

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”

²¹ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, 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 Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus replied, “What is impossible with men is possible with God.” (NIV84)

Theme: Make God your top Priority

1. You will receive true treasure.
2. You will enter the kingdom of God.

The first commandment is often referred to as the chief commandment because all other commandments hinge on the first. You cannot obey the other nine commandments without obeying the first. And every sin against a particular commandment is also a sin against the first commandment. Yet many Christians don’t always think about sinning against the first commandment. After all, you don’t see too many Christians bowing down to false gods.

But open idolatry is only one way we break the first commandment. For Christians secret idolatry is much more common. Secret idolatry has to do with one thing: priorities. Who or what is first in your life? What is your number one priority? As Christians it should be God and his Word. But sometimes our priorities get out of whack. We start following the ways of the world and our top priority becomes ourselves and what we want—and so we commit secret idolatry.

So today Christ encourages you to make Christ your top priority. For you will receive true treasure and you will enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die for our sins when a Rich Young Man came up to him and asked him: **What must I do to inherit eternal life?** He asked question that many still ask today. It’s natural for man to think that we must contribute somehow in some way to our salvation. This man wanted to save himself so Jesus told him what he had to do. He had to keep the commandments perfectly. Jesus listed fourth through eighth commandments. They could be summarized by, **love your neighbor as yourself**, which is actually included in Matthew’s account of this story.

All these I have kept since I was a boy, the man said. We scoff at such a thought. But isn’t that what much of the world thinks? They believe that they are basically good people who do what is right. And because of who they are and what they have done they can earn their way to eternal life. As Christians we know better—so did Jesus. Yet Jesus decided to play along with the Young Man.

Fine, Jesus said, if you want to earn your own way to eternal life there is just one more thing you need to do. **Sell everything you have and give to the poor... Then come, follow me.** Jesus had led him to consider his life according to the second table of the law. Now he pointed him toward the first commandment. Get rid of everything you have. Don’t worry about your money or your possessions. Get rid of it all, and follow me. If you do this, you will have eternal life. So all you have to do is obey the first commandment. It all comes down to loving God above all things. Make him your number one priority. If you do this perfectly, you will have eternal life. So Jesus was seeing how much this man loved God. Did he love God, or did he love the world? Did he love money and his possessions, or the Lord? All it comes down to is the first commandment. What was his number one priority?

The Rich Young Man showed his true colors. **When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.** The man loved money. He loved the things of this world. He cared more about his wealth than God. So he walked away. He left Christ—

refusing to follow him. We left sad and greatly upset. Upset because he wasn't willing to give up all his possessions for Christ. We are never told what happened to this man. Perhaps he repented and followed Christ. But we simply don't know. But we do know what would have happened to the man if he never repented. He would have perished in his unbelief. He would then suffer forever with the devil. For he chose money over God. Earthly wealth became his god.

What about you? Has earthly wealth become your god? Now, God will never demand you to give up all your possessions. But he does want you to give generously to him. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** He also says, **On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up.** God wants us to save a portion of our income and give to him on a regular basis. It's a planned, cheerful giving—not because we feel forced into it. It's a giving on the basis of our income. Both rich and the poor, the young and the old, are to give to God out of thanks and praise. And we give to God first, and we give to him our best. As Solomon said in Proverbs, **Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.**

Is that what you do? Or are you like the Rich Young Man? Judge yourself. You just received your giving statements through nine months. Or maybe you didn't because you didn't give anything. Where are your priorities? Is God number one? Did you give to God first? Did you give to God your best? Or did you keep some back, did you give to him only after you have spent on yourself—did you give to him only what is left, or not at all? Where do your priorities lie? With God, or with your money? With the spread of his gospel, or with worldly possessions?

As Christians our priorities lie with Christ. God and his Word is always number one in our lives. So we give to him willing and cheerfully? Why? Paul alludes to the answer in verse 22. He said sell everything you have, and then: **you will have treasure in heaven.** What is true treasure? Eternal life—which we receive through faith. For it is faith that receives all the blessings that Christ won for us. It is through faith that we are saved.

It is God who gives us this faith. It is through the gospel that the Holy Spirit brings us faith. When we hear the Word our faith is strengthened. So this faith is something we cannot gain on our own. It is a gift of God. And through this God-given faith we have the forgiveness of sins. Through it, we have eternal life. So through faith we have true treasure. The treasure of heaven. So we don't care about worldly wealth—it's not true treasure. Our top priority is God and his Word. We choose him over any amount of worldly wealth.

God is the number one priority in our lives, because not only does he give us true treasure, but he also leads us to enter the kingdom of God.

It really doesn't matter whether or not you consider yourself rich. If it's not money that entices you it's something else. We have all things that tempt us away from God. From time to time we put things ahead of God in our lives. What is it for you? What have you put as more important in your life than God? What keeps you away from studying God's Word? What has kept you away from worship? Is it your family? Your job? Sleeping in, having fun, hunting, your favorite hobby? What was so important that you just had to do it? What is so important that you have placed it above God in your lives? Or what has enticed you away, that you don't obey God's Word. Is it your own sexual wants and desires—that you have placed above God's will for marriage? Is it the desire to be liked or to save face, so that you don't share the gospel with anyone as God commands? Maybe it's your own feelings and emotions—or perhaps even your own ego. Something happened that offended you at church, so you are going to stay away from it to make a point. What is so important that it leads you to disobey God? What is so great about it that it has become your number one priority?

If it's not clear by now, it should be: We can't save ourselves. That is because we can't keep the commandments. Not the second table. And certainly not the first commandment. For we constantly fail to put God first in our lives. We put the things of this world ahead of him, making the world our number one priority. We bow down and worship that the altar of the almighty dollar, our own reputation, or own wants and desires. If our salvation depended on our keeping of

the first commandment, then we would walk away sad and dejected like the Rich Young Man.

After he left, Jesus said **How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, 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.**

A camel is one of the largest animals on this earth. The eye of a needle is only a few millimeters in diameter. It's not possible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Even the thought of it is ridiculous. So it's not possible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Why? Because they care too much about their wealth. But Jesus' disciples understood what he was saying. So they asked Jesus, **Who then can be saved?** No one can. If the rich can't save themselves, then no one can. For we all care too much about the world. We all fail to keep the first commandment.

It may be impossible for us, but not for God. There are plenty of rich people in heaven. Abraham comes to mind. So does David. You will be in heaven. Despite of your sins, despite all the times you have failed to put God first in your life, you will be in heaven. Not because of anything you have done. But because of Christ and his work. It may be impossible for you to keep the first commandment, but not Jesus. As God he never once failed to put God first in his life. He kept all of the commandments perfectly. And that perfection is now credited to us. For Christ became our substitute. As true God and true man he was able to pay our price. And he was able to give us his life. His obedience has been credited to us. His perfect life is now our perfect life. His obedience is now our obedience.

So it is only because of Christ that we are saved. Through him and him alone we have the forgiveness of sins. Through him and him alone our sins have been paid for. Through him and him alone we have eternal life. The Rich Young Man asked Jesus what must he do to be saved. The answer is nothing. There is nothing we can do to be saved. For Christ has done it all for us already.

Through faith we have what he has won for us. Christ now rules in our hearts through faith. He has brought us into his kingdom. And he will be with us until he takes us home. And there in heaven we will dwell with our Savior forever. And there we will enjoy and the glories

and riches of life with our Savior. And that is far more precious than anything this world has to offer.

Jesus says in Matthew 6, **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** Our treasure is not on this earth. Our treasure is in heaven. It is with our God and Savior. It is on things above, not on things below. Our heart is on God. Our heart is on his Word. He is our number one priority. He comes first in our lives. After him comes everyone and everything else. For no one else can save us and give us eternal life. No one else has accomplished the impossible for us!

The first commandment demands that God holds first place in our lives—that we make him our number one priority, that he takes precedent over our hobbies, our jobs, our wealth, or even our families. Yet it's impossible for us to keep this commandment. But not for God. And his obedience is now ours. He has done the impossible for us. So we make him our number one priority—because he made us his. Amen.