

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 14, 2018
TEXT: MARK 10:17-22
THEME: YOUR GREATEST POSSESSION

¹⁷ 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.

In the name of Jesus:

According to Greek mythology, Achilles was the central character and the greatest war hero in Homer's Iliad. He was killed in battle at the end of the Trojan War, by Paris, who shot him in the heel with an arrow. If not for the weakness of his heel, Achilles would have been considered invincible, but his enemy discovered his weakness, and as such, the phrase "Achilles Heel" has taken on the meaning of the weakness of a person. The Achilles Heel is that thing which causes a person's demise.

In our text for today, we see the Achilles Heel of a rich man. Jesus identifies the rich man's Achilles Heel and we would be wise to learn the lesson that Jesus is teaching in our text, the rich man's Achilles Heel is also ours as well.

Mark records that a rich man approached Jesus with an honest enough question: "What must I DO to inherit eternal life?" It seems on the surface an innocent question, but note what this man is asking, he is inquiring of Jesus if there is anything that we can do, any good work that he could perform, that would allow

him to gain entry into heaven. Jesus responds by saying, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹You 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. Jesus, in love, instructs this rich man what he needs to do, as Jesus says: “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.” But the man was disheartened by what he heard, and he went away sorrowful, because he had great possessions. Let me put this into my own words, if I may, the man left Jesus heartbroken. Why? Because he had a lot of stuff.

Catch your breath for a moment and consider the implications. We live in a country where each and everyone of us has a lot of stuff. It is as if Jesus is saying to each of us, “so, you want to follow Me, do you?” Then sell everything you have, your car, your two cars, your clothes, your 401 K, your pension, give it all away and then we can talk about you following Me.”

Woah! In our day and age, we are use to trying to find more storage space in order to store all of our stuff. And as time goes on, we tend to collect more and more stuff. It is pandemic. On any given Saturday you can have your pick of garage sales to go to, as people try to get rid of their stuff, and as we grow older, the term we use is that we need to downsize, that is, get rid of some of our stuff so that we can have less stuff for our family to go through after our death.

The problem isn't the stuff we possess, it is the love of it. The problem is when we place our faith, our trust, our life and self worth in the stuff we possess. It

is as the Bible says, the love of money is the root of all evil. In this case, it is the love of the stuff, the worldly possessions we have and accumulate, that Jesus is addressing. The sorrow that the rich man in our text has is that he is sorrowful for what he had to give up. It is a grief which comes from the fear of lacking something. It is his lack that made him sad.

You may be saying, “well, wait a minute, Pastor, he had a lot of stuff, what is it that he is lacking?” He was lacking salvation. He steadfastly refused to give up his stuff, for he was afraid that if he didn’t have his stuff, he couldn’t make it. His stuff was more important to him than his salvation.

What is it that you hold dear, that you are afraid of to lose? It could be your possessions, maybe its your investments, maybe even your retirement, or reputation, or career, or status, or leisure activity, or hobby or habit. Maybe its your family, your children, grandchildren, or comfortable lifestyle that you have been living. What Jesus is addressing here is not the things or people in your life, it is your love of them whereby they take the place that God is supposed to have in your life. These things, this stuff, whatever it may be, become idols that we worship and hold dear, that take the place that God is supposed to have in our lives.

Let’s call a spade a spade, when something, anything, is more precious to us than Jesus, then we have an idol in our life, and we are guilty of idolatry. The man’s stuff became his God. They were more important to him than his salvation, more important to him than Jesus. And that is why this man’s situation is such a sad state of affairs, for the things of this world were more important than the Life that lasts forever.

What is most important to you? This man lacked one thing, he lacked the fear, love, and trust in God. But God's Good News to you is that you lack nothing in Jesus! For God's priority is your salvation. God wills that you and all people be saved and come to know the truth of His love. That is why God sent His Son Jesus down from heaven, to do the will of the Father who sent Him. Jesus never lacked anything in heaven, but He set it all aside to live as you and I live. Christ came to truly live and love the Father with all of His heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And then, at the right time, God raised His Son up on Calvary's cross, taking away His love and presence from His Son, abandoning His Son, forsaking Him on the cross, treating Him as sin who knew no sin, damning Him for your sins and mine that the sins of the whole world, so that we might be saved and lack no good thing from God.

Doesn't the Psalmist write: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want?" David here instructs us that the Lord loves us and because of His love, we shall not lack anything from God. I shall lack NOTHING. That is God's promise to you. For when you have Jesus, you have all you need, you lack nothing in Jesus. You can be content, just as the Apostle Paul was content, for when you have Jesus you know that in reality, Jesus has you. He has a hold of you, making His claim on your life in the waters of your Baptism. God has enriched you in everyway, giving you everything you need in Baptism: faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sin, delivering you from death and the devil, and giving you the certainty of eternal life. Because Jesus lives, you live, and Jesus lives in and through you.

You have God's promise that He is with you always and that He will provide for you in your life. Doesn't Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

So what is it that you are holding on to, clinging to in your life? What is it that is getting in the way of loving and serving Jesus? God's call to you today is to repent. Confess your sin and ask for God's forgiveness. And God's forgiveness is given to you this day, here at this Altar. Just as Jesus loved this man who had a lot of stuff, so

too Jesus loves you. He invites you to once again lay aside those riches that you have and to follow Him. Let go of the idols in your life and cling to Jesus alone. For in following Jesus, you will be able to say with the Apostle Paul: In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” May our gracious God give you the gift of being content in what God has given you. In Jesus’ name. Amen