

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Gospel lesson today is one of my favorite parts in the Bible. Our Lord Jesus has some very challenging issues for us to consider today. He will have us wrestle with our very salvation. In the Gospel lesson, a rich young man comes to Jesus and asks the question that is at the heart of everything, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus goes on to tell the man he must sell all his possessions and follow him. Jesus also says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Has this got you thinking? Because here's the thing: You are rich. So am I. Compare our standard of living today to any other time in history. Compare our standard of living with the majority of people in this world. By either standard, we are rich. Thus we have the title of today's message, "Much Savings = Not Saved?" Because we have many possessions, is our eternal soul at stake? It very well may be. Please listen to this message today from God's Word.

As I said before, a man came up to Jesus. And from the other gospels we know he was a young man and already a ruler. It would make sense if he were a synagogue ruler. And one more important detail: the man was rich. The man fell on his knees before Jesus. He had something pressing on his heart. He was greatly concerned (and rightly concerned!) about his eternal future. So he asks Jesus, "**Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" He asked the right question, didn't he? He asked the right person, didn't he? Look at Jesus' answer:

**"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.**

Jesus response strikes us. Was Jesus saying he wasn't true God? No, not at all. As we shall soon see, the man had, in his mind, lowered the bar regarding God's requirements for eternal life. He call Jesus "good" even though he knows little about Jesus. He considered himself "good" as we shall soon see. Apparently, there were many in this man's book who were "good." When Jesus tells him, "God alone is good," he was encouraging the man to take an honest look once again at God's standard of "good." In God's definition, "good" is God. If any person is to be defined as morally good, then he must be as good as God is. Jesus is teaching the man that he did not meet God's definition of "good" even though he thought he had.

Again, the question was, "What must I do to inherit eternal life." What would you answer if someone asked you that? I think I would be inclined to answer, "Believe in Jesus Christ who is your Savior and you will have eternal life." But we are again surprised to hear what Jesus says:

**"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 doesn't direct the man to trust him for salvation. Instead he points the man to the 10 Commandments! Jesus does this because he knows the man's heart. God gives us in his Word the Law and Gospel. And God wants us to properly divide his word of truth. He gives his law to teach us his holy requirements. God is holy and requires that man be holy, pure and blameless as well. God wants us to compare our lives with his requirements and come to recognize how far short we have come. God shows us our sin so we understand the grave danger we are in. God speaks of his anger about our sin and rebellion. God wants us to despair of self and recognize that salvation is in no way found within us. Salvation is only possible if it is within him.

When we ask God the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life." God gives us the answer, "You can do nothing. All your best attempts have magnificently failed. You're not even close to meeting my holy requirements." God would have us reach the sad conclusion, "I have not kept your commandments."

But look at what the man replies, **“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”** The man before Jesus that day did not understand that he was not meeting God’s holy requirements. He did not recognize the danger his soul was in. He did not even consider that God might be angry at him for what he had done. Jesus knew that God’s law had not yet had its intended effect on the rich, young man.

Before we pause and think about how this text relates to our own lives, I want to take just a bit more: **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.** The law was just not hitting home in the man’s heart. He continued to rely on himself for his salvation. So Jesus looked at him and loved him. Aren’t those neat words? This man saw no need for Jesus as his Savior. He felt he was quite good enough to save himself. Jesus didn’t lose his temper with the man and send him away. Jesus loved the man and his heart ached for him. He desperately wanted him to recognize the sin that was rooted deep in the man’s heart. And so in love, Jesus hit him where it hurts: in the pocket book. He directed the man to go sell all his possessions to the poor and he would treasure in heaven. This was not what the man wanted to hear. He was wealthy. He enjoyed his wealth. He could not give up his wealth. And so he didn’t ask any more questions. He didn’t pursue the matter further. He just went away sad.

I’ve had more than one unbeliever point this passage out to me. “So here Jesus directs believers to sell all their stuff and follow him. Yet you haven’t done that! You are a hypocrite, and you’re not going to have treasure in heaven. You simply pick and choose what you’re going to believe and do.” That’s a tough one, isn’t it? What is Jesus really saying here?

Is Jesus really saying we must sell everything to the poor if we are to have treasure in heaven? In a sense, yes he is. Jesus knew the young man before him. The man truly believed he was sinless and had kept all of God’s commandments. He believed he was good enough for God and that he was not in any kind of danger because of his sins, and he believed that he was not in need of any kind of saving or Savior. And so Jesus shows the man bluntly that he had not even kept the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. “You shall have no other gods,” it says. That means God is first in our lives. He is number one. He is the first priority, the most important. All trust and reliance must be in him and no one and nothing else. All glory must go to him and to no one and nothing else.

Had this man kept the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment? If he were as perfect as he thought he was, then it would not be a problem for him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor as Jesus asked him to do. Jesus then asked him to give up the one thing that was more important to him than God. Jesus was commanding him to let God be in first place in his heart and life, and to cast out the idol of wealth which had taken God’s place. The man could not do it. He held fast to his idol. And he left very sad.

And this is what Jesus wants us to give serious thought to today. Is there an idol in your life? I doubt you have one on your mantle at home. But do you have an idol in your back pocket? Do you have one in your purse? I’m talking about your billfold. Are we guilty of the very same sin that this man was guilty of? We are, aren’t we? Don’t we treasure “stuff” too much and our salvation in Christ too little? Don’t we covet too much what we don’t have instead of being satisfied with what God gave us? We have an idolatry problem.

There are other things that could take first place in our life. Think of Abraham. His long-awaited son, Isaac, could easily have taken first place in his life instead of God. But it didn’t. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his one and only son from Sarah, Isaac... the son of the promise, what did Abraham do? Did he go away sad, for he loved his son much? No! Abraham set out the next morning, prepared to do exactly as God commanded. Abraham still had God in first place in his life.

Let’s understand clearly: Jesus has NOT commanded us to sell our possessions to the poor. He commanded that man to do so. The command is not given TO US anywhere in Scripture. But God is calling on you today to give up whatever it is in your life that is more important to you than God. Is

your focus in life on material possessions? Your soul is in eternal danger. Do you place family above God? Work above God? Or imagine this... if the Nebraska Husker football team made it to the national championship and you got 50 yard line field-side tickets, would you give them up if for God? I'm only half-joking. Take as serious look in your life now. What is it in your life that is shoving God off the thrown of your heart?

Don't do what the man did. Don't walk away in despair and sadness because you can't give up that thing you treasure, trust and glorify more highly than God. Confess this grave sin against the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. Do you want to inherit eternal life? Turn from your rebellious life and follow Jesus.

And should we follow Jesus, we will hear what that man did not hear since left in despair. We will hear Jesus tell us that he removes our sin and our guilt. As we follow him, we see his perfect and humble life, always following the will of the Father. And he says to us, "My life is yours." And when we follow him, we see him go the way of the cross. Forsaken by the father for our sins. He suffers and he dies... the perfect sacrifice for our 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment sins and all others as well.

After that man walked away, Jesus 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?"**

Disciples could hardly believe what Jesus said. I don't think I really thought about this before, and maybe you haven't either. Do you realize that this young rich man was a very likable fellow? He's rich. He's a ruler. He's got it going. But he's not the kind that walked over others to get to his position. He's a really nice guy. How do I know? He's got strong morals. He follows his conscience. He wants to learn better what's right and what's wrong. He probably HAD done a pretty good job of keeping the Commandments. This man was most certainly a treasure to his mother. The other mothers said, "Your son is such a nice young man. You must be so proud of him!" This man would be a dream to have in any congregation. Helping others. Studying his Bible. Asking questions. And yet this man was on the wrong track for getting to heaven. And this man led Jesus to say that it his hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God... even harder than for a camel to go through the eye of needle!

So the disciples were left asking: "If **this** man is not saved, then who possibly could be? We don't have things together like this man does. And we don't know anyone who does. Yet he's not being saved? And salvation is especially hard for the rich? 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."** And this is the crux of Jesus' message today. The man came to Jesus thinking it *was* possible for man... for him... to save himself. He relied on self and wealth for his salvation... and that wouldn't cut it. And that's a common problem with people who have life easy, who are self-made, who are successful and hard working, and who lead pretty good lives. They tend to think that they can do it well enough when it comes to matters of salvation and God's holy requirements. And they are wrong. It is impossible for man to be holy enough. We must despair of self and turn to God.

And then we hear of God's grace and goodness that though for us it is impossible, with God, all things are possible. God accomplished for us what is impossible for us to accomplish ourselves. Through the perfect life and innocent death of his own Son, God pays our way into eternity. [Paying at the movie, we're short... friend comes along and makes the payment for us. And we get in!]

So if we have wealth (which we all do) does this mean we won't be saved? It could very easily mean that if we're trusting in self and wealth as the rich man did. Do some serious soul-searching this week and ask yourself if material possessions... or anything else... are what you focus on and rely on. Then confess. Turn to the Lord Jesus and follow him. He does the impossible for you. He removes your sin debt in full, provides you with the holiness you lack, and makes you an heir of eternal life. "What must I do to inherit eternal life." Answer: Nothing: It's God's gift to you through Jesus Christ. When he died, you inherited it all. Follow him. Amen.