

Dear Sons and Daughters of God in Jesus,

Years ago a partner of mine in the ministry invited a woman who was visiting the church to come again. She answered that she didn't need to, because she said, *"I am a good person."* He asked her the question, *"Are you good enough?"* Now, she believed in God and heaven. She also believed that she was good enough to be accepted into heaven. She saw herself as "the good daughter."

Today we hear of a man, a rich ruler, who though he had lived a good life, was unsure if he was a "good son" and would be given eternal life. Jesus does not ignore this man, but addresses his concern.

This is an important subject because we all want to have eternal life. You may have thought to yourself at some point, *"Am I good enough to inherit eternal life?"* Or someone may have asked you, *"How good do you have to be to inherit eternal life?"* Today Jesus teaches us about what it means to be "good" in God's eyes. For salvation he points us not to ourselves, but to **The Good Son**.

1. Who is it?

Who is the Good Son? Who is good enough to inherit eternal life?

A. It is important to understand the ruler's question.

1. He comes to Jesus and says, **"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** It may sound like he is asking Jesus to give him a "to do" list. What he is actually saying is, *"Jesus, you're a good person. You obviously have done many good works. Tell me that I am good enough and that there is nothing more I have to do to inherit eternal life."* We see the problem with someone trying to earn eternal life. There will always be doubt, *"Have I done enough?"* Always chasing, never achieving.

2. Jesus cares about this man's desire to have eternal life. But he must correct his wrong thinking. **"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone."** (19) He is asking, **"Are you just flattering me or are you calling me God? The only who is truly good, that is perfect, is God himself."** He wanted this man to know, if he wanted to enter heaven, he couldn't be pretty good, but perfectly good.

B. Next Jesus helps this man explore the question, “Do I measure up to God’s standard?”

1. Jesus starts with part of the 10 Commandments. He says, “**You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’**” (20) (*Exodus 20:12-16; Deut. 5:16-20a*) The man confidently answers, “**All these I have kept since I was a boy,**” he said. (21) Jesus knew he would answer this way. He is setting him up to reveal what he has missed, and also what has been nagging him in his conscience.

2. Jesus does this by telling him, “**You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor...When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.**” (22a, 23) The man was sad, because he loved his riches. Jesus’ command exposes the coveting or evil desires in his heart. He not only was breaking the 9th and 10th Commandments which tell us not to covet, but he was breaking the very 1st Commandment by making the treasures of this life his greatest priority. There was an outward shell of goodness in his life, but underneath he had an evil heart. He was not good enough.

C. It is easy for us to sincerely want to be Christians and to put on an outward shell of goodness. We go to church, we pay our taxes, we don’t beat up people. It can very quickly turn into self-righteousness. “*Of course I am going to heaven. Look at what a good person I am.*” We heard in the Old Testament reading from Deuteronomy, “**the Lord your God ask[s] of you ...to fear the Lord your God, to...serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...**” (10:12) The Lord God does not ask us to serve in part, but demands that we obey him with all our heart and soul. We must confess that we fall far short of what he demands. We are not good. We do not deserve eternal life based on our efforts.

2. The invitation

So Jesus offers an invitation to the man and to us. “**Come follow me.**”

A. As a part of that invitation he holds out, “**Treasure in heaven.**”

1. What is “treasure in heaven?” Jesus describes it this way in Matthew 6:19-20, “**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.**” The earthly treasure we

have, including our life, we do not get to keep in this life. The treasure and life that Jesus offers in the next life is forever. So Jesus also says, **“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”** (Matthew 16:26) This man was loving something that was very temporary.

2. Jesus invites him, **“Come, follow me.”** To follow Jesus is to listen to him and to trust him. We listen to his word which is in the Bible. The Old Testament tells what Jesus was coming to do to save us. The New Testament tells us what he did to save us. Jesus promises that whoever believes in him will not perish but will have eternal life. That is the treasure, life under God now and forever. This is what we believe.

B. Jesus is still concerned about us. As the man was leaving, Jesus issues a warning to his disciples and the crowd.

Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (24-25) First he tells us it is hard for the materially wealthy to get into the kingdom of God and then in the next breath he tells us it is easier for a camel to go through eye of a needle. Of course it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a regular sewing needle. The eye of the needle is meant for thread, not a camel.

Jesus is warning his disciples that wealth will get in the way of their pursuit of the kingdom of God and in the end if it has a grip on their heart, they will not enter the kingdom. I would believe that Judas, Iscariot, the apostle, was standing there and this is what happened to him. He loved money more than Jesus.

We have a lot of earthly wealth compared to those 1st Century disciples. The poorest among us has multiple pairs of shoes, slippers, etc. I am not suggesting that you should only own a single pair of footwear. However, I am asking you to take Jesus’ warning seriously. Don’t let your wealth and your lifestyle get in the way of coming to hear his word. It wouldn’t take much to go from a life long Christian to one who comes irregularly and then not at all. If we want excuses, there are plenty. Jesus looks at us with love and concern. He says, **“Continue to follow me!”**

3. The question

The disciples are shocked. After the man leaves they ask Jesus about what he has just said. They ask the question, **“Who then can be saved?”** Jesus has an answer.

A. Jesus states that **“[This] is impossible with man.”** In other words our salvation does not depend on us.

The disciples ask this because the prevailing belief in Jewish society was that as long as you were an outwardly good person, you would go to heaven. It is also the prevailing belief now. Some years ago a WELS pastor took a poll on a Sunday morning of his worshippers. One of the questions was, *“How are you saved?”* The good news is that 90% said, *“in Jesus.”* The bad news was that 10% answered, *“By being a good person.”* That is a church where the Law and Gospel are preached every single Sunday. Some still gave the wrong answer.

2. Jesus states it clearly, **“This is impossible with man.”** that is human beings. We can never do enough good works to save ourselves. The reason is because we all sin and our good works cannot make up for our sins.

B. So Jesus continues, **“What is impossible with man is possible with God.”** The Lord God saves us.

1. The title of the message is “The Good Son.” We have spent time hearing why the rich ruler was not a “Good Son” and why we are not “Good Sons” and “Good Daughters.” But there is a Good Son. It is Jesus. He is the perfect Son of God. He was Good in his keeping of every Commandment of God. St. Paul says in Romans, **“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”** (5:19) His perfect obedience is our perfect obedience. His death at the cross paid for our broken Commandments. In Jesus God sees us as Good Sons and Daughters.

2. Since there are no doubts about our salvation, we can now live our lives using our riches to honor Jesus. If we need guidance, we have his word.

Conclusion: Years ago I was called to visit a wealthy woman who was dying in hospice. We talked of life and of Jesus. Her response to the sentence, *“Jesus has heaven ready for you.”*, was that she smiled confidently and said, *“I know where I am going.”* Live confidently in Jesus, the Good Son. Amen.