

The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 25, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Mark 10:17-27 - Pentecost 21

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." (NIV)

My wife Lisa has this pet expression she often uses. She likes to say “*for the most part.*” For example she will say that the trip was relaxing for the most part or tell someone that we had a nice time for the most part. But most often she uses it describing our kids behavior. I have heard her say countless times that the kids were good for the most part. Now even our kids have started using this expression. I’ll come home and ask them how they have been and they will say “*good for the most part.*” Or they will try to use it to their advantage asking for Dairy Queen or McDonald’s while adding: “*Dad, we have been good for the most part.*” And I think that expression fits with our human nature, doesn’t it? We don’t expect everything to be perfect. We are satisfied if everything goes well for the most part. It makes us very happy if our children are behaved at least most of the time.

Does that kind of thinking carry over to our relationship with God? Do we think we earn something before God by trying to be good more than we are not? Is God happy with a “*for the most part*” kind of obedience to Him? As we listen to this valuable lesson from God’s Word today I want us to think about this question: **Is it enough to be good for the most part?**

In our text we have a man who runs up and falls on his knees in front of Jesus. Matthew tells us this man is young and Luke adds that he had great wealth. But if most people had to describe this man with one word outwardly speaking they might have used the word good. He was just a good young man. He was polite and deeply religious. He was enthusiastic, energetic, well respected and appears to be the type of guy any Hebrew mom and dad would love to have for a son-in-law. Calling Jesus a good teacher he asks Jesus one question: “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” When Jesus answered: “*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."

On a rerun of the *Family Feud* (if you are a fan of the show you know that they survey 100 people) they asked the question: How many of the ten commandments have you broken? What would you guess was the top answer? One. Out of all those surveyed most people felt they had only broken one. Isn't that shocking? Most people need to look a little harder at what God's commandments actually say or at least look a little closer at themselves with a more honest evaluation. Most people think they are pretty good for the most part.

This young man felt that way as he looked at God's second table of the law. Since he was a boy he thought he treated others fairly and loved his neighbors as he should. But like many who took that survey on the *Family Feud* he needed to take a much closer look at God's commands and an even deeper look into his own heart. That's exactly what Jesus gets him to do. Before we hear Jesus' words and think they are unfair or asking too much, I don't want us to miss why Jesus speaks them: "***Jesus looked at him and loved him.***"

"Jesus looked at him and loved him." That is why Jesus says: "***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.***" Please understand Jesus is not setting a precedent for everyone to follow. God's Word never demands we give up all our possessions to live a life of poverty. But Jesus knew what was in this man's heart. He loved something more than Jesus. This man thought that he was good enough to stand before God, but he couldn't even get by God's first commandment. And God will not tolerate being second place. The Lord demands that we fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. This young man might have been good for the most part, but being good for the most part is not good enough for God. The best being good for the most part can do is land a person in hell. For he too was a sinner. Jesus exposes him as one and "***at this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.***"

Jesus could start on our hearts with the first commandment as well, couldn't He? Does God always come first in our lives? Idolatry is not just bowing down to Baal or other false gods made of wood or stone - idolatry is anything that we put in our hearts above God. Recently, I was talking to another pastor who said that sports is our god in America today and I really couldn't disagree. I am not just picking on those who spend much time & energy on sports, because God's first command exposes us all. We sin when we put money, family, favorite hobbies, or anything else in our hearts ahead of God and His Word. We too fail to get by the first commandment. We are sinners that have not been good enough to deserve anything from God. Jesus could go on down the line with God's commands and we would have to walk away like the rich man - faces down - sad.

That's what God's law does. It crushes and condemns and Jesus was a master at preaching it. But as Martin Luther said: "***God must make us sad before he makes us glad.***" Jesus wants us to realize one thing for sure. Did you catch what He first said to this young rich man? "***No one is good--except God alone.***" Jesus wants us to see that it is hopeless to look to ourselves to find the answer of how we can attain eternal life. There is nothing we can do to win salvation - our works and efforts are all futile. It is not just difficult to save ourselves but impossible. Jesus said "***How hard it is for the rich to***

enter the kingdom of God!" While there are certain challenges to being rich, Jesus might have also said it is hard for the poor, the middle class, or anyone - in fact, as Jesus says, ***"with man this is impossible."***

Jesus wants to make sure that this young man, his disciples, and us don't miss the point. If there was a camel in here walking down the center aisle I'm positive all of us would notice it - they are pretty big animals. It would be easier to stick that big camel through a little eye of a needle than for us to earn heaven. We can't do it. None of us are good enough because just being good for the most part doesn't cut it with God. So Jesus exposes us and makes us sad. He leads us to despair in and of ourselves and says with the disciples: ***"Who then can be saved?"***

By grace we know the answer. We know because Jesus says to us, ***"With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*** Jesus wants this rich young man to open his eyes and see standing before him the only one who was good - for Jesus is God. What was God's Son doing in a manger? What was He doing at age 12 in the temple gladly hearing God's Word? He was being good enough. What was Jesus doing healing the sick, loving every person, resisting Satan's every temptation, preaching the Word? He was being good enough. No lust in His heart, no gossip ever on His lips, no greed ever entering His mind - Jesus loved God with all He had! Jesus was good enough for God.

In fact, Jesus was the only one who was good enough to offer His life to God as a substitute for others, to pay for sin, all your sin. We know that is exactly what Jesus did on the cross because He loved us so much. He suffered for our greed and lust and lack of love for God and paid sin's eternal price with His death. And in answer to the young man's question, what must I do to inherit eternal life? You don't do anything to inherit something. You get something for free when someone dies, simply because you are named in the will. When Jesus died in your place and rose again, there was a reading of a will. Jesus says: ***"I leave you everything. I leave you my righteousness - you get to cover yourselves in my perfect life and love for God. You get my holiness, which alone makes you good enough for God. I have made the impossible possible. You are saved. You have eternal life."*** Thanks to Jesus we don't have to live worrying about trying to be good for the most part, for because of Jesus' work we are all good! That, my friends, makes us glad - so glad in fact that we want to be good all of the time. Amen.