

Proper 24 – The Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost
St. Mark 10:23-31

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today's text follows last week's text, and in truth, found it's way into last week's sermon. As a result, what you hear today will, in some parts, be a rehash of what you heard last week. This is not all bad; as I've mentioned quite recently, just like children often need to hear the same things over and over again from their parents, so children of the Heavenly Father need to hear the same thing from Him over and over again.

"Good Teacher," the man asked Jesus, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Essentially, Jesus replied, "If you're looking for something 'to do,' keep the Law...all of it." "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth," the man boldly stated. "One thing you lack," Jesus replied, "[G]o, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." And the man went away sorrowful because he had great possessions. (cf. Mark 10:17-22)

Jesus told the rich man that keeping of the entire law hinges on the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) What does this mean? "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." All things means everything—everything created by God and given to you out of His Fatherly divine goodness and mercy, which includes your money and possessions, your works and supposedly good deeds. Possessions, money, and things wither and die or rust and decay—they are temporal blessings which will not last unto eternity when God creates the new heaven and new earth (cf. Revelation 21:1) And your works, which may at times benefit others or even yourself, are never purely good, and they are certainly never good enough to measure up to God's holiness. These things cannot gain you entrance into the kingdom of God; they do not make it so that you inherit eternal life.

So, after the man left, Jesus explained it to His disciples:

How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.

The rich are prone to trust in their riches over and against God for entrance into His kingdom. And this is not simply a difficulty for the rich. Let me put it to you this way: when things are going well, when times are prosperous, it is easy to make God an afterthought, so to speak, to think that you have done great things that have somehow earned God's favor so that things have gone well for you.

Therein is the meaning of the phrase "rich person" when Jesus uses it. "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." Generally, today, the rich are seen as villainous. It wasn't too long ago when protests were waged by "The Occupy Movement," where the rich 1% were vilified and their riches are demanded of them in order that they be given to the poor and needy, the 99%. I've even heard it said that there's no such thing as an honest rich person—that anyone who has amassed wealth could only have done so through dishonest means.

In opposition to the general modern view of the wealthy is the view of the wealthy in Jesus' time. There existed in that time a disdain for those who amassed wealth illicitly or unscrupulously. Luther mentions this in his catechisms as he covers the Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments. However, while the modern view still looks down upon the wealthy who achieved their riches through hard work—they are still part of the 1%—these were seen to have the favor of God in Jesus' time.

So, when Jesus said, "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," you can imagine the confusion on the part of the disciples. If it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich person who is favored by God to

enter the kingdom of God, who can be saved? If it is easier for the impossible to happen than for the favored of God to enter His kingdom, who can be saved?

This flies in the face of all of those who would like to believe that heaven is filled with people who are good. It's the "good," however that's defined, who are thought to have God's favor today, however God is defined these days. He was a good American, so God must have loved him and granted Him entrance into His kingdom. She helped the poor and downtrodden with what little she had—such a good work—so she must be in heaven, now. No, if they are with Christ after death, if they are in His kingdom, it's not because he was a good American or that she performed such good works even to her detriment. These have the favor of God not because of what they have done. "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." Trust in riches or in one's goodness does not grant entrance into the kingdom of God—on the contrary, they displace the fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

"With man it is impossible," Jesus said. Why is it impossible with men? As it is stated in my favorite article of the Heidelberg Disputation, the 26th: "The Law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done." The corollary is also true: the Law says, "Do not do this," and it is done anyway. In this manner, the Law of God shows you your sin. It shows you how much you fall short of His glory. It reveals to you that you do not fear God, that you hate Him, and that you would rather trust in yourself or the temporal gifts He gives you than in Him.

As Luther wrote of the First Commandment, so he repeats as he explains all of the other commandments, which flow and proceed from the first and chief commandment. So the explanations to commandments 2 through 10 all begin with, "We should fear and love God so that..."

So, it follows that whenever you do not keep the Law, you demonstrate a lack of fear and love of God. Now, I don't mean to say that you, who live under the grace of God, would ever express a lack of fear and love of God, but your sins express it for you. Whenever you lust after another who is not your spouse, you show a lack of fear and love for God. Whenever you strike another person or call him an air head, you show a lack of fear and love for God. Whenever you take what isn't yours or do not help to improve and protect your neighbor's possessions and income, you show a lack of fear and love for God. Whenever you gossip about your neighbor or speak ill of him, you show a lack of fear and love for God. Whenever you scheme to get what belongs your neighbor in a way which only seems right, you show a lack of fear and love for God. Whenever you do not honor your father, mother, or God-given authority, you show a lack of fear and love for God.

Again, you would never utter such words, "I don't fear God, what can He do to me?" Or, you would never dare say, "I hate God!" At least, I would imagine that, especially as you are right now listening to me, the thought of saying these things and meaning them is despicable, deplorable, and detestable. For I'm sure you would say that you delight in the law of God according to your inward man. But, you see another law in your members, warring against the law of your minds, and bringing you into captivity to the law of sin which is in your members. In other words, the good that you will to do, you do not do; but the evil you will not to do, that you practice. So, you cry out like St. Paul, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:19, 22-23, paraphrased; Romans 7:24)

"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." "The law says, 'Do this,' and it is never done"—it says, "Do not do this," and it is done anyway—"grace says, 'Believe in this,' and everything is already done." "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Therefore, trust not in your riches or works—these all do not save you; trusting in them is eternal death. Believe in Jesus Christ, for He has worked out your salvation, and He has given you faith to believe and trust in Him.

"With man it is impossible, but not with God." It is impossible, because you cannot do what the Law of God demands to make reparation for your sin—you cannot die and rise again as payment for

your sin. If you die for your sins, you are dead in your trespasses and sins for eternity. But this is not impossible with God, for He was born of the virgin Mary in the person of His Son, taking on this mortal nature, and was given the name Jesus, which means, "YHWH saves." He shed His blood and died in your place with your sin—He is the propitiation for your sins—and He rose again from the dead to give you eternal life. His love covers the multitude of your sins, (cf. Proverbs 10:12, 1 Peter 4:8) a love which is demonstrated to you in the death of Jesus (cf. Romans 5:8), in the shedding of His blood.

Therefore, dear sinners, look to your Baptisms, where your hatred of God is forgiven, and you are justified. There, at the font, you were joined to the death of Jesus Christ. There at the font, you first died to yourself and your robe was washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Now, you daily live in your Baptism as through God-given confession of your sins, you drown Old, hard-hearted Adam, and rise again to newness of life as absolution is pronounced over you, even as in your Baptism you were joined to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:3-11)

Dear Baptized, your hatred and fearlessness of God are covered in the perfect love of and submission to God found in the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior. He has rescued you from the body of death by His bodily death and given you new life in His resurrection to life. He is now seated at the right hand of God, pleading for you before His Father and your Father in heaven, "I died for that one; their sins are covered."

Jesus has taken all of your sin into His flesh—all of your lack of fear and hatred for God—and exchanged it for His perfect life, death, and resurrection. His righteousness is accounted to you—you receive the love God shows to the thousand generations of those who love Him, because Jesus kept His commandments for you. For it all, He received the full wrath of God—the punishment of the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate God who is jealous for you.

Now, you may have great wealth or you may live on the edge of poverty; you may do some pretty good works or you may see your every action being one of sin. Either way, by the grace of God, you do not trust in these for your salvation, for you have been given faith to believe in Jesus the Christ, who died to forgive your sins and took you with Him, giving you new life. With man salvation is impossible, but not with God. Therefore, by that faith, you receive these words: You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.