

**The Second Sunday in Angels' Tide, October 10, 2021**

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

**Forsake Riches, Follow Jesus**

Mark 10:17–22

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Eph 1:2*

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**Jesus, looking at [the rich young man], 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” (vv 21).**

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Jesus is journeying toward the cross when a young man runs up and kneels in front of Him. It's a matter of life-or-death for this man, though not as we so often see in the Gospels. This time, there's no fever, no leprosy, no demon possession, no dying son or daughter. There's only a soul in search of eternal life. He comes running up with the monster of uncertainty nipping at his heels. Before Jesus, his question tumbles right out: **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (v 17). How can I be sure? How can anyone be sure?

He's sincere and earnest, as young men sometimes are. His desire for eternal life is obvious. His thirst for assurance is real. He wants a guarantee of eternal life. He wants something he can count on. He wants something he can take to the bank. He wants—needs, even—something to *do*. That's the main verb of his salvation question. Maybe you noticed it. **“What must I DO?”** The way he asks the question puts him in the driver's seat. He thinks he's in control. He sees salvation as something he can do. Just tell me what it is, Jesus, and I'll do it! How often do we insist on being the one to do things? Such self-confidence! We often trust ourselves more than we trust anyone else. So it was for this man. All he needed to know was what to do. **“Good Jesus, what must I DO to inherit eternal life?”**

Well, if you're looking for something to do, the Bible has plenty to say. But first, Jesus has a question for him: **“Why do you call Me good? No one is good except good alone”** (v 18). In other words, Jesus wants to know, “When you call ‘good teacher,’ are you calling Me ‘God’ or are you just trying to butter Me up? Because what you believe about Me matters eternally. Who do you say that I am?”

But as for what to do, there's no mystery. **"You know the commandments,"** Jesus says. **"Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Do not defraud. Honor your father and mother"** (v 19). Do these things. Start with that. But Jesus doesn't list all the commandments. Maybe you noticed. He doesn't name the first three commandments: You shall have no other gods, don't misuse the Lord's name, and remember the Sabbath day. He also omits the last commandments: You shall not covet. Exercising self-control over the body and tongue is one thing. Keeping the heart in check is something else entirely.

The young man hears what Jesus says and rejoices. **"Teacher"** —not *"Good Teacher,"* just plain *"teacher."* **"Teacher,"** he says, **"all these I have kept from my youth"** (v 20). If it's a matter of doing, then he's done it! You can't get any better than this guy. He's a good citizen, a great neighbor, an all-around upstanding young man. But he's missing one thing: He's blind to the fact that eternal life is a gift, not a reward. Eternal life is an inheritance, and an inheritance can only be received as a gift.

**Jesus, looking at him, loved him** (v 21). What a beautiful sentence. Jesus knew this young man and loved him with a love that would lead to the cross. But there is one thing, the only thing that matters, and it has to do with Jesus. So the Lord tells the young man, **"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"** (v 21). For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And **disheartened by the saying, [the young man] went away sad, for he had great possessions** (v 22).

There Jesus strikes at the heart of this man's do-it-yourself religion. Jesus says, *"I'm here to help you, son. You're spiritually lacking something. Here's what it is. Sell all your stuff. All of it. Liquidate your assets and bank accounts. Add it all up. What's the total? Thousands? Millions? Impressive! Give it all to the poor. Sure, you won't have all your stuff, but you'll have heavenly treasure, eternal life, by trusting in Me. Learn a new spirituality! I'm the Giver. You're the receiver."*

*"I'll take care of you,"* Jesus says. *"Not only now but forever. I promise. One of these nights, when the Passover is celebrated, a night on which I'll be betrayed, I'll hand out my last will and testament. I'll spell it out this way: Bread and wine. With the bread My Body. With the cup of wine My Blood. The new testament in My Blood. All for you. All sin forgiven. Pure gift. Nothing you have to do. And to give you the inheritance, to put my last will and testament into effect, I'll die on a Friday afternoon. That's what I'll do."*

*"When it comes to the salvation job, I'm the only game in town. The salvation verbs belong to Me! Eternal life is what I do. I'll say when IT IS FINISHED. And I dish out its benefits. I am the*

*Lord your God. The inheritance of eternal life is my gift to you. So, come along, follow Me and receive what I have to give.”*

Jesus knows that there’s only one guarantee when it comes to eternal life. It’s not by way of the commandments. It’s by way of inheritance. That’s why He goes to the cross. It’s what He must do for this young man to inherit eternal life. It’s what He must do for you and me to inherit eternal life.

And the rich young man turns and walks away. He won’t be given to by Jesus. Jesus won’t let him do anything to get eternal life. That’s a complete let down for someone who wants to be in control of everything, including his own salvation. He was all hyped up about doing the salvation job himself. He even asked “good” Jesus’ for advice. “*Sell everything, give it all to the poor, and then trust Jesus? No way! Not a chance!*”

He trusted his stuff. He feared, loved, and trusted in his wealth and possessions but not Jesus. If he unloads all his stuff . . . he just can’t take that chance. He won’t trust Jesus. He can’t.

What about you? Are you going to walk away from Jesus? What do you fear, love, and trust above Jesus? What hinders you from trusting Jesus’ promise to take care of everything both now and forever? What idol forbids you from following Jesus? From receiving gifts from Him? Is it property? Wealth? Or something else?

I recently heard about a pastor who included in his bulletin a note about why we give offerings.<sup>1</sup> The five reasons were:

1. To thank God for providing for all our needs.
2. To fight against the love of money.
3. To strengthen our trust that God will continue providing for us.
4. To remind ourselves God is the true owner of all things.
5. To help those in physical and spiritual needs.

Jesus was teaching the rich young man the second reason—giving to fight against the love of money. Offerings and gifts of love are a way in which we discipline ourselves against the constant temptation to serve the wrong master.

The pastor I mentioned encouraged his members to give their offerings while saying, under their breath, “You are not my master. You are not my God. You cannot save me.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.1517.org/articles/gospel-mark-1017-22-pentecost-20-series-b>

Whatever the idol is it will crack and break under the pressure you put on it. Your idol can't handle all your fears. Your concerns. Your guilt. Your sin. Your eternal life salvation. Oh yes, the idol promises you heaven. But it can only deliver hell. It promises life but it can only bestow death. It claims to be your god but it lies.

Jesus doesn't. He tells the truth. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. *"I am the Lord your God."* That's His promise. He gives Himself entirely for you. With all that He is and all that He has. Reconciles you to the Father with His Blood. The Father is not angry with you. He does not hate you. He loves you for Christ's sake. Forgives you for Christ's sake. Gives you eternal life for Christ's sake.

You are saved in Christ. He is your Lord.

And now you are free to use your property, wealth, or possessions in service to the neighbor. That's your family, your congregation, your community, your country, and the world. What you have is all from the Lord. He gives you all your stuff not so to idolize it. Instead, you are His instruments to use all your stuff to help those in need and those who are helpless. And as you use your stuff to help your neighbor you do it to Jesus.

Happy following Him.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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*Phil 4:7*