

October 13, 2024
Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Mark 10:17–22

THE LAW ALWAYS DEMANDS MORE BUT JESUS ALWAYS GIVES MORE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In our Gospel text this morning Jesus is traveling with His disciples in the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. (cf: Mark 10:2) Apparently, a rich young man had heard of Jesus’ teaching. As Jesus was on His journey, our text says:

“... [the] *man ran up and knelt before [Jesus] and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’*” (Mark 10:17)

The man doesn’t know exactly who Jesus is, but he respectfully addresses Him as “*Good Teacher.*” He’s looking to Jesus for insight and wisdom – namely – what must he do to inherit eternal life. At first glance it appears the young man is on the right track. Jesus is the *Good Teacher*, however, the title *Good Teacher* doesn’t go far enough. Many people in our culture today are willing to acknowledge Jesus as a *Good Teacher*. Even the Muslims, Jews, and some unbelievers say that Jesus is indeed a historical person who was a wise teacher and fine example of how to live and treat others.

But Jesus won’t let him get away with calling Him “*Good*” – because there’s only one way Jesus could be truly *good* – and that’s if He is the One True God. No one is *good* except God alone. (cf: Mark 10:18)

Secondly, the rich young man reveals his own misunderstanding how one inherits eternal life. He focuses on himself and his works saying: “*what must I do to inherit eternal life.*” The man’s question contradicts itself. One does not inherit by work that *you* do. You inherit because of the work that *someone* has done. And because someone else was successful – and – that successful person was kind enough to name you as an heir – you are eligible to receive an inheritance. The heir can be anyone! But one thing is sure – the heir puts in *zero* effort. They only receive.

The man in our text was a pious Jew and recognized that something was missing in his life – and that something was assurance of eternal life. He thought he’d jumped over all the hurdles, dotted all the *i*’s and crossed all the *t*’s. At a young age he had amassed great possessions. But there had to be more. So, coming upon Jesus, he asks what he must do to *earn* something that is only freely *given*.

Jesus tries to redirect him away from his own good works to the goodness of God. But Jesus also recognized that the man needed to hear the full sternness of the Law. The Law always accuses

you of your sin and condemns you to death as payment for the wages of your sin. So, Jesus told him exactly what he must do. **Keep the commandments! Keep God's Law!** (cf: Mark 10:19)

Jesus summarized the Second Table of the Ten Commandments, focusing on the man's relationship with his neighbor – which should've been enough to terrify the heart of any man, because none of us loves our neighbor as we ought.

The Law always demands more. You and I always fall short. Just when you thought you jumped over every hurdle, dotted all the *i*'s and crossed all the *t*'s, there's always one more hurdle to clear, one more *i* to dot and *t* to cross. But the man in our text didn't see it that way. Just as the Pharisees were blinded by their own self-righteousness, this young man was conceited, smug and secure in his sin, saying:

“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” (Mark 10:20)

Even if he could've lived a perfect outwardly moral life, Jesus knows the man's heart. The darkness of his sinful heart betrayed him just as your heart and mine betray us. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. (cf: Luke 19:10) Our text says Jesus looked at him and loved him. (cf: Mark 10:21) He didn't beat him over the head with a Bible. He didn't wag His finger in his face, or scold him for his self-righteousness. He spoke the truth in love and compassion so that the man might recognize his sin, saying:

“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” [But] ***disheartened by the saying, [the man] went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.***” (Mark 10:21-22)

For hundreds of years this text has been used to condemn wealth. When people hear this text they start to squirm in the pew. And granted, wealth does pose a great danger as we'll hear in next week's Gospel text. Those who have possessions are tempted to trust in their treasure rather than trust in God. But in our text Jesus is not condemning the young man or you or me for having possessions. As with all sinners, the man is guilty of more than just a single transgression.

First, possessions are a great blessing from God. All that you have and all that you are – is a blessing and gift from God. But unfortunately, sometimes, like the man in our text, your possessions – possess you. Instead of fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things, you fear losing the security of your possessions, trusting in them as if they will sustain you unto eternal life. Instead of using your riches to love and serve your neighbor, you cling to them and hoard them as if they'll never perish so that you can serve only yourself.

Secondly, like the man, you and I also suffer from the sin of works righteousness... thinking we can save ourselves by our deeds. But keeping God's Commandments perfectly is impossible. Each of us daily sins much, and we deserve nothing other than God's eternal punishment. You and I are so arrogant at times that we think our sins aren't really *that* bad and God's doesn't really care how perfectly we follow His Law. But as you heard in the Introit earlier:

“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!” (Psalm 112:1)

God's Commandments – God's good and holy Law is His good and loving will for the lives and well-being of all people. And what is His will for your life? God's will is that you love and trust in Him above all things – and – to love and serve your neighbor as yourself. And while it's true, keeping God's good and perfect Law *perfectly* is impossible for the sinful man, it doesn't mean that as a Baptized and redeemed child of God, you shouldn't strive to do better. It's God's good and loving will after all!

As a new creation in Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit strengthens you to seek good and not evil, to be good stewards of your riches by giving your tithes and offerings to the church so that the Gospel might continue to be proclaimed in this place... and be good stewards of your riches by serving your neighbor and all who're in need – all while struggling against your old Adam.

The man in our text lacked one thing. His trust and faith were misplaced. He needed to follow Jesus. In our text, it's as if Jesus said: "*Get rid of all your distractions and false gods that you trust in – and follow Me.*" These are the same words by which Jesus called each of His disciples. After He taught them that He must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again, (cf: Mark 8:31) St. Mark writes that:

"[Jesus called] the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?'" (Mark 8:34-37)

It's as if Jesus is saying, "*You can't save yourself, but I can.*" He is saying, "*Don't trust in your own efforts and works, but trust in My work of salvation of going to the cross and dying for your sin. There's nothing you must do to inherit eternal life. The work has all been done. It is finished. I opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. It's my free gift of grace for all who believe in Me. They are My heirs. It's written in My blood in the covenant which is poured out for mankind.*" (cf: Mark 14:24)

Even though Jesus loved him and had compassion on him, He will not force the man to repent and follow Him. The man went away sorrowful secure in his sin. Jesus loves and has compassion on all mankind – but He forces no one to repent and follow Him, and many go away, secure in their sin. Jesus wanted the man to recognize his sin, repent, and follow Him. But he could not by his own reason and strength – and neither can you and I on our own. It's not in our sinful nature. So, Christ became your substitute, giving up everything He had for you – even His very life, dying a death on a cross. (cf: Philippians 2:8)

You don't inherit anything by work that *you* do. You inherit because of the work that *someone* has done and they have made you an heir. The Law says "do." The Gospel says "done." The Law always demands more. Jesus always gives more. Jesus went to the cross to die for the sins of the rich young man – and for you and all mankind. If later on the man repents, the benefits of the cross are there for him. Jesus' gifts are for him and for all who do not resist the Holy Spirit working through the Word, but take up their cross and follow Jesus.

Dear Christian, in Baptism you were born again, born from above, (cf: John 3:3, 5) and God adopted you and made you an heir of His kingdom. In St. Peter's first epistle letter he writes:

"... [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3–5)

As an heir of the kingdom, at the font you were freely credited with all of Jesus' earthly work of salvation: His perfect life and sacrificial death. He sanctified you to live a holy and blameless life. And while you cannot live up to His commands, because you are Baptized and clothed with the righteousness of Christ, God sees you as holy. He wants you to live by faith alone in Jesus. He wants you to do His will.

Jesus bids you to confess your sins and receive His absolution. He forgives you all of your sins, your sins of trusting in your wealth and yourself above God. He comes to you in Word and Sacrament to remove the burden of the Law from your shoulders. He pours out His body and blood – given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. By His means of grace, Jesus joins you to His sacrificial death and to His life victorious. It's your inheritance as a Baptized believer in Christ. You are an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.