

JESUS LOOKS AT US AND LOVES US

Mark 10:17-27 | Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost | October 11/14, 2018

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Jesus

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Years ago people in certain parts of Asia had a clever way of trapping monkeys. They’d take a jar just big enough for the monkey to get his hand in, attach it to something substantial and bait it with a nut or a piece of candy. The monkey would reach into the jar and grab the treat. But with his fingers wrapped around it his little hand made a fist that was too big to pull out of the jar. Because he wanted that tasty treat so badly, the monkey would refuse to let go. So there he would sit, trapped because of his greed.

Paul wrote to Timothy: **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil** (1 Timothy 6:9).

In the portion of God’s Word before us today we meet a man who put his hand in the jar and just wouldn’t let go. He was in love with his money. But, perhaps even worse, he was in love with his own goodness. In spite of all this, Jesus looked at this man and loved him. He loved him by being brutally honest with him. He loved him by accomplishing the impossible for him. He does the same for us. Today God’s Word assures us that **JESUS LOOKS AT US AND LOVES US.**

I. By being brutally honest

While Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem **“a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.”** We know from Mark’s account and from the other gospel writers that this man was young, he was rich and he was a ruler. He was probably in charge of his synagogue, which means he was also a religious man. This guy was respected, upstanding and well-to-do. He had a lot going for him. His parents must have beamed with pride. But the conversation he had with Jesus makes clear, he was far from perfect.

“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸ **“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”**

Some hear in these words a confession from Jesus that he is not truly God. That wasn’t his point at all. Jesus was making clear that only God can be called good. To do good enough to get to heaven, you have to be as good as God. God himself

said, **“Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy”** (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus was being very blunt with this young man. “You want to get to heaven? Be as good as God. Keep all the commandments. Be perfect.”

The young man almost broke his arm patting himself on the back. **“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”** I’m sure he had ... to a point. He had kept himself from committing cold-blooded murder. He hadn’t cheated on his wife. He wasn’t a thief. He wasn’t a liar or a cheat. He had been obedient to his parents. Outwardly he looked pretty good. But his heart was rotten to the core.

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.

Please understand: Jesus wasn’t really telling the man what to do to earn heaven. In love, he said what he said to expose the sin in this man’s heart. This man who thought he had kept all the commandments hadn’t even kept the First: You shall have no other gods. His money was his god. He worshipped his wealth. And he wasn’t about to give it up. Rather than confessing his sin he went away sad, disappointed with the “good teacher.”

Any of this sound familiar? Stop any number of people on the street and ask them, “If you were to die today and God

asked, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what would you say?” The huge majority will answer like this man did. You get to heaven by being good! Do we ever think that way? *No! Not us! We’re Lutherans!* And yet, that kind of thinking still creeps into our minds. I mean, we’re pretty good people. We try to be kind to our neighbors. We try to be faithful to our spouses. We pay our taxes. We obey the laws of the land. We go to church. Surely, that’s got to count for something in God’s eyes, right? Wrong. In brutal, loving honesty Jesus reminds us that **“no one is good—except God alone.”** No matter how hard we try we can’t measure up to God’s demands. We can’t earn anything from him—I take that back, we can earn one thing from him: hell. After all **the wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23).

Does something else about this man remind you of yourself? Jesus said, **“How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”** I know what you’re thinking. *Jesus isn’t talking to me! I’m not rich!* Yes, you are. And I’ll prove it to you using just the clothes you are wearing today. How many people in this world have more than one set of clothes, much less a dresser and a closet full of them and a house in which to store them? How many people have money to buy new clothes at the store when the old ones wear out (or when they just become unfashionable)? How many people have a car in which to drive to the store? How many people have a washing machine and a dryer to clean their clothes they buy at the store? And we think of these things as basic necessities. How many televisions

do you have in your home? How many cars? Fishing poles? Computers? Smart phones? Tablets? Shoes? Pieces of jewelry? Even though the checking balance may not always show it, we are rich. We still have a lot more stuff than we need to survive. By the world's standards we are fabulously wealthy.

Is that wrong? No. Thank God for being so generous with our daily bread! The problem isn't money, but the *love* of money. Sometimes we get our hand caught in the jar too, don't we? What if Jesus said to us what he said to that man? "Sell all your stuff. Give to the proceeds to the poor. Then follow me." Would we react any differently than that man? Jesus, of course, doesn't require us to get rid of all our stuff, but the question is worth pondering. What's more important to me? My God or my greenbacks? My Savior or my stuff? Which do I spend the most time thinking about? Which do I work harder for? Do I have possessions or do they have me?

You know, it's easy to look at the man in our text and think, "What an arrogant, greedy fool!" It's not as easy to look in the mirror and have the same thought. And yet that's exactly what our Savior wants. Just like he was with that man, Jesus is brutally honest with us. He looks at us and he lovingly calls us sinners to repentance.

II. By accomplishing the impossible

So the rich young ruler left. He had made his decision. He had set his priorities. Neither Jesus nor his Word were among them. **Jesus looked around and said to**

his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

²⁴ **The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."**

²⁶ **The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"**

²⁷ **Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."**

As they listened to Jesus' brutal honesty they began to wonder if there was any hope for them. After all, they were sinners too. Trying to save themselves was like trying to stuff a camel through the eye of a needle. I don't know about you, but I can barely feed a thread through the eye of a needle. A 1,500-pound camel? It just won't work.

And that's exactly Jesus' point: We cannot save ourselves. **No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law** (Romans 3:20). If left up to us – to our efforts, our strength, our works – salvation is impossible!

But Jesus accomplished the impossible for us. Just think about all the impossible things he did to save us! He took on human flesh in the womb of a virgin so that he could live under the law as our substitute. A virgin birth! God in human

flesh. Impossible! But he did it for us.

He kept every one of God's laws perfectly at all times in thought, word and action. That's impossible. But Jesus did it for us. And God graciously gives us the credit.

He died on the cross for us. That seems possible. But realize: *God* died on the cross. That's impossible. But Jesus the God-man did it for us in order to make full payment for our sins and the sins of all people.

And then he rose bodily from the grave on the third day. A dead man came back to life. That's impossible. But Jesus did it for us to give us the victory, to assure us of our own bodily resurrection.

Forgiveness for all of our sins, a new life as God's dear children and an eternity of joy in heaven – we can't possibly earn these things. But Jesus won them all for us. And through Word and the sacraments the Spirit gives us faith to receive them – something else that is impossible for us. But not for God. **“All things are possible with God.”**

My friends, sometimes – like the rich young ruler – we get caught with our hand in the jar, clinging to the trinkets and baubles of this world, trapped by our greed. Thank God we have a Savior who looks at us and loves us. Thank God we have a Savior who through his Word bluntly points out our sins and lovingly calls us to repentance. Thank God we have a Savior who lived and died and rose again for us. Thank God we have a Savior who forgives all our sins and gives us

eternal life. By the Spirit's gift of faith, let us cling to the One who looks at us and loves us. Amen.

S.D.G.