

## Mark 10:17-22

One of the saddest words in the English language is the word "almost." The young swimmer almost made it to shore. The fireman's ladder almost reached the highest window of the burning building. The rope lowered to the ledge where the hiker was trapped was almost long enough to reach him. And so it goes...almost. It's a tragic word when used in this way. And it's a word for us to think about, as we do in considering the story in Mark 10.

Here was a man who came up to Jesus asking what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer was simple enough. "You know the commandments...do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal," and so forth. The man replied in the positive. "Ever since I was young I have obeyed all of these commandments." I've behaved myself. My life is above reproach. I don't have any faults. His unspoken conclusion must have been, "I must be in! I've got it made! If this is what it takes to inherit eternal life, I'm safe!"

Jesus looked at him and Mark tells us that He loved him. His heart ached with compassion for this poor deluded man who thought so highly of himself. He was so close to God; so close to the truth, but in reality he was so far away. So Jesus gave him this invitation, "Go and sell all that you have, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and then come follow Me." But Jesus was asking too much. He was very rich. He shook his head and went away sad. He was an "almost, but not quite" follower of Jesus.

If you're anything like me, then you have people in your life who are like this man: co-workers, friends, even family who are almost, but not quite followers of the Lord. You invite them to come to church with you, and they agree to go, but something always comes up. They, like the man in our story, are decent folks. They've kept their hands clean. But like that man, they're pinning their hope of heaven on their decent living. They may have some knowledge of the Bible, and they've seen the inside of a church before--weddings, funerals, and perhaps Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday will bring them in. They may think of themselves as Christian people, but Jesus Christ and His way of the cross is not what sums up their life. They're almost His followers, but not quite.

The tragic thing about the man in our text is that "almost" would not give him that eternal life he wanted. He loved what he had more than he loved God. The treasure of heaven did not attract him as much as his treasures on earth. On this man's tombstone one might read the following words: "Here lies a decent man who almost made it to heaven...but his possessions got in the way."

Every day scores of men, women, and children die in this same way--they almost make it to heaven, but not quite. They think...they hope they have what it takes to enter into eternal life, but like the man in our text, they are deluding themselves. He told Jesus that ever since he was young he had kept all the commandments. This was a lie. Murder is not just a sin of the hands. To hate someone within the heart is murder. To hold a grudge, to refuse to forgive another is the sin of murder. To commit adultery one needs only to lust within the mind and heart. Even to listen to gossip is to break the Eighth Commandment.

This man truly believed that he was without fault; that he was all the way there with how God wanted him to live. But no matter how decent he was on the outside, sin still dwelled within him. Clean hands do not make up for a filthy heart. "Almost" does not make it with God. To keep the Law in every place but one, is to break the whole Law.

Jesus loved this man, and He tried to help him to see this. When He told him, "Go and sell all that you have...and come follow Me," He wasn't giving a new command. He was showing him that he wasn't even keeping the First Commandment. The man did not love and trust in God above all things. God came in second behind his possessions. He was almost first, but not quite. And "almost" is not good enough to inherit eternal life.

But Jesus loved him and He tried to perform a spiritual "Heimlich maneuver" on him. The man was choking to death on his wealth, and so Jesus dug His fists from behind into the man's gut with the words, "Go and sell all you have." He was dislodging the thing that the man was choking on. But the man would have none of that. Jesus was almost able to help him; almost able to save him; almost able to rescue him from eternal death...but he walked away and left Jesus behind.

Let's consider now, not the people in our lives anymore, whether they be friends, family, or co-workers; let's consider ourselves in light of this story. What similarities do we share with this man? What "almost's" are in our life? And is there something we're choking on but we're unwilling to admit it? It could be our possessions. It could be our way of life. Perhaps we're choking on our stubborn pride. Maybe a grudge that we're holding in our heart is what we're choking on. And if we're like this man, then we really don't want God to do the Heimlich on us. We may be choking, but we're too proud to admit it. We may be choking, but we're too angry to forgive. We may be choking, but we do not want to make any changes in our life--we like things the way they are.

But friend, Jesus loves you too much to watch you almost make it to heaven. Whatever we're choking on, we need to repent of it. Whatever it is that is keeping us proud, unforgiving, and spiritually lazy, you and I need to repent. Let there be no "almost" in your life. Let us confess that we're not almost as good as we can be, but that we are poor, miserable sinners. Let us not think that we've almost got it made with our decent living, but admit that we deserve only punishment both now and forever.

Friend, you have a Savior who did not almost go to Mt. Calvary; Jesus went all the way there for you. Jesus did not almost give up everything He had for you; He gave it all in death. You are not sinners who were almost saved from your sins; you are saved...you are forgiven...Jesus paid the price for every one of you. Jesus takes that sad and tragic word "almost," and throws it completely out of your life. He did everything that had to be done to purchase eternal life for you. He didn't almost do it all--He did it. His words were not, "It is almost finished;" He said, "It is finished!" And in your baptism Jesus did not almost make you His forgiven child; He washed all your sins away. He declares you to be His Christian saint. In His Holy Supper He doesn't almost give you His flesh and blood; He gives you, with the bread and wine, His very self for your salvation.

To look at our life apart from Christ, all we would see is one "almost" after another. Almost forgiven...almost God's child...almost made it to heaven. But though the man in our text walked away from Jesus, you never need to do that. You never need to live apart from Christ. You can live every day looking at Him who is your Savior. And so on your tombstone it will not read, "Almost..." It will read, "Safe in heaven with Christ Jesus." Amen.