

**Goal: The hearers would follow Jesus clinging to Him as the one thing in their lives.**

I want to start by clearing something up about our text today so that you don't take Jesus the wrong way. First, Jesus is not giving a general rule for all Christians to follow. He's not commanding that all Christians go into poverty. He's not saying that each of us have to go home from church and sell our house, our car, and all of our belongings if we want to have eternal life. Ok? So, now you can relax, right?

You see, Jesus isn't commanding us to give away all of our possessions, because how would we ever live out our vocations as His people? If you're a husband or a wife or a parent, don't you need to provide shelter and food for your family? If you got rid of all of your possessions, you'd be neglecting your calling as a husband and father, as brother or sister, as son or daughter. And that would be an irresponsible use of God's blessings.

This was the mistake that some in the church made back in medieval times, and why monks took vows of poverty. They thought they were doing what Jesus said to do, and by becoming poor, they became godly. But the two don't necessarily go together, and if you don't get that, then you're going to miss half of Jesus teaching today. *“And as he 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?” (Mark 10: 17)* Jesus' ultimate answer was what? (*“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.” (Mark 10: 21)*

So, what was the one thing this man was lacking? What was the one thing he didn't have to inherit eternal life? He didn't have Jesus. When Jesus says: *“Come, follow me”* He knew this man's wealth was the one thing preventing him from following; the one thing getting in the way of him having Jesus. Hopefully you understand that wealth isn't wrong or sinful. God made some people extremely wealthy, like Abraham, David, Solomon, and Job. And to be honest, He's made each of us very wealthy. Even though in our country, and in our state, we might not feel very wealthy. But compared to most of the world, we are rich! That's not bad, but it can be, if it prevents you from having Jesus.

So, if what this man said was true, that he kept all the commandments from his youth, he was a very good Jew, a righteous man by most accounts, someone who everyone would've admired. So much so, that many may have seen his wealth as a reward from God. So, when Jesus said that he was lacking only one thing, how excited he must have been. Only one thing, he was

so close to the eternal life! But imagine his shock when he heard what it was. That one thing was huge. He had to let go of his wealth and follow Jesus. So why couldn't he do it?

Did he love his wealth more than Jesus? Maybe. Maybe he'd just bought his dream home or maybe he didn't want to give up his nice clothes and his delicious food, or maybe he couldn't imagine how he would take care of his day-to-day needs if he sold all of it and followed Jesus. How would he eat? Where would he live? How could Jesus possibly provide all that? Did he think his wealth could give him what Jesus couldn't? Maybe. Maybe his self-esteem was tied to his wealth and he was afraid of being a nobody. Or maybe it was his security or comfort that he was afraid of losing. Only one thing, Jesus said, and he was ready to do anything, but that.

So, what does this mean for you and me? What's your one thing, because we all have it? One thing. At least one thing, right, that we're not willing to give up. What's your one thing keeping you from following Jesus? Maybe it's wealth, getting as much as you can, while you can. Or, maybe for you it's something completely different, like a grudge, that bitterness in your heart because of something someone did to you a long time ago and you're not willing to let it go; you're not willing to forgive it; you're not willing to reconcile. Is that your one thing?

Or maybe it's the fear of suffering or the fear of being inconvenienced. Maybe you fear what loving and helping others would really mean for your life. Maybe you fear the backlash you would suffer if you actually spoke God's truth and shared His Gospel at your workplace or with your neighbors. Maybe you fear really giving up your life and following Jesus, and what living the full Christian life might look like or lead to. Or maybe it's pride, and you're unwilling to say you're sorry, repent and ask for forgiveness. Maybe you're unwilling to obey your parents, because what they said is dumb, or because it's not what you want.

What's your one thing? That one thing that hardens your heart and makes you like the rebellious people of Israel that we heard about in our reading from Hebrews. (***“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” (Hebrews 3: 12 – 14)***) What's that one thing, or maybe many things, that you're hanging onto and not letting go? And consider this, is it worth trading for eternal life? Is it that important, that valuable? And you thought you could relax.

Now, you know how that man felt. Letting go isn't easy. When Jesus says, ***“Come, follow me.”*** (***“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.” (Mark 10: 21)* He’s striking right at our core and revealing what we really can’t let go of. That one thing that stands in your way of inheriting eternal life.

There’s only one person who’s worthy of eternal life. Who’s actually good, who did everything perfectly, and gave up everything, even His own life. What did He do? On the cross, Jesus clung to our sins to free us from them. He clung to the cross to win life for us. That was Jesus’ one thing He was not willing to let go of, you. And because He did, there is now a way for you and I to inherit eternal life. To be joined to Him and have His inheritance given to us. In baptism, that’s what Jesus does, He puts His name on you and gives you a new identity, son of God. Christian. Inheritor of eternal life.

And when those “one things” pop up, and grab your heart and love and desire, instead of going away sorrowful and disheartened like that rich man, repent. Repent and be filled again with Jesus’ forgiveness. Repent and be filled again with His love. Jesus isn’t here for people who don’t fail, He’s here for those who do. For you and me. To give us the clean hearts and the right love that we need. To give us Himself and His life.

And He gives us Himself and His life, His Body and Blood here, so that you and I lack nothing. All your “one things” are swallowed up by His one thing, your sins swallowed up by His forgiveness, your death swallowed up by His life. Eternal life in Him is the gift He has come to give to you and all people so that we lack nothing.

And when we talk about eternal life, it’s not just some future utopian reality that we hope for, free from problems and suffering. No, it’s living as a Christian in the here and now, knowing our future is secure, but also knowing that we have nothing to fear, even death. Eternal life is living amidst the struggles and hardships and temptations of this life with a peace, joy, confidence, and freedom of loving others so that they would experience Christ in us.

You are free then to follow Christ. Free from the entanglements of sin, the world, and our own sinful natures. Free at home, free at work, free at school. Wherever you are, in all of your vocations. The gifts we have are the gifts we give. And we don’t lose anything by giving to others. In fact, we grow wealthier because we grow in love and joy and peace and life. The truth is, *“there is no man so poor as the one who holds onto his wealth. And no man so rich as the one who doesn’t.”* Which are you? Come, follow me, Jesus says. To the cross. I have life. For you. Amen.