

Sacrificial Generosity

^{17b} *“Good teacher,” he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’* ¹⁸ *“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.*

¹⁹ *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.’*

²⁰ *“Teacher,” he declared, ‘all these [commands] I have kept since I was a boy.’*

²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”*

Mark 10:17b-21

According to Mark a young man ran up to Jesus.

He was a wealthy man, probably a member of some official council or court.

This man fell on his knees before Jesus and addressed him reverently as "good teacher," obviously expressing his high regard for Jesus.

His question indicates that he was thinking in terms of Jewish works of sacrifice and righteousness.

He wanted to *do* something to *merit* eternal life, whereas Jesus taught that eternal life is a *gift* to be received.

It’s a fair question for a person to ask. In fact, most of us from the church would love people to ask us that question.

Everyone wants to live forever in a healthy, happy life!

For the believer, our eternal dwelling or the ultimate experience of joy and peace *is our hope!* And it is the desire of our heart for others whom we love to join us there.

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²¹ *Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

²² *At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

²³ *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”*

²⁴ *The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”*

- Why did Jesus answer the way He did?
- Why not just tell him the good news?
- Why use money and possessions?

Jesus was getting to the heart of this man’s desire.

Jesus was saying, before you address me with such a title, ‘good teacher,’ you had better think soberly about what the implications are, and especially what they are for you.

“One thing you lack...” Jesus said

Jesus continued to address the real need – “you, also, need to check your heart – this is where you fall short.”

The HEART defines the person.

“But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.” Matthew 15:18

When life strangles us by our material wants and perceived needs, our greatest needs of Godly love and peace (God’s Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven) are crowded out – MATERIAL THINGS BECOME IDOLS.

Having money has been a priority for the world in general, but understanding true poverty is the greatest remedy for “heart conditions” that hinder spiritual wealth.

Understanding true poverty brings great WEALTH

According to Pew Research (March 2015) 80-95% of the population of 12 of the poorest nations in the world agree that “religion is very important in their lives”. Interestingly, 57% of the USA population also agree to this statement (the highest level of agreement among the richest nations worldwide).ⁱⁱ

Our greatest riches are not from this world.

And neither is our greatest *poverty*.

The man wanted to be assured of heaven and was expecting to be given a method to achieve eternal life – or, to live forever.

²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed [at the answer Jesus gave him], and said to each other, “[If not by sacrifice and righteousness] Who then can be saved?”

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

With God all THINGS are POSSIBLE

“... all things are possible with God.”

You might have noticed that Jesus only quoted the last six commandments, leaving the ones that identify mankind’s relationship with God.

1. “You **shall have no other gods before me.**
2. “You **shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything** in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You **shall not bow down to them or worship them**; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. “You **shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God**, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
4. “**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

Exodus 20:3-8

It’s interesting how Jesus’ life unveils the mysteries of God and ties all ten commandments into two.

³⁵ “One of [the men], an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ ³⁷ Jesus replied: ‘**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘**Love your neighbor as yourself.**’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:35-40

The impossible is possible with SACRIFICIAL love.

The church at Macedonia is an excellent example of making the impossible, possible.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

*And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² **In the midst of a very severe trial**, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. ⁵ And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.*

In the midst of **SEVERE** trial,

- They first gave themselves to the Lord,
- And, then, with overflowing **JOY**
- overcame extreme **POVERTY** and
- turned their minimal circumstances into rich **GENEROSITY**
- by giving to God's ministry through the Apostle Paul.

And they exceeded the expectations of Paul and his companions in ministry!

The rich young man who approached Jesus didn't understand **POVERTY**.

In fact, it frightened him.

Sacrificial Generosity was not an option he was willing to take.

Where do our lives cross these same thresholds?

What are our fears that are keeping us from sacrificial generosity?

Do we have too much "world" at stake to emulate God's extreme, sacrificial generosity?

So far in our journey through the seven disciplines of faith,

- We have been challenged to be in devotion to God daily – meditating on His word and desires for our life.
- We have been given the tools to develop a heart-felt relationship with God through prayer.
- We have discovered that our sins continue to tangle us up as we strive for maturity, and we need ongoing repentance before God our Father.
- And we have been encouraged to come together to get to know each other, to develop ongoing relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ – stirring up one another toward love and good deeds.

This next step in our life toward a mature faith is to pursue a sacrificially generous heart before God and to His people.

This will be the **HARDEST** faith step we'll ever take.

Because when we give till it hurts and continue until it hurts no more, we are challenging God by faith to be faithful to His promises.

Philippians 4:19-20

“And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Paul had just thanked the Philippian church for their ongoing support and mentioned how God had used them, alone, to provide for their needs while on his missionary journey to Macedonia.

We could be that church that literally changes the course of life for people everywhere.

Let's do that, beginning now!

ⁱ All scripture references will be taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ Pew Research, March 2015 – Data for GDP per capita (PPP) from IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2014.