

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And Jesus, looking at [the rich young man], loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, see all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me’” (Mark 10:21).

You may not consider yourself to be rich. But if you have a refrigerator and a car and you can afford to go out to eat ever so often, you are considered “rich” by worldly standards.

You see, an American family at the official poverty line has an income that puts them in the top three percent of the world’s people. If your income is the average household income that would mean that you are not merely a one-percenter compared to the world; an average American household income puts you in the top of the one-quarter of one percent in the world.¹

So, no matter where you are: as a cashier, a factory worker, a banker, a farmer – you are rich. But that is okay. There is no sin in having money. And Jesus loves rich people, including you and me. Rich people need the love of Jesus.

One day as Jesus was setting out on His journey, a rich man, like you and me, ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him and asked Him, ***“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”*** (Mark 10:17)

It appears that this man has figured out the answer to his own question, but he wants Jesus’ approval. You see, this man assumes that he has the necessary ability to easily reach eternal life.

So, Jesus responds to the question saying, ***“Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone”*** (Mark 10:18). Now, Jesus is not arguing with the man or trying to one-up the man. Jesus is getting to the heart of the issue. It was certainly rare in Jewish circles to address a man as “good,” since “good” was reserved for God.

¹ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

So, does this indicate that this man believes that Jesus is divine? Or could this be ironic? Or simply flattery? We don't know. But Jesus continues getting to the heart of the issue.

He says, ***“You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother’”*** (Mark 10:19).

So, why did Jesus choose these commandments? Well, it's likely that these commandments were the ones that the rich young man was most sure that he has kept. We all have our favorite commandments that we believe we have *never* broken. We say those things all the time: “I've never murdered anybody.” “I'm a faithful husband.” “I'm a faithful wife.” “I pay my bills.” “I have never cheated anyone.” “I don't gossip.” “I take care of my mom and dad.”

Our sinful nature gives us the thought that we can keep God's Ten Commandments without too much trouble. Our sinful nature believes we are quite sure that we have a good moral record.

So, the rich young man says what you might say to Jesus, ***“Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth”*** (Mark 10:20).

Without a blinking of an eye, this rich young man says he has fulfilled each of those commandments. He says He has fulfilled the Second Table of the Law. He claims that He has loved his neighbor as himself since his youth. He claims he is perfect. He claims he has not sinned.

For this rich young man, God's Law did not terrify him, since, according to him, he has kept the Law.

Then Jesus lovingly looked at the rich young man and said, ***“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”*** (Mark 10:21).

Like this rich young man, our possessions can weigh us down so that we pay too much attention to the wrong things. Like him, our possessions can get in the way of following Jesus. So often, your possessions, your riches, are standing in the way of embracing Jesus' friendly, kindly, gracious invitation: ***“Follow Me.”***

Now, money and possessions are not evil in themselves. Jesus is not saying that we must give away all that we have to the poor in order to inherit eternal life. That would not be wise, since we need material goods for survival. But Jesus is using this to get to the heart of the issue.

Jesus, here, is answering this rich young man's question by zeroing in on his one great fault: he loved his wealth more than he loved God. He has made his wealth his idol – his false god. He feared, loved, and trusted in his material wealth above all things.

So, to inherit eternal life, this rich young man needed to rid himself of his idol – his false god. And after he rid himself of his idol, he was to go and follow Jesus. This rich young man desires eternal life, but in order to have it, he must put God first in his life by following Jesus.

So, what are you willing to give up?

The triune God is a jealous God as He wants you all to Himself. So, just as Jesus looked up at the rich young man and loved him, He also looks up at you and loves you.

By bringing up the commandments, Jesus is not playing gotcha. He brings up the commandments as a reminder that we fail in keeping them, even if we think we can. But as soon as we put anything as more important than the one true God, the dominoes fall as we break each commandment one by one. So, whoever fears and loves anything else in heaven and upon the earth will not keep any of the commandments. The triune God takes no pleasure in those who have other gods.

You see, everything flows from the First Commandment: ***“You shall have no other gods”*** (Exodus 20:3). Flowing from the First Commandment, we do our neighbor no harm, injury or violence, nor in any way oppress our neighbor regarding his body, wife, property, honor, or rights. We honor father and mother, masters, and all in authority, and are subject and obedient to them, not for their own sake, but for God's sake.

God is angry and punishes those who despise Him and His commandments. On the other hand, God abundantly rewards those who love Him and keep His commandments. So, what do we do? We respond to Jesus' invitation: ***“Come, follow Me.”***

So, don't let anything get in your way, or derail you, or distract you, or point you in another direction. Jesus says this isn't about what you have or don't have. It isn't about what you ought to do or should have done. What matters is following Jesus.

You see, Jesus loves you so much that for yours and my sake, though He was rich, He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). The Son of God had all the riches of heaven, but He lowered Himself by becoming man, taking upon Himself human flesh, so that He could give you your undeserved inheritance: eternal life.

Jesus is with us today in His Means of Grace as He forgives yours and my sins and strengthens our faith through His Word and Sacrament.

Jesus fulfilled the Law, suffered and died our punishment for not obeying God's Law upon the cross for you and me. He rose, so that we would also rise from the dead.

So, how much would following Jesus cost you? Jesus says: ***“A person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take His cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds His life will lose it, and whoever loses His life for My sake will find it”*** (Matthew 10:36-39).

So, following Jesus means to go His way. And His way may not be easy, according to our sinful nature. For He says, ***“Enter by the narrow Gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the Gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few”*** (Matthew 7:13-14).

For us rich people, to follow Jesus is to find eternal life by losing everything – but receiving more! How do you think you are following Jesus if you are paying more attention to something else all the time?

But Jesus, who loves you, calls you, and invites you saying: ***“Come, follow Me!”***
Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +