

Jesus Love for a Rich Man will Knock You off Your Feet

Grace and peace are yours from your Lord and Savior who loves you dearly, Amen.

To walk the dusty paths of Palestine with Jesus must have been truly exciting. What miracle will be next? Who's that running up to Jesus? What memorable words are going to come from the Savior's lips? Even in the way the Savior glanced with his eyes, there seemed to be whole sermons that would silently speak exactly what needed to be said.

Today we have such a privilege to behold and consider two very poignant glances, two very knowing looks, expressions from our Savior's loving eyes. These glances are in response to an all too familiar question that Jesus has been asked several times: "what do I have to do to get to heaven?" Inevitably it's always a DO question; inevitably the person asking the question thinks they already have the right answer, but yet they are so far off.

Instead of shaking his head in disgust, we see nothing but love flowing from the eyes and lips of our Savior. In fact, Jesus' loving response will literally knock you off your feet – at least it did for the disciples. Here's the blessed thing about our Savior's love: 1) He loves us enough to tell us the truth – just as he did for the rich man; and 2) He loves us enough to make the impossible – possible. Hear to verses 17-21:

¹⁷ 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?" ¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ 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.'"²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him.

I. He Loved him enough to tell him the truth

These events happen just after last Sunday's reading as Jesus spoke of marriage and of bringing children to him so that he can bless them. As Jesus is walking along, a young man runs up to him and falls on his knees before him. Luke tells us that he was "a man of great wealth" (18:23). Enthusiastic, energetic, polite, and deeply religious are words we can use as we draw from our text to profile this young man. He was no doubt loved by people, and he thought he was loved by God for the sterling life he had endeavored to live. He was zealous for the Lord God and he was pretty sure he was a shoe-in for heaven. He respected Jesus as a "good teacher" who might be able to help in on that way to heaven. All this is to say that he didn't know Jesus or himself at all.

Jesus fixed his gaze upon this young man... and loved him. He didn't roll his eyes. He didn't close his eyes and nod his head in a disapproving fashion. He simply "loved him" – agape love – undeserved loved, self-less love, compassionate love. This rich man was truly a poor man... poor in his understanding of God's Word, poor in his knowledge of what it means to be righteous in God's sight, utterly poor and destitute in keeping even the first commandment.

Jesus listed commandments from the Second Table of the Law, those last 7 that deal specifically with loving your neighbor. In this area, this man thinks he's golden. But when it comes to the First Table of the Law, the first 3 that deal with loving God, Jesus loves him enough to tell him the truth, and by doing so, he opens this man's eyes to see his sin. ***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."***

These words may seem too demanding, but it's what needed to be said. This man worshiped himself and God's gifts of wealth. His heart was full of ugly greed and selfishness. Jesus' preaching knocked him off his self-righteous feet. These good words from the good teacher, however, were not the ones he wanted to hear, so, ***the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.***

Through the preaching of repentance, the Holy Spirit had done his job. This this good law-abiding, upright, fine fellow rejected the call to repent. He had a god whom he was already worshiping and following, and it wasn't the true God. He went away with his fingers still clinging to his wealth. As Luther said, before God can make us glad he must make us sad.

In hearing these words, the Holy Spirit desires that we heed the warnings given. 1) The dangers of self-righteousness, thinking that we are already doing such a great job at keeping the Commandments that we can

reduce Jesus to a mere “good teacher” to whom we occasionally go. 2) Then there’s the danger that is inherent with great wealth. Jesus speaks of this in a moment. 3) Perhaps the biggest point however, is how we react to the loving sincere look and words that comes to us from a friend, a loved one, a fellow Christian who calls us to repent from whatever sin we are so caught up in. Do walk away full of pride or anger, or will we swallow our pride and humbly confess our sin?

In Luther’s very 1st of his 95 Theses he commented on this aspect of the Christian’s attitude on repenting. **“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”** To repent is a daily necessity for a Christian because we are both sinner and saint. We still carry with us that sinful nature which loves to worship anything and everything except the one true God. We need more than just a good teacher – we need a Savior! It’s the Holy Spirit’s work, that in the call to repent, we not only heed it, but that we also turn and see the loving, caring, saving eyes and arms of our Savior! He loves us so much that he truly makes the impossible – possible.

II. He loved him enough to make the impossible - possible

The eyes of the Savior had looked into the faces of little children and looked at the young man. They now “looked around” for disciples to instruct. Here was another opportunity to teach a lesson about money. Riches have caused many a Christian to lose their place in the kingdom of God. The warnings abound (Ps 62:10; 1 Ti 6:6–10). ***Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!”***

The disciples “were amazed.” His words to that nice young man were so devastating, so crushing. It is hard to enter the kingdom of God. All self-righteousness and sin must be left behind to enter through the narrow door. But then Jesus really knocked them off their feet – and as we look closely at these next words, it will for us too! ***“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*** This proverbial expression is a way to say that something is impossible.

Jesus is saying that it is *humanly* impossible for a rich man to enter heaven, for no matter how good he may be, he will always have moments when he thinks more of his riches than of God. To gain heaven by our own works we must walk the tightrope of God’s law without ever veering to the right or left. The heavy load of riches can easily cause a person to lose his balance, waiver, and disqualify himself for God’s kingdom.

The look on the disciples’ faces must have been priceless. They were utterly dumbfounded as they ask one another, ***“Who then can be saved?”*** Such a feeling comes over us when we discover we must be perfect for a perfect and holy God (Mt 5:48). A self-righteous person who comes to a knowledge of what God expects for eternal life will always be knocked off his feet and ask, “Who then can be saved?”

And yet, there is hope. God is able to do the impossible. The angel told Mary, ***“Nothing is impossible with God”*** (Lk 1:37). A virgin was able to bear a son. Five thousand people were fed with five barley loaves and two small fish. The world came into existence by God’s Word. God came to this earth as a man with human flesh. The Christian faith is built on God’s miracles – and the greatest is that every sin is cleansed by the blood of Christ-crucified, and that the Holy Spirit creates a living faith in our hearts to trust that Jesus’ blood has cleansed me! This God-given gift of faith rejoices in the glances and words of Jesus that call us to repent, because in those eyes we also see our Savior... who reassured his disciple as he, ***looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God, all things are possible with God.”***

Faith clings to a God who has done the impossible. How impossible? that he has truly loved unlovable me – me with all my failings, me with my tendencies to love riches more than the giver of riches, me who forgets just how deeply I need a Savior each day... yet – how possible! God has done it! He has forgiven you and me. He has washed away our sin. He calls us his own and in him we put our trust. And through the Holy Spirit he works in us the wisdom and knowledge to use God’s gifts of wealth, skills, abilities in ways that honor and glorify God and serve and bless our neighbor. For truly in Christ we already have heavenly eternal treasures. Amen.