

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

I like this young man in our text. I like him for his zeal. He wanted to do good; he wanted to live a godly life. Not at all like many who chase after riches.

Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* prayed to the Lord, “*Oh, dear Lord! You made many, many poor people. I realize, of course, it’s no shame to be poor. But it’s no great honor either. So what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune?*” And then he sings with the giddiness of dreams: “*If I were a rich man Yubby dibby dibby dibby dibby dum ... I wouldn’t have to work hard Yubby dibby dibby,*” etc.

Now that’s not the young man in our text, though I submit, that’s the dream of many of us today, don’t you think? Strike it rich and all’s well. Kiss your problems goodbye. Kiss work goodbye. Easy street. “*I wouldn’t have to work hard! Yubby dibby dibby dibby dibby dum.*” Oh the deceitfulness of riches.

Last Thursday in LSUS’s chapel, Pr. McFadden, serving Mount Calvary, showed a news report of many who had done just that: struck it rich, hit the jackpot in the lottery, the Powerball, \$200 million. Wow! And their lives became a shambles after that, many ending up in short order in divorce, bankruptcy, and some in jail. It wasn’t for them, “*Yubby dibby dibby dibby dibby dibby dum.*” But more than that, the riches became all consuming, and when that happens, then there’s no room left for the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

You see, as Christians we can acknowledge the good gift of wealth in our lives. Wealth can be used to do many good and wonderful things—within the kingdom of God and without. But earthly prosperity and wealth is not what the kingdom of God is about. I know there are many who, under the guise of being a Christian preacher, speak of earthly wealth, material or bodily prosperity as the Christian objective. It’s called the “prosperity gospel,” but in the words of St. Paul, there is no Gospel other than the one that proclaims, “*the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*”

And if St. Paul warns us about the “*desire to be rich,*” about how easy it is through this desire to “*fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction,*” how much more so should your pastor warn you about those who preach to evoke those innate desires in you, warn you so that you may not wander away from the faith through this craving, for remember: it’s not the money itself, but “*the love of money [that] is a root of all kinds of evils.*”

But that, apparently, was not this young man in our text. He was much more pious than that. He was rich; this is true. But his desire was not to be a rich, **idle,**

deedle, daidle man. Rather he came up to Jesus, falling on his knees, to ask: “*Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

Listen to that! Isn't that wonderful?! It's similar for us. I mean, if we all have an earthly goal of having just a bit more than we have now — and that doesn't have to be selfish; we could want more so that we could do more to help others — so, if our earthly goal is to have a bit more, isn't our heavenly goal, our Christian goal, the same as this young man's? To inherit eternal life? To be with the Lord forever, to have restored to mankind what was ripped away when Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden? When they sinned eternal life was replaced with death. We want eternal life back; the young man wanted eternal life!

But you know the problem. “*By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight.*” The law just gives us the knowledge of sin; it increases our awareness of sin. You know, on the other hand, we are justified, that is, we receive “*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*” We “*are justified by [God's] grace [alone] as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as [an atoning sacrifice] by his blood, to be received by faith.*” We confess that “*one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*” This means that we are justified — we have eternal life — when we follow after Jesus alone.

Isn't that what Jesus says all over the place? “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.*” “[W]hoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.” “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*”

But why then did Jesus answer the young man the way he did, quoting the commandments? Because He loved him. The young man needed to hear the truth. He wasn't a crass idolater, completely rejecting every godly thing. But he was an idolater; he loved his riches more than he wanted to follow Jesus.

So you can hear Jesus as He brings this realization to this young man. Jesus prefaces His remarks: “*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*” Specifically, young man, all the things that you think you have done, an outward keeping of the commands: “*not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not bearing false witness, not defrauding, honoring your father and mother,*” are not sufficient. The law demands total obedience, and if you fail at even a single point, you have failed to keep the entire law.

You are not good; man is not good; only God is good. Jesus preached the law to the young man that he might see his own idolatry reflected back to him in this revealing mirror. Remember how we sing: “*The law is but a mirror bright To bring the inbred sin to light That lurks within our nature.*” There's its main purpose: to show us our sin, and so Jesus used it: “*Go, sell all that you have,*”

Jesus said, “*and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*” And the man went away sorrowful, because he trusted his wealth rather than God.

But the Gospel is not to “*set [our] hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy,*” especially the priceless treasure of our redemption through Jesus. For Jesus is indeed good, for He is the eternal Son of God, and that goodness is manifested in a love so deep that He would for mortals’ sake take our mortal form and wear our human frame. His goodness was manifested in a love so broad that He would allow Himself to be betrayed by wickedness and arrayed in a crown of thorns; He would allow Himself to bear the shameful cross and death, and give for us His dying breath. His goodness was manifested in a love so high that for us He rose from death again and ascended on high to reign, that for us He sent His Spirit here to guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.

The Gospel is that mankind’s salvation is all God’s work. It is called grace and gift, and yes, an inheritance, “*imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for [us].*” And we receive it when we share in Christ, having been incorporated into Him by baptism, having been “*born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*” We receive it by His mercy when He saves us “*by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*” justifying us by His grace and making us “*heirs – that is, inheritors – according to the hope of eternal life.*”

The Gospel is that none of this happens by “*works done by us in righteousness,*” but we are saved when we have a firm confidence in Him to the end. That’s called faith — “*be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life,*” says He who knows, for He is the First and the Last, who died and came back to life. The Gospel is that we enter into this Sabbath rest only by following Him who is greater than Moses, greater than our earthly rulers, greater than our earthly wealth, greater than any other god we might want to put our trust in, for Jesus is our treasure.

The Gospel is that though this treasure has ascended to heaven, He deigns to come down to us today, that we might partake of this priceless treasure in the sacrament of His body and blood. May He strengthen our faith in Him alone by it, and out of that faith, our fervent desire to do for others, seeking and loving good, using our wealth in service to God and to our neighbors.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.