even more he was good. Jesus loved him enough to say, whatever you've done, however high you've climbed the ladder, that ladder is leaning against the wrong object.

And you may make it to the top, but you are climbing the wrong place. You're getting nowhere. nowhere, your only hope, is in Christ alone.
And my invitation to you today, if you don't know Christ, is that this day, you would turn from your sin and trust in Jesus.
I want to ask you to bow your head and close your eyes with me as we prepare to worship through the Lord's Supper, a reminder of the sacrifice of Christ.
As our deacons make their way to the front, let me give you a chance, church, just to pray for a moment to confess your sin, to remind yourself of what we have in Jesus, and to take a moment, if you would, to prepare your heart to receive these elements this morning.
[44:51] love you. She has been watching this yet. When you're such a beautiful mother, if you don't know what what you're doing, you will see you as the moving child. If you don't know what you're doing, you will see that your heart is coming in and looking at me. If you don't know what you're doing, you will see that your heart is coming in and watching that the human body is coming in and watching that you're getting things that you're looking there.

You know I think that can all be doing and working on this life. You know I think that we're doing it and being something that are still getting something that's new and looking at well. It's got you that fathers with our goal. We're doing

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