

ONLY FAITH IN CHRIST SAVES

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, where He would pay the price for mankind's salvation, when a man came running to Him and fell on his knees and asked, "Good Teacher, what am I to do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17). Though he was a ruler (see Luke 18:18), probably in a synagogue, this young man did not know the way to eternal life. He thought eternal life was to be gained by deeds a person would perform, but he was uncertain as to just what those deeds were. He went to Jesus because he thought Jesus had the answer. Only for him Jesus, though "good," was no more than a "teacher."

It was this misunderstanding Jesus sought to correct first. "Don't you know that only God is 'good,' only God is perfect, and only God can therefore provide salvation? Why then do you call me 'good'?" With this, Jesus did not say that He was not God but, rather, sought to have the young man reflect on why he was calling Jesus "good" and what implications that might have. It was to make him think. There was more involved than just going to Jesus with a question and seeking an answer.

The man had asked, "What am I to do?" As ruler in a synagogue, he had given the answer to many others. Jesus now gave him the same one - God's commandments. Jesus referred only to those that had to do with the young man's dealing with his fellowmen because these would have been the ones he would have felt the surest about. And he did: "All these I have kept since I was a child." Why then his question? Although he had done everything, he felt dissatisfied. Today many people would reply that those commandments no longer apply and that eternal life is just imagination. They are worse off than this young ruler. He had lived an exemplary life. But...

Jesus' heart went out to him, so Jesus zeroed in on his one great fault. Jesus told him to sell all he had and give to the poor. Thus he would rid himself of the wealth that he loved more than God and that was keeping him out of the kingdom of God. But not only that. After having rid himself of his idol, he was to go and follow Jesus.

The price was too high for the rich young man. He forgot to look at the prizes - Jesus Christ, treasure in heaven, the kingdom of God. Did he ever return? We don't know.

Jesus then used this occasion to teach His disciples a needed lesson. "How hard it is [for those who trust in riches] to enter the kingdom of God!" They were shocked. Then Jesus added: "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." Man simply cannot save himself, neither the rich young ruler nor the disciples nor anyone else. Work-righteousness does not appease God.

Is our case then hopeless? No, for Jesus says, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." God can even move an idolatrous rich man to set aside his riches and to rest his heart on God. That is the power of the gospel.

Peter, not one to keep silent, spoke up: "We disciples have done exactly what you told the ruler to do. What about us?" He too had not fully grasped Jesus' words. So Jesus pointed to the evidences of the grace of God they were already experiencing and would continue to experience in eternity. There was no way the gift of eternal life could be looked upon as a recompense for their deeds. It was pure grace.

Jesus' words also comfort us in our lives here on earth. Because we belong to Christ, flesh and blood relatives may spurn and ridicule us, and we may also suffer more serious persecutions. But Jesus assures us that we will have all we need in the family of our Lord Jesus Christ. His love dwelling in the hearts of believers will come to meet us. Those are bonds of love more precious than all earthly bonds of blood. They last into eternity.