



Grace and peace to you from God our
Father and from Jesus Christ who alone
accomplishes everything we need, amen.

If this sermon doesn't seem quite up to par,

I admit I had trouble this week finding the right

words for today. It isn't that the text is especially difficult. I think I understand what is going on in the Gospel. The problem is that I'm too much like the man asking Jesus what I must do in order to inherit eternal life. I think I'm too close to the story and I don't like where I stand in relation to Jesus and the requirements He sets before the rich young man. That's what troubles me. I do understand what Jesus is saying about discipleship and I don't like it. Possessions and money rule our lives. If you notice a problem in the world, I don't care what the problem is, follow the money. In the end, it's always about the money. Whatever great debates we have in our Church or Society today it's always about the money. Jesus talks about money a lot, in fact there are 40 occasions when Jesus discusses finances with the disciples through parables and teachings. The only subject Jesus talks about more than money is the Kingdom of God and today we're lucky enough to hear Him talk about both money and the Kingdom. If all you go by is this Gospel text, it seems we must give all we have to the poor in order to make eternal

life possible. This, as a long time Lutheran, is difficult for me to swallow. I want my Grace free and I want it now!

Most of us would never consider ourselves rich. By the standards of our country most of us are not rich, but when compared to the rest of the world we have wealth unimaginable to the average person living south of the equator. Yet we struggle, we work hard for our money, we earn what we get paid and it's never enough... We look around and it always seems like everyone has more stuff than we do. The television keeps telling me I'm no good unless I have the latest and greatest iPod or Android, or the best line of men's clothing from the Men's Warehouse, and the best engineered European BMW, Audi, or Mercedes. No, we are certainly not rich, are we? Besides, when did being rich become something to be ashamed of and a sin anyway?

In the story world of our Gospel, being rich was considered a blessing from God. It was a reward for being a righteous person. The notion of riches being a blessing from God is prevalent throughout the Bible in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the first century a faithful, good, righteous, heaven bound Jew was rewarded by God with lots of children, lots of health, and lots of money. Wealth was seen as a sign of God's blessing. We still believe the truth of this today. We say things like, our country is 'blessed' by wealth and a strong economy. God provides all good things, I assume by 'good things' we mean wealth and the things

money can buy. In the Bible, Abraham was blessed with land and children, Solomon was given great wealth when he only asked for wisdom. On the other hand, people who are poor or blighted by illness or disability were looked on as being unclean, impure, and sinful. Suffering and affliction were and are still looked upon as God somehow punishing us. When something goes wrong in our lives the first thing that comes to mind is, “what have I done to deserve this?” Jesus turns all this around by pointing out to this rich man that his inability to detach himself from his money and be in relationship with the poor makes it impossible for him to enter the Kingdom of God or to inherit eternal life. His attachment to his riches hold him back from inheriting the thing he seeks. If the rich, those who are blessed by God, can’t make it, then what chance is there for the rest of us? See my problem? Jesus says, “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 person to enter the Kingdom of God.” I don’t write this stuff, I just preach it...

The solution posed in our text today is not that we should all go sell off all our possessions, give all the money to the poor and then follow Jesus. That would be gross misinterpretation of this scripture. Giving all our money away can’t be the requirement for everyone because there are other stories where Jesus doesn’t require such sacrifice. Salvation came to the chief tax collector, Zacchaeus in

Luke's Gospel (19:8) when he gave only half of his wealth to the poor. If it isn't the amount or the percentage of our income or our overall wealth that we give to God and if it isn't keeping the Laws or the Ten Commandments that opens the stairway to Heaven, then what can I *do* what can we *do* to inherit eternal life?

Sometimes it's fun to imagine a different outcome when reading these stories from the Bible. I like to let my imagination run a little, so let's just take a moment to speculate what if the rich man had agreed to sell everything? What if he really did what Jesus asked of him, what then Jesus, huh, huh? Does he earn the prize then? I don't think it would be that easy... It would go more like this... Jesus says, "Bravo young man! Now you must fast for an entire year. When you finish that, I need you to wipe out leprosy in your lifetime. Then, pray on your knees while crawling across the desert all the way to the top of Mount Sinai. When you've finished that..." I wonder at what point does the man reach his breaking point. When does he say, "Jesus it is too much, I can't." At that point, the breaking point, the Law has done its job! The man is broken. He finally understands the total impossibility of *doing* anything to earn eternal life. And he goes away sad and dejected because the thing he wanted, he cannot obtain through his own effort or ability. Main purpose of the Law comes down this, none of us can make it by counting on our ability to keep the Law. If there is nothing we can

do, then who can be saved? Now I am broken... I am in despair... If the Law has accomplished its job, you are too.

With mortals it is impossible, but nothing is impossible for God. The man in our text for today walked away sad, but that man lived while Jesus was still on the Way. That's how this Gospel text begins, Jesus is on the way. On the way to where? He is on the way up to Jerusalem, the place where God will make all things possible. Jesus looked on this rich young man and our text says He loved him. This is the only place in the entire Bible where Jesus loved a specific person. It's this love that propels Jesus the rest of the way to Jerusalem where He crawled, not across the desert or up Mount Sinai on His knees, but he crawled up on that cross out of love in order to *do* what we cannot.

What is your breaking point? Is it your possessions, your job, your family? Where you place your trust, that's your idol. What hold you back from completely giving your life to Jesus, that's where the Law comes to bear on your life. We all have a breaking point. I know mine is still that forgiveness thing... That point when you say Jesus, I can't, or more honestly, Jesus I won't... Once you discover your breaking point, you understand your limits and the door to the grace of God is opened for you.

How important is it to answer the rich man's question? Do we even care about getting to heaven or inheriting the Kingdom of God anymore? Is any of this stuff still relevant for us today? C.S. Lewis wrote, "If you read history you find the Christians who did the most for the present world were those who thought most about the next. The Apostles who converted the entire Roman Empire, the great men like Martin Luther who began the great reformation, the English evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It's since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that we have become so ineffective in this one. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither." (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: Collier Books, 1960], p. 118)

May you finally stop chasing after the lesser glories of this world and seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. May God bless you that you may bless others by loving neighbor as yourself. May you realize there is nothing you can do to inherit eternal life and simply fall to your knees and give God praise and thanksgiving for the self-sacrificial love that has already paid the price for your admission into eternal life. Thanks be to God, amen.