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St. Mark 10:17-27:

## **There Is No Compromise. Praise God!**

- I. "What Must I Do?"
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St. Mark 10:17-27

Dear Friends in Christ,

Every few years our text for this morning is scheduled for an appearance by Lutheran church bodies, and I would say for a good reason. I recalled an old story about a young man who trudged through knee deep snow one cold, winter night to ask the girl he was dating to marry him. After asking her, she replied, "When you have several thousand dollars, I will seriously consider it." Like I said, it's an old story. Now it would have to be at least thirty thousand dollars.

Six months later, as the two walked hand in hand through the park, he stopped the girl and asked, "When are we going to get married?" She asked, "Well, you remember my condition. Just how much money have you saved?" He answered, "Exactly seventy-five dollars." She sighed and smiled, "Oh well, I guess that's enough!" I first read that story under the title "flexibility." I call it "extreme compromise."

When it comes to the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God that teaches eternal life through faith in Christ...

## **THERE IS NO COMPROMISE. PRAISE GOD!**

### I. "What Must I Do?"

Martin Luther wrote:

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 (this has always been the situation within the church)...

This is to make God a merchant and to tell Him: If you give, I will give.

Our text begins, "And as he (Jesus) was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life (v.17).'" And there he is; the example of one who wants to be reconciled to God by works: "What must I do to inherit eternal life."

There's no doubt about his desire for eternal life. There's no doubt that he was realistically facing his mortality, not living with the thinking that dying, death and the other side are too negative and distracting. And he calls Jesus "Good teacher." Well, he saw something that set Jesus apart. But he didn't see far enough. Jesus is more than a good teacher.

We do ourselves a favor to remember the words God gave David: "The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one (Ps.14:2,3)." Again, Jesus says, "No one is good except God alone (v.18b)." And that's who stood in front of the man: the only "good" - God in the flesh!

All this reminded me of something I've heard in many forms over the years. One was from a man who was telling me about the death of his good friend. And it came flying out of his mouth: "Well, if 'so and so' didn't make it to heaven no-one will. He was one the finest men to walk the face of the earth!" Everybody's a theologian.

I know, most will say, "Wait a minute! There are a lot of good people on this earth!" Well, there are! Good, according to sinful human standards of goodness. But not as God demands; namely, perfect. And so, the next words Jesus speaks: "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 (vv.18,19).'" Those are commandments 4-10, the ones that deal with our person to person relationships. Next, let's recall these words of Jesus:

“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 (just angry!) with his brother will be liable to judgment...

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks (just 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 brother and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (St. Mt.5:21,22; 27,28; 43,44).”

Have we had enough? Well, the man in our text did not. In fact, he reflects the thinking of most . . .

## II. “Sell All That You Have.”

“And he said to (Jesus), ‘Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth (v.21).’” Well, there’s that Scripture that confronts everyone, “I said in my alarm, ‘All mankind are liars’ (Ps.116:11).” And with that, “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 had kept nothing from his youth except the inclination to sin; the same inclination we all carry.

And standing before us is the 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 reality of sin. Well, we know and confess, “All mankind are liars.” And if we’re listening, there’s Paul’s confession: “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 (Rm.7:18).” Hey! That’s me!

Every Sunday we begin our part in worship with the Confession, “I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you.” “Sin” is missing the mark. “Iniquity” is sin combined with the awareness that what we’re doing is wrong. And you know what? This person standing in front of you is, without question, miserable with the same, innumerable sins that flood my mind and flow out my mouth day after day. I am miserable with what I have done and shouldn’t have, and the things I should have done but didn’t. And I’m talking about a life of it! Don’t we often suffer the consequences of our sin and the on-going regrets?

I cannot cry out David’s words enough, “Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities...(Ps.51:9).” And I can’t thank the Lord enough for paying for my sins; for the promise “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps.51:17).” For the promise, “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rm.6:23).”

What’s really amazing concerning our text is this: “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).’” Jesus loved and cared about this man - would salvage the man’s eternal soul. But the rich man’s god was his “stuff.” He would not recognize his idolatry and turn to Christ. There was no trust in Christ. We’re told, “disheartened by this saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (v.22).”

## III. It’s Not About What We Do

Please listen to this incident that took place around 35 years ago. I’ve read it before. I’ve never forgotten it.

A chief executive officer of a successful corporation decided to renew his spiritual life by participating in a week-long spiritual retreat for adults sponsored by his church body. At the last general session each participant was asked to say a few words. When it came to this man's turn, he rose and told of his long struggle to be a success. He told of long hours, tough competition, burning ambition, and little time for his family. He enumerated the rungs of the "success ladder" he had to climb. And then he finished saying, "Now that I am there, it wasn't what I thought it would be. I feel empty inside...This week I have looked around and have come to the conclusion that I propped my ladder against the wrong building.

Christ isn't asking us to sell everything. He's asking us to look at what holds our hearts to this world and what distracts us from our walk with Him. To what are we propping our ladders? To the pursuit of whatever we can get out of this world? To the thinking that if we give it our best God will love us? We do our best out of gratitude for what He has done for us.

Do you believe you're going to heaven when you die? Do we understand that everything depends on Jesus? Our walk with Him is about what we sang in the sermon hymn: "Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me Savior, or I die."

God doesn't love any of us because we're lovable. He loves us because...because...He loves us. Because He wanted to. There is no compromise with that! Praise God!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott