

Mark 10:17-22 – The One Thing

Let me clear one thing up for you right at the start of this sermon, before we get too far into thinking about the Word of God we heard today:

Jesus is not giving a general rule for all Christians today. He is not commanding poverty for all Christians. And you do not have to leave church today and sell your house, your car, and all your belongings if you want to have eternal life.

OK? You can exhale now!

In fact, not only is Jesus not making a general rule here, but maybe you exactly shouldn't do that very thing! For if you have a wife and children to shelter and feed and care for, if you are providing for parents or siblings, then to sell your house and all your belongings would be to neglect your calling as husband and father, as brother or sister, as son or daughter. And that wouldn't be a good thing, but, in fact, an irresponsible thing.

You see, that was the mistake some in the Church made in medieval times, and why monks began taking vows of poverty: they thought they were doing what Jesus said to do here in becoming poor and godly. But the two don't necessarily go together, and to think that is to miss half of what Jesus said to this man who came up to Him that day and asked such an important question: **Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**

For what was Jesus' answer? Ultimately it was this: **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.**

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. That's the key phrase here, when Jesus says: **Come, follow me.** Jesus knew this man's wealth was the one thing preventing him from following Jesus; the one thing getting in the way of him having Jesus. For it isn't wrong or sinful to be wealthy. God makes some people very wealthy, people like Abraham, David, and Solomon, just to name a few. And really, you and me, too. Even though in our country, in our context, we may not consider ourselves wealthy, compared to most people in the rest of the world, we are fabulously rich! And that's not necessarily bad. But it can be, if it prevents you from having Jesus.

And so it was with this man. If what he said was true, that he kept all the commandments from his youth, he was an exemplary man; someone everyone in the community would have looked up to and admired. So much so that people, and maybe even this man himself, may have viewed his wealth as a reward from God for doing so well in the rest of his life.

In his conversation with Jesus, when Jesus said that he was lacking only one thing, how excited he must have gotten! Only one thing! How close he was to the kingdom of God! So imagine his shock when he heard what it was. That one thing? It was a doozie ... he had to let go of his wealth and follow Jesus.

So why could he not do it? Why could he not let go of his wealth?

Did he love it more than Jesus? Maybe. Maybe he had just gotten his dream home, or he didn't want to give up his nice clothes, delicious food, and all you can get when you have money.

Or did he trust his wealth more than Jesus? Maybe. Maybe he couldn't imagine how he would have what he needed for day-to-day life if he sold it all and followed Jesus. For what would he eat? What would he wear? Where would he live? How could Jesus – who didn't have anything Himself – provide all that?

Or did he think his wealth could give him what Jesus could not? Maybe that too. Maybe his self-esteem was tied to his riches and he was afraid of being a nobody. Or perhaps it was security or comfort that he was afraid of no longer having.

Only one thing, Jesus had said. Oh, how good that sounded! And he was ready to do anything ... except that.

So now, what is it for you? What is your one thing?

Because we all have it. One thing. At least one. That we're not willing to let go of. That we hang onto. That we fear, love, and trust more than Jesus.

What's your one thing?

Maybe it's wealth. Lots of people are consumed with that, getting as much as you can, while you can.

But maybe that's not it for you. Maybe for you it's something quite 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 fear of suffering. Or maybe not even suffering, but inconvenience. Fear of what loving and helping others would really mean for your life. Fear of the backlash you would suffer for speaking the truth. Fear of where living this Christian life might lead ... and so you're not willing to really let go and walk down that road.

Or maybe for you it's pride, and so you're unwilling to say you're sorry and ask forgiveness. Or you're unwilling to obey your parents, because what they said is dumb; or if you do, only just enough to get what you want, because that's what you're hanging onto.

What's your one thing? That one thing that hardens your heart, like we heard in the reading from Hebrews, that makes you like the rebellious people of Israel in the wilderness. What is that one thing – or maybe many things – you're hanging onto and not letting go? Is it worth trading for eternal life? Is it that important, that valuable? Can it really give you what you need? Is it worth taking to the grave?

Thought you could exhale at the beginning of the sermon, huh? Now you know how that man felt! Letting go is not so easy. What Jesus asks here is a doozie ... for us, too, when He says: **Come, follow Me.** In fact, it's more than a doozie – it's the knife plunged into our hopes ... because no matter how hard we try, there will always be one more thing we don't do, one more thing we can't let go of, one more thing that makes you getting on the list of those inheriting eternal life out of your reach.

For actually, there's only one name on that list. Only one person who was truly worthy of eternal life. Who was truly good, who did everything perfectly, and clung to nothing – not even His own life – and that was Jesus. What did He do? He clung to us instead of His own life. He clung to our sins to free us from them. And then He clung to the cross to pay the price for those sins of ours that He took from us, to win life for us. That was Jesus' one thing, that He was not willing to let go of: you.

And because He did, there is now a way for you and me to be on that list and enter eternal life: to have His name on us and to enter under His name. To be joined to Him and have His inheritance given to us. And 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 life with Him. Because of Jesus, you're on the list.

And when those "one things" pop up, when the things and people of this world 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; be filled again with His love. For 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 right love that we need. To keep us on the list. To give us Himself and His life.

He gives us Himself and His life, giving us His Body and Blood here, that you lack nothing; that His life be in you and thus your life be eternal. 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. And all that based not on what you do to get your name on the list for eternal life, but what He has done for you and now gives to you. For eternal life in Him is the gift He has come to give to you and all people. That we lack nothing; no good thing.

And lack no good thing already here and now. For when we speak of eternal life, that is not something that is coming sometime in the far, far away future, that is irrelevant to our life now, our problems now, our concerns now. No. Christianity is no pie-in-the-sky, head-in-the-clouds, spiritualist movement. No. Christianity is about life now. Christianity is Jesus becoming a man in this world. But it is exactly such confidence and assurance in the future that impacts our life now. For if you know your future is secure, if you know you have nothing to fear – even from death – then you are free to live now! To live now in peace and joy and confidence. And free to love. For there is nothing to hold you down, nothing to hold you back, nothing you lack. For you have Jesus. And when you have Jesus you have the Father, you are a child of God, and so your name is on the list.

You are free then to follow Him. Free from the entanglements of sin, the world, and our own sinful natures. Free at home, at work, where you shop. Wherever you are, in all your callings. The gifts we have are the gifts we give, not hoard. And we lose nothing by doing so. In fact, just the opposite – we grow wealthier. For we grow in love and joy and peace and life. For the truth is this: 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? Which do you want to be? Come, follow me, Jesus says. To the cross. I have life. For you.