

Mark 10:17-22 - "Receiving the Lord's Gracious Invitation"

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Just before our text Jesus said: "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*" Then, in our text about a man who "*had great possessions*" in this world, the Lord helps us to see what He was talking about. This man's great possessions were not the problem, it was the unchildlike pride that possessions and things like worldly success and knowledge can give to all of us. So, listeners, beware!

When this man kneelt before Jesus and asked Him, "*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*" it appears that he is off to a good start. Children and adults, do you remember what I said last Sunday about kneeling? Kneeling before God can be a sign that we recognize that we are sinners in need of God to save us. It's certainly true that this man was a sinner in need of God's help, like all of us, but the help Jesus gave him was not the help this man wanted.

First of all, Jesus, knowing what this man was thinking, asked him why he called Jesus "Good Teacher." Without waiting for a response, Jesus pointed out that "*No one is good except God alone.*" By saying that God alone is good, Jesus was also saying that this man was not good, which is true for all of us.

Then Jesus helps this man see that he was not good, or good enough to save himself, by first listing the commandments in the second table of the Law which have to do with loving our neighbor; both what we should not do (like "*do not murder*") and what we should do (like "*Honor your father and mother*"). When the man says, "*Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth,*" it becomes obvious that he was thinking of God's commandments in a very narrow sense, like most people.

If we think of the commandment, "*Do not murder,*" as speaking only of physically killing someone, most of us could say that we have kept this commandment, even though we want to wring some people's necks at times. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus broadens our understanding of this commandment by saying that "*Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire*" (Matthew 5:22). Therefore, Jesus makes it obvious that we have all failed to obey this commandment.

But in our text, since Jesus was not talking to a crowd of people but an individual, He, out of "*love*" for this sinful man, zeros in on the heart of his problem. Jesus said, "*You lack one thing,*" The one thing his man lacked was the fear, love and trust in God and God's Word above all things. This is God's first commandment, "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 15:3).

To identify the god this man was worshipping, Jesus told him to "*go, sell all that you have and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*" These words include both Law and Gospel. But since this man thought that the key to inheriting eternal life was his ability to keep the commandments, he interpreted everything Jesus said as Law—as something he must do to inherit eternal life. Therefore he was "*disheartened*" by Jesus' words and "*went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*"

We may think of this conclusion to our text as ending on a sad note. But actually, even though at this point we don't know if the Lord's words ever brought this man to repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior, at least Jesus' words caused him to become disheartened by his inability to save himself since he was presumably unwilling to give up his "*great possessions.*"

What this sinful man failed to hear or comprehend, at least at that point in time, was Jesus' invitation for him to "*come, follow me.*" This was a gracious invitation to a sinner, like you and me, to be one of Jesus' followers or disciples. And it was not conditional on him first giving up all his possessions.

What would this man see if he followed Jesus, even from a distance? He would see Jesus do what he was unwilling to do because he didn't believe in Jesus as his Savior. Because of Jesus' perfect faith in His Father to save Him even from death and hell together with His perfect love for us, He willingly gave up everything, including His very life, in order to save us.

Witnessing or knowing of this love and power of God in Jesus Christ is what enables us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to love God and trust that He wants what is best for us. So, when He tells us in His Word what's best for us, like trusting in Him and His Word over and above what we or others think is best, and loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-38), this is what we, according to our fear, love and trust in God, want to do.

Do we always do what our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior wants us to do? From the time of our conception until the end of our life in this world, our sinful nature (which doesn't trust in God to save us) prevents us from wholeheartedly giving up what God has given us to help others. We may struggle with giving up even 10% of what God has given us, let alone our whole life. And even if we did, our whole heart wouldn't be in it.

At such times, where does our faith in God take our lack of faith in God? Where does the saint in us take the sinner in us? To God, in repentance and faith, who alone can set us free from our sinful nature and the grip of death (Psalm 25:15), and enable us to better use the gifts He gives us for the good of others.

[Children's Sermon] What's going to happen to this gallon of ice cream, that I bought yesterday, since I've taken it out of the freezer? It will melt.

The sinner in me, that I was born with, wants me to eat it all myself, even if it makes me sick. But the saint that God created in me when I was Baptized, wants me to share some of this ice cream with others, like each one of you.

The same is true with all that God gives you and me. All that we have in this world, including our life in this world, is melting away no matter how strong or smart we think we are to stop it from melting away. But what does God also promise will happen to everyone who believes in Jesus when our life in this world comes to an end? We will live forever with Him in heaven, where the best is yet to come!

So, what does God want us to do with all that He gives us in this life before it melts away. To keep it all to ourselves, or to share some of it with others?

When we share the things God has given us with others, that may make them suspicious. So, they may ask why—what's in it for you?

What will you tell them? Jesus gives me all that I need now and forever. How do we know this? Because Jesus died and rose from the dead on the third day, and He gave us faith in His promise that the same thing will happen to us when we die. He will bring us back to life so that we can continue to live with Him in heaven, forever and ever.

Prayer: O Lord, God of hosts, give us stronger faith in the Good News of our eternal salvation through Your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may better share this Good News with others through our thoughts, words and deeds.

In Jesus' name. Amen.