

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and wallet**

*<sup>17</sup>As Jesus was setting out on a journey, one man ran up to him and knelt in front of him. He asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>18</sup>Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except one – God. <sup>19</sup>You know the commandments. ‘You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.’ ” <sup>20</sup>The man replied, “Teacher, I have kept all these since I was a child.” <sup>21</sup>Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack. Go, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” <sup>22</sup>When he heard this, he looked sad and went away grieving, because he had great wealth. <sup>23</sup>Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” <sup>24</sup>The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus told them again, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in their riches to enter the kingdom of God! <sup>25</sup>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.” <sup>26</sup>They were even more astonished and said to one another, “Who then can be saved?” <sup>27</sup>Jesus looked at them and said, “For people, it is impossible, but not for God, because all things are possible for God.” – Mark 10:17-27 EHV*

There is a famous saying that goes, “The eyes are a window to the soul.” This indicates that a person’s eyes may give away the true emotions that the words, or perhaps even the other facial expressions, may not. Although this may be true, I think there is another part of a person’s body that may tell you more secrets than even the eyes. This is the wallet. Okay, maybe that isn’t a part of a person’s body, but it certainly could reveal some secrets.

If you want to know a person’s soul, it will be revealed to you through his spending. Take a look at your budget. This will tell you what is truly important. Take a look at your unbudgeted expenses, this may tell you even more.

If a man is keeping secrets, his wallet could tell you those secrets. If a man has a problem, his wallet could tell you what’s wrong. The man’s spending will tell you more than he may ever want revealed. Perhaps this is why it is so unpopular to talk about money. Perhaps this is why no one wants a pastor to talk about money from the pulpit. Perhaps this is why you don’t talk about money at the dinner table. Your spending and budgeting may tell people more than you want revealed.

Maybe the famous saying should then be “The wallet is the window to the soul.” In Jesus’ interaction with the man who has come to be known as the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus exposed how his relationship to his riches revealed that there was yet one thing he needed, a right relationship with God. Then, Jesus further explained this truth to his disciples.

In today’s sermon, we will see that the seventh, ninth, and tenth commandments which deal with the use and desire for earthly possessions are truly first commandment issues, dealing with one’s relationship with God. Essentially, Jesus held the greatest commandment before these people. This is held before us today as well. This commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and wallet.

Where did this man come from? What was his name? We just call him the Rich Young Ruler. Luke shared that he was a ruler. Matthew shared that he was young. All three gospels gave indications that he was wealthy. None however tell us his name. None tell us his background.

What made this man go to Jesus asking what he needed still? Why did this man desire to learn what he needed to inherit eternal life? I suppose we do not have answers to these questions.

What we know about this man is rather telling though. He must have known God's law. He also must have led a fairly good life. When Jesus held the commandments before him, he was able to assert that he kept these commandments from his childhood.

The commandments that he kept were part of what is often called the second table of the law; that is commandments four through ten. These cover a person's interactions with his neighbor. Evidently, this man had been an outwardly good person.

When I say he was an outwardly good person this is according to the lower standard of good that Jesus called out in his interaction with the Rich Young Ruler. This man called Jesus, "Good teacher." In Jesus' response, he indicated that there was a problem with this person's perception of good. He called Jesus good, but only God is good. Notice how this man after being corrected did not confess faith that Jesus is God. Instead, he simply called him, "teacher."

The Rich Young Ruler had a misconception of what good was. He did not recognize that Jesus was good, yet he viewed himself as good enough. What a mixed up view of the world. This young man viewed himself as good enough, yet he viewed Jesus as not truly good.

The Rich Young Ruler came to Jesus with a question. He wanted to know how to inherit eternal life. Jesus recognized that this young man was looking in the wrong spot altogether. Therefore, this young man would not receive life. So, Jesus, loving him, had to say something very hard to him.

With the full severity of the law, Jesus told him that he still lacked something. He needed to sell all of his possessions and give them to the poor. You see this man's relationship to his riches revealed a problem with his heart and soul. What was wrong with this man? He was an idolator. He did not fear, love, and trust in God with all his heart, soul, and mind. His relationship to his worldly wealth would ruin his eternal experience.

Unfortunately, the Rich Young Ruler did not confess his sin and repent as Jesus spoke the law to him. He did not see that although he may have felt he kept the second table of the law, he truly broke the first table. The Rich Young Ruler did not recognize his idolatry and confess it. Instead, he walked away sad.

After this young man walked away, Jesus shared an important truth with his disciples. Interestingly, Jesus called them children here. Maybe this shows his compassion in speaking to them. He said to them that it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Then he ramped it up to say that it is impossible.

A rich person entering into the kingdom of God, which is his ruling activity in their hearts, is like a camel trying to enter into the eye of a needle. What does this mean? This means that it is impossible. A rich person cannot enter into the kingdom of God on his own while relying on his riches.

Yet, with God all things are possible. A rich person, like any idolator, needs to repent of his sin. He needs to turn to God. Only God can bring him into the kingdom of heaven.

In this interaction, Jesus demonstrated the connection between one's interaction with earthly possessions and wealth with his relationship to God. Essentially, Jesus called out, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and wallet."

Previously I noted that a person's wallet can be a window into his heart and soul. What would your spending tell others about your priorities? Consider your budget. What portion of your money goes to others? What portion goes to God? What portion is spent frivolously for your own enjoyment? Could your spending reveal some hidden sins? Your budgeted and unbudgeted expenses could say a lot about your priorities. Would your spending confess your faith to others? Think about it. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and wallet?

The Rich Young Ruler had allowed an idolatrous relationship to money to arise in his life. Again, we don't know much about this man. Was he born rich? Was money always there for him and he learned to trust in it? Or did he earn his wealth? Did he see money as a result of his hard work? We simply don't know. We just know that his love for money caused a problem with his relationship with God.

The Rich Young Ruler however was not alone. Jesus indicated this clearly with his warning for the disciples. Money can become a common idol in this world. Whether a person is wealthy or poor, the problem is their view of money. Consider what Paul said in his letter to the young pastor, Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils. By striving for money, some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains." (1 Timothy 6:10 EHV) A love of money and earthly possessions will lead a person toward destruction.

Now, many of us could sit here today and think, "Well, I am not rich. So, I am okay." Perhaps, you are sitting here today in debt up to your eyeballs. Maybe you can barely make ends meet at the end of each two week pay period. Just because you are not rich doesn't mean this message isn't for you. The problem isn't about how much money you have. The problem is the relationship to money.

Brothers and sisters, you do not love money, do you? Although you would never say it, perhaps the inclination is there. Maybe you don't really even love money. You just love what money can do. Money makes you feel safe and secure. Money can get you a nicer house in a nicer neighborhood. Money makes you feel ready. Money in the bank can help you weather the storms of life. Money makes you happy. Money can buy you fun experiences and toys. Money makes you feel loved. With money, you can pay for others to join you. You know what... it might just seem like people like you more when you have money. Maybe you don't love money. Maybe you love what money can do.

In this love affair, let's remember that money is not the issue. God has made many of his faithful followers wealthy and they have done great things with that money to his glory. God made Abraham and Job wealthy. Maybe God has even made you wealthy. The problem is not money. The problem is priority.

Evaluate your relationship to wealth and worldly goods. Are your priorities straight? Is your relationship right? Those who have allowed money and all that it can buy to a higher position than it deserves, that is those who have made an idol out of money, need to repent of this sin. Confess this sin and turn from it.

Do not allow the love of money to remain in your life. Jesus recognized the dire need for the rich young ruler and told him to give all of his money away. He needed to completely disconnect from the money and his love for it that would lead him to destruction. Do you have a love of money? Repent.

There is nothing that money could do to save the Rich Young Ruler. There was no price he could pay to gain this inheritance. It is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven on his own. It is also impossible for a poor person. Yet, with God, all things are possible. There was a price paid to bring life for those who could not earn it. The price was Jesus' precious blood. This is as Peter wrote, "Because you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your

forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19 EHV) Your salvation was priceless. God the Father gave His Son. Jesus lived, died, and rose for you. You are forgiven for your love of money. You are forgiven for all your sins. You will inherit eternal life. This is God's gift to you. With God, all things are possible, even your salvation.

As people bought by the precious blood of Jesus, let us show our thankfulness to God in how we handle our money. Are you storing up treasures that you trust in? Perhaps you need to give some more to the poor and church. Are you frivolously spending money for yourself? Perhaps you need to save more of that for future use. Moved by the fact that your eternal inheritance is a gift from God, you can rectify your budget and use of money. Understand commandments seven, nine, and ten, which regard wealth and possessions, according to the first commandment, which regards your relationship to God. Now, you can love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and wallet. Amen.