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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 12, 2015
7th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 25:7-10; Acts 14:8-18

Hymns: 246; 366:1-4; 430:1-4; 430:8 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 19:16-26

“Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”

17 So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”

18 He said to Him, “Which ones?”

Jesus said, “‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’

19 ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

20 The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?”

21 Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, 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.”

25 When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”

26 But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Dreaming the Impossible Dream

What is your impossible dream? Many young people dream of being a professional ball player in whatever their favorite sport might be. We may see them as dreaming the impossible dream. Sometimes their fathers and mothers are so affected by their emotions regarding their own children that they are convinced that their children could really possibly make it. They share in that dream. For most it is the impossible dream, a dream that they may entertain for a number of years but then they finally realize that they don't have the talent required to play at a professional level. But it's not impossible for everyone. After all there are a few thousand pro athletes in America that make more than a decent living. So then it really isn't the impossible dream. It may be the improbable dream, but not impossible. And when an individual works, I mean really works at something one never knows. Perhaps this person will make it.

This can be true for any of number of different fields of endeavor, one may dream of being a doctor, another may dream of being a professional musician, another an Oscar winning actor, another dreams of being President. There are some seventeen or eighteen mature men and women who sincerely believe that they have what it takes to be President, and they are all working hard to make this dream a reality! In a couple of years one of them will very likely be President! So let's be careful about what one calls impossible. People appear to accomplish the impossible every day!

That is exactly what people think who believe that they are going to attain eternal life. Impossible? Yes, but it lies before us all, and we all should have the hope of –

THEME: Attaining that Impossible Goal of Eternal Life.

In our text we are told of a young man who came to Jesus seeking the Lord's counsel in how to attain this goal of eternal life. He was uncertain about attaining that goal. He felt as if something was missing. What was actually going on was that he possessed a conscience that testified that he fell short of what was necessary to enter into heaven. --

I. The Impossible Standard of Perfect Righteousness --

This young man inquired of the Lord what deed he lacked, what deed he might yet do to attain eternal life.

Jesus' response is most interesting, for Jesus immediately challenged the young man's manner in addressing Jesus. He had called Jesus "good Teacher." This challenge wasn't because Jesus didn't see Himself as being good. Jesus was pointing out that no one is good except for God.

That challenges the world's premise that there is enough good in most people for them to be saved, if they just work at it. Surely this was where this young man was coming from. He called Jesus good because he also considered **himself** to be good.

Jesus continued His response to the young man's question by referencing the commandments. When the young man asked which ones, Jesus recited the basic components of what most people would consider a "good life;" don't actually kill anyone, don't tell lies about your neighbor, don't commit adultery, respect your parents, be nice to the people around you, loving them, well, sort of loving them like you love yourself. The young man assured Jesus that he was *good* with all those things. He had done them from his youth. He still clung to the idea that he was good, but at the same time he felt that he was lacking something. He didn't feel that certainty of salvation that he desired, that he needed to feel in his heart. What he wasn't ready to do was admit that he was **not** good, that he was a **sinner**, unworthy of eternal life.

That is the way of human nature. No one wants to think of themselves as being bad. Even Christians shy away from the word

“sin” when they are discussing different kinds of activities that may not be “quite right” in their own lives. The people of this world will not even acknowledge as sin the things the law clearly condemns as being sinful. Sexual sins of all kinds are common among the people of our land. God’s institution of marriage is despised as outdated and irrelevant. Many couples live together without being married. Thousands upon thousands of unborn babies are murdered in America **every year** because they are deemed as inconvenient, and undesired, and so they must be a health risk for the mother. Just about every state in the country encourages covetousness with their lotteries, taking advantage of many of the poorest of their citizens whom they are supposed to protect from such predatory schemes. **In the eyes of the world it is all good.** There is **no sin.** So why not believe that all people can attain the impossible dream of true righteousness and eternal life?

Too many children of God are too often swept along with the current in this stream of thinking so that we also start to imagine that people aren’t so bad. We know our neighbors. They’re nice people. God surely must see many of us as being good enough in our lives to merit eternal life. Indeed we are so good that we must deserve some credit for our own salvation. **God looked down from heaven upon the children of men and declared, “There is none who does good, no not one”** (Psalm 14:3)!

When we come together here in church we confess our sins, but outside of these doors we find some voice within us that encourages us to deny, deny, deny! The apostle John wrote simply and quite straightforward.

1 John 1:8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

The truth is, **we are sinners.** The truth is, our best efforts fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The truth is, all our righteousnesses are no better than filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Jesus made that point very clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:43-48 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who

hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

The kind deeds we do are often self-serving at best. We do them to feel good about ourselves, or to make our community a nicer place to live. “Be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Be complete in righteousness in every way. Be wholly altruistic, with nothing in it for yourself in every word, in every action, yes, even in every thought. That is the standard for perfect righteousness that is necessary for eternal life. That is impossible, for you have already fouled up more times than you could ever know, but God knows.

What is revealed is --

II. The Impossible Quality of Perfect Love.

Jesus, who knows the hearts of all people, laid one last challenge before this young man.

Matthew 19: 21-22 “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

He may have fooled himself into believing that he loved other people as much as he loved himself, but there was something that laid hold of this man’s heart even more than God Himself. The treasure of this man’s heart was his earthly wealth. That he could not part with. It meant far too much to him. To ask such a thing was positively heart wrenching. He went away sorrowful.

This affection for wealth is such a danger. We live in a material world. Wealth is equated with power and influence and security. That is nothing new. That was not only Jesus’ point in our text, but

it is also a lesson that has been taught in Scripture from the earliest writings of Moses and the prophets. So it comes as no surprise to find the Apostle Paul also addressing this love of money in his first epistle to Timothy.

1 Timothy 6:6-11 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 11 But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

Yes, the love of money, and the corresponding desire for wealth that all too often gets out of control can cause one to stray from the faith and lose the most precious possession of all, the eternal life that the young man in our text dreamed of, but desired just a little less than his wealth. To him it must have sounded like Jesus was just being unreasonable. Many today still consider it unreasonable for the Lord to even speak to the matter of money, and how one acquires money or trusts money, or loves money, or uses money.

In our text Jesus concluded:

Matthew 19:23 “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, 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.”

There it is again, the impossible dream, even or especially for the rich. It is simply impossible for a rich man to enter into heaven.

Jesus makes it clear that --

III. God Alone Makes Salvation Possible.

And the disciples are so shocked by Jesus’ statement that they exclaim: “**Who then can be saved**(v.25)?” They recognized the

attraction of money. More than that, they recognized the wealthy of this world and influential of this world, the upper class of this world as being superior people. If they can't make it into heaven how will I ever make it?

That is exactly the mythology of the world of which we need to be disabused. The rich and powerful of this world don't have an advantage. We may think we see an advantage for them; it may even be evident in many different circumstances of life, but it isn't true with God in heaven above. Money and influence and an air of superiority mean nothing to the Lord. So Jesus replied:

Matthew 19:26 "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

It is **impossible** for you to secure eternal life for yourself. You can't buy it with money. You can't secure it with some kind deed. You can't secure it because you can't get rid of sin, your sin, your guilt, your condemnation. With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Ephesians 2:4-5 "God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

God is the one who could secure the perfect righteousness for us. He sent His Son into the flesh to do just that, and Jesus did it by living the perfect sinless life, and by loving the perfect love for God and man. The Lord in heaven above saw the need, the need for an all atoning sacrifice for sin, and God sent His Son into the flesh to be that sacrifice. God made the impossible possible when He secured the peace between the most holy God and a horribly sinful mankind.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21 "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him

who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

So it is that the one deed that had to be done for us to secure eternal life has been done. God did it. He did it in His Son’s holy life, and His Son’s innocent suffering, death, and resurrection. He did it by pouring His Holy Spirit into our hearts, calling us to faith, setting us apart from sin and this sinful world, and making us children of God and heirs of everlasting life. Now we not only dare to dream the impossible dream, we know its reality in our living Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We **have** eternal life through faith in His name!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.