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Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing
Mark 10:17-31
July 3, 2016, Jeff Germon

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Has anyone here ever heard of the term ***ignoratio elenchi***? It's a Latin term that literally translated means ignorance of proof. Aristotle said that it is a fallacy that arises from "ignorance of the nature of refutation." Simply put, we would call it **missing the point**.

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Have you ever brought up a conversation topic and someone hijacks it and takes it down a path you never intended it to go and you can never get back to what it was that you wanted to talk about? They totally missed the point. They took you on some adventure that you didn't ask to be on and they completely missed the point. That would be an example of ***ignoratio elenchi***.

Politicians are very good at using ***ignoratio elenchi*** arguments. Have you ever heard a news reporter ask a politician a question and the politician goes on to answer a very long circular response that makes the question asker forget what he asked? That is an example of ***ignoratio elenchi***. It is missing the point.

Jesus spent so much time butting heads with religious people who missed the point. The Gospels are full of examples of this. And the history of the church is replete with illustrations of this kind of missing the point that has distracted it from doing the job Jesus gave it to do. The Pharisees and religious teachers in Jesus' day were experts at missing the point on so many levels. Here's what Jesus said about them in John's Gospel.

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John 5:39 (NLT)

³⁹"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!"

They missed the point of the Scriptures. As Baptists we are often guilty of the same thing. We have been so proud to call ourselves "People of The Book." We are in danger of forgetting that The Book, from front to back, points to the risen Jesus who has called us to follow him into his kingdom kind of life. He is the main point. But, we have made it into a book of principles for life and we carry it around and use it as a policy book for judging other people.

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We tend to forget that, as James says, **it's actually a mirror into our own hearts**. It **shows us** just how ugly we are on the inside and **how desperately we need Jesus**.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said the thing the religious do is gather eager disciples around them and turn them into worse monsters than they are.

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Matthew 23:15 (NLT)

15 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are!”

Those are some pretty harsh words. We should heed those carefully. We are never too far from being like them.

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It is so easy to miss the point and turn life with Jesus into an exercise in sin management, thinking, “As long as I don’t do this or that, and make sure I *do* do this, that, or the other thing, I’m okay.” When we live our lives that way we completely miss the exciting, dynamic life Jesus called us to.

The older I get the more I think about what life is really about. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to get to the end of my life and realize I have wasted it. I don’t want to be on my deathbed looking back and thinking about all the the adventures life took me on and discover that they were misguided adventures in missing the point. We have one life to live. That’s it. I want to make sure from this day forward I live it on point with Jesus.

We’re going to take a look at another encounter Jesus had. This one is with another person who is seeking some answers from Jesus. He seems to be quite desperate. He knows he is missing something, but he doesn’t quite know what it is.

Jesus uses his probe with this man, in love, sticking it further and further into his heart to see what is really there.

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With Jesus it is all about the heart. In every encounter Jesus has with people his goal is to move their hearts on to his way of living. This encounter is no different.

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Mark 10:17–31 (NLT)

17 As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good.

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19 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’” 20 “Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

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21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

22 At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

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23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” 24 This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

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26 The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked. 27 Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God.” 28 Then Peter began to speak up. “We’ve given up everything to follow you,” he said.

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29 “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.

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31 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

Just to make sure we fill in the context, let’s take a look at what happened just before this. All three Gospels that record this encounter include the same event happening immediately before this. It’s another case in missing the point. This time it was Jesus’ twelve apprentices who missed the point.

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Mark 10:13–16 (NLT)

13 One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. 14 When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, “Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.

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15 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.” 16 Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them.

I don’t think it was a coincidence that all three Gospels record this event just before the encounter we are looking at this morning. The contrast between how the children came to Jesus and how the man in question this morning came to Jesus is very different. We’ll see that as we go along.

The disciples completely missed the point when they tried to hinder the children from coming to Jesus. The children and their parents knew they needed something from Jesus. As adults, we tend to think it shows weakness to be in need. We like to put on

airs of self-sufficiency. We don't like to come across as needy. We don't want to bother Jesus. The thing is, we are all needy. We need Jesus.

The disciples scolded the parents for bothering Jesus. When you really think about that, it is pretty crazy. **The disciples tried to keep people from coming to Jesus.** They totally missed the point. The job Jesus gave them was to bring people to him not keep them away.

We do the same thing though. The impossible rules we make up, the heavy weight of guilt we lay on people, the constant judging and intolerance we have towards others who are different than we are, our focus on knowledge, doctrine and theology instead of allowing God's Word to change our hearts all keep people from Jesus. And we do it all under a facade of religious piety, just like the Pharisees did. We totally miss the point.

Here's another thing Jesus said.

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Matthew 23:13–14 (NLT)

13 “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you shut the door of the Kingdom of Heaven in people’s faces. You won’t go in yourselves, and you don’t let others enter either.

I wonder how many people we have shut the door to the Kingdom on because we missed the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus. We have complicated it so much with our rules and doctrine that nobody can get in.

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We are not the gate keepers of heaven. Let's not make following Jesus more complicated than Jesus did.

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Mark 10:15 (NLT)

15 I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

Let's go back and walk through our main passage and see the difference between the child like faith Jesus talked about and the person in this encounter.

[21]

Mark 10:17–31 (NLT)

17 As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem,

So, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Why is he going there? He was heading to Jerusalem to die for us to make a way so we, a sinful, broken people, could have relationship with a holy, righteous and completely good God.

a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Mark doesn't explicitly tell us very much about this man. We know he is rich from what Mark and the other writers say about him. ***“He was rich and had many possessions.”*** We also learn from the account in Luke 18 that he was a religious leader. And Matthew calls him a young man. All three Synoptic Gospels describe him as a moral man. He kept the law to the best of his ability, at least from his perspective. He made sure he did certain things and didn't do certain other things.

This is someone who seemed to have everything, wealth, power, morality, religion, and yet he knew he was missing something. Something wasn't quite right so he went to Jesus to find out what it was. Mark tells us that he came running up to Jesus, knelt down, and asked what thing he just do to live forever in heaven. He sounds desperate doesn't he?

Here's how Jesus answers him. And it sounds like the perfect example of ***Ignoratio elenchi***. It sounds like Jesus isn't answering his question, like he completely missed the point. But, he actually sticks his probe in right on the mark.

18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good.

Huh? What does that have to do with this young, rich, religious, pious, morally upright man's question about how to find eternal life? Jesus is so funny and brilliant. He knows our hearts. Sometimes we come to him asking for something and he comes back with the perfect question to find out what is in our hearts. So, with this, seemingly, out of context question, Jesus pushes his probe a little further into the man's heart.

18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good.

Now, if the man really knew who Jesus was he would have realized that Jesus is truly good because he is truly God. Jesus let's that percolate in the man's heart and goes on.

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19 But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’” 20 “Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

How many commandments are in the Ten Commandments? It's not a trick question. There are ten. How many does Jesus list? Six. Take a look at them. What's missing? In the Ten Commandments God gave Moses at Mount Sinai, the first four have to do with how we relate to God, and the last six have to do with how we relate to people. The first four and most important ones are conspicuously missing.

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- 1 You shall have no other gods before Me.**
- 2 You shall not make idols.**

- 3 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
- 4 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Why did Jesus not mention these commandments to the rich, young, religious leader?

This man had been so focused on keeping the commandments and doing the right thing that he completely missed the point of them. He was like the typical overly religious Pharisee. They kept the commands and lost the heart of them. Their views on the Sabbath is a case in point. They religiously kept it but had no idea why.

Pastor Steve touched on this a couple weeks ago. Jesus taught about patching old clothing with new cloth and the foolishness of putting new wine into old wine skins. It doesn't work. They are incompatible. The old way of the law and the new way of Jesus are completely different ways of living.

Just after the encounter Pastor Steve looked at Jesus was walking with his apprentices through a grain field on a Sabbath day. While they were walking along the disciples picked some grain and ate it.

The Pharisees saw what they did and said, "Aha! They are working on the Sabbath. That is not lawful." How did Jesus respond to them?

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Mark 2:27 (NLT)

27 Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath."

Sabbath literally means "stop", or "rest" from work. God instituted the Sabbath for us because he knows we need rest. We need to recover after we work. The Pharisees and the overly religious totally missed the point. This was another of the many cases of the Pharisees and religious leaders' adventures in *Ignoratio elenchi*. We don't take a Sabbath to make sure God doesn't get mad at us. We rest because we need to rest. We need to take care of our body, mind and spirit.

When we make that into a law we miss the point. We bind ourselves up instead of living in the freedom Jesus called us to. The sabbath was made for us, not the other way around.

So, Jesus sticks his probe further into this rich, young, religious ruler's heart.

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21 Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him.

Jesus looked deep into this man's heart, saw what was really there. He saw that he totally missed the point. He knew he was so close, but so so far from the heart of God.

“There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

What’s the point Jesus is making here? Let’s see how the man responded to Jesus to see what his point was because we will see where the man’s heart is.

22 At this the man’s face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

It’s a very sad ending to this story. Unlike the story we looked at a few weeks ago about that other Pharisee, named Nicodemus, whose heart opened up to Jesus as he stepped out of the darkness and into the light, this unnamed man, even though he knew he was missing something, wasn’t able to get past his own self-sufficiency. His wealth, position, religiosity and even his good works kept him from God. It’s a sad story, but it is all too common even today.

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23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” 24 This amazed them. But Jesus said again, “Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. 25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

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29 “Yes,” Jesus replied, “and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.

[29]

31 But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.”

Jesus wasn’t saying there was anything wrong with being wealthy. There were lots of biblical characters who were very wealthy. The problem with money though, no matter how much of it you have or don’t have, is that it is easy to make it the main point of our lives. We need money to survive. Our basic needs of food, clothing and shelter cannot be met without money. So, money is not the problem.

The problem is that whether we have lots of it or very little of it, money can easily become the main point. We can very easily forget that God blesses us so we can be a blessing to others. He doesn’t bless us so we can hoard it for ourselves. We do not win “game of life” by having more than someone else when we die. I have never seen a

greedy person who is happy. Have you? It's impossible for a greedy person to be happy. They can't be. They are perpetually discontent. They always want more.

The problem with money is that, because we can't live without it, we can tend to put too much value on it. We feel like we are worth more when we have more of it. It can easily become a measurement of our worth and hence it becomes our god. That was the problem with this rich, young, religious leader.

Let me just say a word about verse 25.

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25 In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

Some people claim that there was a gate in Jerusalem, that opened at night after the main gate was closed. If you were traveling and had a camel that was loaded up the camel would not fit through the gate unless all its baggage was removed and it stooped down through the gate. The lesson they say is that in order to enter the kingdom of God you need to get rid of everything that weighs you down, including your wealth. You need to humble yourselves.

The problem with that interpretation is that there was no such gate at the time of Jesus. There is such a gate in a Russian Church in Jerusalem, but it wasn't built until over 1500 years after Jesus.

Jesus wasn't saying it's hard for the rich to get into the kingdom of God. He was saying it is impossible — except with God. It's so easy to make money the main point, whether we are rich or poor.

So, what is the main point?

Jesus' main point here is, let's keep the main thing the main thing.

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After Jesus gave his disciples the lesson about the camel and how hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Peter proudly asserted that he and the other disciples had given up everything to follow Jesus.

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Jesus doesn't argue with Peter.

29 "Yes," Jesus replied, "and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, 30 will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life.

So, what's his point?

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His point is that our life on this earth is not the main event. This is the warm up for heaven. We shouldn't live our lives as if this is all there is. It's not. The rich young religious man missed the point of life by stockpiling his wealth and not following Jesus. His point is that everything God has given us, whether our wealth, time, talents, or energy is to be used for the sake of Jesus and his Gospel. That is what our lives are supposed to be about. That is what we are about as a church, and you are the church.

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We will never be satisfied if we live our lives as if this is all there is. **Life will not make sense to us until we start living with eternity in mind.** If we live with eternity in mind, even persecution, pain, and trials can be used for good.

Contrast the story of Nicodemus, the Pharisee, who turned from darkness to light, with this rich, young, religious ruler; who do you think ended up living a more satisfied life?

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The question for us this morning is **are we investing our lives on the main things, or are we missing the point?**

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³¹ But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then."

Let's meditate on that while we prepare our hearts to celebrate communion together.