

1 LENT
FEBRUARY 14, 2016



1ST MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

PSALM 25:1-11; MARK 10:17-31

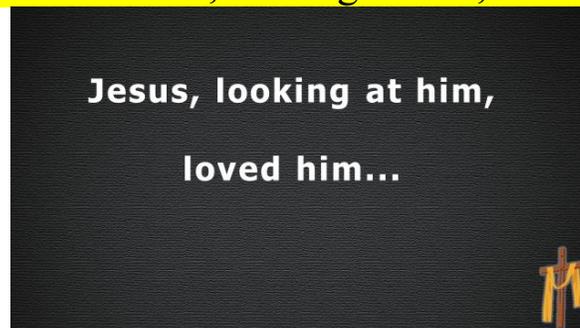
Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

OK, so here's the deal... I'm going to **START** my sermon with the **END** of my sermon, I'm going to **BEGIN** with my **CONCLUSION**, I'm going to **OPEN** with my **ENDING**... For there is one, single, solitary point that I want you to take away from this bible passage, this story about Jesus, this insight into the very heart of God's goodness and grace.

When the Messiah, the Son of God, the very **LIGHT** of the **WORLD** turns to that rich, unhappy man in our story...when Jesus turns to every man, woman and child of every age – you and me included... when **JESUS** looks at him...and at us, the Lord, we are told, **LOVES HIM...LOVES US...**

[slide, words: Jesus, looking at him, loved him...]



If you don't hear another word out of my mouth, if you can't recall anything else about this sermon, if you forget that you've ever heard me say anything at all...remember this: Jesus looked at this person who was not at peace with God...and JESUS LOVED HIM.

That's pure gospel, genuine good news, authentic and absolute grace...

I am reminded of two other sheer GOSPEL moments in the bible that are as wonderful as this... and they both happen when Jesus is nailed to the cross. **Can you think of a gospel, God-loves-you-absolutely good-news experience that occurs with Jesus on the cross?** [I'll give you a hint: think of the seven last words that Jesus speaks as he's dying]

Here's **my** first: When the one criminal, who's dying at his side, says, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom*, he hears the Lord say in return, *Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise*. **Hope** doesn't get any better than that, does it?

My other gospel moment happens at the **beginning** of Jesus' pain. Even as he's being nailed to the cross, says the Gospel writer Luke, Jesus prays, *Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing...*

Pure grace, pure love, pure gospel (good news) from the Author of life, the source of hope, the fountain of grace...

Jesus looked at the man...and loved him.

So let's take a step back now and see what happened to stir such emotion in Jesus' heart. As I said earlier, from the mount of Transfiguration experience where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, the disciples have followed their Lord down the slopes and back into life, making their way to Jerusalem... Though they don't understand it yet, they are on the final leg of Jesus' final journey where they will be forced to watch Jesus take his final steps on his way to the cross.

With that heaviness in his spirit, accentuated by many encounters with hard-hearted Pharisees, we're blessed to see this tender peek into Jesus' own heart.

[slide: man kneeling before Jesus]



As they're getting ready to leave, a man runs to Jesus and kneels at his feet. Now one theologian has pointed out that, in the Gospel of Mark, whenever anyone kneels at Jesus' feet, you can be pretty sure that some kind of healing miracle is about to occur.

So here comes this man rushing up to Jesus, throws himself at his feet and pants, *What must I do...to inherit...eternal life?*

What do we know about the man?

He's rich.

He loves God.

He honors the Law.

He's serious about living out his faith.

Yet he's missing something and doesn't know what...

This is a GOOD person, right? I mean, he's the best kind of person, and he proves it by his response when Jesus recites the commandments.

Teacher, he said, *I've kept all these since I was a kid!*

He's got it all! He's rich like...Donald Trump!...but **unlike** Donald Trump, **this** man has **dedicated** his **life** to **living** by **God's Law**.

So the question we have to ask is this: *Why is that not enough? What is this man missing?*

Jesus' answer to him is superbly simple, absolutely accurate, completely confounding...and downright disturbing to many of us: *Sell what you have, give the money to the poor, and come, follow me.* The man is SHOCKED by this – and so are the disciples – and so are we!

As that poor rich man walks away, Jesus then says something that shocks the disciples even further: *How hard it will be for wealthy people to enter the kingdom of God!* I mean, to be rich and holy in those days was to be living proof of God's blessing.

[slide: camel and eye of the needle]



What does this mean for us? Are we the wealthy? Is this a universal command? Are we **all** supposed to sell **all** that we have, give **all** the money to the poor and follow Jesus? Would it really help the cause of the Gospel for us to make ourselves destitute – and dependent on the state? How would that help us follow Jesus?

In fact, we are wealthy – even the poor in this country are wealthy compared to so much of the world. So if Jesus is not, in fact, calling us to make ourselves, but holy people, then what gives, what's going on, what's the man missing? **Any ideas?**

It seems to me that he's asking the wrong question, right?

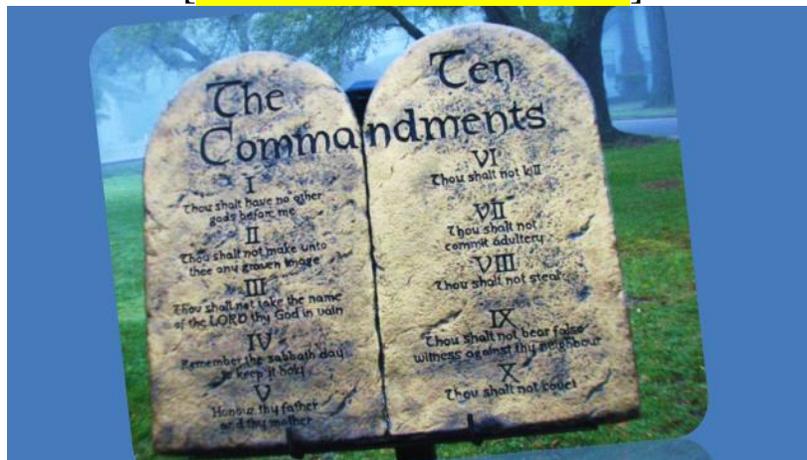
If he's asking, *How do I inherit, deserve, earn my way into heaven?*, then he's been given the **right** answer by Jesus. The **only** way to *earn* it is to be **perfect** – it's true for him and it's true for you and me as well – as Jesus says in Matthew 5:48

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

And the perfect thing to do is to sell everything, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus to the cross trusting God absolutely – or at least enough to pray, *Not my will be done, O Lord, but Your will be done...*

That poor, rich man who is shocked, whose heart is filled with grief, who turns his back on Jesus...has it all wrong. Though he's lived his life by the law, it's only been by one half of the law.

[slide: 10 Commandments]



Of the 10 Commandments, the first 3 address our relationship with God:
You shall have no other gods.
You shall not make wrongful use of God's name.
Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

You'll note that Jesus only cites the other side of the Law – all those commandments that have to do with how we treat our neighbors: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, don't defraud, honor father and mother. **Why do you think that is? Why did Jesus ignore the other three?**

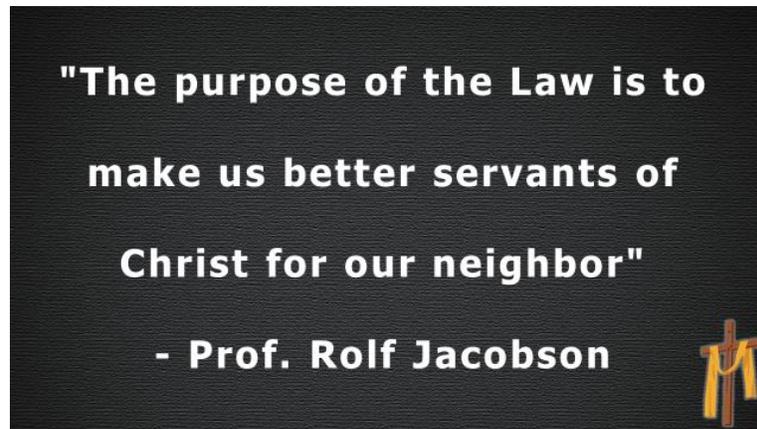
Well, it seems to me that either a) the man has the first three nailed – no problems there, or b) the key to the man's predicament is how he doesn't understand what those commandments are asking him to do.

Here's my take on it - here's what I think is the mistake that this poor rich man made: *he thinks that his devotion to the Law:*

- should make him righteous,
- should create within him a clean heart,
- should cleanse him of sin and allow him to stand before God listening to the Lord speak those beautiful words, *Well done, good and faithful servant!*

In fact, the **Law** was **never** given as a **tool** to help us *make ourselves holy*, to help us *get right with God*. *The purpose of the law*, says Rolf Jacobson, O.T. professor at Luther Seminary, *is to make us better servants of Christ for our neighbor* (podcast, workingpreacher.org, Mark 10:17-31).

[slide, words: *The purpose of the Law is to make us better servants of Christ for our neighbor*– Prof. Rolf Jacobson]



Do you see what the rich man was doing? He was so focused on keeping the law for his own sake, that he was for all practical purposes useless to his neighbors who could have used him as a friend, as a helping hand, as a generous and caring servant of the Lord.

That's why in all of the Commandments that start out, ***You shall not...*** Luther's explanation includes both the negative AND a positive.

For example, the Fifth commandment states: **You shall not murder.** In his explanation, Luther writes:

*We are to fear and love God
so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors,
but instead help and support them in all of life's needs.*

If the rich man was patting himself on the back for making it through the day without murdering someone, he was only a tiny bit right. In fact, if what Luther said is true, he **also** should have been there for his neighbors *helping and supporting them in all of life's needs...* He was uniquely situated to be an amazing help to people, but he couldn't see it. Still, Jesus looked at him...and loved him.

So what are we supposed to take away from this hard story? Is Jesus saying the same thing to us? Sell what you have, give the money to the poor, and go, follow him?

Or is he saying, if you get the question right, you might very well get the answer right as well.

Where the rich man asks, *What do I need to get into heaven...?*, Jesus asks, *What does the world need to live in God's love?*

How would you answer that question: **What does the world need?**

Well...it needs everything.

So Jesus' answer is to give the world...everything:

- his love, teaching, and healing ...
- his suffering, pain, and death...
- his forgiveness, his hope, his gift of new life every day of life.

The question he asked of the rich man, is the same question he asks his disciples, and everyone everywhere of every age since: What does the world need...from you and from me?



[slide: open hands]

The answer for the rich man is the same answer for us. The world needs us to be good for our neighbor's sake... And remember, God's only asking us to do what he has already done:

*God so loved the world that he **gave his only Son**, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

However **you're** doing on your spiritual journey, however you may feel about your life of faith, however you may be able to deal with life's setbacks, disappointments and troubles, know this, cling to this, wrap your heart around this truth...when Jesus looks at you...he loves you. God has given his love to us, so that we might give an open hand to our neighbors.

Amen.