

Mark 10:17-22

**Jesus Loves Me**

Have you noticed that the readings over the past few weeks have emphasized the application of God's Word to our daily lives? For example, the readings from James have challenged us to live out our faith in loving service to our neighbor. James tells us plainly that faith without works is dead. But James is not saying that our works will save us. Rather, he is saying that living faith, does not sit idly by as our neighbor suffers from want or need. Good works spring forth from hearts that overflow with gratitude and love for all that God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The readings have also taken us to task for our unfaithfulness to God, and our preference for the things of this world. These are hard sayings, and we do not like hearing them. Instead of listening to what God has to say to us, and then asking Him to forgive us and help us to amend our lives, we come before Jesus expecting Him to tell us what a good job we have been doing. What we don't expect, or want to hear, is the truth about our prideful self-righteousness, our self-centeredness, our worldliness, or even our need for a Savior.

Enter the rich man from our text. "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Like many people today, this fellow thinks he is so good that he can get himself to heaven by what he does and how he lives his life. But there is more to his question than meets the ear. In those days, it was thought that God blessed those who pleased Him with worldly wealth and possessions. Such material blessing was understood to be a sign that a person's salvation was sure. If things were going well in your life, then God must be pleased with you and you didn't have to worry about getting to heaven.

Sadly, there are many people who believe this today. They think that as long as things are going well in their lives then everything between them and God must be fine, and they don't need to be concerned about the salvation of their soul. "Life is good! So why do I need Jesus in my life? Why do I need to go to church when things are going so well without it?"

Like the rich man, those who think this way do not recognize Jesus for who He really is. We know this is true in the case of the rich man from the conversation he had with Jesus. At first the man refers to Jesus as "Good Teacher." He might just be being polite, or perhaps a little flattering to garner favor from this popular Rabbi. But after Jesus reminds him that only God is truly good the man stops referring to Jesus as the "Good Teacher."

The man may think there is something special about Jesus, but he does not recognize Him for who He truly is. He does not see that Jesus is the Good Teacher, God Himself, in the flesh. He does not understand that Jesus is the One who has come to bestow the riches of heaven -- the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to everyone who believes in Him, regardless of financial or social status. Instead, the man sees only a popular teacher with good ideas for living a decent and moral life. He does not realize that Jesus is the Son of God who loves him so much that He will give up everything, including His own life, in order to save him.

(Not much has changed in the past 2000 years.) The rich man comes to Jesus hoping to hear confirmation that his wealth and exemplary life are all he needs to inherit eternal life. But to his surprise, Jesus does not tell him what wants to hear. Instead, Jesus confronts him with the very thing he trusts in for his salvation -- the Law of Moses. "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 your mother." And believing that he actually has faithfully kept the letter of the Law, the man replies, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

He sounds like our four-year-old preschool class this past week after I talked with them about the Ten Commandments. Every one of them proudly declared that they always listen to their parents and do what they are told. Right!

Like us, the man believes that since he hasn't actually killed anyone, he hasn't committed murder. But what about those times that he has lashed out in anger or wished someone harm. He also doesn't see those half-truths he tells, from time to time, as bearing false witness.

Like the rich man, when we compare ourselves to others, we feel pretty confident that we will inherit eternal life. After all, we haven't committed any really big sins. So, all we have to do is stay out of trouble and check in with Jesus once or twice a year, and drop our pocket change in the plate, and it'll all be good. Right? Maybe not.

Knowing what is in the man's heart, and who his god really is, Jesus replies, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give it to the poor...and come follow Me" (v21). This was a devastating blow. Jesus made it painfully clear that there is nothing that we can do to inherit eternal life. All our wealth and possessions are worthless when it comes to the salvation of our soul, or the souls of our children. All our good works and money mean nothing if we are not following Jesus.

He crushes our self-righteousness with the full weight of the Law. He destroys our false hope of salvation by our good works and obedience to the Ten Commandments, by the application of a single commandment, the one commandment upon which all the others hang: "You shall have no other gods." And like the rich man, we are disheartened, even crushed by the Law, because we too have other gods that keep us from following and trusting in Jesus alone.

When we see ourselves in the mirror of the Law, we know that we are lost and condemned sinners in desperate need of a Savior. And that is precisely what Jesus offers in verse 21 of our text -- a Savior. "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him..." Jesus loved him. Jesus looks past our sinfulness, into our very souls, and offers Himself to us as our Savior.

The man may have walked away from Jesus, but Jesus did not walk away from him. And He does not and will not walk away from you. The fact of the matter is, that when this man approached Jesus He was walking on a journey that would demonstrate the enormity of His love for us sinners. This journey was not another preaching tour around the lake. This journey would end in at the cross. Jesus was beginning the final leg of His journey that would fulfill the demands of the Law for us. He was setting out on His journey to defeat sin, death, and the devil for us. It was a journey that would require Him to give His very life in payment for our sins, and then rise again to life for our salvation.

Therefore, knowing where His journey would end, Jesus looks at that self-righteous, misguided, sinful man and rather than condemning him for his failure to actually keep the Law, He loved him.

It is important to understand how Mark uses the word "love" in this text. Yes, it is a form of the Greek word "agape", but there is something about Mark's usage that can be missed in translation. Our text reads, "He loved him." But the sense Mark uses describes the ever present and ongoing love of Jesus; not unlike the love of a mother or father for their newborn child. It is a deep and abiding love that never ends. This is the kind of love Jesus had for the man who stood before Him. This is the kind of love He has for you.

Knowing that neither the man, nor we, could ever perfectly keep the Commandments, or give up all that we hold so dear in this world, Jesus also looked upon us from eternity and loved us with an ever abiding love. Out of His great love for you, Jesus gave up everything, even His own life, in order to save you.

Even though you daily sin much and constantly fail to keep the Commandments, Jesus continues to love you with a love that is beyond all understanding. Instead of condemning you for your failure to keep the Law, He tenderly and lovingly forgives you over and over again. As He called the rich man to leave behind his love for the things of this world and follow Him, so He calls you to leave behind all that you hold so dear in this life, all that you trust in for your self-worth, your security, and follow Him, that you may inherit eternal life.

“Come follow Me” are not words of Law, but wonderful, loving words of Gospel, spoken to you, personally, by Jesus. They are words of love and forgiveness that promise an inheritance of eternal life to you and to all who believe in Jesus.

So, rather than being disheartened by Jesus’ call to leave behind the things of this world and follow Him, you can boldly proclaim, as our preschool children did this week in chapel ...

Jesus loves me! He who died  
Heaven’s gates to open wide.  
He has washed away my sin  
Let’s His little child come in.

Yes Jesus loves Me  
Yes, Jesus loves Me  
Yes, Jesus loves me  
The Bible tells me so.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen