

“Who Then Can Be Saved?” – Mark 10:17-27

Salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. Have you heard that from this pulpit before? I won’t apologize, because we need to hear it, to be reminded. It is so easy for Christians to slip and start to lean, ever so slightly, on their own piety, to fall into the trap of spiritual pride.

You are not capable of saving yourself. You are not capable of keeping yourself saved. You need Jesus. You need to trust in His finished work. You need to rely on His grace and God’s infinite mercy, alone.

Last week we saw Jesus’ love and care for little children. He told us that “*of such is the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 10:14) The kingdom belongs to them, not because they are innocent – they aren’t. Not because they understand their need for salvation – they can’t. But because of God’s unmerited favor, because of God’s grace. God is going to take care of those little kids.

But, what about those of us who are capable of understanding our inherent sinfulness? What about those who are cognitively able to understand who God is and what He requires? There is a Biblical principle that covers this, that teaches us about this. Jesus says:

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; (Luke 12:48)

With age and maturity, comes responsibility. As the Gospel is revealed to you, you have an obligation to respond in the appropriate way. Reject it, and you will spend eternity in Hell. Accept it, make Jesus your Lord, and you have an eternal inheritance in heaven. But,

“... whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” (Mark 10:15)

“Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling;” You cannot justify yourself and you cannot do anything to earn salvation. By faith alone, you must cling to the grace of Almighty God.

... looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

This morning, we’re going to look at a young man who had everything going for him. He had been given much. He had the best religious instruction. He had social status. He had money. But tragically, he was unwilling to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Now as He was going out on the road, (Mark 10:17a)

I need to stop right here and set the scene so you understand why Jesus was going out on the road and where He was going. Jesus and His disciples had been hanging out in Perea. This was a region on the East side of the Jordan River. It was on the route Galilean pilgrims would take on their way to Jerusalem.

Jesus was there, in large part, because it was not safe for Him to be anywhere close to the holy city. This was after He had raised Lazarus from the dead. And we read in John that there were many who witnessed this most amazing miracle. Some ran off and tattled to the chief priests and Pharisees, who huddled together.

*Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said,
“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. (John 11:47)*

Of course, He worked many signs; He is God the Son! What they should have done is humbled themselves before Him, fallen on their faces and begged for mercy. But instead, after their little huddle, they came to a different decision:

Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. (John 11:53)

On, the insanity of sin! Not only did they want to kill Jesus; they wanted to murder Lazarus too.

... because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. (John 12:11)

By the way, I believe this is why we don't see the story of Lazarus included in the synoptic gospels. Lazarus was still alive when Matthew, Mark and Luke were written, so, if they had included the account of Jesus raising him, it would have put him in further danger. John, remember, wrote his gospel at the end of the First Century, and that danger would have passed.

Jerusalem wasn't safe for Jesus, but He had an appointment to keep at Passover, an appointment that was established before time began. He was the Lamb who would take away the sin of the world and that Lamb would have to be sacrificed at Passover.

Jesus was going out on the road to begin His final trip to Jerusalem.

Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17)

Just who is this guy? Matthew describes him as a young man, Luke identifies him as a ruler, and all three synoptic gospels indicate that he had great wealth. Most likely, he was one of the officials in charge of a local synagogue. As I said before, he had a whole lot going for him: youth, money, prestige and power.

He ran to Jesus and knelt before Him. He humbled himself before the Lord. So far, so good! Furthermore, he asked the most important question anybody can ask: How do I inherit eternal life? You need to know the answer to that question, and you need to be able to share your answer with everyone in your sphere of influence.

Jesus answers him, first, with a little bit of irony.

So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. (Mark 10:18)

Two really important theological facts come from this verse. First of all, no one is good. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)* Every one of us is totally depraved.

But the second fact is even more profound. He called Jesus good; but only God is truly good. Guess what? He's right. Jesus is God, but I'm pretty sure this young guy hadn't figured it out.

You know the commandments: 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' 'DO NOT MURDER,' 'DO NOT STEAL,' 'DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS,' 'Do not defraud,' 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER.'" And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." (Mark 10:19-20)

No, he hadn't. I know, because nobody can keep the Law perfectly ... except Jesus. I'm sure he was a particularly fine fellow; I'll give him that. But from this one statement, we

learn that he was counting on his own piety to get him to heaven and Jesus would need to put him in his place. He would have to prove to him that he wasn't actually "all that". So, He gave him a command.

*Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."
(Mark 10:21)*

Did you catch the fact that Jesus loved him? This young man was prideful, and he was going to make the wrong choice. Jesus certainly knew it. But Jesus loved him. Jesus loves sinners!

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

One of the characteristics of true godly love is that it requires us to tell someone what he or she needs to know even if he or she doesn't want to hear it. Jesus loved this guy enough to point out what he was lacking. He could have said, "Hey, good job on those commandments. I think you're going to be okay, there buddy." But that would have been hate, not love.

Unfortunately, this rich, young ruler valued his possessions far more than he valued a relationship with Jesus Christ.

But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:22)

If Jesus truly is your Lord, you are obligated to do what He says. You need to strive for obedience. This young guy wasn't willing to submit.

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches 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." (Mark 10:23-25)

The disciples were astonished at this teaching, *thambeō* (θαμβέω) in the Greek. It is a very strong word which means to stupefy with surprise. This teaching blew them away. Why? Because their theology was flawed. They were still looking at externals. They saw a pious young man who was richly blessed of the Lord. If you're rich, God must really like you. That was what their theology taught.

But Jesus told them that it was virtually impossible for a rich man to find the kingdom.

Now, some commentators will tell you that the eye of a needle was the name of a very narrow gate in Jerusalem, through which a camel would have a very hard time passing, but with a little planning and work, and maybe by slathering a bunch of butter on its sides, you could get the critter through. That is absolutely not what Jesus is saying. There is no scriptural or architectural evidence that such a gate ever existed. Jesus is plainly saying that it is impossible for a rich guy to get into the kingdom ... on his own.

It is probably a litter bigger problem for rich folks, because when you are rich, there is a great temptation to trust your riches. If you think God has blessed you because of your own piety, why wouldn't you think that you have earned entrance into the kingdom. So, rather than trust Jesus, you instead trust some combination of Jesus and your own works.

But the other reason it is difficult for a rich guy to get into the kingdom is that nobody gets into the kingdom without submitting to the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus gave this guy a direct command. It bummed the guy out, but ultimately, instead of submitting, he just went away. His riches were more important to him than Jesus was.

And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" (Mark 10:26)

This “astonished” is actually a different Greek word, *ekplēssō* (ἐκπλήσσω) It means to strike with astonishment. It didn’t just cause them to wonder, it left them in shock. If the best and the brightest among them can’t be saved, who can? This young man was a ruler in the synagogue. He had the best education you can get. He had all the money he needed. He had great prestige in the community. And by the way, didn’t he humble himself before the Lord?

Can anybody at all be saved?

Well, yes. But not by any human effort. If you are going to come into the kingdom, you have to come as a little child and you don’t have it in you. Nobody does.

But praise God, there is a way.

But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)

And there it is. There is nothing you can do to earn salvation. God has to do it for you.

You can’t live a life that is righteous enough for Almighty God. You can’t do any religious work that would qualify you before God. You must be born again or you won’t even see the kingdom of God, (John 3:3) and that is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus died on the cross to save sinners. He was raised again from the dead, so we can have a living relationship with Him. Salvation is offered to us as a gift, bought and paid for by the eternal Son of God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Sola fide – By faith alone. The only thing you can do is believe! So, ask God for the faith to believe and trust your salvation to the finished work of Jesus Christ, alone. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You." (Mark 10:28)

Peter still didn’t get it and I suspect the same could be said for the other guys. They were focused on what Jesus asked the rich young ruler to give up. And they were thinking, “Hey, we gave up our former life to follow the Lord.” But it wasn’t about the sacrifice. It was about his willingness to be obedient. This young guy wasn’t willing to be obedient. If Jesus is your Lord, that means you are willing to do what He tells you to do.

Don’t miss the point; it is possible to be a Christian if you happen to be rich. God calls some who are poor, and God calls some who are rich, guys like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, the Apostle Paul. If you’re rich in the world’s goods, praise the Lord; use your riches to glorify Jesus Christ. Hold them loosely, though. If He asks you to give them up, you need to be willing to do so. If your heart is right, it will not be a sacrifice at all.

*So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **with persecutions**—and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)*

Obedience to Jesus is never a sacrifice. It might look like it for a time. Yes, you may endure some persecutions. In fact, it might get downright uncomfortable at times. The world might treat you with serious contempt and you may lose some stuff you once had.

Kris and I once had a really nice house in Everett Washington. We had a nice boat that we could use to cruise some of the most beautiful islands in the world. We had a great church family. We had great jobs. But at a point in time, Jesus called us to come to Coram, Montana and we had to leave those things behind.

It was no sacrifice at all! We now live in a really nice house. We live in one of the most beautiful places in all of the world and we have a fabulous church family. You are our brothers and sisters and mothers and children. But best of all, we know we have eternal life in the age to come.

And in the age to come ...

But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:31)

When we get to heaven, there are going to be some serious surprises. We will be surprised by who is there, and we will be surprised by who is not. You are not qualified to judge the condition of a person's heart, and neither am I. The "first" are those who because of their wealth, education, position, prestige, talents, etc., are highly regarded by men in general, sometimes even by God's children. There are many of those who are now regarded as the very pillars of the church who will have little or no status in the kingdom. The last refers to many of the humblest servants, who will be greatly exalted. Think, for example, about Mary of Bethany. She was harshly criticized by the disciples for "wasting" a flask of very costly perfume as she anointed Jesus with a profound act of love. But Jesus said:

Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:13)

It is never about your social status in this world. It is not about your wealth or your poverty. It is not about the success of your particular ministry. It is about humble submission to the Lord of the universe.

Want to be great in the kingdom? Submit to the Lord's leading. Be a servant to all. And pray that the Lord would give you the grace to do so, because, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."