

## **“ETERNAL LIFE: BURDEN OR BARGAIN?”**

**Text: Mark 10:17-22**

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?” Now there’s a problem right away with what this man asks. What must anyone do to inherit? Nothing, right? To receive an inheritance, depends on the giver alone. The giver of the inheritance chooses who will be the recipients of his or her wealth, and he must die. That’s usually how inheritances work. It’s all gift—grace, we might say. No doubt this rich young synagogue ruler must have spoken with the Pharisees, because that is certainly what they would have told him. Be good. Do good. And in his own estimation, he was!

He asks this law question, and interestingly, what you ask Jesus a law question, you get a law answer back. Jesus directs the man to the second table of the law—commandments 4-10—those commandments which deal with our relationship to one another. To this the man responds: “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.” He was just a really nice guy. This is the kind of guy you’d like to daughter to meet. He’s so nice that it would make you throw up!

Now let’s assume for the moment that really did keep all the commandments from his youth. And let’s assume that his motives behind his commandment keeping were pure—that he really did all these things out of love for others and not selfishly for himself—to get something for himself (like eternal life).

What does Jesus say to him then? Basically this: well, that’s all well and good. Then you only lack one thing. If you really want to know what you must do to inherit eternal life, here it is: sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” If you are as good as you think, that shouldn’t be a problem, should it? Your reward isn’t here on earth but in heaven. You’re asking about eternal life, and you certainly realize that you can’t take it with you. So don’t wait until you die; do it now. Serve your neighbor, and then come, follow me.

He couldn’t do that. I picture him scratching his head and thinking. “Is that what it means to be good? Is that really what one must do to inherit eternal life?” And he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

You see, the Law has two tables, or two parts. The second are those commandments Jesus listed today, dealing with your neighbor, loving your neighbor as yourself. He thought he was doing quite well with this second table, but he had a blind spot, and Jesus is exposing that now. He must!

God’s Law has two parts, two tables. And it’s the first table (commandments 1-3) that deal with our relationship to God that this man had a problem with. To fear, love, and trust in God above all things, as Dr. Luther taught in his explanation to the first commandment. Or, as Jesus once put it: to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. So Jesus was exposing this man’s idol—something that he feared, loved, and trusted above God, and that was his great wealth. And he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

When he approached Jesus that day, was he expecting a pat on the back? Kudos from Jesus? Perhaps. He certainly had placed much of his eternal security in his commandment keeping. Perhaps he wanted to be sure that his commandment keeping was on track. Could Jesus leave him in this false belief—this false sense of security thinking that he was good to go, and had eternal life, only to be sadly disappointed on the day of his death? Absolutely not!

Note these words of our text: “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him...” So Jesus exposes his heart, his idol, his false god—that thing he’s not willing to let go of—that he thinks he can’t live without.

Please understand that there isn’t anything wrong with having wealth. The problem for this man was that it had become his god.

For this man it was his great wealth. For you, perhaps it's something different—Something you know God wants you to do, God wants you to be, but you just can't. Maybe because you love it more than God, or trust it more than God, or fear it more than God. Maybe because you can't imagine living without it. Maybe because that's where you find your meaning or value, or a desire you just must fulfill. So what is it? What good gift from God do you find getting in the way of Jesus? What do you find yourself clinging to instead of Jesus? What do you look to for happiness instead of Jesus?

So this man went away sorrowful, because he knows he can't do what Jesus tells him; what he must do to inherit eternal life. And it's how we would leave this place today if "You lack one thing" is all we hear. If more commands which are impossible for us to accomplish are heaped upon us here.

But you didn't come here today to kneel before Jesus and ask the question: Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? You came here today to kneel before Jesus and say: Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord, I am not, can't be who you want me to be. Lord, I haven't and I can't do what you want me to do, as hard as I might try. And so you don't leave sorrowful, because you hear something more. Begging for mercy, mercy is what you get. Instead hear Jesus say this: I forgive you all your sin.

Seek the Lord and live, the prophet Amos said today. Seek good . . . that you may live, he also said (and as Jesus reminded us today "Only God is good—so, in other words, "Seek God!) That's the one thing you need for eternal life. All our sins were nailed with Jesus to the cross and then laid in the tomb. And all that comes out of that tomb is life. Life that Jesus is, and has, and now gives to you. The good that Jesus is, and has, and now gives to you. And that's what Jesus wanted this man to see.

Notice what Jesus said. You may have missed this unless you were really hyper-attentive. Jesus told the man, "You lack ONE thing..." But then he seems to mention TWO things.

Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and Come, follow me."

Here's the point, Jesus didn't tell the man to sell all that he has and give to the poor as a way of earning eternal life. That's not the one thing! That was just to expose his idol. The one thing that he lacks is "come, follow me."

It's important to know where Jesus is going. And the answer is Jerusalem! To the place where Jesus came to go—was born to go—to the cross. He wants this man to see that what he needs to do for eternal life - but can't - Jesus can, and is doing for him. Because Jesus is the one who kept all the commandments perfectly from His youth... and with all the right motives, and who truly did give all that He had for the sake of the poor (for us who are spiritually poor), including His life on the cross - so that this man, and you, could have treasure in heaven. You see, "follow me" isn't a command to obey, but an invitation to see and receive.

So you've come here today because here is where Jesus puts His cross today for you.

His cross in the Font, because in baptism you die and rise with Jesus to a new life. And the first thing you hear in the Divine Service reminds you of that - that you are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And that new and good life you need, you have received. Gift.

But that new and good life you haven't lived this week. So you have come to hear the words Jesus spoke from His cross: words of forgiveness. And you aren't disappointed. He speaks them to you - "I forgive you all your sins" - and then that same Name put upon you in baptism is spoken on you again: "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And that new and good life you need, you again receive. Gift.

And you followed Jesus here to hear that love spoken of and promised in the prophets (Amos today)... lived in all that Jesus said and did (as Mark recorded for us today), and attested by the apostles, and the eyewitnesses of Jesus dead but now living (the author of Hebrews today). Those words through which the Spirit of Jesus works in your heart to uproot and cast out those idols that live there; to pry them from your cold, dead hearts and give you that new and good heart you need. Gift.

And now you will follow Jesus to His Supper. Follow, for it is not we who do this Supper, but Jesus who does it, who is here in it and invites you to it; to eat and drink His Body and Blood - the same Body and Blood that hung upon the cross, was laid in the tomb, and then rose to life again. Food that gives you life and sustains you in the life He accomplished for you and now gives to you. Gift.

Gifts. Forgiveness. That's what Jesus is all about. So that you leave this place not sorrowful but joyful! This man's question - and yours - has been answered by the cross. What you must do Jesus did, and what you must have Jesus gives. What must you do to inherit eternal life? Just this: Receive it!

And then leave this place and live it. Live like you really do have treasure in heaven, because you do. Live like you're going to live forever, because you are. Because you have a good life, a good Lord, a good and gracious Savior. Who doesn't change.

So what must I do? Jesus answered that questions from the cross: "It is finished." It is completed. I did it. For you. "Follow Me." In the Name of Jesus. Amen.