

SERMON FOR OCTOBER 10, 2021

TEXT: MARK 10:17-22

THEME: THE POVERTY OF WEALTH

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:

Can you love Jesus, can you follow Him when you are rich? That is the question posed in our text for today. There was a young man who was rich, who wanted to follow Jesus. But when he encountered Jesus, he was neither angry at Jesus, nor did he marvel at what Jesus taught. Instead, the young man went away from Jesus sad, gloomy, downcast, and disheartened. Why? The Bible says "because he had great wealth."

This young man was wealthy, he seemingly had everything. In fact, he was not only wealthy, but he was a good person as well. He was morally upright, and a person who was willing and eager to learn at Jesus' feet. In fact, Mark records that this young man ran up to Jesus and sat at His feet. He then

asked Jesus a question: “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responded: “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.”

He had the world at his fingertips. He had everything, and yet...he lacked one thing. He didn't have the treasure that God prepared for him in heaven. He was wealthy by worldly standards, but he was spiritually and eternally poor.

We usually think that if we have great riches, we can be happy. Oh, we know that money can't buy happiness, and that winning the lottery brings about more trouble than what it is worth, but we as Americans, according to worldly standards, are quite wealthy. Many think that if we only had a little more money than what we possess, life would be oh so much better. And that is why we are so interested in trying to get a raise at work, in making certain our portfolios are earning the maximum amount of money they can, and why many try to minimize the amount they owe in taxes.

Maybe we can relate more to this young man than what we originally thought. When he approached Jesus, money was the last thing on his mind. But Jesus, it seems, doesn't shy away from talking about money. Jesus speaks so much about money because no matter whatever culture you live in, the dollar is still the Almighty Dollar. Money, or cash is king, and if cash is king, then Money, Cash, and Material Wealth has become your god.

Doesn't the Lord forbid idol worship in the First Commandment? You shall have no other gods besides Me, says the Lord. And what does this mean, only that you and I are commanded to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. If you aren't loving the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, then you aren't keeping the First Commandment and you are just like this rich young man in our text for today. When it came time to choose what Master he was going to serve, on whether he was going to follow Jesus or follow the ways of the world, this young man went away angry, because he realized he could not do what Jesus was asking him to do. And maybe that is why you become so defensive when the Lord wants to talk to you about money, because you and I are just like this rich young man, at times finding security in more wealth while being impoverished in our relationship with God.

God's Good News for you is that Jesus loved the Lord His God with all of His heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus' will was to do the will of the Father who sent Him from heaven to buy back the world from its love of material things. But Jesus didn't use money to pay the price for your salvation. He purchased and won you, not with silver or gold, but with His holy, precious, suffering, His bloody death on the cross, and in His resurrection from the grave. You belong to God because Jesus bought you, with the sole purpose of having you not to live your life in service of your sinful passions and lusts, but to use your life to bring praise and glory to God, sharing the gifts that God has given to you with those who need God's gifts.

Jesus forced this rich young man to consider a question that you and I need to answer at some point in our lives. That question is this: What is really most important for you in your life? That is why Jesus says later, "how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." It is difficult because Jesus has identified the problem, you can't serve God and money. You will either love the one or hate the other. There is no middle ground.

You may not think that you are wealthy, but when compared with the rest of the world, you are! We are tempted to live our lives looking at our retirement income, checking on our investments, making certain that our tax shelter annuity is making the most money it can with our investment. Now to be clear, money is not the problem. God gives His good gifts to His creatures,

and money is one of those gifts. But what the Bible warns about is the love of money, for the love of money is the root of all evil. When you love money more than the Lord, then evil is close behind because your life is following another god, and that god is a false god.

God gives us money, to use for His purpose in a God pleasing way. Certainly one way to use money is to provide for yourself and your family. But God doesn't want our hearts and lives to become so inwardly focused that we forget about the needs of others and the work of the Lord.

That is why the Church has traditionally placed a time in the worship service to gather our tithes and offerings. Notice, I said tithes. God calls upon you to set aside a portion of what He has given to you to give back to Him. This is to be done habitually, regularly, to remind and teach that the Lord is the Master and not the money. God doesn't ask us to give when we feel like it or when we remember to do so, He says to regularly set aside what He has given to give back to Him. This is what the Apostle Paul means when he says: "Each person should give what he has decided in his heart to give (2 Cor. 9:7), and that each believer is to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share (1 Tim. 6: 17-18).

Americans are known to be among the most generous people on the face of the planet. When a natural catastrophe or disaster occurs, Americans are the first to respond to help in times of need. But Americans don't give like

Christians do. Americans give to help others, once their needs have been met. Americans give from the excess that they have. Some Americans give at the end of the year, to get a tax break. But Christians give for a whole different reason and with a different motivation for giving. Christians give because they love the Lord. And they also give so that they don't turn into someone like the rich young man, who lived for the love of money. We as God's children give away what God has blessed us with so that we don't fall into the temptation of trusting that which the Lord has given to us. When we give, it would be good for us to remember and to say with conviction, "Money, you are not my master, you are not my God, you cannot save me."

But there is one who can. Jesus. And He alone is the reason why we give. Jesus is our Master. Jesus is our God. Jesus alone can and does save us, from the love of money, so that being rich in the mercy and love of Jesus, we will love and serve Jesus in all that we say, in all that we spend, and in all that we do. To the glory of God and in Jesus' name.

Amen