

My favorite track event to watch is the steeplechase. I don't even like racing or running events normally. But there is something about the steeplechase I just find captivating. It is a long distance run typically around 3000 meters. Normal long distance running is about surviving. But the steeplechase adds extra challenges. It adds a number of hurdles spread out through the race. You cannot just keep your pace, you also have to be ready to jump. And it is not just like a hurdle race because four of the barriers are even higher. Most runners can't jump over it and have to step on it. And after these higher walls there is a big pit of water.

Life is like a steeplechase, especially our spiritual life. It's a long distance run where we are trying to follow Jesus. And all throughout life there are hindrances, temptations, and barriers. There are barriers that try to distract us and pull us off course. Some of these barriers keep people from even starting the race.

This morning we are going to look at four barriers to the kingdom. These are four things that all of us will face in our walk with Christ. Because when Jesus teaches us about these barriers, He also gives us a way to overcome them.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 18:15-43

The first barrier is pride. **Pride is a barrier, admit your helplessness.**

This barrier makes the disciples stumble.

It does not just make them stumble.

They are actually putting this barrier in front of others.

We see this in verse 15, **"Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them."**

Through the entire gospel people are coming up to Jesus to touch Him to listen to Him to follow Him to see Him for themselves.

And at this point people are even bringing not just their children but their infants.

And their hope is that Jesus will touch them and bless them.

But His disciples tell people to stop. And they don't just say no Jesus doesn't have time for your baby.

They rebuke the people.

They tell them how foolish they are for wasting Jesus's time.

Jesus is too busy with important people like us, He doesn't have time for babies.

Jesus's time on Earth is very short.

He only spends about 3 years in public Ministry.

And for a while the Gospel of Luke has spent it walking and heading towards Jerusalem because He has an appointment with the cross.

He doesn't have time to talk to everybody who wants to see Him.

And so if you were one of Jesus's disciples helpers you would try to triage.

This is what most assistance of famous people do a lot of their job is just trying to keep the Riff Raff away from the celebrities or keep them from taking up too much of their time.

To make sure that they have time to spend with the really important and significant people.

And so this is what the disciples do.

Because infants don't have anything to offer Jesus.

They may not even be awake.

They certainly don't understand who Jesus is.

In Jesus day, infants were not valued.

The infant mortality rate was very high.

Most babies wouldn't make it.

Which may be why these mothers are bringing their infants.

But Jesus makes time for these infants.

Verse 16, "**but Jesus called to him, saying, "let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs to the kingdom of God."**

Jesus tells His well-meaning disciples to stop knock it off.  
Jesus says this is not a waste of my time.  
Jesus says this isn't on me being gracious.  
The kingdom of God that I have been preaching about my entire Ministry belongs even to infants.  
The kingdom of God belongs to those that the world things are insignificant.  
Kingdom of God belongs to those that people overlook.  
The kingdom of God belongs to those who have nothing at all to offer it.

Verse 17, "**truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**"

Jesus tells us disciples that they need to stop trying to keep the children from Jesus and instead need to learn from them.  
They need to learn to be helplessly dependent like a child.  
Because infants can't do anything for themselves.  
They don't know how to go to the bathroom on their own.  
They can't feed themselves.  
And at night they need a lot of help figuring out how to go to sleep.

That is also how we need to be.  
We have to recognize that we cannot get into the kingdom of God on our own.  
That we cannot be apart of the Kingdom through our own merits or our works.  
It only comes by grace and God's goodness.

But the disciples have forgot that they were chosen that because of their awesomeness but because of God's grace too.  
The disciples have allowed their pride to make them forget.  
They were helpless nobodies before Jesus found them.  
They are not anymore deserving that these helpless infants.  
And we are not anymore deserving of Jesus' time than anyone else.

When we hear this story we often want to be like the infants.  
We wanted to be the people who are dependent on God and we should long and strive to be.

But often times we are like the disciples.  
We can be hindrances to those who want to come to Jesus.  
We allow our pride  
Because every place including our own is surrounded with people who are as vulnerable as infants.  
There are those who are homeless.  
Those who are trapped and poverty, those who aren't citizens.  
Those struggling with their sexuality or with their gender or who they are.

And we might not say like the disciples don't come to Jesus we don't want you.

But we can set up and design churches in a way that naturally includes people so that they don't have to come.  
We could wear suits on Sundays, so no one without one feels welcome.  
We could design the service so it fits what we want and in a way that makes it hard for unbelievers to understand.  
We could move our church building once the area gets surrounded by too many poor people or people of other ethnicities, like many churches do.  
The challenge of Jesus here to his own disciples is to let go of our pride.  
To admit that we are helpless.  
To admit that we still need grace too.  
And then offer that grace to others instead of keeping them from Christ.

The second obstacle is riches. **Riches are a barrier, give them away.**

Riches are a barrier that will keep us from following Jesus.  
Some of you might be raising your hand inside thinking riches sounds like a wonderful problem to have.  
I know there is part of me that thinks so.

But so much of the way Jesus talks about money and wealth is always with a warning.

Over the last few years, I have started studying and paying attention to how Jesus talks about money and possessions.

And He talks about it so much differently than our culture does.

And here Jesus makes it abundantly clear that having possessions, that having stuff and having riches makes it harder to follow Jesus.

And the only way to overcome it is to give them away.

This is the story of the Rich Young Ruler as we like to call him.

And he asks a great question.

Verse 18, **"And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "**

How can he be a part of the Kingdom?

How can I be a true follower of Jesus who will gain eternal life?

But there's a couple problems already.

Which is why Jesus responds in verse 19, **"And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."**

Now some wrongly think this is Jesus saying that he isn't God.

This isn't Jesus saying that he is not good.

This is Jesus saying I am God.

The ruler has to decide if he thinks Jesus is good or God.

Because what we believe about that determines our destiny.

And Jesus presses further in verse 20 and ask him if he has kept the law.

**"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'"**

You might remember from when we went through the Ten Commandments there was a lot packed in each of those.

It is not just don't cheat on your spouse when you are married.

Is that you need to keep all lustful thoughts from your heart even when you're single.

It is not just don't murder people and is that we are not to hate even our enemies.

It's not just that we shouldn't steal it's that we also shouldn't want what other people have and be jealous.

And so much more of the requirements of the law or meant to reveal how much we need Jesus and how short we fall of God's glory.

Verse 21, **"And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth."**

He has totally missed the point because there is no way that is true.

He might have kept the letter of the law but he is not kept it Spirit or its point.

It seems as if he believes that he deserves salvation because of how righteous and amazing he is.

Jesus is trying to show him that he's to be like an infant and acknowledge his dependence on Grace.

Verse 22, **"When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."**

Jesus tells him that one thing he has not done is given all his possessions away to those in need.

Jesus tells him that if he wants eternal life he needs to leave all of his stuff behind and go and follow Jesus.

He needs to act like the disciples who left all they had to follow Jesus.

Verse 23, **"But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich."**

But he gets sad.

Because he does not want to leave all that he has for Jesus.

He wants to gain eternal life through his own actions without it costing him too much.

But Jesus tells him it has to cost all that he has.

He needs to be willing to leave it all behind to give it to those who need it.

But he can't and he won't.

His riches are holding him back.

They are a barrier to his salvation and his spiritual life.

He will never be able to follow Jesus as long as he has this much stuff.

Because he cannot let go.

**Verse 24, "Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For 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."**

Jesus knows it and Jesus makes a proclamation that riches are such a barrier it is almost impossible for those with a lot of possessions to come into the kingdom of God.

He says it would be easier to get a camel and push it through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to become a citizen of Heaven.

**Verse 26, "Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" 27 But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."**

And most of us are like the crowd who heard Jesus say this and they object.

Because they realize Jesus is not just addressing this ruler he is addressing them.

He is telling them that they need to give up their riches to the poor and to follow Jesus.

And we don't want to.

And so they say Jesus what you're saying is true no one could become a follower of God.

And we still have these objections today.

All sorts of Scholars come up with fancy reasons why Jesus must not have meant what he said.

They may tell you that the eye of a needle was the name of the gate and it was just hard for camels to get through but they could squeeze in.

Or will say well, Jesus must not have meant that we actually had to give all of our stuff away just that we must be willing to.

Or that this man's problem wasn't that he had too much stuff it was that he loved it too much.

We don't have to actually give our stuff away, we just need to be willing to. Like an addict who can "quit anytime they want."

I could give all my stuff away if Jesus asked.

I think that we get so convicted by what Jesus says about money that we just try to change it.

Jesus tells us our riches will hold us back from following Jesus and then if we don't want them to be a hindrance then we need to practice giving them away.

And Jesus responds with you can with me.

He reminds them of his grace.

Because this is the gospel. Jesus can do the impossible.

He can bring what was dead to life and transform us through the cross.

He doesn't expect us to stop living our stuff on our own through our own strength.

That through His grace He will empower us and He will help us and He will give us the ability to leave everything behind to follow Him.

His own disciples are an example of this.

Verse 28, **"And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you."**

Peter cries out that they have left their stuff behind.

Did they hear Jesus's words and that he accomplished The Impossible with them.

As they left all that they had to follow Jesus.

Verse 29, **"And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."**



You see the promise of Jesus is that what we will gain is worth infinitely more than what we will give up.

What you leave behind is nothing compared than what is ahead.

What you give away to the needy can never be wasted.

Proverbs 19:17 **"Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed."**

And our rewards are not just in the life to come, there are also here now.

Because Jesus says they will receive many times more in this life AND in the life to come.

There are those who will lie to you about this promise.

They will tell you Jesus is promising something like a heavenly ponzi scheme.

If you just give the church \$1,000 then God will give you back \$10,000.

That is not what Jesus is promising.

If riches are a barrier why would God give us more of them?

He promises not more earthly things, but better things.

He promises us the kingdom.

Every cent we give away for Jesus sets our souls free.

It helps us to purchase the blessings of the Kingdom.

And I think giving them away is the only way to find freedom.

If we are unwilling to depart with our things, like the ruler was, then they still have a hold on our hearts.

And practicing giving away our things.

Not just the things we don't want anymore, but the things that are valuable to us, is a wonderful spiritual practice.

Every time we give it loosing riches hold on our hearts.

It is hard to hold on to things you give away.

And every time we give, especially when it hurts, we are hurdling over those barriers as we follow Jesus.

The third barrier: **Ignorance is a barrier, ask for sight.**

I mean spiritual ignorance.

Not understanding or accepting the things of Jesus is a barrier in your walk with Jesus.

We see this over and over in the gospels.

People are held back by their lack of faith and lack of understanding.

And here we will see that even Jesus' disciples experience this ignorance.

Verse 31, **"And taking the twelve, he said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem,"**

Since Luke 9, Jesus has been heading towards Jerusalem.

And now we are almost there.

He is telling the disciples that the moment they have been waiting for is almost here.

The climax of the gospel is coming.

**"and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished."**

All of their dreams are about to come true.

All of those promises from Moses to Elijah will be realized in Jerusalem.

Verse 32, **"For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. 33 And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise."**

That is not the promises they thought would come true.

Jesus tells them that the Messiah we will be rejected by Israel.

They will give the Messiah to the Gentiles instead.

And instead of the Messiah coming to reign in glory,

He will be mocked and killed.

But on the third day, He will come back to life.

Verse 34, **"But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."**

The disciples do not understand what Jesus is saying.  
None of it makes any sense to them.  
They are totally ignorant and can't comprehend what Jesus means.

This is not the first time that Jesus has told them His plan.  
It won't be the last.  
But they still don't get it.

And their ignorance is a barrier.  
When the suffering comes they will run and flee.  
They will doubt and think it is all over.

But notice where their ignorance comes from.  
**"This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."**

They don't get it because they are dumb.  
They don't get it because God hasn't explained it yet.  
He hasn't given them the ability to understand.

And how should they respond?  
What should they say to Jesus?  
They should ask for help.  
They should ask for Him to teach them so that they can understand what He means.

And we should do the same.  
There will be times when you do not understand what God is doing.  
Times when you don't grasp why Jesus came the way He did.  
And if we stay in our ignorance it will hold back our faith.  
But we can ask.

This is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit.  
He came to open our eyes and help us see.  
And we can ask Him to help us see.

This is why I often pray before my sermons that the Holy Spirit would speak to us.

That He would reveal what is hidden.

Because only the Holy Spirit can remove this barrier.

But this is why Jesus came.

To do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

The last barrier. **The crowd is a barrier, cry out for mercy.**

The world and the masses will try to keep you from following Jesus.

But we must cry out in prayer to Him anyway.

We hear a story of a blind man.

It is one of my favorite stories in the Bible of Jesus healing someone.

Because in the story the crowd is trying to stop him, but he doesn't let them.

Verse 35, **"As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant."**

Outside of famous Jericho there is a blind man begging for money.

And he hears a ton of people around.

He knows it is a crowd, but he can't see why.

So he asks people what is going on.

Verse 37, **"They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."**

The crowd tells him that Jesus is coming through.

That explains the crowd and he seems to know who Jesus is.

Because he immediately cries out.

Verse 38, **"And he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

Notice the difference between what the crowd says and he says.

The crowd says the place in Israel Jesus is from.

It is a normal statement.

The blind man says who Jesus is.  
He makes a theological statement.  
This is the only place in the gospel of Luke Jesus is called "Son of David."  
He is calling Jesus the Messiah.  
The promised Son of David, who is the king that was promised.

And he cries out for mercy.  
He acknowledges his helplessness and dependence on Jesus.  
And he asks for grace.

Verse 39, **"And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent."**

The crowd tells him to stop.  
In fact, they tell him to shut up and be quiet.  
Not just because they are rude.  
Not just because they don't seem to care about his plight.  
But because he is saying something dangerous.  
He is making a political statement.  
It is not just that his statement will anger the religious leaders.  
His cry will anger the Romans.  
Israel cannot have a Jewish king.

**"But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

He does not stop.  
He continues to cry out.  
And he cries out all the more.  
He does not change it cry.  
It does not soften it to make it less offensive or dangerous.  
He cries to the Messiah for mercy.  
And I am amazed at his faith.  
He has no idea how close Jesus is.  
He cannot see where Jesus is.  
Jesus may have already passed by.  
For all he knows his crying is pointless.

And the whole crowd is pressuring him.  
Everyone around him is screaming and yelling at him to stop.  
He has to cry louder to try and top their cries.

Because when the pressure is mounting.  
When everyone around you is telling you to stop.  
We too should raise our voices to Christ to call for mercy.  
Because Jesus will hear.

Verse 40, **"And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, 41 "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me recover my sight."**

I love that Jesus hears and asks.  
Jesus never forces healing on anyone.  
And He gives people an opportunity to ask Him.  
It also seems like Jesus will show Him whatever mercy the man asks for.

Verse 42, **"And Jesus said to him, "Recover your sight; your faith has made you well." 43 And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God."**

The man is healed.  
His faith that would not be hindered helped him receive grace.  
And he responds how the crowd should have.  
He responds how the ruler should have.  
He leaves what he has to follow Jesus.

**"And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."**

This is a beautiful thing.  
When we don't let the barriers of the world hold us back.  
When we choose to follow Christ anyway.  
It does not just keep us on the right path.  
It can change those around us.

This man's faith and determination helped the crowd.  
Instead of them changing his behavior, his faith changed theirs.

When you face opposition from the crowd and the world.  
We should cry louder.  
Not because we are trying to fight and defeat the world.  
But because we are trying to convert them.  
And we want them to worship God like we do.

I couldn't help but think of Bishop Kumar Swamy who came to speak to us  
on Wednesday when I read this story.  
The Christians in India face heavy and real persecution from the crowd.  
Pastors are beaten during the sermon and told if they come back they will  
be killed.  
And yet after all the stories he shared, they did not fight back.  
They did not complain.  
They just cried out to God in prayer.  
And kept running after Jesus not letting any barrier stand in their way.  
And so should we.

This morning we have looked at four barriers to following Jesus.  
Pride is a barrier, admit your helplessness.  
Riches are a barrier, give them away.  
Ignorance is a barrier, ask for sight.  
The crowd is a barrier, cry out for mercy.

Ultimately, we can only overcome these barriers through faith in Christ.  
We cannot jump over them in our own strength.  
We need Jesus.  
Cry out to Him as loud as you can.  
And He will give you grace.