

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

²⁰ “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.”

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (NIV84)

Theme: What is impossible for man is accomplished by God.

Jesus had just finished teaching his followers about God’s gift of marriage and children. He concluded by saying, **anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.** And this got a young man thinking. Mark calls him young, Matthew tells us he was rich, and Luke mentions that he was a ruler of some sort. So here we have the story of curious rich young man who came up to Jesus to ask an honest question. **Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?** Jesus had just finished talking about entering God’s kingdom, so naturally the rich young man was curious about how to get there.

And like many he thought he could get there by himself. He is really no different from you and me. That is what we all think by nature. We think that there is something we can do to earn eternal life. That if we are good, if we are nice to others, if we work hard, and so on we can gain a spot for ourselves in heaven. Or we figure that somehow in someway we can please God enough in order to make him save us. As if we can earn his favor and convince him to bring us to heaven by our actions.

Jesus decided to play along. **You know the commandments**, he said. **Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.** Jesus mentions most of the 2nd table of the commandments—the last seven. These are the commands are summarized by the one command, which Jesus told also told him as recorded by Matthew, **Love your neighbor as yourself.** “Pssch,” thought the man. “I’ve done this.” “I’ve never murdered anyone, I’ve never stolen anything, I’ve never even testified in a court, I’ve always been respectful to my parents. I have kept these commandments—it’s really not all that hard” And that is what he told Jesus. **All these I have kept since I was a boy.** He sounds like us, doesn’t he? We usually think we do a pretty good job keeping the 10 commandments. As long as we don’t murder someone we are good with the fifth commandment. As long as we don’t sleep with someone outside of marriage than we are good against the sixth commandment. We could go on. We completely ignore the fact that it’s not just by our actions that we can sin against the 10 commandments. It’s also with our words and thoughts. Anytime we say a hateful thing we are guilty of sinning against the fifth commandment. Every time we lust after someone we are guilty of committing adultery. And yet, we still think we are pretty good. We consider ourselves better than we truly are. We also figure that if we mess up here and there, it won’t be that big of a deal. God will overlook it. He will consider the whole body of work, and your good will far out weigh the bad.

Jesus continued to play along with the rich young man. “Fine,” Jesus was saying, “If you have kept all of these laws, do one more thing, then you will be in heaven.” **Go, sell everything you have and give**

to the poor. It was a simple thing really. If he kept all the commandments, this one wouldn't be that hard to do. All he had to do was sell all of his possessions and give them to those in need—that was certainly loving your neighbor as yourself—no big deal. But Jesus wasn't really giving this man an opportunity to earn eternal life. Jesus was pointing out this man's sin—that he didn't even love God. The young man left Jesus. He went away sad, because he had great wealth and he didn't want to give it up.

This young man chose his wealth and possessions over God. Thus he broke the first commandment. And all other commandments along with it. Even if you, on the outside, keep a certain commandment, but you don't do it out of love and thanks to God, you really aren't keeping it. For if you don't believe in God you can't keep his commands. If you don't love God then you can't obey him. Everything goes back to the first commandment. When we sin against any commandment we also sin against the first commandment, for it is God who commanded you to obey it. When we sin against a commandment we are saying, "God I love money, I love gossip, I love sex, I love whatever more than you." You cannot keep any commandment without first keeping the first commandment. This young man loved his money, his possessions, his property. He loved it more than God. He committed idolatry by putting his wealth ahead of God in his life. And since he didn't keep the first and chief commandment, he couldn't earn his way into eternal life.

Jesus remarked to his disciples, **How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!** Why is that? Because the rich, as a whole, love money. They often care more about their possessions than God and his Word. God is not first, money is and so they fail to obey the first commandment and all others along with it. The pursuit of more wealth can also lead them down sinful paths. **The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil**, as Paul says in 1 Timothy. How many times do we see that once a person gets a taste of wealth, he can't get enough? And he looks to any means necessary, including many that are sinful and illegal to acquire more wealth. The love and pursuit of money could lead you to neglect your family, your job, and perhaps even your God. It could also lead them to a false sense of pride and security. If they needed something, they had to the money to buy it.

Every man has his price, God must to. They figure they could buy their way into heaven, just as they do here on earth.

The rich young man walked away from Christ because he loved money more than God. What causes you to walk away from God? Maybe it's your wealth. Perhaps it's your desire to become wealthy. It could be power or fame. TV, sleep, sex, sports, hunting, or gossip. Maybe it's your job, your friends, your happiness, or your family. There are many things that we may be tempted to love more than God. And if we do, we sin against the first commandment.

It is hard for people to enter the kingdom of God. As Jesus said, **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.** The type of camel that Jews were familiar with reach an average of 6'6''. They can regularly weigh over 1300 pounds. The eye of a needle is only a few millimeters wide. It's impossible. There is no possible way that a camel of any size could fit through a needle of any size. If it's easier for the impossible to happen than for someone to enter the kingdom of God, then it too must be impossible. So the disciples asked him, **Who then can be saved?**

Jesus replied, **with man this is impossible.** Man can't save himself. We cannot contribute to our eternal life in any way. As sinners and born enemies of God we cannot earn his respect and favor. We can't convince him somehow that we are worthy to be saved. We cannot buy our way into heaven. We cannot earn our way to salvation by keeping the 10 commandments. We cannot even keep the first commandment—how can we keep the others! If we try to save ourselves we will accomplish nothing but failure. As Paul says in Romans, **no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.**

It may be impossible for man. But not for God. As Jesus says, **With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.** God has the power to do what we can't. God has the power to make a born enemy, a sinner, dead set against him—his child. He is able to do whatever he wants—and he wants to save us.

God knew that once Adam and Eve rebelled against his will they would be utterly helpless. So right then and there he promised to send

them a descendent who would defeat Satan by crushing his head. All throughout Scripture we see passage after passage of how God saves us, apart from anything we have done. It began when God chose us—not when we chose God. As Paul says in Ephesians, **God chose you to be saved.** In time, God decided to put his plan of saving you into action. He sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus lived a perfect life that you could not. Not once did he fail to love his neighbor. He never put anything—including money, power, or fame ahead of his Father. He kept the first commandment perfectly. And when he willingly let himself be murdered on the cross he took all our sins upon himself. He became guilty of the commandments that we broke so he could suffer through hell in our place. Then he rose from the dead and promises that those who believe in him will live with him forever.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their one and only Savior will have salvation. But we cannot believe in Jesus Christ on our own, or come to him. So God brought us into his family at our baptisms. **He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.** When most of us were baptized our sins were forgiven and we were adopted into his family. But perhaps, for some of us, it wasn't when we were baptized, but when we heard the Word. Through the work of the Holy Spirit you, **were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.**

It is through this same Word that the Holy Spirit keeps us in the one true faith. He guards and protects us against all attacks from the devil, until he brings us safely to his eternal home. Since the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith, he marked you as his own. The devil cannot harm you. God will not let him rip you from his arms. He will also watch over you life as you live in this sin-filled world. He will make sure the pains of the world do not overwhelm you.

And finally God will take you to live with him in heaven forever. Eternal life is a purely a gift from God. It is the inheritance promises to us from God after he chose to adopt us as his own children. Paul summarizes our salvation this way. **It is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not of yourselves, it is a gift from God, not by works so that no one can boast.**

Christ says it's impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. But there are rich people in heaven already. Abraham was quite wealthy by anyone's standards. So was Job. As was Joseph of Arimathea, who buried Jesus in his own tomb. There are plenty of believers in heaven right now who were rich. And there will be more. And that is only because of Christ. The rich are just like the rest of us, we can't save ourselves. But what is impossible for man is accomplished by God. He has saved us. He has forgiven our sins. And has given us eternal life.

Therefore we love God. We love him more than anything else this world has to offer. And through Christ we are able to put aside the things that we love. We take a look at our lives and determine what the things are that may lead us to walk away from him. It doesn't matter what it is—fame, fun, fortune, or whatever, and we strive to avoid them. This is done only through God. As Paul says in Philippians **It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.** God works in us so that we may obey him and serve him only. It is God who enables us to follow not only his first commandment, but all of his commandments. It is his grace that motivates us to do so. For through a thankful heart we willingly serve the one who saved us. Because realize that we can't do the impossible. But God has done it for us already. Amen.