

2024 Mark 10

This text had me in a pretzel all week long. Not because I didn't know what to say about it. But because there is too much to say about it! How can you cover it all with any sense of coherence? Now, a good pastor would just pick one of the topics to focus in on for one sermon, but, well, no one is good except God alone, right?

On the surface we have a man who asks about his works and Jesus answers with seemingly, only works. Is Jesus affirming that works get you eternal life? No. We know Jesus' teaching, we know the Gospel, we know why he had to go to the cross, because our works CAN'T get us to eternal life. So what is Jesus doing then?

We must go to another level. And I think we get this right? And so we talk of this account as Jesus walking the man down the "works path" so that he can see that it does not end in life, but sorrow. "You want to play the works game, young man? We'll play. Lets talk commandments, oh you think you got those down? Well here is another command for you... " And it's one he cannot keep, at least not that we see, and so he sees this path of works leads to, not eternal life, but sorrow.

We are left unsatisfied. Did the man ever sell all he had? Or did he despair? Did that despair drive him back to Jesus and the freedom of Salvation by Grace alone? We don't know. Perhaps because, that's what actually happened, and perhaps then we, as rich as we are in modern America, might ask ourselves the same questions: Would we sell all we have to follow Jesus? "Oooh, careful pastor, that's not a fun question." We like the second one better: Do we rejoice in the freedom of Salvation by Grace alone? Yeah, that's a better question isn't it?

Now I think many of us have heard this before, no? We've gotten to the second level before. We see the method to Jesus "madness" in walking with this man down the works path to show it ends in sorrow.

So yes, this reading impacts the Method of salvation, But folks, this text has so much more in it, or perhaps I could say, that teaching – the method of salvation, impacts so much more.

Consider the man, we would typically call him prideful. He thinks he is good. He thinks he kept all the commandments. You are right, he is prideful in that respect, in fact even more than we might expect because Jesus gave him a warning. Jesus said no one is good except God alone.

Which is not to push back on the man calling Jesus the Good Teacher, as if he isn't true God and therefore not good. No, Jesus agrees with him on that, and then clarifies that only God is good "so who would you be rich young man to say you were good and have kept all the commandments? Go listen to that sermon on the mount rich young man which applies these commandments to the heart – then see who is good." Yet still... the man thinks he's kept them all and thinks he is good. And so yes, we can check that box, he is prideful. And yet.... He kneels before Jesus, he calls him Good and longs to submit to his teaching. And he wants to know what to do to get eternal life – which implies... he isn't yet sure if he's done enough. And that folks is not pride, it is despair. And these are the only outcomes of a works-based salvation either you think you've done enough, or certainly more than that other person, so you are fine – or, or, maybe when you really think about it, when you really think about your mortality, when you are right there in front of Jesus the Good Teacher... well, "have I done enough? How can I be sure?" There's a whole lot of people out there and maybe in here who think they are good, will we be so bold when we see the King? And now you are in a scary place. This reading impacts how we view goodness and assurance.

This text impacts how we view the commandments. You will notice Jesus only lists what we call the second table – those final commandments that have to do with our relationship with our neighbor. Surely in regards to salvation he would bring up the first ones, no? About our relationship with God? Ah, but don't you see. If this man was trusting in his works, how well he kept the commandments, then that could not help but impact his relationship with God – what was he trusting in? Himself? His behavior? Is that a good god to trust in? Is that solid ground?

And so Jesus gives him another command to follow him – after, after, he sells all he has. The invitation is there – “follow me!” But it isn't Jesus keeping him from being a disciple, it's the man himself and his love of money. And now there are two things, his works, and his money, that are keeping him from following Jesus unto life. These are idols. And so we confess, as Luther explains in our catechisms, that “we should fear and love God so that we don't steal, commit adultery,” and so on, why? Because all the commandments have to do with the first commandment and God. This reading impacts who we trust in above all else.

And we are not immune to temptation here. We “tsk tsk” this man, but can we admit that we are tempted to trust in our works, or find security in idols, and can we just admit that we don't want to sell all we have and give to the poor, either? I don't. And we know that God has not issued this command to us but if that gives you relief, well why? It's because you do kind of love your money and think you need it. May we be a people who confess that. This reading impacts how we view our money.

Finally, we cannot miss how Jesus looks at the man and loves him. Right before plunging a dagger into his proud, but scared, idolatrous heart. Some loving action that is Jesus! But it is. In spite of society that only things agreeing and affirming is love. Jesus loves this man enough to let

him walk the path of good works, the path of sorrow, to see how it ends, that he might come and follow him.

Have you ever thought about that? In the midst of your trials and pains and fears, and sins. We go through these hardships and we think “surely it is because God is mad at me or distant from me.” But we see today that this man must walk through great introspection and struggle not because God hates him or is distant, but because God loves him.

He loves you. Maybe that’s why you have that trial. To wake you up, to strengthen you, to make you lean on him more. Maybe. And if that is the case, can we still say along with our Lord’s teaching today that God is good. And trust that he is working for our good. As he was working for this man’s?

And if that seems hard, well, perhaps we might synthesize the threads of this sporadic sermon.

I said this text informs the method of salvation. Which means salvation is brought about not by our work, but God’s. Specifically it is won on the cross and the empty tomb, which is then delivered to us in word and sacrament. And so the method of salvation takes our eyes of ourselves and our works and our feelings and outside of ourselves to a Savior.

I said this text informs how we view goodness and assurance. We lack what this man lacked, one thing, the goodness of God unto life. But now our eyes are not on ourselves but on the Savior and I might ask – is he good? No one is good but God alone. Yes, he is good. And if his goodness is given to you for free. Well then, how could we despair? It’s his goodness, it’s complete, how could we ever be doomed! And if it’s his goodness, how could we ever be prideful? We didn’t earn it, we didn’t purchase it, it was a gift – it says nothing about us, but, our eyes move again, it says everything about him.

I said this text impacts who we fear and trust in above all else. And here we sit with our sins and doubts and fears – can we say we have some perfect faith? No, ah, but now our eyes are on us again, not his work. Can we rather look outside of us to one who has made us his own? In baptism, in promises of his word? I fear and trust in him, not by force of my will, but by his gracious invitation to call and claim me – even when I was his enemy. I am a Christian, in other words, not by my work or decision, but by his.

Then we talked a bit about money. And I confessed that I think we like our money. But lets take our eyes off ourselves and put them on him once more. What did he sell and give to poor, miserable sinners like us? All he had! And not just possessions. The very clothes on his back were taken and replaced with whip scars, and the blood was poured out. And if we want to talk money – how much is one drop of that blood worth? That blood of God, who is Good, who is feared above all else? What's the price? What's the potency? Enough to wash you clean? Enough to make you good? Enough to save a world a thousand times over? Enough to make a universe new one day? Brothers and sisters the Lord looked on us sinners and he loved us and then he went himself into suffering, he was pierced, for that is how God's love is shown, in suffering.

And it hurts to partake in it, yes, but don't you see that there is the treasure in heaven that makes us rich! Therein lies Life eternal. It cannot be found in us or in a rich young man. No, we must look outside of ourselves to a risen Savior. Look there and find Goodness, assurance, very God of very God, a priceless sacrifice, and love that is faithful and steadfast to the end. Amen.