



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 25, 2009

21st Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 10:17-27

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 2 Kings 5:14-27

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90

Second Lesson: Hebrews 13:1-6

Gospel: Mark 10:17-27

Love the Lord Your God Above All Else

Through prodding of the Holy Spirit, Solomon once said, "There's nothing new under the sun." We had what I thought was a fairly interesting Bible Study this morning looking at the Book of Haggai. We could see exactly how true it is that what the people went through in the time of Haggai mirrors what our country is going through and what we, as a congregation, are going through. I found it kind of interesting and insightful. It kind of opened my eyes to why God says, "It's not multiple choice. I really want you to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I really want you to be as iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another. I really want you to get into the Word of God and use it to build up and encourage one another. That's why I didn't leave it an option. That's why I just said to do it." I can see this morning why the Lord speaks that way.

Nothing new under the sun; we see that in what I just read to you from the Gospel of Mark. The love of money has always been a struggle for people that walk the face of this earth. It's one of the temptations Satan used to try to trip Jesus up because he knows how well it works on the people that Jesus created.

So this morning we see and take a look at this threat that comes to doing what our Lord has asked us to do. We see how often we all created this, and we see it in ways that maybe we don't like to hear, but in ways that our God speaks to us because he loves us, just as he showed his love to this rich young man this morning by laying bear his sin.

We are told in the parallel accounts in the other Gospels that this guy was young. We are told here he is wealthy. We are told he has a real desire to see Jesus. He ran up to him. You kids here this morning; how many of you ran to the car to get to church? How many of you had to be dragged by your parents to get going so you wouldn't be late? He ran up to see Jesus. Then what did he do when he got there? He threw himself at Jesus' knees. He threw himself on the ground. This guy wanted to see Jesus! And by his actions, he's telling us he thought Jesus was pretty doggone important, right? When was the last time you threw yourself on your knees in front of anybody when you didn't just trip?

The he asked Jesus a question. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Another Gospel says, "What good thing must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus picks up on the use of the word "good" and reminds him that his question is flawed when he

says, "Good? There's no one that is that good to be right with God except God himself. Nobody is good, completely good, or absolutely holy, except God himself." But then he goes forward and says, "You want to approach God on the basis of what you do?" The commands, that's what we do and what we don't do right? On the basis of the Law, "Let's talk about what we are supposed to do and not do. You know the commandments." And notice that as he goes over the commandments, he goes over everything basically in the second table of the Law; how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. He doesn't address the first table of the Law, loving God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind at all yet, does he?

So the guy hears all these and he's ticking them off in his head. "I never killed anyone. I never slept with anyone outside of marriage. I never stole. I never lied. I didn't defraud someone. I've honored my father and mother. I've done all these. Check, check and check; Jesus, I did them all. Since I was a kid I've done them all." There is nothing to indicate that this guy wasn't an outwardly great person.

Our society conditions us nowadays to think that anyone that has wealth is inherently evil, right? "They got their wealth because they screwed the little guy and they've taken advantage of them. They're just pure evil walking the face of this earth, and we've got to do everything we can to hurt them because they're evil." That's a load of garbage!

We aren't told this guy is evil. We have no reason to doubt that he didn't do all of these things, and that he wasn't a kind and loving man, and that he wasn't a good man. If you think just because you hear he's rich he has to be evil, you've bought in to one of the world's lies.

But now Jesus looks at him and sees this desire to serve God and loves him. He looks at him, loves him, and knows he has to show him where he falls short. If he doesn't see his own sin, he doesn't see any need for a Savior at all, right? So Jesus says to him, "Go sell everything you have. Give to the poor and then come follow me, and you will have incredible treasures in heaven." Is this the way Jesus is teaching to enter eternal life? No, he tells us, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." But this guy did not see the need for a Savior from sin yet because he didn't see his own sin. This statement is designed to show that he loves things more than he loves God, and the things that he has that his money could provide for him are things that he loved more than he loved God. When we are told, "At this the man's face fell," literally it says, "At this, the man became appalled," you can kind of picture the change in his face. He is appalled. "You want me to do what?"

Then he went away because he had great wealth and the idea of getting rid of it all just to be closer to God? It wasn't going to happen.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind." Before we get on our high horse and say, "I'd never do something like that rich, young man" or "I'm not rich. I'm glad I'm not rich because it's so hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven." When Jesus says "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God,"

literally he says, "How hard it is for those who have things to enter the kingdom of God." Think about it for a minute. When you go home today look around your house. Do you think you have one or two more "things" than the people of Jesus' day had? Do you think we have so many gizmos and gadgets that if they saw us talking into these little hand things they would think we are some kind of gods? If the people of Jesus' day saw all the "things" that we have, what would they think? We are loaded to the brim with gizmos and gadgets, aren't we? And the things that our money can buy become a stumbling block in our lives of serving God.

Do you doubt me? I'll prove it. Last week we had to cut our budget because over the last few years, what has come in has gone up every year but it hasn't matched how much more we, as a congregation, have said that we want to spend. We want to have a fifth teacher and about every year we are close to that much money behind. About five years I think we've been doing that.

If at our next voters' meeting we say, "Now to save even more money, we are going to have to cut out Thursday night church. We are going to have to cut out Bible studies. We shouldn't have so many Bible studies. And we are going to cut back on all those things." There might be a few people that might get a little upset and say, "That's what we are here for. We should be doing those things." But the majority of people come to worship on Sunday, not on Thursday, so they wouldn't miss that. The majority of our people don't come to Bible study, so they probably wouldn't miss that.

But if I said to you "We also decided at our meeting last week to eliminate grade school basketball because of all the electricity it uses and all the things that it does that impact the bottom line of our budget," do you think there would be a little bit louder hue and cry about "We can't do that," than if we said we are going to have eliminate some programs that bring us the Word of God? I don't think the echo would have died of saying there isn't going to be grade school basketball before we'd have something there to fix it. I don't think it would take five years. Do you think I'm wrong?

The question I have to ask and the question that we each have to ask ourselves is, what does that reveal about what we love the most? At times do we love what money can provide for us more than we love God? I think the answer is obvious, isn't it?

I remember when we talked about bringing up an education fee. I remember at that voters' meeting the voters said, "It won't fix the problem. Why should we do it?" Well, last week we passed a budget that has about \$45,000-\$50,000 shortfall after we cut all the staff salary by 5%. It didn't fix the problem, but I didn't hear anybody say it last week. Now is it because, "That didn't affect my pocket book, so let's go ahead and cut that, but the other one might have affected my pocket book, so we can't do that"? Tough questions, aren't they? But these are questions we have to ask so that we see where we stumble and fall and don't love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind.

Now, let's be straight and be clear on this. Before you say, "The big guy in white up there is just whining because his salary got cut," know that I'm the guy that made the motion to cut my salary because I think something has to be done. We can't continue going in the same direction that we've been going. So I'm not whining about less in my pocket book.

Do we always love God the way we should? I think the answer is obviously "no." I think we try to make multiple choice out of what God has said to do for him. God has said, "Love me completely. Give me your time, your talents and your treasures. Commit them to me. They belong to me because I've loved you with an everlasting love, and I've taken away your sins. I've opened heaven to you. Now here's how you respond and serve me." He said, "Serve me with your time. Serve me with your talents. Serve me with your treasures." It troubles me when I hear our members at times say, "Well, I'm giving less to church because I volunteer my time." Not that "I'm not giving as much as I want," but "I am giving less because I am serving with my time." God hasn't said do this or that. He said to do both. When do we get to make God's clear statements multiple choice?

It's kind of back to where we started with Bible study, too. That's not multiple choice. God has said he wants us to grow in grace and knowledge. It's only when we grow in grace and knowledge that we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. The only thing that fixes these financial barriers that we erect when we love self or money or the things money can buy for us more than what it could do for God is to fix our eyes on Jesus. And I think Satan knows that. And that's why he gets into our heads and he gets us not talking about Jesus as the answer. He gets us pointing fingers.

Did you ever hear anyone say, "Look at all those people that give zero in their envelopes. If they would give more, then we'd fix the problem." Do you see what Satan is doing? He's getting us to look at other people instead of looking at ourselves. I can't control my house cat and I'm supposed to control what other people give? I can't control other people. I can only control me. You can only control you. So God wants you to look in your heart and ask yourself the tough questions and come to honest answers and then apply it in your life. When we do that, then we have to look at who God is and what he has done. We have to look at his love and how he has forgiven us. We have to see that all things are possible with God. He has taken people like you and me, people who have all kinds of things, and has washed away our sins. He has given us eternal life. He baptized us into Jesus' name so now we are little Jesus' running around here. And when we focus on Jesus, we can do incredible things. But the more Satan can get us focused on each other saying, "They should be doing this. They should be doing that," instead of looking at the only thing we can control – our actions. I can't believe for you and I can't make you do what you should be doing. I can teach. I can admonish. I can rebuke, but I can't control. I can control how I am going to respond to God. The more we focus on that, we focus on Jesus. The more Jesus then does incredible things.

All the times that we've pointed the finger at everyone else, that just fills hell with Satan's cackling, doesn't it? He's got us looking in the wrong direction. When we come to the Lord's altar and we kneel next to each other, we shouldn't be thinking "that person over there doesn't give enough." We should be thinking "This is great! We are all blood-bought souls and here is our Savior saying, 'This is my body. This is my blood. It has opened heaven for you. It has taken away all your sins. It has washed away all the times you have not loved God above everything else.'" Then that changes us. It renews us. And it leads us to answer some tough questions, but in the right way—by looking at ourselves. That's all we can control.

Camels, eye of a needle? God's done it. He's opened heaven for you and for me.