

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Quinquagesima Sunday, February 14, 2021

✠ ✠ ✠

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

Hymns: 369, 238:1, 373, 285, 644

Lessons: Psalm 14, Romans 3: 9-31, Luke 18: 9-14.

Text: Mark 10: 17-27.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our sermon text is commonly called the story of the rich young ruler. It is found in two other gospel accounts: Matthew 19: 16-26 and Luke 18: 18-27. In Matthew we find out he was young and had many possessions. In Luke he is called a “ruler” or leader. Of his status in life we know little more, except that he had many possessions, that he was “very rich” as Luke says.

Anxious to see Jesus, he came running and he knelt down. Perhaps he wanted to make a good impression on this one who obviously had something important to say about heaven.

From his question, we know that he wanted to earn, or to trade, or to barter something for something. Literature and movies show us characters like him: They think that their money can buy anything, but at least in older literature, there was always something they couldn’t buy. Such people are out there in real life, too: those who think or have been lead to believe that money can buy anything they want. Perhaps we have even known some of them. Aren’t they present in every community? Their money, their wealth, their position have given them that idea that they can buy anything.

But this young man came to Jesus and wanted to know what he had to do to inherit, to earn, to gain eternal life. He knew there was something he did not have, and he wanted to guarantee it, and that led to his question. We read: *“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?’”* That leads to our question this morning:

WHAT IS IT THAT THE RICH YOUNG RULER LACKED?

We find the answers in Jesus’ words to the man, and in Jesus’ words to his disciples:

- 1. The knowledge of sin,**
- 2. The sorrow of repentance,**
- 3. The grace of God.**

All these things were totally lacking in this rich young man’s life and heart.

Jesus first puts him to the test: Jesus is asking: Who am I? What do you believe about me? We know Jesus as the Son of God, the Gate, the Way, the Door to eternal life. Only through Him do we enter heaven. The young man did not know that, and he failed the first test.

Jesus knew this man’s heart, and we read: *“‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good--except God alone.’”* Jesus implies: I am God. I am good. Is that why you called me good? But that is apparently not why he called Jesus *“good.”* The young man’s answer is not recorded in God’s Word. Perhaps he had no answer.

In answer to his question, Jesus preaches law to him: *“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.’”* What was the reason Jesus told him these things? To show his sinfulness, his utter inability to earn salvation through good works or obeying the commandments. This is the function, the purpose, the use of the Law of God as a mirror.

But in his pride and blindness, he does not see his sinfulness. ***“Teacher,” he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’*** He cannot see the sin in his heart. He cannot see the sins of his deeds and words and especially not of his thoughts. Perhaps he was so concerned about outward things that he had never looked into his own heart. Pride was in his heart. Blindness was in his heart. Isn’t that so characteristic of youth? Not really recognizing what we don’t know? We – the older among us – were young once. We had a great deal of pride. We could do anything, we were on top of the world, we knew more than our parents. There is the story Mark Twain supposedly told about how stupid his father was when he was 14. Then, by the time he was 21, he was amazed at how smart his father had gotten in just 7 years!

This man’s pride couldn’t see any wrong in himself. But this is not only a problem with young people. As we grow older and smarter, we also tend to think that we know it all.

Perhaps he was good at seeing the sins of others, like that Pharisee in the parable about the Pharisee and the publican – the evil tax collector – both standing in the temple. ***“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”*** (Luke 18:11-12 NIV)

In his pride, the man in our text today had no knowledge of sin, at least of his own sins. He didn’t know as Genesis 6 tells us ***“that every inclination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil all the time.”*** (Genesis 6:5 NIV) He didn’t realize, as Romans 3 quotes the Psalms: ***“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*** (Romans 3:10-12 NIV)

But our sermon text tells us: ***“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.’”*** Jesus loved him. This is not so unusual. Jesus loves everyone and wants no one to be damned. But that we are told Jesus loved him shows the warmth, the concern, the kindness and the love Jesus has even for those we find it hard to like: the conceited, those who think that they never do wrong, who never recognize in themselves any fault. Now we have no knowledge or evidence that this one was conceited in the simple sense of the term, for he displayed the proper humility toward Jesus. He knelt down before Jesus. He called him a good teacher, and recognized that Jesus was a good one from whom to learn. But this man was certainly proud of what he thought were his good deeds and his good life. He was all wrapped up in his pride, his false humility, and his blindness. Perhaps Jesus felt sorry that someone had taught this man the words of the Law of Moses without ever showing or teaching him the spirit of the Law. We know that the Law shows us our sins.

Jesus says ***“One thing you lack,”*** one thing. This sermon’s outline lists three things: but we see that because he lacked the knowledge of sin, he also lacked the sorrow of repentance.

He felt and believed and thought that he had done no wrong. Thus he had nothing to be sorry for. He had nothing to repent of. He did not have the knowledge of having wronged someone. He had no knowledge of having hurt someone. Of having had lustful thoughts and impure desires. Of having cheated or stolen, or taken in any way what is not his. Of having lied, and as Luther puts it, betrayed, slandered, defamed anyone.

And as a rich young ruler, or leader, one likely to have had people working for him, he had no knowledge of having cheated those under him, or defrauded them. Or of having unjustly gotten the better of someone in a business deal.

He just did not know that he had sinned. Thus, he could have no sorrow over sin. He just didn’t feel bad about any of this. We see later that he did feel bad about the idea of having to give up his worldly possessions, the things that had become his god. That made him feel bad.

He had no spirit or sense of his own unworthiness. Here we see, too, how important it is to preach the law in all its severity, so that the gospel means something. If I am never told that I have done wrong, I will never appreciate what Jesus did to take that wrong away from me. If I am never told that I have sinned and do not think that I have sinned, I will never appreciate what Jesus did to take me away from all my sins.

Jesus says to him: get rid of your wealth, your possessions and then see. You are lacking poverty, the poverty of spirit that a poor sinner feels. Then you will need God and his forgiveness. You have had a soft life. If you had a hard life, perhaps it would be easier to see how dependent all men are on God for our physical,

material life as well as eternal salvation. ***“At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”***

And so, because he lacked the knowledge of sin and the sorrow of repentance, he also lacked the grace of God. ***“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.’”***

The young man was shocked, appalled, and gloomy, as an original meaning of the Greek word suggested. Earthly things meant so much to him.

Possessions mean a great deal to all of us. But what is our God? Is it trust in our wealth? Or is it trust in the true God? We often hear in the news of the world about how someone loses their possessions. It would be easy to look at such people and ask, “what is their god?” But we must never let those material things get in the way of what this man lacked: the grace of God.

Man can’t earn eternal life: God has to give it. And God does offer and give it. He gives it freely, without price, without anything we can do. Jesus did it all: He lived the perfect life I couldn’t possibly live. Then he died as punishment for my sins. For all of them. Even for those I don’t think I have or don’t recognize. And even those I want to overlook and ignore. He kept the law perfectly because I can’t do it, and then he was punished for all the sins I am guilty of. He did this for all the sins of the entire world.

How easy it is to think: “All these commandments I have kept.” Especially, God, when I look around me at the sin and corruption of the world. There are so many people who are much worse people than me! I am pretty good, God.

But that idea damns. We need that grace of God. We need God’s undeserved goodness and mercy and love. We must know and be reminded that we sin, daily and much. We must know and be reminded daily that all our good deeds are like filthy rags. And filthy, dirty rags are useless in trying to clean our sins away. We need Jesus, we need God’s grace.

Jesus tells it all in the last verses of our text: ***“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.’”***

God can save anyone. God’s grace is sufficient. ***“The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!’”***

How hard it is for anyone to enter heaven! We all sin. And the law must show us our sins. Convict us of our sins. Point the accusing finger. Condemn us so that we turn to Christ. Because of Jesus Christ our sins are washed away. With God salvation is possible. Only with God. ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”*** Acts 16:31 (NIV) Jesus even gives the ridiculous picture of putting a camel through the eye of a needle.

What did the man in our text lack? The knowledge of sin and the sorrow of repentance, And because he didn’t have those, he totally lacked the grace of God.

May we always, every day, have the knowledge of our sins and the sorrow of repentance and the grace of God. May we every day be reminded from God’s word:

By grace I’m saved, grace free and boundless;

My soul, believe and doubt it not.

Why stagger at this word of promise?

Hath Scripture ever falsehood taught?

Nay; then this word must true remain;

By grace thou, too, shalt heav’n obtain. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 373: 1)

And that is our message for all the world, too! Amen.

(Reprinted from Ministry By Mail for February 17, 2002)