

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighth Sunday After Trinity, August 11, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 26 (218:6) 430:1-4, 375, 52

Lessons: Leviticus 19:9-18; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Matthew 5:33-37

Text: Matthew 19:16-26

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

Jesus said, “*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*” **Luke 18:8**. Millions of people worship idols and not the true God. Some people have the idea that everyone will be saved and go to heaven. They say, “We’re all aiming for the same place, it’s just that we’re traveling a different road.” So the thinking of many people has degenerated into this false idea that it doesn’t much matter what you believe. Such people have discarded the Bible as the only source of authority for teaching in matters of faith, and they do not believe that the Bible is the very truth of God. Few people accept the Bible as the one and only source of truth for what is to be believed.

We, on the other hand, are among the few privileged people who by God’s grace still look to God’s Word for the answer to this question:

WHO CAN BE SAVED?

From our text let us learn the answer:

- 1. Not those who trust in their own good works;**
- 2. Not those who love their riches more than the Lord; but,**
- 3. Those only whom God saves by his grace in Christ.**

“*Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’*” A young man came to Jesus with an important question. Luke’s Gospel says that he was a ruler, probably a Pharisee who ruled in a synagogue. He was not asking Jesus **how** he could earn eternal life, for he spoke of doing good. He already believed in salvation by works. He wanted to know **what** good thing he had to do to have eternal life.

“*‘Why do you ask me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.*” This answer by Jesus is used by those who use their human reason to establish religious truth. They accuse Jesus of preaching salvation by good works. That’s not possible because Jesus is the Son of God and in his Word he teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works. He did not and he could not contradict himself, for God cannot contradict himself. Jesus told the young man that only One is perfectly good and that is God. Jesus wanted to show this young man that the good God demands in his commandments is not possible for man to achieve by himself. Where is there a person who has kept all the commandments of God perfectly? The Bible answers: “*All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one,*” **Psalm 14:3**.

Then the self-righteous young man asked Jesus which commandments of God he had to obey. Jesus replied, “*Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.*” Jesus quoted the 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 4th commandments and then added the summary of the Second Table of the Law: “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” The rich young ruler was so spiritually blind

and so self-righteous that he told Jesus, *“All these I have kept, ... what do I still lack?”* Just imagine, instead of humbly confessing his sins, this unconverted man boasted that he had kept all the commandments that Jesus quoted. Now he wanted to know what more he still had to do to have eternal life.

“Jesus answered, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’” Oh, the wisdom of Jesus! How marvelous is his omniscience! He knew perfectly well how to show this self-righteous young man his sinfulness. Jesus knew that the real god of this young man was his wealth. So he suggested that he sell all he had and give it away to the poor and then come and follow him as his disciple.

Our text tells us the young man’s reaction to this suggestion of Jesus. *“When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”* Since the young man would not part with his riches, he showed that he loved them more than the Lord, and therefore showed himself to be far from perfect in keeping the commandments. It should be perfectly clear, then, that no one can be saved by trusting in their own works, for no one performs perfectly what the Lord demands in his holiness.

So, we go back to the question asked in our sermon theme: WHO CAN BE SAVED? The answer: **Not those who trust in their own good works.** This is a very important teaching of Holy Scripture. Paul writes, *“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin,”* Romans 3:19-20.

When Jesus saw the rich young ruler sorrowfully walk away from him, he began teaching the disciples about the danger of riches. This provides us with another answer to the question in our sermon theme: WHO CAN BE SAVED? The answer: **Not those who love their riches more than the Lord.**

2.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, 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.’” Is this perhaps an overstatement by Jesus? No, the Lord never says anything except the truth. Did Jesus really want to teach that it is very difficult for a rich man to be saved? Indeed he did, and this is not figurative language. Jesus means exactly what he said. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved.

Here we must be careful that when we hear about the rich that we don’t just think of those who are millionaires or billionaires. We are rich compared with the majority of people in this world, people in underdeveloped countries, people who live in shacks and hardly survive because they have no money to buy food. There are two classes of people the Lord speaks of, those who are wealthy, and those who want to be rich and covet the wealth of others. There is great danger in either having riches or coveting them. There is the danger of loving them so that love of God and love for his Word is forgotten. We can spend so much time and energy in acquiring and enjoying the material possessions that money can buy that the Lord is almost forgotten in our daily living. When some complain of the mortgage payments and installment payments they have to make, they claim to be poor. What we all should do is make a list of all the things we have purchased for ourselves over and above the actual necessities of life.

Then we should ask ourselves if our expenditures have made it impossible to be rich toward the Lord. Have we robbed the Lord of what is rightfully his because we have spent so much on ourselves? And if we really do not have much, do we not often covet more than what the Lord has provided?

All of us should remember what Paul wrote, *“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 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,”* 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

Now we want to learn yet the third answer to our theme question: WHO CAN BE SAVED? The answer: **Those whom God saves by his grace in Christ.**

3.

When the disciples had heard Jesus speak about the great difficulty of a rich man being saved, *“they were greatly astonished and asked, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”* Of and by himself no man can be saved. Conversion, or entering into the kingdom of God, is something that is impossible for man to accomplish by himself. But Jesus is not saying no one can be saved. He is saying that if a person is saved, it is possible only because God by his grace has accomplished it. It is like saying, if we are saved, it is a miracle of God. And indeed it is. Those who are saved are brought to faith and preserved in the faith only by God’s grace in Christ.

This is a miracle of God’s grace. Paul writes, *“Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved,”* Ephesians 2:3-5. As spiritually dead people we were unable to save ourselves. God, however, took pity upon us and sent Jesus to be our Divine Substitute. He kept all the commandments perfectly in our stead. He took upon himself the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death in our place. By his suffering and death on the cross he fully atoned for all our sins. John writes, *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”* 1 John 2:2. And the good news the Gospel of Christ crucified promises is in Jesus’ words, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned,”* John 5:24 Paul writes, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast,”* Ephesians 2:8-9.

Now we know the three-fold answer to the question, WHO CAN BE SAVED? Let this be our response:

*“Seek where we may
to find a way
That leads to our salvation;
Our heart is stilled,
On Christ we build,
He is our one Foundation.
His Word is sure;
His works endure
He can defeat our every foe;
Through Him
we more than conquer.”*
Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 383:1 adapted)

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