

Sermon for October 21, 2012 – 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:17-27

**Theme: Regarding our salvation. . .**

- 1) *Our goodness counts for nothing.*
- 2) *God's love and power accomplishes everything.*

<sup>17</sup> 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?" <sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone. <sup>19</sup> 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.'" <sup>20</sup> "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" <sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" <sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

I'll never forget the astonishment expressed by a former member of mine, who questioned how God could forgive the sins of murders and child molesters. Her insinuation was: forgiveness should only be for "good" people like us, not "bad" people like them.

I'll never forget the Easter sermon I preached to 30 inmates at Ozaukee County Jail. I started off my sermon by saying: "We all know how horribly sinful we are in God's eyes . . ." Many of the inmates objected vocally and said, "We aren't horrible people. No, we are actually quite good."

A WELS pastor told me this story: On one occasion he was giving communion to a shut-in. He invited this man to confess his sins before communion, and the man said in all serious: "Pastor, since I'm shut-in, I don't really have any sins to confess."

These three events illustrate the truth that no one wants to admit that he is utterly evil and needs a savior. Everyone wants to think they are better than the next guy, and therefore "good enough" to earn God's love and salvation.

But the truth is that no one is good before God. Why not? Because, as our sermon text illustrates, even the best of us cannot keep the first commandment! Let us consider this fact and its implications under the theme: **Regarding our salvation. . .** 1) *Our goodness counts for nothing.* 2) *God's love and power accomplishes everything.*

Part One: Our goodness counts for nothing.

Our sermon text begins: <sup>17</sup> *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him*

Using modern imagery, let me describe this young man to you based on what we know from Scripture. Picture a young man who grew up in religious family and never missed a Sunday service. He avoided the temptations of wine and women. He worked incredibly hard to get ahead, but NOT at the expense of others. Imagine a man who was faithful to his wife and a good father who made sure his children were in worship. He was respected in the community, an active leader in the Church and made sure to give a little more than 10% in offerings – just to make sure he wasn't cheating God.

This incredibly moral man felt satisfied about how he lived his life. What more could he do than what he did? He tried to obey every law, and yet something bothered him. Something was missing. Then he heard accounts of Jesus preaching and his miracles of compassion. He considered Jesus to be a very good man – probably even better than himself. If there was anyone who could answer the question why he didn't feel "good enough" to earn heaven, it would be this rabbi named Jesus. Maybe he had the answer that would give him peace

And so he *ran up to [Jesus] and fell on his knees before him* (out of the utmost respect) and asked, “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” It’s as if he were saying: “I know that you are good, and so am I. And yet, I don’t feel good. Is something missing? Although maybe not. Maybe I just need you to reassure me that I am good enough to get to heaven.”

Jesus knew that there was something missing – a huge canyon existed between him and eternal life. The trouble is that this man had his nose so high in the air, and he was not seeing the huge danger that lay beneath him. And so Jesus replied: “*Why do you call me good? No one is good-- except God alone.*”

Jesus was trying to get the man to think. This guy was probably in the synagogue every Sabbath. Didn’t he recall the Scripture which said: <sup>2</sup> *God looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.* <sup>3</sup> *Everyone has turned away, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one (Psalm 53:2-3)?* If God says “no one is good” how could this man imagine he is good? If God said no one is good, how could this man consider Jesus good – unless, of course, Jesus is more than a man: He is God.

There is only one way for a man to be good in God's eyes, and that is keeping the Ten Commandments perfectly.

*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.'*”

Notice what Jesus is doing: he is only quoting select commandments in the order that many people (but not God) would consider being from really bad to not quite so bad. These are all commandments that a person could keep “outwardly” (though not in the heart). A person who does all these things is considered a good person in the eyes of the world – and this is what the man thought about himself.

<sup>20</sup> *"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."* At least – this is what he thought he did.

*Jesus looked at him and loved him* – not because this man was so good, but because He did not want this man in hell. He wanted this man to see his sins, to see how evil he was in the eyes of God, so that he would truly repent of his sins and look to Jesus as the Savior. Jesus loved this man, and this is why he told 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.*” *At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

The two chief commandments that summarize the whole law are this: *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,'* and *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* (Matthew 22:37,39). If this rich man was truly good, he would be excited at Jesus words and gladly give up everything. He would trust that the LORD would provide for his every need. He would love seeing all of his hard earned wealth go to those who truly need it. Such an act of love would demonstrate that he feared, loved and trusted in God above all things; and that he truly loved his neighbor as much as himself. This is what God considers “good.”

But the man went away sad. Why? Because he came face to face with the realization that he was not good enough for God. This man, so proud of his morality, did not even keep this first commandment. He loved his wealth so much that he did not want to part with it when the choice came between it or God. He loved his fellowman so little, that he was willing to let the poor go on suffering while he lived in luxury.

But before our sinful minds even entertain the notion that we would have done better, consider what happens next: <sup>23</sup> *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"* <sup>24</sup> *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!"* <sup>25</sup> *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."* <sup>26</sup> *The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"*

Notice the disciple’s amazement. They get it. Do we? Before them stood a most moral man. If he couldn't save himself, could anyone? All humans - both rich and poor - are selfish and unable to express the self-sacrificing love needed to be truly good in God's eyes. And that is the point: when it comes to our salvation and relationship with God, our own goodness

counts for nothing. Does this mean we are lost? No, because salvation is found apart from what we do, and that salvation is Jesus himself.

Part Two: God's love and power accomplishes everything.

Regarding the question of who can be saved, Jesus looked at [the disciples] and said, "*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.*"

God alone has the power to save us. He alone has the power to credit the righteousness - the goodness we need, to us. He alone has the power to wipe away our record of sin. And what is more - God has the love to accomplish all these things.

Just think: salvation itself was standing right before the rich man, but he was too blind to see it. What blinded him? himself. Jesus knew that this man needed to recognize his need for a Savior before he could believe in him as the Savior, so this is why he spoke to him as He did.

God's law does not show us the way to heaven. It show us that we all need a Savior from heaven. None of us can keep the law as God desires. Not a single one of us is truly "good". We are all selfish. We all need a Savior.

And the Savior is exactly who Jesus is. He did the impossible: he lived the perfect life of love that no human being has ever been able to live. He gave up everything, becoming poor, so that He could make us rich by giving us forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift. He was tempted in every way - just as we are - and was without sin. He then took all our sins upon himself and suffered the full punishment they had earned. Why did he do that? So that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. To put it another way: "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Just think - though faith in Christ, we are completely good in God's sight. Why? Because were are clothed with Jesus' goodness. When God the Father looks at us He sees His Son, with whom He is well pleased. And because we are covered in Christ's righteousness we also express this righteousness through our deeds - all done out of thanks to God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, regarding your salvation: there is nothing you can do to inherit eternal life. You are not good - but Jesus is. His divine love and power accomplished your salvation. He has forgiven your sins and given you his righteousness. He is yours and you are His. No more worry. No more wonder. Just peace and joy in your Savior's great love and the eternal life He won for you. May this great gift move you to thank God by living to His glory. Amen.