

Mark 10:17-27.

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" 20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Jesus tells us exactly what we need to hear.

- 1. It is impossible for us to gain heaven by ourselves***
- 2. By God's grace alone are we saved***

The beans has been harvested, most of the corn has been picked, and a few of the fields have now been plowed. The farmer looks over his land with great satisfaction. It was another good year. Sure, prices could be more favorable, but life's pretty good. What if God came to you and asked you to sell the farm? What would you do? What would you say? The first paycheck came in from that new job that you had worked so hard to get. What if Jesus told you to cash it and give it all to the poor; quit your job and follow him? What if Jesus told you to take all that you had, all that land, the source of your wealth, the possessions that you have and sell it all and follow him? What would you say? What would you do?

Such a scenario makes us uncomfortable, a little nervous, maybe even a little sad, but often this is the very gut check, the priority gauge that we need, as it makes us consider where our faith and devotion lies. Today, I am not asking you to sell your farm, or quit your job, and sell everything that you have and give it to the poor. However, I *am* asking you to consider that big question that Jesus was leading this young man to ask. What, if anything is standing in the way of my relationship with God? And if we look at our priorities honesty, we often put too much of our trust in ourselves, and in the things we have. Too often we give more glory and more attention and more devotion to the career that we are building, the reputation that we have earned, and things that we have than we give glory

and honor to our God one who gives all these things to us. And when put those things before God, our land, our possessions, our reputation each one becomes an idol to which we regularly bow down. That is something that our Savior wants us to avoid for it will destroy our relationship with the true God and may jeopardize our eternity. And so we listen with careful attention to the words of our gospel for today and we hear how **Jesus tells us exactly what we need to hear. It is impossible for us to gain heaven by ourselves and by what we have or what we have to offer. But rather by God's grace alone we are saved.**

A young man had just run up to Jesus thrown himself at Jesus feet and had asked him perhaps that most important question that anyone could ask. ***What must I do to inherit {to acquire} eternal life?*** This young man seemed to have everything. He seemed to be rich in property and possessions and it seemed he was also rich in character. From all accounts it seems that this was a young man that any mother would have been proud to call her son. When Jesus asked him if he had obeyed God's commands to avoid murder, and adultery, false testimony, and fraud; when Jesus asked him if he had honored his father and mother, the man quickly answered, ***All these commandments I have kept since my youth.*** There was a bit of pride and perhaps even arrogance in his answer, but this answer came more from a lifetime of well-meaning honest intentions which led this man to answer in such a way. For his entire adult life this young man had been careful to live his life the right way. Surely that was worth something? He believed that he had done right by God, he trusted in all that he was and all that he had to offer and he presented himself before the Son of God.

But something was missing, something wasn't right, and so we are told Jesus looked at him and he loved him. Jesus knew the young man's intentions were genuine, but Jesus also knew that this man's understanding of the way of salvation was critically flawed. And so Jesus looked at him and loved him, and he loved him enough to tell him the one thing that he really needed to hear. ***There is one thing that you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*** Jesus told him this not because people of wealth can't follow Jesus or be in heaven. He didn't say this because it is an absolute prerequisite for discipleship to sell all the things that we have and give to the poor so that we may follow him. No, Jesus said this to this particular individual because, this was exactly what this young man needed to hear. This man had missed something, and this oversight was keeping him from a proper relationship with God. This young man may have done his best to love his neighbor as the commandments had instructed him, but this man had a big 1st commandment problem.

Jesus told this man something that he needed to hear, but it was certainly not what that man wanted to hear. Notice how Jesus, in love, so skillfully and carefully constructs this discourse so that this rich young man might realize the sins that were really troubling him and keeping him from following God and were endangering his eternity. Did you notice that Jesus started with the last half of the commandments first, but he skips the commandments that have to do with this man's relationship with his God? And so the man answers rather confidently because he trusts in his reputation and ability to get along with his neighbors. But then Jesus immediately tells him to sell all that he has and follow Jesus

then you will have treasures in heaven, and Jesus says this to him because this man had a serious 1st commandment problem. In his love, Jesus spoke the words so that the man could see specific law. This was his problem. The gods of greed and materialism had taken God's rightful place as the most important things in his life. The gods of greed and materialism had to be destroyed in his life so that he could follow Jesus, so that he could believe in the God of salvation.

The one thing that he lacked was saving faith in God. He did not fear, love, and trust in God, but instead he loved his possessions and he trusted in himself and all that had and all his own efforts more than he loved and trusted in God. The money that *he* had gained, the possessions that *he* obtained, had become his gods. These were the things that he trusted in, these were the things that he loved and lived for. And that became all the more apparent when the young man turned and walked away from his Savior with a heavy heart when Jesus exposed his secret idolatry. In love Jesus told this man exactly what he needed to hear and it hurt, but it was for his good.

In his word God does the same for us, doesn't he? Quite often our Lord speaks to us with words that we don't want to hear, not because he is trying to frustrate us or because his goal is to get us to walk away sad, but he speaks to us so directly and specifically because he loves us. He wants us to fear, love, and trust in him above all things and so that means we cannot love and trust in ourselves and our own understanding or own possessions more than God. So the LORD in his word tells us what we need to hear. "You are sinners. You are imperfect. Even your righteous acts are like filthy rags. Yes, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And our God loves each one of us so much he doesn't just tell us that we are sinners in generic ways that we can brush aside. *Well, I haven't murdered anyone. I haven't stolen anything significant.* And we try to do that, especially when things are going well. *I have been pretty good to my neighbor lately. I haven't done anything too harmful or too sinful.*

In his love God comes to us, especially in times like that, and he tells us exactly what we need to hear. Through his word he points out those holes in our life, in our morality, in our ability to serve and perfectly obey God. God tells us in his word so clearly and so often so that we may understand that we cannot save ourselves. It is impossible; for our God not only tells us, "do not steal" but he also tells us, "do not covet." You and I may be able to guard our lives against blatantly stealing from our neighbors, but when the LORD addresses our sinful, greedy, jealous, envious thoughts, he aims to shine a light on how sinful we are inside and out. Our God not only commands us, "do not murder," but he reminds us that "whoever hates his brother is a murderer". The LORD not only commands us, "do not commit adultery", but he reminds us that "whoever looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart". The LORD warns us in his word, he tells us exactly what we need to hear. And he lets us know that whenever we break any of these commandments we also break the first commandment as we put our own desires, our own agendas, and our own will before the will of God. As it turns out, we too have a big 1st commandment problem. And so the Lord, in his great love for us, speaks to us in a way that convicts us of our sin and makes us realize that only God can save us.

But thanks be to God that the Word also reminds us that while the wages of sin is

death, the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. As the man walks away convicted by Jesus' request, our LORD uses this moment to teach his disciples and all those that would follow him an important lesson about saving faith. ²³ ***Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"***²⁴ ***The disciples were amazed at his words.*** The disciples were shocked! If this man who was rich in possessions and character, if he didn't have enough to offer God to obtain eternal life, how could anyone ever hope of entering God's kingdom and obtaining eternal life?! And that was the exact point that Jesus was making. It doesn't matter how rich or poor you are, no matter your earthly status, it is impossible to improve your heavenly status on your own. It is only by God's power and grace that we are saved. Again, Jesus said. ***"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!*** This time there was no mention of rich or poor, just the difficulty for anyone to enter the kingdom of God. And then Jesus utters the phrase that would truly catch their attention and make it absolutely clear that this was impossible on their own. ²⁵ ***It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.***²⁶ ***The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*** But then Jesus said something else that was exactly what they needed to hear at that moment. ***"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."***

By his grace God does the impossible for us. It would be impossible to save ourselves by means of earning our way to heaven. God's Word shows us that even in our best moments we lack perfection. God's Word tells us exactly what we need to hear as it speaks specific law. I am not perfect. You are not perfect. We cannot save ourselves. No one could ever be good enough, or make an offer to God that was rich enough to get into his kingdom. The Bible makes that clear.

But the Bible also speaks words of rich and specific gospel to you and me as well. Words that you and I so desperately need to hear even more than the words of the law. And God's Word speaks so clearly of a Savior who was perfect in my place and in your place. He avoided all the sins that you and I have fallen into: the sins of greed, and coveting, and lust, and theft, and hatred, and all the other sins we have wandered into purposefully or accidentally, but with Jesus there was no mistakes, no slips us, instead he feared, and trusted, and loved our God above all things. He kept the 1st commandment completely, as well as all the commandments perfectly. This is an impossibility for any other human being, but Jesus, the God-man, did the impossible for us. He was without sin and then he laid down his life so that sinners bloated with sin and carrying the heavy burden of punishment could have their sin and punishment taken away so that they might enter into that narrow way into God's kingdom and into his heaven through faith in Jesus Christ alone. By faith in Jesus we know and believe that Jesus has done the impossible for us, because he tells us exactly what we need to hear. It is impossible for us to gain heaven by ourselves, but by God's grace alone are we saved. Amen.