

Take Heart; Don't Be Disheartened

Proper 23

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Mark 10:17-22

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

How do we know we have salvation? That's the question a man is concerned about in our Gospel text today.

What is more—can we have that certainty? Everything around us changes so frequently. We can have many possessions, or we can make the grade, or we can try to do everything right, but we may still question if we're doing everything right or if we have salvation.

Verse 1

“(A)s (Jesus) was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.’”

The text tells us is that a man ran up to Jesus, knelt before Him, and asked a question. Jesus replies to the man's question in a way which would direct his thoughts to that which, or who, is ultimately “good”—God. The man must not consider Jesus as simply another good, but *the* good.

The man had asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. You are Lutherans: what's the problem in the man's question? He asks what he must *do* to inherit eternal life. So Jesus answers in a way which leads the man's focus off of his own works to who God is: “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

This Jew had believed that he had been keeping God's Law perfectly, and yet had not found that one thing he must still do to inherit eternal life. He believed that Jesus knew that one remaining action. He believed that he was a good person—but that there was still something he had to do to insure he would have eternal life.

Are you ever tempted to think the same? Do you ever find yourself thinking you are a good person? Or that you have been keeping God's Law as you should?

Verse 2

“‘You know the commandments: Do no murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’ And he said to him, ‘Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.’ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’”

When the man replied to Jesus that he had kept the commands from his youth, he did it with all sincerity. He had been trained from his youth in the ways of the Pharisees, which had nullified the effect of the Law. The purpose of the Law is to show our sin, and to produce terror and repentance.

The man may have been disappointed with Jesus' first response—thinking to himself, does this man have nothing more to say to me than these same old commands I have been following since my youth? But what is Jesus' response? It is one of love—what kind of love? *Agape* love. The same sacrificial kind of love which we heard about last week hearing about how husbands and wives serve one another.

Jesus loved the man and told him to go and sell all that he had, and that then he would have treasure in heaven. Wait. Is Jesus telling this man that human works can save him? No, quite opposite.

Jesus is giving him a command to do which he will *not* be able to do. The Law never saves but only shows that we would be rightly condemned. Even our very best works—whatever work or works you have done that you think were good—are not ones which will save you but can only condemn you. Do not trust your works—even your best ones. They cannot and will not save you. You have no hope of your own. Just as that man had no hope of his own.

Verse 3

“Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”

So was it love that Jesus had shown this man? Jesus gave him another thing to do, and the man had left sorrowful because it was not something he could do. Is it really love when you hear something you don't want to hear? Our society would say no. Only hearing what you want to hear is love.

So was it love that Jesus showed that man? The Scriptures—God's Word—tells us that it was. “Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” He *agape* loved him. He told him Law so that he might repent and have to look for something or someone else to save him. But what, or who?

What about the One who is good? God is good, most certainly. But why, then, did the man call Jesus a “Good Teacher”? Did the man truly believe that Jesus was good? These are the questions Jesus made the man start to consider by telling him one more thing to do and allowing him to leave sorrowful.

So does loving someone always mean telling them what they want to hear? No. Jesus didn't tell this man what he wanted to hear. But He did teach him how to truly be saved. By looking for a Savior outside of himself. And Jesus would prove to be that Savior. He would prove to be God in human flesh***

When you hear His voice, don't be disheartened if you hear something you don't want to hear. Take heart! God's Word tells you how to be saved eternally—even if it's in a way that you don't want to hear right now.

Yet even the Confessions remind us that we can have that certainty of our salvation when we live in faith: “Thus far is the mystery of predestination revealed to us in God's Word, and if we abide and thereby and cleave thereto, it is a very useful, salutary, consolatory doctrine; for it establishes very effectually the article that we are justified and saved without all works and merits of ours, purely out of grace alone, for Christ's sake...the doctrine affords also the excellent, glorious consolation that God was so greatly concerned about the conversion, righteousness, and salvation of every Christian, and so faithfully purposed it [provided therefor] that before the foundation of the world was laid, He deliberated concerning it, and in His [secret] purpose ordained how He would bring me thereto [call and lead me to salvation], and preserve me therein. Also, that He wished to secure my salvation so well and certainly that, since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost from our hands, or through craft and might of the devil and the world be snatched and taken from us, He ordained it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and placed it for preservation in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, from which no one can pluck us (BoC, The Solid Declaration, XI. Election).”

In other words, we can have no certainty of ourselves, of our own works—and we must guard against the lies and temptations of the devil. But trusting our Lord Jesus at His Word—that no one can pluck us from His hand—He will bring us safely home.
In Jesus' Name. Amen.