

WHAT DO I STILL LACK?

We live in a world and a culture where clearly the emphasis is upon things, material things, especially wealth. That emphasis is reinforced with priority given to things here, and to things now. There has been a corresponding loss of emphasis or attention given to spiritual matters and to looking to the future and to something other than what is here on earth.

Because that is the world and culture in which we live, it is almost refreshing to read, as we did this past week about the young ruler, the rich, young ruler who came to Jesus in order to learn what he needed to do to inherit eternal life.

I am sure you brought your Bibles this morning, so would you please open it to the **18th chapter of Luke's gospel** and let's read this interesting account, beginning in **verse 18...**

And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 19) And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. 20) You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" 21) And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." 22) When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 23) But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. 24) Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! 25) For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Now as we get into this text, there is a very real danger that you might pre-judge what I am about to talk about this morning. You may be thinking to yourself, "*Here we go again, another sermon on giving, or sacrificial living, or maybe the evils of materialism.*"

I want to ask you to not do that, for the simple reason that if you do that you will probably be turning off the lights and tuning out, thinking you already know all about those things. And if you do that, you are closing your mind and heart to the Word of God. Instead, I would ask you to do this: Imagine that you are that young man who came to Jesus. Like him, you are trying to take advantage of what you see as an opportunity to get a true and precise answer to your question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Mark tells us that the man came running up to Jesus. I imagine the scene something like this: Jesus and his followers are passing through this city, and they are about to leave. You have heard about him, and you know there are reports that he may be a prophet. He may even be the long awaited Christ, or Messiah for whom your people have been looking for centuries. You think you have been doing a pretty good job of living the kind of life that you believe God expects of you, and that seems to have been reinforced by the fact that he has really blessed

you materially. You are doing very well, but maybe in the back of your mind, there is this little seed of doubt.

And so, seeing that you may have an opportunity to remove that doubt once and for all, you decide to go for it and you begin running after this one they call Jesus. You begin calling out to him, “Jesus!” “Jesus!” “Wait!” And as you continue running and calling out, the crowd behind Jesus begins to stop and turn and they see you approaching so they begin to stand aside so you can pass through.

And finally you are in front of him, and out of respect that would have been expected in that culture, you bow at his feet. That is what Mark tells us he did (excuse me, what you did!)

And before you can hardly catch your breath, you blurt out your question. Well, maybe it isn’t phrased exactly the best way, but it gets to the heart of what you really want to know.

The question itself is very interesting, don’t you think? We sort of associate it with other questions like it, such as the one we read in **Acts 2:37**, “*Men and brethren, what must we do?*” Or how about the one asked by the Philippian Jailer, “*What must I do to be saved.*”

They do sound similar, but read closely brethren, there are some differences.

I think it is interesting that the man—or rather that you—used the word “inherit.” That seems to imply that you believe that this is something you have coming to you, almost by birthright. And as a Jew, that man probably did feel that way.

The idea of eternal life as a gift, as Romans 6:23 teaches it is, was as far from this man’s thinking as anything could be. He was absolutely confident that he had eternal life coming; he just wanted to make sure that he didn’t lose it on some technicality.

But then notice Jesus’ answer, which must have completely spun the guy around. Jesus says, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*” Now if you are like me, I’ve read that passage—or Matthew’s account of it in chapter 19, or Mark’s in chapter 10, and all three record those same words—and I’ve wondered, “Why did Jesus say that?”

Why did Jesus object to this man calling him good? After all, wasn’t Jesus good? Doesn’t the Hebrew writer tell us that he was tempted in every way like we are, and he was without sin? Yes, that’s all true, so why did Jesus object to being called good?

The answer is, I don’t think he was objecting to being called good, but that this was what we call “a teaching moment.” He wanted this young man—He wanted you—to think about what you just said. “If you call me good, knowing that there is only one who can truly be called good and that is God, then be prepared to understand that what I—the good person you say that I am—am about to tell you. If you are calling me a good teacher, then be prepared for the answer this good teacher is going to give you.”

Sometimes people come to me with a question and they want to know what the Bible teaches about something. And when I am able to help them, I show them in the Bible what the Word of God says. And we may talk about it for awhile, and then they may go away saying something like, “Well, that is interesting.”

But people, if something is what God says, please understand you have got to take that for more than something that is interesting. That is the way it is. This [the Bible] is what you are going to be judged by; not my opinions, or your think-sos, but by the Word of God.

But now, having made that point, Jesus goes on to answer the man’s question. He says to him—in response to his question, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*”—Jesus says, “*keep the commandments,*” referring to the commandments contained in the old covenant and often called the Law of Moses. “*if you want to know what you have to do in order to inherit eternal life, do what you are commanded.*”

That’s what Solomon said isn’t it? In the last two verses of **Ecclesiastes 12**, the book in which Solomon explores what is truly important versus what is only in vain, he comes to this conclusion:

“*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14) For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*”

Do you want to be saved? Do what God commands you.

Well, that was too generic for the young ruler that day, and so he responds: “Which ones?” Now, we might wonder what part of Jesus’ answer did he not get. However, let’s give him the benefit of a doubt and keep listening. Jesus names off several. Luke identified 5 of them, Mark and Matthew identified six. Essentially, he points him to the commandments found within what we call the Ten Commandments.

At that point, I can imagine almost a great sigh of relief from the young ruler, the rich young ruler. Maybe he is thinking, “*Wonderful! He didn’t tell me anything other than what I have already heard.*” You see that’s the danger of thinking we already know what there is to be learned here.

Bible study needs to go deep my brethren. Stop just reading it and acting as if there is nothing to learn here. You’ve got to learn to ask questions, to be curious, to investigate a little more.

Well the young ruler, the rich young ruler, must be thinking to himself, “*I was right. I’ve got this thing pretty well sewed up.*” He replies to Jesus, “*I’ve done all of that. I’ve kept those commandments ever since I was a child.* Luke and Mark do not record something else that was said at that moment, but Matthew tells us that after declaring that he had kept all of the commandments, he said, “*What do I still lack?*”

Apparently, even though he was pretty confident that he had eternal life in the bag, there was something that he wasn't quite sure about. *"Is there anything else? Is there something missing that I'm overlooking?"*

I like the way Mark gives us what happened next. In **Mark 10:21**, we read, *"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.'"*

Wow! I don't know if that strikes you the same way that it does me, but this floors me just about every time I read it. After all, this isn't just a story. This really happened, and this was a real person, one of those "lost" that Jesus had come to seek and to find, and what did he do? He just about guaranteed that the guy would never be saved. He laid something really hard on the man didn't he?

You say, *"Not really, after all the guy was asking what he needed to do in order to inherit eternal life, so that wouldn't be a bad exchange."* If you think like that, then how about you going and selling ALL THAT YOU HAVE AND GIVING IT AWAY TO THE POOR?" How easy would that be for you to do today?

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that is what Jesus is telling all of us to do today. I can easily prove to you from the Word of God that He is not at war with rich people. But in the case of this guy, this rich young ruler, that was exactly what he needed to hear, and that was exactly what he needed to do. Even so, it wasn't something he wanted to hear. We know that because of what happened next. Luke tells us that he went away very sad because he was extremely rich.

Now think about that folks. In another place—Matthew 11:28-30—Jesus said his yoke is easy and his burden is light. But I can assure you it didn't sound very light to that man—that rich young man!

I can just imagine that scene that day. Here he is, and all of this probably took place within just a matter of minutes. He is kneeling at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus has just laid this terrible news on him. In a heartbeat, his hope and dream was taken away. And it begins to sink in on him that he isn't going to inherit eternal life. No, not if it costs that much.

And so, he gets up, perhaps dusts himself off, bites his lip and with great sadness turns around and walks away.

Incidentally, did you find it interesting that in the next chapter, chapter 19, you have that story of another man—a *wee little man* named Zacchaeus—who was, "Oh the shame of it all!" a tax-collector (publican). Jesus goes to his home and when the people around them were shocked and began to grumble, *"He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* And undoubtedly they were saying these things loud enough for Jesus and Zacchaeus to hear them,

because Zacchaeus responds, and did you catch what he said, "*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.*"

Whoa! Interestingly Jesus didn't jump on him and tell him he needed to give it all, not just half. Even so, half is quite a bit isn't it? Can you imagine what an impact on the people of this city we would have if every one of us did that?

But Jesus didn't tell Zacchaeus that he needed to give it all. I wonder why?

I think the reason the difference between this "sinner" and the rich young ruler who had kept all of the commandments since he was just a child was that his wealth controlled him. The tax-collector controlled his wealth and had a heart full of compassion for the poor. That's why I say God is not at war with the rich. His problem is with people whose wealth controls their life rather than His Word and His ways.

And so, Luke tells us that Jesus looked into the eyes of that young ruler, that rich young ruler, and said to him, "*How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.*" And that is when he went on to say what has now become a proverb, "*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*"

Why? Why is that the case? It is not because God doesn't like rich people. Someone once said, "*God sure must like poor people because he made an awful lot of them!*" But God doesn't hate rich people. He doesn't hate their riches. In fact, He is the one who makes it possible for the rich to obtain what they do, at least when they do it lawfully.

The problem is one of "who" or "what is going to control your heart and life?" Will it be God, or will it be those "things" you've been given and want more of?

Going back to the camel going through the eye of the needle, I've heard all kinds of explanations as to what Jesus meant by that. Some have suggested that there was a gate into Jerusalem called the needle gate that was too low for a camel to pass through. But as far as I have been able to find, there is no evidence for that gate ever existing.

No, Jesus meant what he said, and said what he meant, and that is obvious because of what his own disciples said next. They said, "*Then Lord, who can be saved?*" And that is where we find one of the memory verses for this past week. **Verse 27** says, Jesus said, "*What is impossible with men is possible with God.*"

And that is the good news isn't it? What you can't do by your good works, what you don't deserve by virtue of your birthright, what you can't do by keeping all of the commandments in the world, God has made possible through Christ. Because He loves us so much, He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but shall have eternal life. By His love, His grace and mercy, you can have what that man, that rich young man came asking about that day.

But you can't have it at all if you are unwilling to let God be God, not just in heaven, but also in your life. If there is anyone or anything that is more important to you than God, a higher priority, then you are going to miss everything He wants you to have for eternity.

- Will you hear Him now and obey, when he commands you to put your faith in His Son, repent of your sins, confess the name of Christ and be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?
- Will you hear Him now and obey when he commands you to come out from among them and be you a separate people, for His work, His glory?
- Will you hear Him now and obey when he commands you to renounce completely those things and those ways that you know dishonor His holy name and His purpose for you?

Yes, we can inherit eternal life, if we are willing to become children of God and then do our best to faithfully live in a way that brings Him honor.

If that is your desire this morning, don't put it off any longer. Don't be like that man, that rich young man, who went away that day very sad. You can leave here like the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. You can leave here rejoicing, knowing that you have put your faith in God and have obeyed the gospel of His Son.