

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



Mark 10:17-27

Don't Be Fooled by Wealth

While they don't mean to upset their parents, that is often the result when children ask, "Are we there yet?" Whether it be the drive to Garden Grove to play the hand bells on a Sunday morning or the drive across country on a family trip, "Are we there yet?" is not usually a well received question.

The man in our text was in essence asking Jesus, "Am I there yet?" *Have I done enough to inherit eternal life? Is there something else that I need to do?*

Based on what we learn about this man in our text as well as the other Gospel accounts, he was probably a kind and good person. He would have been a great neighbor. He probably didn't mean to be arrogant when he claimed that he had kept the commandments. He was mistaken because he didn't see the total perfection of thought, word, and deed that were required. But by the world's standards, we have no reason to think he was not telling the truth.

What an important story this is for people who may think that we are the good people in society. What an important lesson for people who may think that "the world needs more people like me." Kind, good people need to hear this story and get Jesus' point. At the same, Jesus has something to say to the burdened conscience that feels the weight of sin. Jesus tells us that God solves the problem that our consciences say cannot be solved.

The story starts with Jesus telling the man that he didn't want to be known as a "Good Teacher." In other stories we hear that he didn't want to be known as a healer or someone who could provide bread. If Jesus is reduced to being a "Good Teacher" he is only another law giver; he is reduced to being what the man in the text wanted. Jesus would tell us what to do. Then we would either do it and inherit eternal life; or fail to do it and be lost. But Jesus would just be a

guide who told us how to do the right things. The important action would be for us to obey.

To show this nice person that he needed more than a "Good Teacher" Jesus had to show this nice man the reality of his sin. So Jesus hit him where it would hurt the most. **"Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** First of all, no where in the Bible does God command us to give away all our possessions. He gave the gifts to us!

But for this man, Jesus could see that his possessions had become his god. He thought he had kept the Commandments, but he couldn't even keep the First Commandment. Something other than God had taken up first place in his heart. To expose the sin, Jesus showed the unholy attitude that was alive and well in his heart.

The blow from Jesus hit the mark. The nice guy suddenly realized that he had sinned. Our text says, **"the man's face fell."** Literally, it says that **he was appalled** by what Jesus said. *What do you mean to say? That I'm a sinner too?!*

It is easy to think about the sins of other people. For this man, it was probably easy to think about the sins others had committed. For us, it is easy and painless to sit in judgment of the man in this text. How foolish he was to think he had kept the Commandments to a degree that he could save himself.

But one of the painful lessons from this story is that sin isn't about what others have done. Jesus' words condemn the sin in me. Jesus didn't let this man live with the false impression that he could save himself. We dare not live with that illusion either.

It isn't difficult for Americans in our day to understand the temptation of wealth that had

clouded this man's heart. By American standards, you may not be the richest person around. But when we consider ourselves compared to the rest of the world and to what people have historically owned, we are rich! Our poor people are rich by the standards of much of the rest of the world.

And so Jesus' warning to this man is a warning that we must hear. Take Jesus' warning literally. For the rich, it is just as easy to get into heaven as it is to get a giant camel to fit through the eye of a tiny needle. "That is impossible," you say. That is Jesus' point!

Those who rely on their wealth for security and comfort may enjoy a few years of ease in life; but their eternal future won't be so enjoyable. Jesus' words are intended to shock us because he wants our attention. He doesn't want us to live a worldly life and then die blind to the reality of our sin.

"Are we almost there?" No, this man wasn't close. As nice as he probably was, he was relying on himself for eternal life. You are not almost there either. Sin, including the idolatry of worshipping money, separates us from God! Sin is not excusable, but brings God's holy anger. Left unchecked, sin results in the fire of hell.

The disciples understood the severity of what Jesus said. "**Who then can be saved?**" they asked. If a nice guy like the man kneeling before Jesus couldn't get into heaven, who could? Their despairing question was exactly what Jesus wants from all of us.

Give up! Quit trying to save yourself. Your sin is real and you cannot ignore it away.

But God can solve the problem that you cannot! Jesus didn't come to be a good teacher, but a Savior. He came to take away sin. He would do it perfectly by dying on the cross. His payment would be the perfect payment for all sins — including yours! The status of being God's children — which we could not possibly attain by ourselves — is given to us through faith in

Jesus! You are restored; every sin is forgiven. Eternal life is guaranteed gift from God. *We are already there because of Jesus!*

Don't be fooled by the things you own. They don't make you better than anyone else. They don't protect you from danger. They don't prepare you for eternal life.

We don't know the end of this story. The Gospel texts say he went away. He didn't want to be challenged to change and put God first.

How about you? The message from the Bible that you have sinned is intended to make you squirm. God wants you to realize the reality of situation. Will you walk away in anger that God dare call *you* a sinner?

Jesus wants to do the impossible for you too. He wants you to be rich! In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we read, "**For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**" You are rich because Jesus is your Savior. Don't judge your wealth by the car you drive or the home you own. Your lasting treasure is found in Jesus, your Savior.

Because of Jesus, you are already there! You have arrived. Now, as a child of God, take care of the things God has given you. Use them and enjoy them, but don't serve them. They are worthless compared to the surpassing glory of knowing Jesus Christ who is your Savior. Real joy in life comes from knowing that your eternity is secure; that for Jesus' sake, you are already fully accepted as a child of God. Amen.

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