

YOUR WEALTH, NOT MINE, O CHRIST. Pentecost 21 – Oct 11/14, 2018

Mark 10:17-27. 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?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. 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.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 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." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said 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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Dear Christian Friends:

Recently a member of Saint John's made a comment to me. At first glance this comment seems insulting, even shocking. But, this comment is really a compliment. So, what was this shocking, yet complimentary comment? "I did not realize how much I sinned until I joined this church."

Why is it good that a church makes its members realize how much they sin? Well, it is good because Jesus does that same thing to the man in our Gospel lesson. It says, **a man ran up to [Jesus] and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**

This man thought he could work his way into heaven. He said, **what must I do to inherit eternal life?** Jesus answers, **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.'**"

The man replies, **"all these I have kept since I was a boy."** You can almost hear him thinking, "Fifth commandment – no murder. Check. Sixth commandment – no adultery. Check. Seventh commandment – no stealing. Check. Eighth commandment – no slander. Check. Back to the seventh commandment – no fraud. Check. Fourth commandment – obey your parents. Check. Yes, I have obeyed the law. So, I am good to go heaven."

But Jesus shows this man that he is not "good to go" to get into heaven. Jesus shows him how he was not really keeping God's commandments as well as he thought he was. Our text says, **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." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.**

Now, first, please notice that Jesus had great love for the man. Jesus truly wanted this man to go to heaven. But there is only one way to heaven. This man's outward obedience to some of God's commandments was not that way. So, Jesus points out how this man's obedience to the law was not as good as he thought it was. Jesus points out how much this man was sinning. Jesus tells him, **One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.**

Jesus shows what commandment this man was not keeping--the first commandment. **You shall have no other gods.** This man did not worship the true God. This man worshiped his money. He loved his money. He trusted in his money. He put his money ahead of the needs of the poor. He put his money ahead of his own soul's salvation.

Right about now you need your church to make you realize how much you sin. You need that because your human nature thinks, "Aha! This does not apply to me. I am not rich. And I give to charity. On top of that, I come to church. I worship the true God. So, I might not be perfect. But at least I am not like that rich man who is rotting in hell with all his money."

Maybe you do not think those exact thoughts. But, in your heart, you have that compulsion to compare yourself to others. In your heart you feel better about yourself when the preacher exposes the sins of others. But you do not realize you are just like that rich man. The only difference is the rich man worshiped the false

god of money. You, and I - we worship the false god of self. By nature, you and I are constantly telling God, "Lord, I do keep your law well enough to deserve a place in heaven. Lord, I am good enough to deserve your love and blessings. Lord, I love you more than my money and more than my stuff. Lord, I even love you more than I love my own family."

Just like that rich man thought he was keeping God's law well enough to earn a place in heaven, whether you like to admit it or not, we do the same. We grossly overestimate how well we keep God's law. We grossly underestimate how much we sin. That's why we need Jesus to show us the same love that he showed that rich man in our Gospel Lesson. We need Jesus to expose our sin.

But Jesus does not mean, "Give up your one favorite sin and you will be good to go to heaven." No, it's not like that. You see, that man's love of his money was not his biggest sin. His biggest sin was turning his money into a false god. And when Jesus told him, **sell everything you have and give to the poor**, that was not the most difficult thing Jesus told him to do. No, the thing Jesus required of that man was not just difficult. It was impossible. After Jesus told him to give all his money to the poor, Jesus told him, **then come, follow me**.

Whether you are rich or poor; whether you are a life-long Christian or new to the faith; whether you go to church all the time, or rarely come to church at all, Jesus demands the same thing of everyone: **follow me**.

That's the command that kills us. That's because to follow Jesus does not mean you "like" him on Facebook or read his tweets. To follow Jesus means to be just like Jesus. We cannot do that. Every one of us must confess, "Jesus, I am not like you. I am not as humble as you. I am not as loving as you. I do not pray as hard as you did. I do not share God's Word as diligently as you did. I do not help the poor as often as you did. I do not show compassion to the lost, the hurt, the outcast, and the stranger like you did. Jesus, I cannot follow you. I am not perfect like you are."

And that's the whole point of the law. If you want to earn your way into heaven, you have to obey all of God's law perfectly all the time without ever sinning even one time. You have to be just as perfect as Jesus. That is impossible for you and for me and for every other human being. That's why we all need to realize how

much we sin. Only then can we finally confess, “It is impossible for me to earn my way into heaven.”

When Jesus brings us to that point, then he answers the disciples’ question in our text, **Who then can be saved?** Jesus gives the only answer to the question of our salvation, **With man this [that is, salvation] is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.** Yes, God does the impossible. God saves you, a sinner.

God saves you by using something far more valuable than millions or even billions of dollars. Saint Peter tells us, **it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold** [*or stocks and bonds, or home equity value, or how many times you go to church, or how much you donate to charity...OK, I added those last few things...*] **It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from [your] empty way of life ... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**

God only accepts one currency to pay the cost to get into heaven. That currency is not money or good works. The entrance fee into heaven is the most precious commodity in the universe. It is the blood of Christ. It is the life of Christ. It is the holiness and perfection of Christ.

Earlier we sang the hymn, “Your Works, not Mine, O Christ.” We can also say, **YOUR WEALTH, NOT MINE, O CHRIST.** Christ’s wealth is his perfect life, his holy, precious blood, and his innocent suffering and death. God gives that wealth of Christ to you. He gives it to you by smashing your self-righteous pride. God makes you realize just how much you do sin. God does that because the more you realize the immensity of your sin, the more you hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ. The more you comprehend the darkness of your sin, the more you want to bask in the glorious light of God’s love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. The more you confess your spiritual poverty, the more you will find hope and comfort and joy in the wealth of Christ’s sacrifice for you. So, even though we are all spiritual beggars, we are wealthy beyond our wildest dreams. Our wealth and our salvation is Christ, our only Lord and only Savior. And with faith in Christ, we are wealthy, indeed! AMEN.