

Sermon Mark 10 23 31 21st S af Pentecost S B
Sermon: 21st Sunday after Pentecost
Text: Mark 10:23-31

Theme: Who can be saved?

Goal: To show God's grace saving everyone who believes in Jesus and follows Him.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: This Gospel is a continuation of the story of last Sunday, The Rich Young Man, being a complement to that episode. Based on *the tragic decision* of the rich man, who decided *to turn away* and to NOT follow Jesus (which *reflected a greater love for his possessions than for eternal life*) (CSSB 1522), Jesus warns His disciples against love for money and teaches them about salvation by grace alone as a gift of God, and not as something that we can afford by our own merits or efforts. This was the main point of Luther's Reformation work, re-discovering the key truth of the Bible: Salvation by grace alone,(SOLA GRATIA) through faith in Jesus (SOLA FIDE).

I – No one can be saved by himself

The rich young man was confident that he had obeyed the Ten Commandments since he was a boy. He was trusting in himself and in his possessions. This kept him from following Jesus, because his heart was bound to his richness. When he “went away sad, because he had great wealth, Jesus said: How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!” Jesus repeated His words because of the amazed reaction of the disciples: “How hard it is to enter the kingdom of God.” - Jesus didn't mention “the rich” in His second statement; this means: He includes everyone. And He added: It is impossible for men to enter the Kingdom of God by themselves. “The disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, 'Who then can be saved?’”

This question and this situation take us back to our sinful origin and to our total incapacity to open the gates of the Paradise by ourselves and to enter God's kingdom by our own merits and efforts. Conscious of his incapacity to please God and to get eternal life by his own efforts, the young Martin Luther reached the edge of desperation. Even as a monk and as a priest at the beginning of his ministry, Luther was always depressed by his sinful state and he was always afraid of God. He tried his best to obey the Commandments and all the rules of the church and of the monastery. But nothing could give him peace of mind and assurance of the Kingdom of God. He became more and more desperate in himself. He wrote in an auto-biographical hymn his story and experiences: *My own good works/ all came to naught, / No grace or merit gaining; / Free will against God's judgment fought, / Dead to all good remaining,/ My fears increased till sheer despair, / Left only death to be my share, / The pangs of hell I suffered.* (LW 353, 3).

Jesus is even harder in His teaching when He says: “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 camel was the largest animal found in Palestine. The vivid contrast between the largest animal and the smallest opening represents what, humanly speaking, is impossible* (CSSB 1522).

This warning of Jesus is not just against the rich who trust in their possessions. But it is against everyone who doesn't trust in God above all things. Luther wrote in the Large Catechism: *to have a god is to have something in which the heart entirely trusts... upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.... So, too, whoever trusts and boasts that he possesses great (wealth), skill, prudence, power, favor friendship, and honor has also a god, but not this true and only God. This appears again when you notice how presumptuous, secure, and proud people are because of such possessions, and how despondent when they no longer exist or are withdrawn. Therefore I repeat that the chief explanation of this point (the First Commandment) is that to have a god is to have something in which the heart entirely trusts.* (Luther, 1st Comm, Large Catechism).

The human answer to the disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" is: NO ONE can be saved by his own efforts or merits!

II – God wants to save all by His grace in Jesus

But Jesus doesn't stop His teaching at this point of desperation. He affirms: "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God!" - even the salvation of the rich and of everyone! *Christ can do what we cannot do.* (SB 244).

God made the salvation of humankind possible through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. He paid the ransom on the cross! He won the battle against death as He appeared alive again on Easter morning! He opened the gate of the Kingdom of God to all who follow Him by faith. What is impossible for man, God made it possible in Christ. "This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him!" (1 John 4:9).

When Luther realized that salvation doesn't depend on his own efforts, but it is a free gift of God to all who believe, he reported: *At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live." There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by the gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness of God with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me."* (Wood, p. 52- Internet).

In the hymn that I previously mentioned, Luther wrote: *But God had seen my wretched state/ Before the world's foundation,/ And mindful of His mercies great, / He planned for my salvation./ He turned to me a*

father's heart;/ He did not choose the easy part/ But gave His dearest treasure. (LW 353,4). The hymn goes on describing Jesus' work for us. (You can read the entire hymn in your hymnal: # 353).

III – God's blessing upon His followers

God is so good that He not only saves us by grace, but He pours out lot of blessings upon the followers of His Son, Jesus. He gives hundred times more brothers and sisters and whatever more we need. This is the Holy Christian Church, God's big family, our extended family. My wife and I have experienced these blessings in the various places we have visited and have lived.

But even these blessings are not a guarantee for salvation, as some think. Peter thought that, because he and his fellows had left everything to follow Jesus, they would deserve a reward. They were not like the rich young man, who didn't follow Jesus because of his richness. Jesus tells about blessings, but at the same time He warns the disciples not to be proud about this, and says that persecution follows a Christian as well.

Luther wrote in the above mentioned hymn about the Christian life: *To me He (Jesus) said: Stay close to me/ I am your rock and castle./ Your ransom I myself will be;/ For you I strive and wrestle; / For I am yours, and you are Mine, / And where I am you may remain;/ The foe shall not divide us.* (LW 353,7).

Conclusion: By God's grace we are what we are. We shall serve Him with a thankful heart and with a godly life, shinning to others His love and His grace in Jesus Christ. When life comes to its end, nothing what we have or did will recommend us or take us to the heavenly kingdom but Jesus alone. In Him we shall trust above all things in the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit, and shall follow Him each day of our lives. Amen.