

Turning from self ... **Receiving** from God

Mark 10:17-31

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Recently, I read of a young man who lives not far from here. He's got both fame and fortune, and talent. He's got far more money than all of us combined ever will. He's got it all! And on top of that, by all accounts, he's a really nice guy. Ask anybody. Unlike some with great fame and fortune, he tries his best to live a good life. He sees himself on a spiritual journey and encourages kindness and compassion for all - how to make the world a better place. And then, one day, he's hoping for what's next - the next life. He's got it all, except for one thing. That, he's not quite sure he has. How can he get it?

Remind you of anyone? Sounds a lot like the man who ran up to Jesus that day, full of excitement. He too, had it all - fame and fortune! And on top of it all, he too, was a really good guy. Ask anyone. They'd tell you the same thing. As far back as they could remember, he was a good kid. Never got in trouble at home or school. Listened to his parents. Did his chores. All his teachers loved him. A model student. He came from a well-to-do family, but he was always happy to share what he had with others. A good guy. The kind you'd love to have your daughter meet and have as a son-in-law one day. He too, was on a spiritual journey. He's got it all, except for one thing, that he's not quite sure he has. How can he get it?

And as [Jesus] was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" What can he do to get it? He has a notion. The same notion we all have. Do good. Do good and you'll be rewarded for it. There's also a feeling, even in our day, that if you do good, you'll do well. God will bless you. He will reward you by giving you a certain amount of prosperity. And that seems to be how this young man might be feeling.

What must I do? And so Jesus tells this rich young man exactly what he must do. A quick tour of the commandments: Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't bear false witness, don't defraud, honor father and mother. There's *plenty* to do in those. The young man's answer is surprising. *"Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."* I've done everything I can think of to get it. Ask anyone. They'll tell you. Matthew includes, *"What else is there?"* Is there anything else I have to do? Tell me, and I'll do it! (William Cwirla)

And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

So what was the one thing this man was lacking? What was the one thing he didn't have to inherit eternal life? *He didn't have Jesus.* And when you don't have Jesus, you don't have anything. That's the key phrase here, when Jesus says, "Come, follow me". And Jesus knew the one thing preventing him from following; the one thing getting in the way of him having Jesus; that which meant everything to him ... his wealth.

Is it wrong to be wealthy? No. God makes some people very wealthy, people like Abraham, David, and Solomon, just to name a few. And really, you and me, too. Even though in our country, in our context, we may not consider ourselves wealthy, compared to most people in the rest of the world, we are fabulously rich! And that's not necessarily bad. But it can be, if it prevents you from having Jesus. (James Douthwaite)

Jesus knew something the young man didn't. Despite all appearances - deep down - he's really not good at all. Like you and I, he's more self-centered than he ever imagined. His life really revolves around what? Not God, but himself. His real god, that which is number one to him, is himself. He worships himself. Serves himself. He, and what he wants, is number one, not God. And His money - that's an idol too. He trusts in his money to take care of Him, to give him a good life, comfort, enjoyment, *life*.

And this young man is not alone, is he? What's number one in *your* life? What are you living for? What do you trust to give you a good life, to take care of your needs, to bring you joy and purpose and meaning in life? Money? That sure helps, doesn't it? Family? Friends? Marriage? Career? Comfort? Fun, enjoyment? Having things go your way? So many things we look to, cling to, hold on to, trust in.

What did Jesus say? *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... Why? For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* (Mt 6:19-21) What is it that your heart holds near and dear? What idols are you trusting in? You, good? Me, good? Not even close. No one is good, but God alone. *"You lack one thing: Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, [let go of your idols] and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me."*

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful. Why? For he had great possessions. Jesus asks the one thing he could not do - give up his possession. Why? Because it would really mean giving up what? Giving up his life, the one thing he loved more than anything - himself. More than God. He wasn't looking to *give up* his life. He was looking to *add to it*; add to it the one thing he didn't already have - eternal life.

Money, family, friends, children, marriage, career, comfort, your life. What's *your* true god, the one you can't let go of; the one you can't live without? As Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*" You can only have one god. Who will it be?

And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "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." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Fame, fortune, the admiration of others. He had it all, or so he thought. There's only one thing he lacked. He wasn't good. And neither are you. What can you do to inherit eternal life? Nothing. Nothing you do is good enough. Why? Because you're not good. With man, it's impossible to inherit eternal life. It can't be done!

You can't get to heaven. So what happened? *Heaven came down to you!* Jesus came down for you. As He told the disciples a few verses later, "*See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.*"

There's only One person who was truly worthy of eternal life. Who was truly good. Who did everything perfectly. Who clung to nothing, not even His own life. And that was Jesus. What did He do? He clung to *us* instead of His own life. He clung to our sins to free us from them. And then He clung to the cross to pay the price for those sins of ours that He took from us, to win life for us. That was Jesus' one thing that He was not willing to let go of - you!

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Go, *sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*" There's *the answer* to the young man's question, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life.*" **Follow Me.** But the young man missed it, the answer he was looking for. *Follow me.* All he heard was what? *Sell and give away.* (Cwirila)

Mark 8:34-35 *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. Let go of your life, with all that you treasure and trust in ... and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Matthew, in his gospel, adds, "... What then, will there be for us?" Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."

"*But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*" In other words, it's not about works. It's about gift. Receiving God's giving. In Matthew, the text is followed by "*For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ...*" The one who does *least*, receives what? The same as the one who does the most.

This is an illustration of what? Again, inheriting the kingdom of God is not about works. It's not about being good enough; about doing enough. For who of us ever does enough? And none of us is good anyway. But it's about God's giving. It's about grace. God's doing; not ours. Not about doing more, but about **receiving** from the One who loves to give!

The young man wanted to take hold of eternal life, but he didn't want to let go of his god - himself, his life. He was torn. He wanted *both*. But there can only be one Lord, one Master, one God. And continuing to hold to the one, he would eventually lose both his things and eternal life. What would he do? Which way would he go? Which god would he choose? Which will you?

In John 6, the same question is asked, "*What must we do to do the works God requires?*" And Jesus says what? "*The work of God is to believe in the One He has sent.*" Believe in God's doing, not your own. Receive from God. Allow yourself to be given to.

The young man went away sad, but you don't have to. Go away rejoicing in what Jesus has done for you; the one thing necessary - to die for your *ungoodness*, and rise for your resurrection! Rejoice, that what's impossible with man, eternal life, is possible with God! Rejoice, and follow Him. The Way. The Truth. The Life! Rejoice, that you can let go of all the false gods you're trusting to save you, and trust the One who really *has* saved you. Follow Him. Turn from yourself and receive from God - goodness, gift, love, salvation, everlasting life!