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Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.
Mark 10:17-27

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good -- except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Heavenly Father, do that which is impossible with man: Save us from the materialism of our world. Tear our hearts away from riches and the things of this life that so quickly come to an end. Keep us from trusting in ourselves. Teach us that since we have not kept your commandments, we cannot inherit eternal life for ourselves, so that we trust alone in your Son Jesus, who by his perfect life won heaven for us. Make your eternal blessings in Jesus our Savior the one and only treasure of our hearts. Amen.

Dear friends whom Jesus has looked at, loved, and saved,

The story is told of years ago, when men went to Alaska to look for gold, some penetrated far into the interior. There they came upon a miner's hut which seemed as quiet as a grave. Entering in, they found the skeletons of two men and a large quantity of gold on a rough table. There was also a letter which told of their successful hunt for gold. They were so eager to get more gold that they ignored the early coming of winter in that faraway northland. The more they mined, the more gold they found. Suddenly one day a fierce snowstorm was upon them. The snow became deeper and deeper, and at last there was no way to escape. Gradually their food gave out, and they lay down to die surrounded by gold.

There are many people like those two foolish miners. They set their hearts on riches and

all money buys. They see it as the goal of their life to always get more, so they spend their time eagerly getting and selfishly saving the things of this world. Suddenly the icy hand of death is upon them, and they perish eternally. What has a man profited if he gains the whole world, yet loses his own soul?

How many the warnings in the Bible concerning wealth and the love of money! We should point out from the start that it is not wrong to be rich. It is the love of money that is wrong, and a poor person can be just as guilty of loving money and desiring riches. Abraham was rich. King David was rich. Zacchaeus was rich. They correctly looked upon their wealth as a blessing from the gracious hand of God that he had given to them to use for a time to his glory. They understood that their possessions really belonged to God, and not to them, and that they were accountable to God for how they used everything he had given them. So instead of setting their hearts upon their riches, they used them to serve God and help those in need.

But for the most part, those who are rich do not fare so well. There is Jesus' parable of the rich man who luxuriously dined at his table, while refusing to do a thing to help poor Lazarus. Lazarus died and went to heaven. The selfish rich man died and went to hell. There is Jesus' parable of the rich fool who had such a bumper crop that he tore down his barns and built bigger ones in order to have a place to store his grain and goods. He told himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" Then there is Judas, who to his eternal doom betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

The Bible says: "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." [I Timothy 6:9-10]

The rich man in our verses today does not fare too well either. He at least was thinking about eternal life. He came to Jesus with the most important question that has ever been asked: "What Must I Do To Inherit Eternal Life?" Jesus gave a three-part answer. Keep the commandments. Give up the things of this world and follow me. And finally Jesus says, "With man this is impossible."

This rich young man was looking for help, looking for an answer, looking for security for eternity. He came to the right place, to Jesus. He was eager, desperate. He ran up to Jesus, fell on his knees and asked, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The question reveals that this young man was trusting in himself for salvation. "What must I do?" "Jesus, tell me how I can do it." He was trying to earn salvation with his own deeds. But then why did he come to Jesus for help? Because all the good deeds that he had done had not assured him of having eternal life. Deeds, no matter how many one may do, cannot earn salvation, and therefore also cannot satisfy and give assurance of salvation.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? The answer is simple: Believe in the Lord Jesus as your only Savior from sin, and eternal life is yours. But Jesus did not answer the man's question directly, because before this man would be ready for that answer, before he would be able to accept it, he first had to understand that he was a sinner who had not kept God's commandments, and therefore it was impossible for him to earn his own salvation.

The man had addressed Jesus, "good teacher." So Jesus asked him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good--except God alone." Jesus was trying to get the men to begin to consider that perhaps his own supposed good life was not really so good. Jesus was not denying the fact that he himself is good, perfect, because he is God. But this man did not recognize Jesus as God, nor was he ready to trust alone in Jesus' good and perfect life for salvation. So what good was

Jesus to this man? We don't need a "good teacher" to show us how to earn salvation. We can't earn salvation. We need a Lord and Savior who has earned Salvation for us!"

But the man thought he could earn heaven himself, so Jesus gave him the answer he wanted: "You know the commandments: `Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" If you're going to earn salvation, you must keep the commandments. Keep them all. Keep them perfectly, completely. Not just a dab here and a dab there, but all of them, all the time, to a perfect degree.

"Teacher," he nonchalantly declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." What an arrogant, self-righteous, hypocrite! we might think. But we should rather feel sorry for him and others like him, because obviously this man was totally ignorant concerning God's commandments. He had never stopped to consider that the commandments demand more than an outward conduct. They require an unselfish love. God's law speaks concerning the thoughts and attitudes of the heart, and not just outward deeds. Had he honestly examined his heart, he would have found the mass of filth and wickedness there. He actually thought that he had kept God's commandments perfectly simply because he had led an outwardly moral life, and had not committed any "terrible" sins. Yet still he was kneeling before Christ at this very moment asking him about some good thing he ought to do in order to inherit life. Was not that a clear admission that his so-called keeping of the law had not been satisfactory?

How many people there are who think that since they have led an outwardly moral life, they have kept God's commandments. While serving mission congregations, more than once I came home from a day of visiting people without a church, only to tell my wife, "I didn't find any sinners today." Then she knew I had had a rough day. When people are secure in their own self-righteousness, all you can do is continue to hammer away at them with God's law, until the Holy Spirit leads them to recognize that they're sinners and repent, and then you have the privilege of telling them about Jesus who is good, Jesus who is God, Jesus who lived a perfect life in their place, keeping all of God's commandments perfectly for them, Jesus who paid the price for their sins on the cross, Jesus who has won their forgiveness, earned their salvation for them. But until people recognize that they're sinners, Jesus is no good to them. What do they need Jesus for? They think they can earn salvation themselves.

We are told that Jesus looked at this young man, and he loved him. Why did Jesus love this self-righteous unbeliever? Because Jesus loves sinners. No matter how far one is from God, Jesus loves him and wants him to be saved. Salvation is not for the righteous, but for the sinner. And the first step toward bringing about the salvation of a man is to bring him to a knowledge of his sins. Jesus would have to tear down this proud young man with God's law and crush him, in order that he might save him.

"One thing you lack," Jesus told him. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Jesus gave the man what he asked for; told him what he must do to inherit eternal life: give up the things of this world and follow Jesus. Jesus knew that this man had great wealth, and Jesus knew that he was very much attached to and in love with his wealth. Jesus hit him at his weakest point. "Young man, you think that you have kept the commandments. But you see in your neighborhood many who are poor and suffering from want. You are in a position to help others. Go then and do it. What better way is there of keeping God's commandments?" Jesus pierced him to the heart, laid his heart bare so that he could see that he had not kept God's commandments. Now he couldn't help but see what a selfish, greedy, loveless man he was.

Still there was hope. If he could tear his heart away from his possessions that would demonstrate that he recognized his sinfulness and need for a Savior. Then he would be ready to follow Jesus and see Jesus earn his salvation for him. This was the moment of truth. The choice

was before him. What would the man do? Would his heart be more attached to his riches than to his God? Had this man enough confidence in God to trust in him to provide if he disposed of all his earthly goods? Or was he an idolater whose God was his money? The account has a tragic ending: "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." The sting of the law had sunk deep into his heart. He was wounded to the quick. But he could not part with his riches. You cannot serve God and money. The man chose money over eternal life. He went away sad. His wealth couldn't make him happy, couldn't do a thing for him, and he would soon be parted from it in death. Still, money is what he chose to serve.

Jesus has also asked us to give up the things of this world and follow him. Loving God above all things includes a full yielding to him. Should he demand, for the sake of the kingdom, that we give up all our earthly possessions, even life itself, for his sake, and serve our neighbor, there must be no hesitation on our part. Our hearts must be torn away from the things of this world so that we trust and serve God alone. We must view our possessions as gracious gifts from God that he has given us to use for a time to serve him and help others. What a temptation our materialistic society is. We are surrounded by riches and earthly goods, and constantly told that this is what is really important, that this is what life is all about. But a love of riches means destruction because it binds the soul to this world. Trusting in this world's goods makes it impossible for a person to enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus was no doubt saddened when this young man whom he loved walked away from him. He looked around to see the reaction of his disciples, and then he said to them, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." How impossible! Some of us have enough trouble getting a piece of thread through the eye of a needle, but threading a camel! And it is even more impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were even more amazed. This was the strongest expression as to man's utter inability to work out his own salvation that they had ever heard. The rich cannot be saved because they trust in riches. But isn't that the trouble with all people, that they trust in something, if not riches, then in something else? The disciples said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." It is impossible for us to tear our hearts away from the things of this world and our own self-righteous attitudes to come to faith and trust in God. That takes a miracle of God. With him alone it is possible. Indeed we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called us by the gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, and sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. Nothing but the power of God is able to break the materialistic heart.

We might feel a bit proud of ourselves if we think that we don't have such a problem with the love of money. But then we have a worse problem, because then we're trusting in ourselves. What must I do to inherit eternal life? I can do nothing. God has done it all. He has earned my salvation and graciously, miraculously given it to me. Our comfort and assurance is not in our own poverty, but in our Lord Jesus, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we through his poverty might become eternally rich.

Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.