

God kept his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He had made Israel into a great nation. As they were about to enter the Promised Land, God wanted his people to know just how much he loved them. Even when they didn't deserve His love, He still loved them. Even their disobedience didn't change God's love for them. Moses says to them these powerful words:

"4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." (Deut. 6:4-9)

There was one God. This **ONE GOD** wanted his people to love Him **ABOVE ALL things**. These words were well known by every Jewish person in Israel. Many Jews took these words literally. They were words that were put into leather pouches (phylacteries) that were worn on the foreheads and arms when they prayed every day.

Today, we will meet a young man who most likely knew those words well. He tried to follow them as best as he could. Yet, could there be something else, something more that he could do to earn eternal life? I think, he was genuine in wanting to know how he could love God above all things. As we will see, he will be disappointed with Jesus' answer.

Who is this man? We don't know his name or how he became so wealthy. He must have been someone who was well-known. This encounter with Jesus in our text today is recorded in three of the four Gospel accounts. What can we learn about this man in these accounts? He was young. Maybe 20 or 25 years old. Even though he was young, he knew how to make money. We are told that he was a man with **GREAT WEALTH**. He was a ruler, a leader. He seems to be respected. Outwardly, he was leading a pretty good life by following God's rules in his life.

Yet, there seems to be something missing in his life. As he approaches Jesus, he asks that burning question that almost every human being has asked at some point in their life: **"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"** Everything else that this man had gotten in his life had come from doing. Why would receiving eternal life be any different?

But before Jesus answers his question, he asks this rich young man a question. **"Why do you call me good?"** That's a strange question, isn't it? In Greek, the word that Jesus uses for **"good"** is much stronger than our English word **"good."** To illustrate: Let's pretend that you walk into a store like Menards. You are looking for new flooring, new window coverings, etc. What do you see on the display? The products are often divided into a couple of different categories such as: *Good, Better or Best*. Who wouldn't want the *Best* compared to just the *Good*?

The word that Jesus uses here could be described as **THE best**, something that is beneficial for all. Therefore, it was a word that was used to speak about God. God is the one who is truly **"GOOD."** Jesus wants this man to see that **"good"** can only come from the one who is **GOOD** – namely, God himself. It would not come from anything good in him. Yet, this man thinks of himself as being pretty good. Jesus wants him to see that if he wants to be good enough to get into heaven, he has to be as good as God himself.

Matthew tells us in his account that when Jesus says to him: **"If you want to enter life, obey the commandments,"** he responds by saying: **"Which ones?"** Jesus says: **"You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"** Even after Jesus lists commandments 4-10, he still says: **"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"**

Clearly, he just isn't getting it. Jesus wants him to see that it is completely impossible for any human being to keep all of God's commands perfectly. You will always fall short. **ALWAYS**. Jesus gets to the point. He gets to the **HEART** of this matter. **"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven."**

Then come, follow me." Is Jesus telling this man that if he pays, then he can play? If you do this, then I will do this for you? Is he telling us to sell everything we have, and give to the poor, and then we get heaven? No.

But Jesus does know where to hit this man. He hits this rich, young ruler where he knew it would hurt the most -- His checkbook. He may have gone through many of the motions in his life, but his love for his money was stronger than his love for his God. It was just too hard – **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."** His money made him feel safe and secure. The one thing he was lacking in his life was his complete trust in God, even if all his money is gone.

So, what's the one thing lacking in your life? What makes you feel safe and secure? Your money? Your checkbook balance? Your success in life? Your work? Your family, your grandchildren, your great grandchildren? The phone you own and all that it can do? None of those things are bad.

What happens though if it keeps you from loving God above all things? None of these things are our Savior. Only Jesus is our Savior. Nothing that we have, nothing that we can do, can save us from our sins. It is impossible to be saved by anything other than Jesus. If our salvation depended on us to ALWAYS love our God above all things, it would be impossible to get to heaven.

But Jesus changed all that. The statement that he made to this rich, young ruler is still true today -- **"What is impossible with men is possible with God."** Jesus took your sins and my sins to the cross. Payment for those sins were made with his death. That is why we can love God above all things. He has done everything for us. Trust him. **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."** Give thanks – **"What is impossible with men is possible with God."** Amen.