

**November 5, 2006**  
**Pentecost 21**

*"Jesus' Love for a Poor Rich Man"*

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**MARK 10:17-27**

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*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?"<sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone."<sup>19</sup> 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.'"<sup>20</sup> "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup> At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

Earlier this year a very rich man named Warren Buffet made the news because he pledged 1.5 billion dollars a year to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Money from the foundation will be used to help cure some of the world's worst diseases. Buffet, dubbed the Oracle of Omaha, was quoted as saying, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way." We applaud the man for his willingness to use his money to help other people, but we are appalled at his false hope of getting to heaven by being generous with his money.

One day Jesus was approached by a wealthy man who asked him the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was a good man who wanted help from Jesus to do even better in his quest to earn eternal life. He wanted the guarantee of a nice place after death. What impresses us this morning is the love and compassion on the face of Jesus as he carefully shows this poor rich man that his best efforts to help other people would always fall short of God's glory in the end.

Jesus does not want us to develop a false hope for eternal life. That can happen even to Christians who begin their lives trusting God's grace to completely provide for their salvation. But then they slowly slip into the thinking that their efforts at being good and trying to live a Christian life actually contribute to being accepted by God and having a better place with the Lord after they die. It is only when you see how poor you are in all your efforts to please God that you find yourself in a position to see the riches you have in Christ. This morning we want to take a closer look at **Jesus' Love for a Poor Rich Man.**"

**Jesus told the rich man how poor he was**

There is a little nursery rhyme that some of you may have learned when you were little children. "Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, "My, what a good fellow am I." There are people who sincerely believe that the blessings they receive in this life whether a plum in a pie or riches in this life are a direct reward from God for being good people. Such was the man who came to Jesus with these words, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He saw Jesus as a good teacher who could offer him help in improving his life just as you might take a cooking class to become a better cook.

Jesus could have kept on walking and ignored this man just as we might ignore people who blatantly tell us how they think everything will be OK for them in the end because they are trying their best and are not as bad as most people around them. Instead of ignoring him Jesus asked the man, "Why do you call me good? No one is good- except God."

Do you see what Jesus is trying to do for this man with this statement? He wants him to realize that his concept of goodness does not even begin to measure up to how good God is. I have found from coaching soccer that you need to encourage kids by telling them "That's a good shot!" or "Way to go!" even though their kick wasn't even close to what it should be. We live in a world where we applaud each other for our kind acts and our goodness even though it is so far from what God's standard of good is.

There is only one person who is good in the highest sense and that is God. His love is perfect and pure and holy. That was the love that the people saw in Jesus. That was the love this man saw in Jesus, but he did not even begin to understand how pure and perfect Jesus was and how far he was from that standard of perfection. While we applaud Warren Buffet's efforts to give over 1 billion a year to the Gates Foundation, even his best efforts to give will always be far from perfect and far from God's standard. Your most loving acts of kindness to your husband or wife this past week, your mom and dad, your brother and sister, your neighbor across the street, were beautiful to behold, even done out of love for Christ, but always imperfect. They can never be the source of our salvation. The prophet Isaiah tells us: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Jesus does not walk away from this fellow but worked even more personally with him by holding up the mirror of God's law to help him see his faults and weaknesses. "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." When the man hears these words you can almost see a big smile come across his face as he says to Jesus, "Teacher, all of these I have kept since I was a boy." The guy is totally clueless when it comes to realizing how much God's law expects of us. Can you imagine anyone ever saying, "I have honored and obeyed my parents as God wanted me to since the time I was a young man?" I have asked children in our Bible camp the question, "Do you honor and obey your parents?" Some of the kids look down in shame, others look up and proudly nod their head "yes." But then when the question is asked, "Have you obeyed your parents perfectly at all times?" The kids shake their heads "no." Such an understanding of God's law condemns us all.

Jesus is not finished with this man. He wants him to come to see himself for what he truly is, a lost and condemned sinner, without hope of eternal life. That is why Jesus takes it to

the next level. Notice again these touching words, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." If you really love people you will share the truth with them that all their best efforts to live a good life will never measure up to God's standard on judgment day. Jesus tells him in love, "One thing you lack. Go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me." These words of Jesus were intended to open up the man's heart and help him see himself for what he truly was, a greedy and selfish person. We are told, "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." He was willing to part with some of his money, but not all of it. The very mention of giving his money away caused him to well up inside with selfishness.

Have you ever seen money change people? What about Jack Whittaker, the man from West Virginia who won the largest Powerball lottery in the history of this country? Sure, he gave 20 million to charity and helped build three churches. But then his life was completely ruined by money. He reached his lowest point when his grand daughter died of drug overdose. His wife Jewel said that she wished he had never won, and if she had known what the money would do to their lives she would have torn up the ticket and thrown it away. Money can change people and turn them into monsters. Brothers and sisters fight over the inheritance and never speak to each other again.

It is easy to see what money can do to others but much harder to see what has it done to me at different times in my life? Look back at your life and ask yourself, "Have I always used my money wisely in such a way that I have loved the Lord with all my heart, all my mind, all my strength, and used my money to love my neighbor as myself?" Do you realize that if you own a home, two cars and have a retirement plan that you are among the top 2% of the wealthiest people in the world? When God's people entered the Promised Land the Lord warned them, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord." I can point a finger at this poor rich man who came to Jesus, or to poor Warren Buffet for thinking money can buy a place in heaven, or for poor Jack Whittaker for messing up his life with the lottery. Then the words of Romans 2 come to mind, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Lord have mercy on me a sinner!

### **Jesus tells us how rich we are in him**

What Jesus wants us to see is how rich we are in him with his love and with life that lasts forever. He said to his disciples "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" What Jesus said about a rich man could also be said about the poor man who is always worrying and thinking about money. Then he drives home the point with these well known words: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" It is hard enough to put a string through the eye of a needle, or even this piece of rope that I have in my hand, or this tennis ball, but a camel? That is utterly impossible. Even those who follow the Lord very closely can easily be tripped up by a sudden infusion of cash that leads them to think and worry more about money than they should.

The disciples get the point that Jesus is making. They ask the question, "Who then can be saved?" They realized how the times they thought too much about money made them no

different than the rich man who walked away from Jesus with a sad face. "Who then can be saved?" Examine any part of God's law this morning and you will come to the same question, "Who then can be saved?" Who has loved the Lord with all their heart? Who has loved the neighbor as much as you love yourself? Who has given perfect love and obedience to parents? Who has been totally honest in business deals and taking tests? The answer that comes back is the same all the time. No one. Who then can be saved? No one if they are trusting in their own performance.

Then Jesus looked at his disciples one more time and said, "With man this impossible, but not with God, all things are possible with God." When Mary was wondering how she could give birth to the Messiah without knowing a man, the angel Gabriel told her, "For nothing is impossible with God." The Christian faith is all about believing in things that are humanly impossible such as Jesus God's Son coming into this world in human flesh, Jesus taking our sin upon himself and making a ransom payment for that sin at the cross, Jesus rising from the dead and filling our lives with the hope of a bodily resurrection even when our bodies turns to ashes and dust. Baptism is a miracle as water and the Word combine to bring Christ and his forgiveness to the person being baptized. God performed the impossible when he opened your heart to believe these things we read in the Bible are actually true. With these miracles we have treasures in this life and for all eternity that can never be taken from us. "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord." With these riches of Jesus' love we become the richest people in the world, eager to share these blessings we have with all people, including the blessing of our money. Amen.