

Copyright October 13 & 14, 2018. All Rights Reserved. Geist Christian Church

Title: Discovering Gravity

Date: October 13 & 14, 2018

Preaching: Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

Scripture: [Matthew 6:25-34](#)

Text: [Mark 10:17-27](#)

E-mail: [Randy Spleth](#)



There is nostalgia about the space program with the release of the movie First Man. It commemorates the 50th anniversary of Neil Armstrong's walk on the moon. Do you remember watching your first NASA rocket launch? When I was a boy, the space program was just getting started. It was a big deal to watch the launches. People all over

America were glued to television sets. I don't know for sure if my first launch was John Glenn's flight that orbited the earth three times in 1962. It might have been because the math works about right. I had just turned six.

Whether it was that launch or another, I remember distinctively as mission control counted off the last few seconds. "Five. Four. Three. Two. One." Then there was a big rumble and all this fire erupting from the base of the rocket. Everything was shaking and then slowly, almost imperceptibly, the rocket lifted from the launch pad. Then, the announcer proclaimed, "We have lift-off." At first, you see the rocket clearly, but it became a candle soaring up into the sky, the camera following it shaking, trying to keep up with it for the first few minutes. Then, something happened that I didn't understand or expect. There was a flash and something dropped away. I remember saying, "Oh no, the rocket just broke." "No, someone said, "That was the booster falling off." "What's a booster?" I asked. "It is what they need to defeat gravity?" What's gravity? "It is why an apple falls on your head" and one did, a decorative plastic apple that my mother kept in a pot by the fireplace.

I'll admit to being confused and not understanding. But we understand. Gravity is that force that holds things down. When a rocket sits on the launch pad, it's held down by the earth's gravitational pull. It takes a booster's thrust to break away from the gravity of earth and into space where it can fly freely. Ever since Isaac Newton noticed an apple falling and realized that there was a force acting on it, we've understood that gravity is a consistent and unfailing force. You don't even know that it is ordering

your world right now, keeping you in your seat, pulling you to the center of the earth. You feel it as your weight. Of course, another force, electromagnetism holds the atoms of your seat together, preventing you from being pulled all the way to the core.

Earth is in the Goldilocks zone of gravity. We have just the right amount of gravity to hold on to our atmosphere. It is the right amount to keep us healthy and strong. Too little gravity, like on Mars and there would be a negative effect on health, including loss of muscle mass, bone density, organ function, and even eyesight. Too much gravity, like on Jupiter and you would feel crushed, weighed down and eventually, your body would break down. At 1G, Earth has the perfect gravity for human beings to live and thrive.

Today, we begin a new series titled Defying Gravity and the concept behind this series isn't that that we somehow need to defy the way the world was created by God. We aren't trying to be light on our feet or float around the planet. Rather, the next four weeks we will recognize another force that works on us in the same way. You can't see it but you feel its effects. It is the gravity of money, the financial gravity that has existed since Adam and Eve left the garden. It is an invisible force that every human being feels, a gravitational pull to provide for the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Like the force of gravity, too much can crush you, too little can have a negative effect on your life. It can lead to homeless, starvation, even death. ¹

Just like Earth exists in the "Goldilocks" zone as a planet, the key to financial gravity is to experience the right amount, to find the financial "Goldilocks" zone, to experience the force in just the right proportion. All of us feel the force of our needs. These are normal things of life. A short list would include food, shelter, clothing, and things that allow you to work and live, such as transportation and communication.

The problem is we live in a society that constantly tells us that we will be better off with more. We feel the very strong gravitational pull to move well beyond the zone of our needs into the zone of wants. For most people, the list of wants is never short: a newer car, a better phone, a larger home, a flatter, bigger, sharper TV, a fancy dinner out or an expensive vacation. As we add these to our lives, we can feel the added force of financial gravity holding us down. What we hoped would bring us freedom actually brings us exhaustion.

Financial gravity is strong, particularly in the United States. The marketing culture is so well developed that its message of more and better is

constantly before us. You are just one purchase away from finding meaning and happiness. At the same time, the once-esteemed value of frugality has gone down. The combination of increased marketing and decreased frugality forms a black hole of consumerism, where the force of financial gravity is so great that it threatens to pull us in. It promises happiness, freedom, joy, and comfort. But the outcome of financial gravity is far different. ²

Our complicated relationship with money and possessions is not a new problem. We see it addressed in the Bible when a rich young man approaches Jesus, falls on his knees as a show of humility and asks Jesus, "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17) He is being honest and sincere even if Jesus' response is a little scratchy. "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone." (Mark 10:18) In Judaism the emphasis on the one God and the unique divine goodness of God was central. While God and God's creation could be called "good", good was not a title attributed to rabbis.

Because the man asked, "What must I do," Jesus offers him examples, listing the second half of the Ten Commandments with one exception. Jesus adds "defraud." "You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" (Mark 10:19) You can see this rich young man saying to himself, "No murder. Check. No adultery. Check. No stealing. Check. Perjury, fraud, Mom, and Dad... I think we're good." "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." (Mark 10: 20)

You should know he's quite sincere about this. He's not a hypocrite. He's not posing. He prides himself on his character and his integrity. It might strike us as odd, maybe even spiritually arrogant to our 21st-century ears. "Nobody is that good!" But in first-century Judaism it was assumed that a pious and obedient Jew would and could be that good, keeping all 613 commandments. Jesus does not seem to take the man's response as anything but sincere. "I've kept all of these since my youth," he says. With that response, there seems to be an implied question. "What am I missing?" You better be careful asking Jesus what you are missing because Jesus can size you up and know exactly what you are missing before you even ask. In fact, Mark says so. He says Jesus looked at him and the Greek word he uses is "emblem in" which means to scrutinize, to see right through you.³ "Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." (Mark 10:21a) Wow. What an amazing man Jesus was. He sees him for who he is and what he needs and Jesus loves him. "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Mark 10:21b)

No one knows how long that this rich young man stood there. It was long enough for him to unpack what Jesus had just said, the four words of instruction that he gave him. "Go, sell, give, follow," four verbs that would haunt the man. He might have wondered why he got those four verbs when others didn't. Have you noticed this? When Jesus walks on the beach and sees Andrew and Peter, he simply says, "Follow me." He doesn't say "Go, sell those boats, give to the poor and follow me." He just says, "Follow me." It is the same with Matthew, a tax collector. Just follow me. For this rich young guy, follow me is preceded by go, sell, give. What up with that? Gravity. Jesus sees that this guy is dealing with financial gravity and he has to deal with that master before he can follow a new one. Jesus is really good at recognizing a rival to kingdom living. ⁴

This rich young man wants to be a good person, so good that he inherits eternal life. But he wants to be a rich young man even more because from his youth, he has heard that his wealth and possessions, his stuff and his money were a sign that he was blessed. His possessions defined him.

Who knows how long he stood there thinking about what Jesus said? We don't know. We just know that eventually, he realized the force of gravity pulling on him because "When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions." (Mark 19:22) This guy was torn between two worlds. He wanted something new in life, to give his life fully to God. He wanted to experience a deeper way of living. But he could not bear to sell out. The force of financial gravity was too much and it pulled him away from Jesus, away from everything he thought he wanted. ⁵

As he exits the scene, Jesus offers these words to his disciples. "...how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." (Mark 19:24-25) There is an old story that Jerusalem had a gate that was actually called the Needle's Eye. It was so low that a camel had to get down on his knees to go through it after his entire burden had been removed from his back. I'm not sure that is what Jesus was talking about. I think he is deliberately describing an impossibility. If teaching today, he might have said, it is easier for a Tesla to go through an ATM card slot. The point isn't that it is hard. The point is, it is impossible, impossible for people. The only way to accomplish it is with God's help, to acknowledge that God can do what you cannot. It's what Jesus said, "For mortals, it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27).

It is important that you understand that most of us are not called by Jesus to give away everything. In Jesus' own day they weren't. Zacchaeus was

quite a wealthy guy who didn't give away everything. Nicodemus was another wealthy guy who didn't give away everything.⁶ Here's what we are all called to. We are to recognize that our many possessions have gravity. It pulls on us, encouraging us to accumulate more and that pull is a barrier to entering the kingdom of God. Why? Because gravity is a force that pulls all matter together. The more matter, the more gravity. The sun has a huge mass that it can hold an entire solar system together. Money and possessions have their own mass as well. They pull us in. The more we amass, the more we experience the gravity that comes from their mass.

Jesus understood these dynamics, both for the young man in the Scripture passage and for us today. And make no mistake, friends, if you live in the U.S.A., you are wealthy compared with most people in the world. We have many possessions, no? Defying financial gravity is needed to accomplish the goal of loving God completely. It starts by discovering the gravity that is pulling you down, by owning and claiming this force in your life. I hope if you haven't already, you'll sign up for the 28-day challenge to discover and consider the places of financial gravity. You might also want to pick up the book by Tom Berlin that this series is based on.

The good news is this. Jesus offers us a way to enter the gravitational field of God's kingdom. Just as money and possessions can weigh us down, they also can be a part of what sets us free, laboring under the burden of the weight we have accumulated. When we surrender our lives and our wills to Jesus, the most tangible expression of this is to give, to use our resources not to accumulate more for ourselves but to become a giving person, to give systematically, to give joyfully, to give generously, to pray to God, "God, help me overcome financial gravity and enter your kingdom."

Think of that prayer as a request to mission control, a request for a booster that will help you defeat the pull of financial gravity and rocket you into the kingdom of God.

¹ <http://www.sciencebuzz.org/earth/GISS/earths-just-right-conditions>

² Tom Berlin. Pastor's resource sermon with Defying Gravity package.

³ ROSSING, B. R. Healing affluenza: a sermon on Mark 10:17-27. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, ago. 2006. v. 33, n. 4, p. 300-303.

⁴ Ortberg, John. Giving. Menlo Park Church. August 19, 2018.

⁵ Berlin.

⁶ Ortberg.