

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Mark 10:17-27 *And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.¹⁹ 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.'²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "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."²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.²³ And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."²⁶ And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."*

You've maybe heard it before, when you've invited someone to church: "I'm not interested in going to church—the only thing those people care about is separating me from my money!" It's hard to blame people for feeling that way since so many churches nowadays do seem to focus almost exclusively on money and fundraising. There are so many mega-churches nowadays from which that pastor drives away in a brand new Lamborghini or jets off in a private jet. Now, we don't do anything like that here, of course. In fact, I'd be astonished if anyone ever walked into this building, looked around, and accused our church of trying to "separate people from their money."

We don't want to separate you from your money, but the Lord does! And I'm not talking now about the offering plate. Rather, I want you to look at something broader, and examine the role that money plays in your whole life. Jesus had a lot to say about this—mostly about the risk that money and riches pose to your spiritual well-being. We find that before us today. In our text, we meet someone who seemed to be the ideal young man in every respect but one: he loved money more than God. Our Lord wants to keep us from suffering his fate. So in a good sense—in a beneficial sense—we can say that, in the words of our theme:

"The Lord Wants to Separate You from Your Money"

- I. In order to free you from the crippling service of self
- II. In order to set you apart for an unencumbered service of Christ.

In the account for today, Jesus was approached by a crippled man. Now, you might be thinking, "I don't remember any crippled man in this story." In fact, the young man who knelt before Jesus seemed a fine figure of man. The parallel texts in the other Gospels tell us that he was wealthy and of such good reputation that he had already, at his young age, been made a ruler of the synagogue. A devout young man, a churchgoer, lots of money, respected in the community—what's not to like? He was an upstanding young man! But there was something desperately wrong with him, something hidden and unseen in his heart that was crippling him spiritually.

The question he asked Jesus indicated his problem right away. **"Good Teacher, what must I do to**

inherit eternal life?" He's come to the right place, he's come with the right goal in mind, but he's asking the wrong question. Notice, he recognizes that this is something to be inherited, in other words, God would be the one to give eternal life away, but he's coming to figure out if there's anything *he can do* to ensure that God puts him on the will. So many people in our day do the exact same thing this man did. They just don't get it. God has *already* told us how to inherit eternal life, right here in the Bible. It's been here all along! But they can't be bothered with the Bible, they bypass God's Word and want to *do* something in order to save themselves.

But Jesus won't let us bypass God's Word. What does He do with the young man? He snaps him right back to the Bible. Jesus said, ***"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ 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.'"***

Jesus laid whole mountains of God's Law before the man, summits impossible to scale! These are requirements that no one can keep—that we haven't kept. But that didn't faze this young man for a second: He answered and said to Jesus, ***"Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth."*** Now there's a good Pharisee talking. Because, you see, he was satisfied with his outward appearance, with a superficial keeping of the Law. And notice, Jesus didn't quote to him every commandment, instead he carefully selected only those commandments that have to do with how we love our neighbors, the ones that *look like* they can be kept in a superficial way. And so the man thought he had! But this only goes to show that the man didn't understand God's Law at all. He didn't understand that lust in the heart is as damning as the act of adultery. He didn't understand that hatred in the heart is as bad murder, that coveting is as bad as stealing. He still didn't get it.

Finally, Jesus found it necessary to confront the young man with his sin in a way so obvious that not even he could fail to see it. ***And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "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."*** It's clear what Jesus was doing, isn't it? If the man didn't recognize how he'd sinned against the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, or Eighth Commandments, he was going to take him back to the First. You shall love God above *everything* else. For the sake of the man's own eternal salvation, Jesus wanted to separate him from his money in order to free him from the crippling service of self. And Jesus got His point across. The man realized that there was something he loved and valued much more than God—his money! He hadn't even kept the First Commandment. The result was that, ***"Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."***

The man arrived at Jesus feet eager and happy, wanting to inherit eternal life. But he went away sorrowful. What happened? What was it that made him sad? He hadn't lost a nickel yet. No one had kicked him out of the church. When he woke up the next day he would still be the same respected young man of whom everyone was proud and to whom everyone looked up. Only one thing was different. He now knew that he wasn't right with God. After all of Jesus' gentle probing he finally saw that, from God's point of view, he fell far short. It couldn't be more obvious—he did *not* love God above all things.

In this young man was fulfilled what Jesus had said in the Parable of the Sower: ***"And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, ¹⁹ but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."*** (Mark 4:18-19)

I'm not surprised that the young man was sad. Self-knowledge can be a devastating thing, especially when what we learn about ourselves is something ugly and shameful. What about you and me? Theoretically, I think all of us would say that our Christian faith is the most important thing in our lives. I think all of us would say that we would be willing to make any sacrifice, give up anything else in our lives in order to preserve that saving faith. That's the theory, anyway. But what a sad day it is when you have to make a choice in your life and you choose wrong. How ashamed you feel when you look back and realize that when you had a choice to make between God and something else, you chose something else.

That's when God's Law convicts us like it did that young man. God's Law is a little like your bathroom scale. When you know you've been "bad", when you've been overindulging for a period of time, you just don't want to step on the scale. Why? Because you know what it's going to say, and you know you're not going to like it.

Some people avoid listening to God's Word for the same reason. They know what they're going to hear if they do listen, and they know they're not going to like it. It's painful! It hurts to be brought face-to-face with the realization that you are in fact a sinner and that you've fallen far short of God's requirements. It hurts to face the fact that money may have played too big a part in your life as well—that a preoccupation with money and getting more of it has often distracted you from following Jesus as you should. It's a danger to us! Paul tells Timothy that **"...those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."**¹⁰ ***For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.***" (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

It's hard for us to hear God's Law. But it's a lot better than the alternative! One theologian wrote, *"If we but knew it, that dark night of the soul when the Law convicts us of sin is one of God's greatest gifts. Far better to confront our sin now and repent, than to go carefree on without repentance and later be cast into Hell."* And that's the reason Jesus reached out to this young man and tried to bring him to repentance. He wanted to save him. The text says, Jesus **"loved him."** In love, He wanted to separate him from his money, the thing that was crippling him and keeping him from forgiveness and eternal life. This is the same thing the Law does for us, guarding lest we be enticed by money and begin to love it, and our money starts to cripple us spiritually.

But you know, God has another, more positive reason for wanting to separate you from your money. In your life as a Christian, He has joyful work for you to do and a love of money would just hold you back. You see, the Lord wants to set you apart for an unencumbered service for Christ. Jesus said, ***"Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!"***²⁵ ***It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.***" Would you ever try to thread a camel through a sewing needle? Obviously not. That's one of those things that's so obviously impossible that no one would even attempt it, and that's how impossible it is for someone who trusts in money rather than God, to get into heaven. ***"And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?"***

About now you might be feeling just as astonished and discouraged as those disciples did—feeling like you are an even worse than that young man was, like it is impossible for you to be saved. You say, *"Lord, I'm a wretched sinner, and my past is filled with mistakes and shortcomings. There are plenty of times when I trusted money rather than God. There are plenty of times when I focused on my finances and forgot about my Father in Heaven. Is it possible that even someone like me can be saved?"* Fear

not! For Jesus says to you today, ***"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."***

You say, "But Lord, I've broken your commandments, not seven times, but seventy times seventy times. Sometimes I'm so disgusted with myself. How can I possibly stand with the righteous on Judgment Day? How can I possibly inherit eternal life?" My Christian friend, don't be afraid! For Jesus says, ***"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."***

In fact, not only is it possible, but when you come before God in repentance, confessing these sins and seeking His pardon, He cannot turn you away. He *cannot* because by the very blood of His Son He has promised to forgive your sins. In fact, if that young man, convicted of his sin had only dropped to his knees and said, *"Lord, be merciful to me a sinner,"* Jesus would have had him rise with the assurance of full and free forgiveness for all his sins. It's the same promise He's given to each of you. When did He make that promise? At your Baptism. Peter says, ***"Baptism also now saves us!"*** (1 Peter 3:21 KJV). At the baptismal font you entered God's kingdom. There He washed you in the blood of His Son and freed you from the punishment and control of sin. There at that font He *set you apart*, He joined you to this tiny, elite group, the Christians, the members of the household of God. And that's one of the reasons why the Lord wants to separate you from your money. It is to separate you from the evil love of money and seductive influence of money so that you can be set apart for an unencumbered service of Christ.

What do I mean by "unencumbered"? When I used to play baseball in high school, I was pretty fast, but I couldn't hit the ball hardly at all. We had other players with the opposite problem; they could hit, but when they ran it looked like they were being weighed down by an anchor. Well, you know, there are a lot of Christians with that problem. They are running through life anchored to their money! They could be running like the wind, they could be doing great things for Christ if it weren't for that constant preoccupation with money slowing them down and holding them back.

It needs to be said, too, that money isn't necessarily evil all by itself. If the Lord has blessed you with an abundance of it, then by all means thank Him for it, and use it responsibly. Use it in God-pleasing ways—to support your family, to support the work of the church and the preaching of the Gospel, to extend the kingdom of Christ. But do be on your guard. If money gets to be an anchor weighing you down, unhook it! Don't let it slow you down and hold you back. Respect God, not money. Love God, not money. Trust in God, not in money. Serve God, not money. Remember the words of Christ, ***"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"*** (Matthew 6:24).

The account of the rich young ruler—it's a sad one because it's a bad news example. This is what happens when things go wrong and money gets in the way of faith. But what if it had ended differently? What if, when Jesus told the young man to sell all he had and follow Him, what if he had smiled at Jesus and said, "I'll be right back!"—and returned following the only one who is the "Way, the truth and the life," who would bring him to eternal rest. How wonderful that would have been!

My Christian friends, Jesus is saying the same thing to you today. Just like that young man, the Lord wants to separate you from your money—in a good sense. He wants to free you from the crippling service of self and set you apart for an unencumbered service of Christ. He wants to empower you, through the mighty working of His Holy Spirit to make *good* choices, to put faith where it ought to be—above everything else, to lay up treasures **not** on earth, but in Heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. May God grant to us all the strength of faith so that, no matter what sacrifice He may ask of us for Jesus' sake, we can smile and say, "I'll be right back!" Amen.