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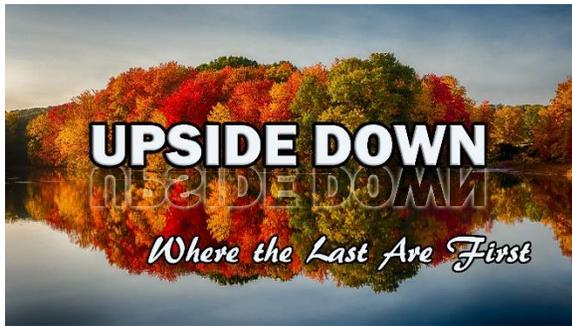
**Title:** Upside Down: When the Last Are First

**Preaching:** Danny Gulden, Lead Pastor, Promise Road Campus

**Text:** [Mark 10:17-31](#)

**E-mail:** [Danny Gulden](#)

[Watch the service.](#)



Harold Kushner wrote about a very bright, driven pre-med student at a very prestigious school. He was traveling abroad before his junior year, and he met a spiritual guru who asked him, "don't you see that you are poisoning your soul with your success-oriented way of life? Your idea of happiness is staying up all night

studying for an exam just so you can get a better grade than your friend. Your idea of a good marriage is not to find a partner that matches your soul; instead, you want to marry the person everybody else wants to marry, just so you can say that you married them. You want to make money not to provide for others and live, but to say that you make so much money. This is no way to live. Why don't you come join us in an atmosphere of love and peace in the Ashram? We will teach you to love and to share.

The man's words resonated with the pre-med student. This new way of life appealed to him. So, he called his Mom and Dad and told them that he was dropping out of school and moving to live in community in this Ashram.

Six months later, his parents received this letter from him.

"Dear Mom and Dad,

I know that you were not happy about my decision to drop out of school and join the Ashram. But, I want you to see this experience has changed me. For the first time in my life, I am at peace. Here there is no competing, no trying to get ahead of another. This way of harmony is so in line with my soul that I have become the #2 disciple in the entire community in just six months. I think I can be #1 by June."

No matter where we find ourselves in life's journey, we are all a work in progress. This is week two of a worship series we are calling Upside Down. We are looking at how Jesus changes our priorities and how Jesus changes our perspectives. We are looking at how Jesus challenges the assumptions

we make about how God works. So often, the way God works turns the way the world works Upside Down.

In the part of Mark 10 today, Jesus starts talking about money. Then, Jesus starts talking about our relationship to money, success, and possessions. It all begins with a question from a person who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life? This question comes from someone who believes he is not a work in progress. He has done everything he believed God wanted him to do since he was young. He thinks that when Jesus answers his question, Jesus will tell him, you've done it. You have already inherited eternal life. You are the model for living the life God wants someone to live. So, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

*"Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said, '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.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, 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." They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals, it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." Mark 10:21-27*

Jesus turns this man's world upside down as he thinks he arrived; he was living life to its fullest. Instead of being complimented by Jesus, he's told, in love, you only lack one thing. But it's a big thing. Maybe the most significant piece of all.

When we hear words like this:

Sell what you own.

Give the money to the poor.

It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

When we hear these words in the Bible, we tend to think two things. We believe there is a loophole that gets us out of it, or we believe that Jesus is talking about someone else. Well, there is no loophole, and Jesus is talking to me. When I studied this text again this week, I was reminded that Jesus is talking to me... and you.

If these words of Jesus surprise us or offend us, we are in good company. Listen to Peter's response.

*"Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.'" Mark 10:28 NRSV*

He's speaking on behalf of the disciples, on behalf of you and me... what more do you want from us?

A highly successful businessperson was once asked to make a substantial donation toward an urgent charity appeal. The businessperson listened to the case presented then said, "I can understand why you approached me. Yes, I do have a lot of money, and yours is an important cause. But are you aware that I have a lot of calls upon my money? Did you know my mother needs 24-hour nursing care?"

"No, we didn't"

"Did you know my sister is struggling to raise a family of eight on her own?"

"No, we didn't"

"Did you know I have one son in a drug rehab clinic / another doing voluntary work overseas?"

"No, we didn't"

"Well, if I don't give them a cent, what makes you think I'll give it to you?!"

You lack one thing.

The kin-dom of God has different priorities, and living into these priorities calls us to change our perspective.

Jesus isn't offering a critique of money. Instead, he is offering a critique of how we define success, especially when it comes to how we use our money and to how we use our resources.

There are things written in the Bible that, over time, come to be misunderstood, and of these comes from 1 Timothy...the way it's often quoted is that "money is the root of all evil."

*"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." 1Timothy 6:10a NRSV*

The love of money. This person asks Jesus about eternal life; he loves money more than he loves God. If you do that, if you love money more than you love God, you will never find the wholeness in life that God intends for you.

Notice that Jesus doesn't tell him to take your money and your stuff and bury it in a deep hole. See, if you do that, you still love money; you still put your faith in your possessions. You place your trust in that which is temporary. Your money, your stuff, it will not save you. Jesus says it this way, that is impossible. You can't live that way, not now, not in eternal life. But God's way, in God's way of living, anything is possible.

Jesus' words today are an act of love. In fact, this is the only time in the Gospel of Mark, where before Jesus addresses someone, it says that he loves them. It's so important.

Use your resources, use your possessions to empower others. Use them as a tangible sign of love toward others. The way we use our resources, our possessions, and yes, even our money is an actual sign of our belief in the kingdom of God. Our belief is that God can save us.

For many, for me, it is our relationship with money that is the greatest obstacle to living a life of commitment to faith. My relationship to money is often the greatest hindrance to my relationship with God.

Maybe we are like Peter, who says, come on Jesus, what else do you want me to do?

The last will be first, says Jesus. Live by faith in God and in solidarity with neighbor. In the world's eyes, maybe that doesn't get you ahead, but in God's world, you understand what God makes possible.

When we can release our tight grip around our resources, we can open our hearts to the love of God and the love of neighbor.

There was a couple, Mark and Sue, who had three children. Their oldest daughter was nine years old; she was a great saver and had saved up \$200. With this money, she wanted to get a puppy. One day, they were at a coffee shop when Maggie, the nine-year-old, noticed a flyer posted by a farmer who had puppies to send to a loving home.

They drove out to the farm to see the puppies and, of course, fell in love. It was also clear that this farmer lived a very frugal lifestyle, a small family-owned farm. Mark promised the farmer they would make a decision and come back the next day.

Mark and Sue knew that they would be returning the next day to pick up a new family member. In doing so wanted to teach their daughter a lesson about being generous with her resources. That evening they asked Maggie if

she was willing to pay for the dog. "The dogs are free she said." I know, said Mark, but think about all of the love and care the farmer and his wife have put into the dog, all the time they invested into finding a good home for the dog, and they don't have much, so wouldn't it be nice to give them some money for the dog. So go up to your room and think about how much you would offer.

Maggie came down about 10 minutes later. "I'll give \$100." Mark had been thinking \$25; he didn't think his daughter would give up half her net worth for the dog.

That's a considerable number. Maybe you should think about it a little longer. If you really want to be that generous, go back to your room and really think through this; take a little longer than 10 minutes.

Mark felt satisfied that he had set his daughter straight, that she would land on a more reasonable offer. Thirty minutes later, she came down the stairs. I began thinking about what you said, looked around my room and thinking about our nice house, how much nice stuff we have hoe the farmer and his wife have so little. and I made a decision. Instead of \$100, I would like to give them all \$200 in my piggy bank.

Maggie gets it. Her piggy bank may temporarily be empty, but her life is full. Her neighbor's life will be full. While others may look at her decision as foolish, in reality, she has grown closer to the heart of God. She lacks nothing. The last will be first.

As children of God and as followers of Jesus Christ, our abundance lies outside of any material wealth and riches we have built up.

*You are free to live by faith in God and in solidarity with neighbor. In the world's eyes, maybe that doesn't get you ahead, but in God's eyes, it's all we need for life abundant.*

Will you pray with me?