

October 21, 2012
Pentecost 21

"Real Riches in Christ"

MARK 10:17-27

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?"¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-- except God alone."¹⁹ 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.'"²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."²¹ 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."²² At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.²³ 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 a rich man 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."

Mention the name of Warren Buffet and what comes to your mind? Immediately you think of a man with lots of money. Warren Buffet made billions of dollars investing in the stock market. He also believes he is rich towards God because he is donating large sums of his vast wealth to help cure diseases. He is quoted as saying, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way." Warren Buffet believes that investing his money in helping people will help him get to heaven.

Jesus met a young man who was very rich with money but very poor when it came to understanding how to get to heaven. He comes to Jesus with the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Do you see my friends how poor this man was? He thinks he is going to get to heaven by his own efforts. He has no idea of how spiritually bankrupt he was and how much he needed the real riches that only Jesus could provide.

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" That's the same question people are asking themselves today. They don't realize how bankrupt they are and how much they need the true riches that only Jesus can give them. Let's take a closer look at this poor rich man who came to Jesus.

Jesus showed the rich man how poor he was

"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?' Notice how the man ran up to Jesus and fell on his knees before Jesus. I picture him to be young, good looking, wealthy, moral and upright. He is the kind of person you want as your boss or business partner, maybe even marry your daughter. He eagerly seeks Jesus' advice on how he can improve

his portfolio of good deeds so he can be sure of an inheritance in heaven. He believes with all his heart that he is blessed with riches in this life because he has tried to be good. He also believes that if he tries his best he will someday inherit even greater riches in heaven.

Jesus could have ignored this man and let him go along with his false hope of inheriting eternal life. Instead Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good-except God alone." He calls Jesus good without realizing how good and pure and perfect Jesus was. He doesn't realize that a good and perfect and holy God cannot accept people and give them eternal life unless they measure up to his standards of perfection and holiness. Because God's goodness is so far above our goodness, Romans 3 says, "There is no one who does good." Warren Buffet can use his money to do good things for other people, but these deeds of kindness are never good enough to earn the favor and love of a perfect and holy God.

How good is good? Jesus tells the man, "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." The man has the audacity to respond with the words, "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy." The man looked at his life and honestly believed that he had done a good job of keeping the commandments because he was judging himself by human standards. If he had judged himself by God's standards he would have realized how poor and bankrupt he was. Jesus made it clear in the famous Sermon on the Mount that the sin of murder includes feelings of hatred and anger toward another person. Adultery includes lustful thoughts in the heart. False testimony includes bad thoughts about other people. I cannot find anything in myself that I can offer God to make him love me and give me eternal life.

"Jesus looked at him and loved him." Jesus did not turn away from this man in disgust for his foolish pride in his own goodness. Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus even looked at you and me when we lost in our foolish thinking and pride. He looked at us and led us to see how bankrupt we are without him, and how rich we are with him as our Savior.

In love, Jesus tells this rich man to "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come and follow me." How did this man react to such a request from Jesus? It says, "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." Jesus words touched a raw nerve in this man. Jesus touched his money and the man reacted with feelings of greed. He saw himself as someone who was far more greedy than he ever realized. Have you ever seen money bring out the worst in people? I have. I have known families where brothers and sisters stop talking to each other because there was a fight over the family inheritance. Have you ever seen money bring out the worst in people? I have. They come to church almost every Sunday and only give a few dollars to the Lord. Have you ever seen money bring out the worst in people? I have. They brag about how they must have done something right in life because of the money they have in the bank.

I have read that you can trap little monkeys by placing out bottles or jars just big enough for the monkey to place his hand in. Inside the bottles are candies and fruits and other things that delight little monkeys. The monkey reaches in, and wraps his hand around

as much candy as he can. He will not let go and can be easily trapped because he is a greedy little monkey. The greed that finds its way into our lives makes us spiritually bankrupt and without any hope of being loved by God. The Apostle Paul confessed that he never realized how sinful and spiritually bankrupt he was until he fully understood that even sinful desires were also unacceptable to a holy and perfect God. Money has a way of bringing out the worst in even the best of us. We need Jesus to give us his riches.

Jesus shows us how rich we are with him

Jesus wants us to see how rich we are because of the love he has for us. "He 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. People at that time believed that if you were rich it was the evidence that God was rewarding you for being a good person. Jesus says the very opposite. He even adds to what he was saying with the words, "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."

Does this mean Warren Buffet cannot get to heaven because he is rich? Who are the rich? Bill Gates? Donald Trump? One of the Waltons of Wal Mart fame? Some would say that people living in the United States of American are rich by comparison to other people in the world. Do you realize that if you own a house, two cars, and have some kind of retirement plan you are in the top 2% of the world's richest people? We have computers, dish washers, flat screen televisions, refrigerators, golf balls and golf clubs. Even though these are economically hard times for many people, we are still rich compared to other people. 56% of the world's population lives on less than \$2 per day. And then we wonder who thinks about money more, people who have it or those who don't have it.

The other day I stopped at CVS. The lady in front of me took some of the cash she received back after her purchase and put it into a machine to purchase a lottery ticket. What if she won? Would the money make her happy? What if she didn't win, would she become upset about not having enough money? What would happen to me if I would win money in the lottery? What sinful and greedy thoughts would come into my life that had never been there before? If is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man, or poor man, or anyone in between to enter the kingdom of God because we all fall short of God's glory in how we think about money.

The disciples get the point Jesus is making. They ask the question, "Who then can be saved?" They realized that they had their moments when they thought too much about money just as this rich man. Examine any part of God's law this morning and apply it to your life. You find yourself asking the same question, "Who then can be saved?" The answer that comes back is always the same. No one! We lack what is necessary for God to accept us and love us. We are spiritually bankrupt people, if it were not for the riches you have in Christ.

Jesus speaks about these riches with the words, "With man this is impossible, but not with God. With God all things are possible." Your God has done impossible things or miracles that make you the richest people in the world. God used a miracle to create the world in which we live. Every bite of food and every swallow of water comes from the miraculous

power of God to sustain human life. With God all things are possible. Our God gave us the gift of his Son. Jesus actually lived on this earth as one of us, taking on himself our human flesh, skin, bones and hair. Our God performed the impossible when he transferred the sin of the world on Jesus his Son and had him punished for our sin so we can be forgiven. That means every sin of greed or worry or thinking too much about money has been placed on Jesus. Our God did the impossible when he raised Jesus from the dead and he will raise our bodies to life again even after they are reduced to ashes and dust. Our God has taken spiritual dead people like you and me and put faith into our hearts to believe in miracles that ordinarily we would consider foolishness and nonsense. Jesus does the impossible when he gives us his body and blood in the Holy Sacrament for the forgiveness of our sin. Our God can even take greedy hearts and turn them into generous hearts that love to give money to help others.

You are richest people in the world because you have Jesus. May the Holy Spirit help you share these riches with everyone. Amen