

October 10, 2021

St. Mark 10:17-22:

“To Make Sure the Air Stays Clear”

- I. The Man.
- II. The Good Teacher.
- III. Polluted Air.
- IV. This Moment of Clarity.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Martin Luther said:

Nature would like to have the kind of God who would be reconciled by our works, but it repudiates the one who freely forgives... Thus the children of Israel sought a God who would repay them for their works, but they persecuted the God who freely forgave and denounced their sins (and we see that in their treatment of the prophets)... This is to make God a merchant and to tell Him: "If you give, I will give."

Well, that's the thinking of so many who sit in churches. This Word of God is alien to most: "...while we were sinners, Christ died for us." And this Word: "...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son." (Rom. 5:8,10) Paul clearly stated our condition: "...I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." (Rom 7:22-23)

I doubt that anything I've said to this point is foggy to most here, but it is absolutely critical . . .

TO MAKE SURE THE AIR STAYS CLEAR

I. The Man.

Here are the opening words of our text: "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him..." (v. 17a) This incident is also reported by Matthew and Luke, but the Holy Spirit gave Luke these additional insights: "And a ruler asked him... he was extremely rich." (Lk. 18;18a,23b) It has been suggested that this man was a wealthy ruler of a synagogue.

And then, it looks as if it hit the man, as it can at any age; the reality from which most try to distance themselves, but sooner or later, one way or another must face. That dark moment that will singe the soul, churn the stomach, and break the heart: "I'm going to die! What should I do?" In the setting of our text it's, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (v.17) It appeared, at least at that moment, his position and money were meaningless.

A fellow by the name of Raymond L. Cox asked, "Will you be satisfied with the fruit of your life's work? Will the efforts you are making now bring you satisfaction when the things of time are receding and eternity looms just ahead?" Those are valid questions, don't you think? We've heard Luther's insight: "Riches are the least worthy gifts which God can give man, yet men toil for them day and night, and take no rest. Therefore, God frequently gives riches to foolish people to whom He gives nothing else." And, as has been noted in the past, it was the early church father, Chrysostom who correctly observed, "Men are nailed to the things of life."

II. The Good Teacher.

But there's something else that must be clear with us: "And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.'" (v.18) Did the man fully grasp what Jesus was saying? Do we? The only "good" is God. That's who was standing in front of the man - God in the flesh. Jesus. The only good!

I know, I'm looking for trouble. There are a lot of "good" people out there, right? We would say "civilly righteous"; that is, they make effort to keep the law and do what's good as humans understand good. Unfortunately, human understanding is flawed by sin. God's "good" is not "human good". He demands perfect! He wants the good our first parents trashed in the Garden! So, Jesus instructs him and us: "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 you mother.'" (vss.18-19) And that covers the second table of the Law, commandments 4-10.

You know what most will say: "I keep these commandments." A good look into the mirror of the Law says otherwise. We must remember the teachings of Jesus, the only Good:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgement.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement... (and don't forget, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer..." (I Jn. 3:15)

"You have heard it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart...

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (Mt. 5:21-22a; 27-28; 43-44)

Isn't that clear? It wasn't for the man in our text. In fact, he sounds quite typical.

III. Polluted Air.

"And he said to (Jesus), 'Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.'" (v.21) His understanding was polluted air. There's that piece of Scripture that looms in the background: "I said in my alarm, 'All mankind are liars.'" (Ps. 116:11) Plus this: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point (**just-one-point!**) has become accountable for all of it." (Jms. 2:10) The man kept nothing from his youth except the natural tendency to sin - lawlessness.

And then there is this scathing reality: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I Jn. 1:8) The man was full of self-deception, as are all who become indignant by the charge of "guilty" as the result of sin; all who deny it; all who minimize it. We know all this! Polluted air. This world is suffocating from it. And so is the church; especially in this country!

How could we ever forget Paul's words: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." (Rom. 7:18) And then we have to listen to all the human reasoning as to why people suffer, hate, kill what gets in their way, destroy marriage and family values, age, and die. It's sad and pitiful because it fails to hear the truth: "For the wages of sin is death." (Rom. 6:23a) If a person never sinned the person would never die.

But what is astounding about this incident are these words: "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him. '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.'" (v.21) Listen, Christ truly loved the man - would die for his eternal soul - would correct that awful thinking that what we can get out of this world is what counts. It has been noted:

By telling this man to go sell his possessions and to give them to the poor people...Jesus is laying his finger on the chief sin in the man's heart, the love of his earthly possessions...The outward act (of selling and giving to the poor) is to be merely the evidence of the inner change.

But the inner change was not there. "Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (v.22)

IV. This Moment Of Clarity.

We're not told what ultimately happened to the man. I would suggest that it stops at this point so that you and I give serious thought about what holds us to this world. Serious thought about the excuses we might have for whatever cheats us from our growth in the Word of God.

Jesus is not demanding that we get rid of our "stuff" and thereby earn God's love and heaven. He's wants us to place a lasting value on what we have through His life, suffering, death and resurrection; namely, faith in His earning our forgiveness and eternal life.

The question, "What must I do to enter eternal life?" has been answered for us. Nothing. Not one thing. Jesus did it all. Anything that gets in the way of that must go. We must abandon it. It is as we sang in the sermon hymn: "Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress (to be clothed in His perfect life); Helpless look to Thee for grace (undeserved love); Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die."

God loves us because He wanted to! Our sins have been swept away. We have eternal life. We pray He always enables us **To Make Sure The Air Stays Clear.**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott