

The Twenty-First Sunday of Pentecost

October 11 2015

**Prayer of the Day:** Grant, O merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation. Alleluia! (Isaiah 25:9).

**Sermon Text:** Mark 10:17-27

Someone has probably asked you that question at least once in your life. "What is the most valuable thing in your life?"

What is your answer? Kids sometimes mention their video games or some card collection or a favorite doll. Adults might clutch that family heirloom (a lamp or a table) or they want a photo album or maybe some special craft their child made.

As you mull over your answer, do you sense some nagging feeling inside? That if you could keep only one thing, one aspect about your entire life, that you should include God? To be honest, I can remember being asked that question in grade-school. Either I would try to silence that nagging feeling by saying,

"My football cards are valuable—and I also value Jesus." Or I would say, "I'll save my Bible." After all, telling people that I treasured my Bible *sounded* like the right thing to say. Yet, inside of me, other things felt more valuable. Or if I assumed that I could keep Jesus *and* one material thing, I still wondered which one I would drop first if I had to choose between the two.

**Mark 10:17-27**

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

<sup>18</sup> "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone.

<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

<sup>20</sup> "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

<sup>21</sup> Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

<sup>22</sup> At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

<sup>24</sup> The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

<sup>26</sup> The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Maybe you feel that same tug-of-war raging within your heart. I mean, you know your heart can love only one thing above all else. Even Jesus reminds you of that. In fact, he asks you: **WHO DO YOU LOVE MOST?**

You really see that question on display today, right? In fact, you see a man run right into it. A certain knew Jesus was in his area. The news is that he just blessed all these little children and then instructed his followers not to hinder them because his message of forgiveness applies even to them ([Mark 10:13-16](#)). Now Jesus is getting ready to leave for Jerusalem.

**As [he] started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.** This is not just some random man. The disciple Luke knows this young man oversees the religious life of the Jewish people ([Luke 18:18](#)). That means he is a church leader; people look up to him in order to imitate his life, to follow his religious example.

Yet, there he is, doing something that appears somewhat strange. A chief religious leader kneeling at the feet of Jesus, hands folded together, begging: “[W]hat must I do to inherit eternal life?” You would think he knew the answer by now. Yet, there is some doubt, some worry, some fear that he is missing something. So why not ask Jesus? After all, he is a “good” teacher— he knows the Bible well; he applies Bible teachings to everyday life. So, maybe Jesus could probably give some good advice, some good instructions to make sure this man is on the right path to heaven.

When Jesus reminds him to obey the Ten Commandments, you can see that wave of relief wash over the man. After what Jesus just said, he *is* good! He has obeyed many of the commandments! He has not killed anyone. He has not spent nights with prostitutes. He is honest with money. He does not lie or gossip. He honors his parents. He is the perfect child, the perfect Christian!

**“All these [commandments] I have kept since I was a boy,”** he says. Any worries, any doubts, any fears about missing out on heaven are almost stilled— but then the Good Teacher instructs him to obey one final command.

**“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** There it is: the final good advice, the last good instruction. After all, that is what the man wanted, right? “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Sell your stuff, give it all away, and *you will have treasure in heaven.*”

It sounds so easy, so simple— that is, until it comes time to actually doing it. Jesus just asked that question: “What is the most valuable thing in your life?” **WHO DO YOU LOVE MOST?**

That question is kind of frightening to answer, is it not? To actually face loving one object and one object only, it might not be so easy to choose, is it?

You have seen many different answers to that question—no doubt about it. What was found in the pyramids of Egypt? **WHO DID PEOPLE LOVE MOST?** Gold. Handcrafted wooden furniture. The dead pharaohs loved life and brought their organs into the pyramid! These ancient rulers believed that after death their power and wealth would be used in the life to come; they wanted to keep all this.

For those who are not dead, you turn on the television, you read the newspaper, you see internet ads, you receive catalogs and you are bombarded with commercials and advertisements. Those things are not bad, but have you ever felt drawn into their marketing? I mean, have you ever considered the point of certain commercials? You watch cell phone commercials and they showcase all this new technology. Everyone who owns this phone is happy; maybe one person owns an old phone— and they are sad. Who wants to be the sad person, the one who seems left out, appears out-of-touch with current society? How can that sad person feel happier and look cool? Buy the phone!

God has blessed us with a country filled with many things. Most people have one house—some have two houses! Not too long ago, it was considered a luxury to have two cars— now, two cars is almost the norm!

We might not think too much about the things we have until we face Jesus' question: **WHO DO YOU LOVE MOST?** Because what is the only correct answer to that question? How does the man respond? He is absolutely crushed! He honestly trusted in his own deeds, but when it came to loving the Lord his God above any other thing, he could not! He loved his money too much to let it go! He would rather bathe in the pool of his coins rather than find true value in Jesus.

Does not this man's response terrify you? No, your bank account might not be your idol right now, but that does not mean you never loved your money before. You might gladly give an offering now, but maybe there were times you felt like you were losing money (that you could have spent on other things). You might know that only your Savior is to sit on the throne of your heart, but you daily realize that many other possessions claw for that same throne.

No wonder the disciples are shocked and astounded! If God demands that you love him with every fiber of your being, every waking moment of your life, **WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?** That question brings overwhelming despair, does it not? It causes much trembling and much horror when people realize the power to enter heaven never relies on their own works. It is terrifying to be confronted with sin and remember all the times you have loved something else instead of the Almighty God!

For all of that misdirected love, Jesus loved you more. Did you catch that? When the man tells Jesus: "**All these I have kept since I was a boy,**" how does Jesus respond? **[He] looked at him and loved him.** That love is not a simple bond of friendship. No, that is the one-sided love of Jesus— a love that moves him to act for your best interests!

You (personally! specifically!) are in *his* heart as he lives on earth. He battles the same temptations you and I face— including those of loving money more than his heavenly Father. Remember when the devil tempts Jesus three times out in the wilderness? ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). For his last temptation, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promises to give them to Jesus ([4:8-9](#)). All Jesus has to do is bow down and worship the devil. There it is— a chance for Jesus to put money on the throne of his heart! Yet, Jesus responds: "The Bible says: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'" ([4:10](#)).

Jesus receives many earthly blessings, but always keeps them in the perfect, proper perspective. Wherever he lives never takes the place of God. Whatever gifts people give

him remain gifts— not loved treasures. Whatever praise people give him, he humbly receives, not to puff up his pride, but because he is the very Son of God!

Why does he do all this? Why is his heart free from any love of money? So that he can walk through all the temptations of greed you face, but withstand them all. So that he can take all your love for stuff on his back and walk before the throne of God. So that he can suffer what you and I deserve to suffer: to have our way [and keep our stuff] and be separated from God! Yet, Jesus looked at you and loved you— and he gave his life for you.

Jesus is the one who removes all that amazement, all that astonishment. Yes, we might be like the disciples, despair, wonder, ask, gasp: “Who can enter heaven?” Yes, looking to the things that you do— you will always be scared because you can never do enough. Yes, looking at those times you loved your stuff more than God— you will be terrified. A camel has a better chance of walking through the tiny hole of a sewing needle than for you or I to have hearts pure of love for God and enter heaven!

That is why you do not look to yourself. Jesus does the impossible for us: Jesus’ heart holds 100% pure love for his God. Then, he credits your life with that impossible feat! The truth is, we only enter this kingdom of God by the work of Jesus and by the faith which the Holy Spirit brings into our hearts.

Because Jesus died and rose from the dead, you and I are part of God’s kingdom! You pray that in the Lord’s Prayer. The third petition says: “*Thy kingdom come*” or “*Your kingdom come.*” Yes, God’s kingdom is heaven itself, but that is not what Jesus is talking about here. When Jesus speaks about entering the kingdom of God, he speaks about God ruling in your heart. God rules in your heart as you trust, rely on the simple fact that Jesus has removed every single sin of yours.

It does not stop there. The disciples recognize just how easy it is to love our stuff more than God. Yes, our world is stuffed with blessings. God gives us housing and cars and reputations. These blessings are not bad or evil; they are things that God gives us.

Yet, always keep them in perspective! God is the Giver— the One who is to be praised above anyone else! So, you thank God for giving you a family— for children and aunts and uncles and grandchildren. You love them, you care for them, and you thank God for putting them into your life. You thank God for giving you money. You use it to buy stuff for yourself— and you thank God for tending to your every physical need. You thank God for your status, your reputation, the way people see you— and you thank him by making sure that you worship the One who gave you these things.

Yet, these things are not the most priceless thing in life. Even if you lose every earthly thing, you have not lost everything. No, Jesus reminds you: “You have treasure in heaven.” Eternal life is yours. A relationship with God is yours. Peace of forgiveness is yours. You have it all!

So when that tug-of-war rages within your heart, when your stuff wants to sit on the throne of God, remember what is truly valuable. Look to the cross; see Jesus love you with an unquenchable love. Rejoice in the reign of God in your heart! So, **WHO DO YOU LOVE MOST?**