**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“He Went Away”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

October 13, 2024

*Mark 10:17-22*

The young man in our reading for today is described as having many possessions. He had so many possessions— or so great of possessions— that the thought of losing them made him sad. To be honest with you, I am sympathetic with the young man in our reading for today; he seems to be doing everything right.

First of all, he comes to Jesus with a question, a great place to start! He even has a good, if not a bit misguided, question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Although he seems to have great wealth, clearly his priorities are in the right place. He doesn’t ask Jesus how to become richer or how to gain power; he asks Him about eternal life. Jesus also approves of the young man; the reading says that He looks at the young man and “loves him.”

Fewer and fewer people in our world today ask questions that have to do with the afterlife. For many people, the idea of eternal life doesn’t really play into their day-to-day lives. Our world today is strikingly different than the world in which the young man of our text lived. The people of 1st century Israel were very concerned with eternal life.

The Pharisees and Sadducees fed the people a steady diet of things that they were required to do in order to inherit eternal life— expansions of the Law of Moses, which were referred to as the Tradition of the Elders. They told the people exactly what they needed to do and promised them they would inherit eternal life if they did them. In short, they became a people of the Law. A people obsessed with trying to earn eternal life.

Again, our world today doesn’t seem to be filled with people trying to earn eternal life. Most people today are much more short-sighted. Their concern if for their lives today and tomorrow. Most of us don’t really think about eternal life; we think about life here today.

In a sense, this too is to be commended. There is nothing that you can do to earn eternal life. The young man fulfilled the Law to the best of his ability, keeping the second table of the Law, but it wasn’t enough. He had everything in the world, but he put his faith in the Law and his ability to accomplish it. His faith was in himself instead of his God.

So, where ought we to land? We shouldn’t spend our life believing that we need to earn our salvation. But we also shouldn’t live life as if eternal life is nothing to worry about. As Christians, we need to live life in the middle. We must acknowledge the Original Sin inside of us and our inability to earn eternal life. But we shouldn’t let that knowledge keep us from doing good works.

God has given you good works to do; they aren’t to earn eternal life or His favor. They are given to you so that other’s might know who your God is. In your baptisms, Christ has given you everything; He has given you far more than any rich young man has. The man in our text was lacking one thing, but it was the only thing that mattered. He was lacking faith.

In your baptisms, Christ has given you faith, the one thing needful. Your faith helps you to trust in God above all things. It allows you to put God in front of all the vain and fleeting things of this world. Your faith shows you that you are a sinner and shows you how much you need Christ.

There are many wealthy people in this world who have all kinds of fancy things but lack Christ. The prosperity preacher will tell you that God wants you to live a happy and successful life. Some of these people will even go so far as to tell you that if you aren’t successful in your life that you need to have more faith, or more likely, that you need to give more money to them.

God’s primary concern isn’t your happiness, and His primary concern is certainly not your wealth. As Christians, we need to hold onto the things of this world with a loose grip. God has given each one of us everything that we have, including our wealth. But because of the sin in our hearts, so often we turn the gifts into the giver. Our money is a gift from God; it is not the source of all the things we have in our lives.

Jobs and money are important, but when they begin to stand between us and Christ, we need to re-evaluate our lives. Too many people have taken the gift of eternal life for granted. I’m sure you all know someone who has stopped coming to church. Maybe they just stopped coming because they moved or changed jobs, or maybe they stopped for another reason. Too easily we forsake God’s Word, too easily we forget why we go to church. It isn’t to sing songs, to hear a motivational message, or to see our friends. It also isn’t to earn eternal life; it isn’t just another box to check.

The reason that Christians come to church is to hear God’s Word preached and read, and to receive His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper for the forgiveness of our sins. We come to church not to earn God’s gifts but to receive them freely for what they are, gifts. They are gifts that nourish our faith and help us to trust in Him more and more every day.

They are gifts that we must be willing to sacrifice everything to receive. Everything that gets in our way, anything that holds us back from them we must be willing to set aside, especially if that is money and our possessions.

Dear Christians, I know that your lives might not be exactly how you thought they would turn out. I know that many of you give sacrificially, choosing to give to God more than what is comfortable, and in doing so, don’t have everything that you could have in this life. If that is you, I promise you that just as Christ says in our text for today, you will have riches in heaven. God does not reward our good works with salvation, but He does reward them. We won’t know what that means and what our reward is until we get to heaven.

You, dear Christian, have chosen to put your Lord first; you have chosen to set aside your pride and everything that might stand between you and Christ. So, you need not be like the young man and walk away sad, but you may walk to Christ’s altar with joy in your heart as you receive something far more valuable than any gift. The precious body and blood of Christ.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.