

Mark 10:17-22

“What Must I Do?”

20th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23B)

October 10, 2021

First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

“*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Mark 10:17b). This is the question an urgent man asked of Jesus. This is a question that is asked by many today: “What must *I* do to be saved?”

For the man we meet today, his actions of running up to Jesus and kneeling down before Him display his eagerness and fervor of his desire. For this man, he hopes that Jesus would be able to give him the vital information he so much desires.

Today, on the 20th Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus gives us the answer that ponders many: “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” “What works must I do to be saved?” Christ teaches us this morning what is really precious and what we ought to possess.

[What Must I Do?]

Now, this man does not ask Jesus *how* he may obtain eternal life. Instead, he asks Jesus, *what* must he do to acquire eternal life for himself. For this man, he had the right intuition: he was attracted to Jesus. He was so close, but at the same time, he was so far from eternal life.

So, urgently, this man says to Jesus, “*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” (Mark 10:17b) You see, this man believes that Jesus has figured out this question. He believes Jesus has the answer. It is as if this man is asking, “Good Teacher, how did *you* do it? Tell me, so that *I* may do likewise.”

Here lies the assumption that this man has the necessary ability that he may easily reach the goal that Jesus has reached. All this man wants is to know what he may do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus replies saying, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone*” (Mark 10:18).

Now, do not be confused. Jesus is not saying here that He is not God. But what He is saying is that only one being is good: God alone. For Jesus, the word “good” if implied in its common sense is too cheap for Him. “Good” does not just mean “kind,” but it also means “beneficial.” Using this meaning, Jesus is teaching what is morally beneficial and who alone bestows salvation.

You see, this man needed to be reminded that God alone is “beneficial,” that God alone is the very source of salvation.

[Second Table of the Law]

So, Jesus proceeds to answer this man’s question, ***“You know the commandments: Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother”*** (Mark 10:19).

Now, Jesus chose these commandments because He knew that these were this man’s “favorites.” For the works-righteous person, these are always the favorites. For the works righteous, they argue that they stand well with God because of their good lives. So, what do they say?

“I’m a good person.” “I’ve never hurt anybody.” “I’m a faithful husband.” “I’m a faithful wife.” “I pay my bills.” “I never cheat anybody.” “I don’t go around gossiping about people or slander them.” “I’m good to my father and mother.”

Our sinful nature gives us the thought that we can keep these commandments without too much trouble. Our sinful nature believes we are quite sure that we have a good moral record.

The reason why we can feel so self-satisfied is that, due to our sinful nature, we often overlook God’s requirements of more than an outward obedience to these commandments:

- Many times, we fail to realize that harboring anger or hate in our hearts against a neighbor is breaking the Fifth Commandment: “You shall not murder.”
- Or that sexual lust is breaking the Sixth Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery.”
- Or that taking advantage of others is breaking the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not steal.”
- Or that complaining about our neighbors, spreading rumors, and telling secrets is breaking the Eighth Commandment: “You shall not give false

testimony against your neighbor.” In other words, if you have nothing nice to say, don’t say it at all. And, if you have to say it, speak only to the person you are at issue with, and not to others.

- Or that taking for ourselves what belongs to our neighbor is breaking the Ninth and Tenth Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”
- Or that rebellious thoughts against parents and others in authority are breaking the Fourth Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother.”

Due to our sinful nature, we have a blind spot to the truth. Now, God demands nothing less than a pure heart that is filled only with love toward the neighbor and devoid of every sinful thought.

So, how does this man respond to Jesus? He says: “***Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth***” (Mark 10:20). Without even the blinking of an eye, this man says he has done all of this. He says he has fulfilled the Second Table of the Law. He claims He has loved his neighbor as himself since his youth.

For this man, God’s Law does not terrify him, since, according to him, he has kept the Law. This man, much like our own sinful nature, believed he was self-righteous in the face of the Law. For him, he was perhaps disappointed to hear Jesus recite nothing but the Second Table of the Commandments, which he claimed, he has kept from his youth.

Now, in citing the Commandments, Jesus was using the Law in preparation for the Gospel. You see, Jesus used the Law to bring this man to the point where he would no longer think that he could keep the Law for his salvation but would realize his utter sinfulness. But in response, this man says, “***Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth***” (Mark 10:20).

[Speaking the Truth in Love]

Now, Jesus foresaw this answer. He is the incarnate Son of God, after all! He knew the Second Table of the Law would not make a dent in this man’s self-righteousness. All the while, Jesus was preparing for the next step. He was going to apply the holy Law of God in a way that would shake and shatter this man’s assumption that he had achieved righteousness.

As Jesus lovingly looked at the man, He did not shrink from the hard course required by love. He put the man to a stern test and said, ***“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”*** (Mark 10:21).

Here, Jesus spoke the truth in love, just as we ought to do. He ***“admonished the idle, encouraged the fainthearted, helped the weak, and was patient”*** as He teaches us in 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

Speaking the truth in love is speaking truthfully to others for their well-being by building them up toward the mature fullness of life we have in Christ. This includes gently admonishing or encouraging people to repent of their sin and pointing out the dangers of false teachings and false teachers. This may be preaching the secure sinner within an inch of hell before we can preach them into heaven. You see, each secure sinner needs to realize how filthy they all are before they are reminded that those sins are cloaked by the robe of Christ’s righteousness. And if you say, you are not a sinner, you are only deceiving yourself.

For us, when we speak the Law in a Law moment, we have done the right thing, even if we don’t see the result that we want to see, which is repentance. But when we see repentance, we rejoice! Sometimes, this takes a while; other times, it’s instant. One thing is for sure, our sinful nature never wants to see people walk away sorrowful and angry. So, when we speak Law or Gospel when that moment is called for, we may not always see the results. All we can do is leave it up to God.

For the man in today’s Gospel lesson, Christ’s words were devastating. They shattered his self-delusion that from boyhood on he had kept all of God’s Law. For this man, his love of possessions had become his idol. The one thing this man lacked was the most important thing: a single-hearted devotion to God. He had other gods in his life. He wasn’t fearing, loving, and trusting in the one true God above all things. He had turned his riches into an idol – a false god. He broke the First Commandment and thus he broke every commandment that followed.

The one thing this man needed to inherit eternal life was a complete inward change. He needed to come to the realization that all his works righteousness was in vain.

Here, Jesus is *not* saying to get rid of all earthly possessions in order to inherit eternal life, but He is laying the finger on the chief sin in this man's heart: his love of his earthly possessions. You see, he clung to his earthly wealth with all of his heart.

Now, what about us? Is God first in your life, or is there a false idol taking God's place? What in your life are you not willing to let go? Do you have a grudge against someone? Have you turned your possessions into an idol? Are you worshipping sinful men, rather than worshipping the Triune God? Have you turned yourself into your own god?

[Inheriting the Treasure in Heaven]

Today's Gospel lesson does not end with a resolution. We don't know what happens next. But Jesus never gives up on this man. Likewise, Jesus never gives up on us.

The thrust of Jesus' words today is to summon inward change within this man, and within us. This change is to begin with contrition by realizing our sinfulness, our guilt and our sorrowing over them. So, when we have felt the weight of God's Law, Jesus turns us to Him in faith as our only Savior from sin and guilt. Once we trust only in Jesus by clinging to Him, we inherit "***treasure in heaven***" (Mark 10:21). We inherit forgiveness of sins, which leads to eternal life and salvation!

Jesus is offering us something infinitely greater than anything we can have here on earth. He is offering us eternal life that He alone has accomplished for us through His suffering and death, which satisfied God the Father's wrath over our sins – our thoughts, words, and deeds against God. And all we have to do is cling to Jesus by trusting in Him alone and His inheritance is ours. All He asks of us is to "***come, follow Me***" (Mark 10:21).

Through the working of the Holy Spirit that began at your Baptism, when the one True God – *the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* – made you His own, we are able to follow Christ. God alone has the power to strengthen our faith and this is what He does through His Means of Grace. Through the hearing of His Word, repenting of our sins and receiving His forgiveness through Confession and Absolution, as well as by eating and drinking Christ's very Body and very Blood under the bread and wine, by faith in Him, we inherit eternal life.

So, what must we do to inherit eternal life? It's simple: repent and follow Jesus. By following Jesus, He possesses us and in turn, we possess Him. It's as simple as that, so trust in His grace for Christ alone is our treasure! In Him alone, we have eternal life! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠