



In 2005 a 43-year-old mother in Connecticut decided to go shopping. She didn't know that this shopping trip would end up gaining national attention. It was 88 degrees and a sunny July day when she parked her car in the lot and went shopping. Apparently, she was too busy with shopping to bring along her 23-month-old son, so she left him in the hot car. Around twenty minutes later she returned to find she had made a terrible mistake. She had not only left her toddler son to sit in a horribly hot car and endanger his life, she had locked her keys in the car with him. When the fire department arrived, they were ready to rescue the child by breaking open a window. But when this mother heard about it she objected. She didn't want to damage her 1999 Audi and instead asked to catch a ride home and get a spare set of keys. Needless to say, the firefighters broke the window and rescued the boy immediately after his mother left the parking lot. When she returned they had her arrested for reckless child endangerment. Talk about misguided priorities! Could our priorities ever get so far out of line? Jesus helps us to see when we might be in danger of making an even bigger mistake. He encounters a man who has his priorities all wrong. This morning we continue our "Family Values" series. And we see how our family gets its priorities straight.

This morning we encounter a man who at first glance seems to have all his priorities in order. He fell down on his knees before Jesus. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He wanted the teacher to grade his homework.

Jesus responds by directing the man to see his situation. "Why do you call me good?" he answered. "No one is good—except God alone." Jesus was not denying his divinity. He was getting the man to realize just how true it is that no one is really good before God. As we read in Romans and throughout Scripture, "There is no one who does good, not even one."

Jesus pointed to God's standards. "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.'" To be good in God's eyes requires that you keep his commands. But when we look at the commandments, who can say they are good? "Do not murder." Jesus says hatred makes you guilty of breaking this command in the heart. Luther rightly expounds on this command saying if we don't help and protect others we are guilty of breaking this command. If thoughts of hurt or hate and failures to help break this commandment, then who is good? "Do not commit adultery." God says keeping this commandment involves more than avoiding improper sexual activity. It means always having pure thoughts. Who is pure? "Do not steal." I haven't stolen, at least not anything which I consider to valuable enough to really call it stealing. Am I still good in God's eyes? "Do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." Who can say they are good and have perfectly kept any of these commandments since birth? That's why the apostle John can write, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8)

But the man before Jesus was oblivious to his failure to be good. "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." "I'm as good as they come, Jesus!" He was deceiving himself.

But does this surprise us? The world around us full of people deceiving themselves. I'm sure you've met this man. There are billions of people who have this plan for judgment day: Fall on the knees before God and plead, "I've done my best. I was a good neighbor. I helped others. I was a good mother or father."

This man was deceiving himself; but God wasn't deceived. Jesus looked at him lovingly. Not because he was a "good person" but because he was one of the lost. And he then told that man what most of us find very difficult to tell a 'good' person. "You're not good enough!" "One thing you lack," Jesus said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

What a demand! Wasn't Jesus going too far? He doesn't tell us to do this! We have no command to sell everything we own. He didn't tell the wealthy Abraham to do this! Job was very rich and wasn't required to do this. Many of Jesus' supporters were independently wealthy too. Why does he require this man to liquidate his possessions and give away all his wealth?

Jesus was pointing out to this man his very basic mistake. He thought he had nearly done enough to earn eternal life. But Jesus exposed this man's most obvious fault. He valued his earthly riches above God. The man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. When he had to decide between his wealth and leaving it all to follow Jesus, he left Jesus behind. In pride he clung to his wealth and tossed aside Jesus. Talk about misguided priorities! "I'm a good person. How dare you imply I haven't done enough!" The mere thought of his money as a source of his sin was too much for him. How impossible it was for him to gain eternal life! He couldn't even keep the first commandment!

Consider your own great wealth. I'm sure there are few here who can honestly say God hasn't blessed them with an abundance of possessions. And no, I'm not saying we need to sell all our possessions or that it is sinful to be rich. But our wealth can tempt us to making a very basic mistake! It is good if we are faithful stewards and control our money. But it is another thing when our wealth starts to control us. We swallow many obvious lies as money becomes our master. "You need

a new phone, a new camera, a bigger and better TV, you need this." A major retailer had a marketing slogan that summed it up in one word with various pictures of its products, "want?"

Treasure in heaven? No, first it's treasures on earth. Hearts cling to this vice, whether a person is good by the world's standards or not. Satan uses our wealth to get us to find treasure apart from Jesus. "Go ahead, buy it! You don't work so hard every day to just support your family and the church, do you? Just cut back on your offerings a little. Put it on your MasterCard! This will make you happy!" We believe we can find goodness in stuff in place of our God. We can become so busy chasing after wealth and what money buys that we miss out on chasing after the One who gives it all to us! Talk about misguided priorities!

And our sinful nature clings to our wealth in a constant struggle against the new man. The thought comes up, "Do I support the church's latest plea for mission support or do I use my money to buy what I've got my own heart really set on?" I know these thoughts have sometimes crossed my mind. We might not even give a thought to the fact that our church's world missionaries have sometimes been recalled, not due to lack of desire to serve or the need for workers, but due to lack of support. We might be too busy supporting our entertainment budget and our bellies to notice. Finally, does it always come to mind with every dollar you earn, "Good now I have more money to help others and give back to God"? How impossible it is for us to gain eternal life! We can't even keep the first commandment!

For this reason, Jesus goes on to instruct his disciples on what it takes to obtain real treasure. Looking around at his disciples he said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ...Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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." This is a hyperbole, an extreme statement meant to drive forward a point: It is impossible. The disciples were amazed! "If it is impossible for such a good man, what about everyone else? What about me? Who then can be saved?" None of us have the capacity to gain eternal life. It is impossible. There was a Somalian pirate crew that once thought it had the perfect plan. Seven pirates in 2010 spotted their target in the distance. They readied their vessel in pursuit. In the dark of night, they fired their guns and shouted over the loudspeaker orders to halt and prepare to be boarded. They were going to loot the ship. Then they realized too late that stealing treasure from this ship would be impossible. It was the USS Ashland, a warship of the United States Navy. Seven pirates with AK-47s didn't stand a chance against it. Those seven pirates had a better chance of taking on the whole United States Navy than anyone does earning eternal life by their own works. It is impossible.

The problem wasn't that the man became sorrowful, but that in his sorrow he went away from Jesus. "Who can be saved?" the disciples wondered. Jesus' answer points to the grace and mercy of God. "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Because we could not gain the impossible treasure of eternal life, Jesus, who alone is good, did it for us. God is alone truly good. When we call God good, we are speaking of more than his justice and holiness. We are also speaking about his great mercy and love. God would not just leave the sinner to face the impossible task of obtaining eternal life. In love he sent his Son.

In love God's Son, Jesus, came to this world. He was rich beyond our understanding. He who created all that exists and had all glory and power set aside these riches. He became poor and lowly. In order to bring us into God's family Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became our brother. With a humble birth he took on human flesh. He set aside his divine glory in order to live the life we could not. He came to live in our place. For all the times that we became guilty of murder by our thoughts of hatred or hurtful actions he lived without such thoughts. For all our impure thoughts or actions that make us guilty of adultery, he was perfectly pure. He did not steal, he spoke with a perfectly honest mouth, he never even once defrauded or cheated someone. For all the times we said, "no" to our parents, he said "yes," -even to the point of carrying out the plan for him die in our place on the cross. This holy and perfect life is credited to us. God gives us the impossible: forgiveness of sins and a place in his family.

Because through Jesus we now belong to God, we are heirs of an inheritance beyond all treasure of this world. You will not have to fall on your knees and plead your own case before God on Judgment Day. He himself, the King, will say to you, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Mt 25:34-35) Notice it really is an inheritance. Sadly, I'm told many families struggle to gain favor of their parents so that they can get a bigger inheritance. Siblings strive and quarrel for the inheritance their wealthy parents will pass on. But that's not what our good God does for his children. He tells us all it is impossible to obtain his gifts by our own efforts. Instead he freely gives it to all through his Son. We don't earn it. We inherit it despite the fact that we are not good. That's grace, God's great love for the sinner. That's his great love for you and me.

Now, when God does bless us with earthly wealth and possessions --which we are so prone to place in value above him-- we take control of that wealth and don't let it control us. And by our very use of our wealth we thank God for that wealth and for our greatest treasure: eternal life. We have a new set of priorities in life! It starts with putting ourselves last and our gracious Savior Jesus first.

We belong to a family that has a Father who made us his top priority. Jesus become our brother and made us his top priority. Our family has a new set of priorities. Our inheritance awaits us.