

READ Matthew 16:24-27

It is not new news for many of you when I state that I was not the best college student that ever walked on campus. Why was I not that great of a college student? One reason was because I was on my own for the first time in my life, and that allowed me the freedom to set my own schedule and basically do whatever I wanted to do at any time I wanted to. I didn't have my mom checking in on me in the morning to make sure that I was up and heading to classes. She wasn't there to make sure my homework was being completed or that I was studying. You see, those things would have led to long term success for me as a college student, but let's be honest...I was far more concerned with taking full advantage of this freedom and simply having a good time.

Instead of spending my evenings and nights studying or staying up to date on assignments, you could often find me at the recreation center, the sand volleyball court, the soccer field, the tennis courts, or at some sporting event having a good time. Let me tell you...doing any number of those things was way more fun in that moment than it would have been sitting in my room in front of some books. I can remember times where some friends and I would be playing sand volleyball or soccer tennis till 1 in the morning when I had class at 8am the next day. You can probably guess how things went when my alarm went off in the morning. You also probably wouldn't be shocked to learn that I greatly appreciated a nice afternoon nap from time to time, but it just so happened that I had a 3pm class this one semester. Again... you probably have a good idea how that went.

What is most ironic about this particular class, which I believe was an economics class, was that we learned a principle that really was applicable in the moment, but unfortunately I wasn't exactly putting what I was hearing in class into practice. You see, we learned about opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is when we weight and evaluate the price of each decision we make. When I choose option A, I am giving up the benefits of option B and vice versa. Applying this to my college experience up to that point, I could choose to either go to class and study and have a better chance of making better grades...or I could choose to have all of the fun that I was having. Each choice comes with a cost. The first choice would mean that I simply wouldn't have as fun of a time in college. The second choice would mean (and I know from experience) that I wouldn't make good grades, in fact I would fail multiple classes, and it would cost be thousands of dollars in extra tuition to graduate with my mom continually being on my case all along the way.

Looking at it in hindsight...the proper choice is clearly obvious, but in the moment...I simply didn't see the value of long term success when I could have so much time in the here and now. While we can all sit here and laugh at foolish younger Nick for not being so great in his decision making, I hope we realize that this is a trivial example of a real struggle that I feel confident in saying that we all face from time to time. If you're anything like me, then you either have, are, or will struggle in the area of living with an eternal perspective in this temporary world. Our congregation focus for this year has been on rising up and living godly in this ungodly world, and one of the great struggles we face is in making sure that we have the proper perspective that is based on what we value most and we all it to influence our decision making.

The Problem: Our human tendency is to value the here & now over that which is truly lasting.

A. We often find ourselves short sighted instead of considering how our present decisions will affect us in the long term.

1. I believe this is a universal human problem that affects us in a number of ways. Maybe we make an impulse purchase because the product in front of us looks incredibly fun, but we don't consider how that money could be much more useful in the future or how the purchase of another product could come in much more handy for us in the future. Think of the young married couple who spends a bunch of money on a two door sports car only to find out they are expecting a baby a month later.
2. You see, I believe it is almost human nature for us to simply fail to consider the opportunity cost when certain decisions present themselves before us. What we often find ourselves doing is

putting more stock in the present and what we see right now than we do on how this decision might impact the future, and this often leads to many feelings of buyer's remorse or plain old remorse.

B. While we want to avoid that type of remorse, the greater remorse we must seek to avoid is that which is brought upon by our sinful decisions.

1. It is one thing to focus only on the here and now when it comes to being a young married couple and buying a vehicle, but what about the decisions that young married couple makes early on in their marriage concerning the type of spiritual lives they will lead? They might think that they have time in the future to really buckle down spiritually so that they can raise up spiritually minded children, but their time in the present that is spent on leading shallow religious lives will only leave them in a position to continue to do the same in the future once the kids do come around.
2. Let's get even more specific by thinking about ourselves individually. What choices do we face that in the short term lead to experiencing a rush of pleasure, but that will have detrimental affects on our long term spirituality. For those who are young and unmarried, do you see the long term value of sexual purity and saving yourselves for your future spouses over the fleeting pleasures of sexual promiscuity? Parents, do you see the value in spending more time interacting with your children and even thinking upon spiritual things as opposed to mindlessly staring at the TV screens or phone/tablet screens for hours? For every person here, do we see the value in holding our tongue and holding down our anger in the moment, or would we rather lose our cool and do or say something we will immediately regret. Remember, everything has a cost.
3. Brothers and sisters, there are choices everyday that we can and will have to make that will show what we truly value and what we are willing to give up and sacrifice. If we value temporary pleasure or satisfaction then we will be putting ourselves in position to fail to obtain lasting joy by being in harmony with the Lord. Thankfully, we can learn this lesson from Scripture without having to make these mistakes on our own and having to learn the hard way.

The Text: The Rich Ruler (Luke 18:18-30)

A. This man knew eternal life was something that ought to be pursued.

1. We can confidently infer this based upon the fact that he came to Jesus (a renown Jewish teacher at this point in His ministry) in order to ask this question.
2. He must have been truly pleased to know that he had kept all of Jesus's instructions even from his youth. He was set and ready to go enjoy that enteral life!

B. Except for the fact that Jesus tells him of the one thing he still needed to go and do...

1. Jesus knew the heart of this man, and rightfully told him that the only thing standing between him and eternal life at the moment was his riches. *"Sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*
2. The choice and cost has been made clear. This young man could choose eternal life which would cost him his temporary early wealth, or he could choose to retain this wealth at the cost of eternal life. Sadly, this choice was all too clear to this man, and he seemingly chooses to retain his riches and forfeit eternal life and treasures.

C. Jesus uses this man's response as an opportunity to speak a warning to those who are rich.

1. Jesus speaks of the difficult of those who are rich when it comes to their entering the kingdom of God. The warning against the rich seems to obviously be the topic at hand based upon the situation involving this particular man, but people seem to take the difficulty of Jesus's words and apply it to all people. *"Who then can be saved?"*
2. To ease their minds and direct them in the proper direction, Jesus states, *"What is impossible with man is possible with God."* The man who trusts in his riches will never enter the kingdom of God, but even the rich man who trusts in God can enter in.

D. Yet, even the disciples are having a difficult time with this challenging teaching of Jesus.

1. The ever ready to speak Peter pipes up, *"Look, we have left what we had and followed You."* I read Peter's words and follow them up with my own commentary, *"What do we get since we have left everything to follow you, Jesus?"*
2. Jesus answers this statement by affirming that those who choose to sacrifice now will not only reap eternal life in the age to come, but they would even receive many blessings in the here and now. Yes, they were choosing eternal joy over temporary pleasures, but they would also enjoy God's blessings as they continued to navigate their way through this difficult life.

The Application: Next time you are faced with a temptation, ask yourself this question, *"Is this fleeting pleasure worth the possibility of missing out on eternal life with God?"*

A. Each of us have that "one thing" that often stands between us and eternal life.

1. Let's remind ourselves that death is brought about when we are enticed by our desires to do that which is contrary to the will of God. **(James 1:14,15)** These desires are only desires because they bring us a certain degree of pleasure in the moment we act upon those desires.
2. These desires are different from person to person. That which I desire might not be what you desires and vice versa, so this means that we must take time to identify the weak points within our lives where the evil one might seek to prey upon such desires. In those moments, we have to decide which choice we value most because our choice will come at the cost of the other alternative choice. Which do we value more? The "one thing" or eternal life & pleasing God? Are we willing to pursue gaining the whole world at the cost of our soul? **(Matthew 16:26)**

B. Are we working hard to make sure that we are making the best choices in these situations?

1. Not only must we identify the "one thing" in our lives, but we must also work hard to discipline ourselves so that we might make the proper choice in those moments of temptation. We must follow the words of Paul in **1 Corinthians 9:27** and disciple our bodies (and minds) by brining them under control so that we might be able to resist the temptations that are thrown our way throughout our lives.
2. In that moment where we might be tempted to view that inappropriate image or video on our phones, are we willing to choose that instead of life with God? In that moment when we are tempted to lose our cool and explode with anger, are we willing to choose that instead of pleasing God through self-control and longsuffering? In the moment when we can choose ourselves over the good of others, will we do that or will we chose to be like Jesus? In that moment when we have the choice between earthly riches or riches in heaven, which one will we choose? While not every decision we make is dichotomous, either/or, there are some that simply are a true dichotomy where we have to choose either/or, and we will have to make a choice as to which one we value most. We will have to truly count the cost. What are we willing to give up? A moment or eternity?

Conclusion: *Don't give up eternal joy in exchange for temporary pleasure.*

What would our lives look like if we were able to rid ourselves and completely avoid of the guilt that is brought on by our decisions to pursue fleshly desires that leave us disappointed in ourselves? How spiritually rich and strong would we feel if we knew that our daily decisions were being dictated by the pursuit of eternal life with God? How incredible would it be to live that kind of life!?

Let me suggest that it is entirely possible to live that that life because that is the life that Jesus wants us to live in Him. He longs and desires for us to truly value that which will benefit us the absolute most in the long term. Sure we might enjoy some temporary pleasure in the moment when we feed the desires of our flesh, but how do we often feel 30 minutes or an hour later? How long will that guilt stay with us, and how miserable of a feeling it is! I don't know about you, but the guilt and frustration of again falling short leaves me sick. Let's all be resolved to live that guilt and frustration behind by making better decisions from here on out as we all seek to value eternity over this short life, and **may we never give up eternal joy in exchange for temporary pleasure.**