

Mark 10:17-22

“*Good teacher, what must I do to acquire, to earn eternal life?*” A true follower of Jesus would never ask such a question. And this is why Jesus invites the man to follow Him.

The world does not follow Jesus. The world follows everything but Jesus. This is why there is no certainty in the world. Everyone who is of the world hopes in their heart to gain eternal life. No one hopes that they perish forever. But the world has everything backwards. The world is turned upside down, and so it does not see things as they truly are.

Eternal life cannot be acquired; cannot be earned; but the world thinks that it can. “If I do enough good...if my good outweighs my bad...I will acquire a place in heaven.” But notice how the word “if” stands at the forefront. There is no certainty in the word “if.” There is no assurance. No one who is of the world can ever truly know and believe, without a doubt, that a place in heaven belongs to them.

And so the man in our text runs up to Jesus to ask, “*What must I do to acquire eternal life?*” But why did he come? Why did he kneel down to question Jesus? He freely confessed that he had kept all the Commandments since he was a boy. Since he was such a good person; not a murderer, not an adulterer, not a thief, not a liar, and so on...why even bother Jesus with such a question?

We know why. There was doubt in his heart. Maybe just a little doubt, but it was there. This man wanted to live with assurance and die with certainty. But this can never be; not for those who are of the world because the world does not follow Jesus.

Do you follow Jesus? “Oh, I follow CNN...I follow Fox News...I follow Cardinals baseball, but now I follow the Blues...and, oh yeah, I follow Jesus, too.” There are people like this. And yes, they are better at following news and sports than at following Jesus Christ.

But what is it, exactly, to follow Jesus? To be aware of Him? To be in the know? Well, look at the invitation Jesus gives the man in our text. “*Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me.*” Crud. And here we were hoping that following Jesus was something easy and did not involve sacrifice.

But hey, to follow a sports team, sacrifice is required. A true follower of the Cardinals will sacrifice time to watch their games on television, and will sacrifice money to go to their games. A follower who is really true and loyal will spend money on airline tickets and make time to follow the Cardinals when they play in other cities around the country.

To be a follower...a follower of anything requires sacrifice. We’re just really picky and choosy about what we’re willing to give up, and this determines what it is that we follow.

Is it possible to follow Jesus with minimal sacrifice? Well, Abraham was required to sacrifice his son Isaac. Peter, James, and John had to sacrifice their careers as fishermen. They with other Christians were required to sacrifice their lives to be Jesus’ followers.

But today we don’t even like to sacrifice our time on Sunday mornings. We want to be called followers of Jesus, but we want to follow Him on our terms. So really we want Jesus to follow us instead of us following Him. But that just simply makes us people of the world.

That man in our text couldn't do it. He couldn't follow Jesus. And not because he had great possessions, but because his great possessions had him. He did not believe that Jesus was his God. He calls Him, "*Good teacher,*" but after Jesus says only God is good, he drops the word "good" and just calls Him "*teacher.*"

I wouldn't follow Jesus either if He wasn't my God. But He is, and He is your God. And God is good. He wants you to follow Him not for the purpose of making you sacrifice all you have, but rather He wants you to follow Him so that you live with assurance and die with certainty.

"*You will have treasure in heaven,*" Jesus told the man in our text. Not, "you might have." Not, "you'll have treasure in heaven if you keep the Commandments." Oh no. Treasure in heaven is a certainty; not a big "if." Because heaven, eternal life, is given as a gift to all who follow Jesus.

It's not how well you follow Jesus. It's not how long you have followed Him. The thief on the cross was a follower of Jesus for just a few hours. But he was promised the gift of heaven and he died with certainty. That thief could never have said, "I have kept all these Commandments since I was a boy." And it's a good thing he couldn't say that. He had to turn away from his life, a life of disobedience, and by the grace of God he turned to Jesus. He had no great possessions. He had nothing. But he did have Jesus. Today that man who was a thief is in heaven. And his place there has nothing to do with how well he lived. There's just a great big "if" in that. All he possessed was Jesus, but that's what it takes to gain eternal life.

I hope you keep the Commandments. I don't want you to disobey God, nor does He. But don't keep them to gain anything, not with God. Follow Jesus. Those who do receive His gifts, and heaven is one of His gifts. Jesus earned a place in heaven. And because He is good, He gives that place to you. Not to the best out there. He gives a place in heaven to sinners like you and me. Sinners who trust in Him, like the thief did.

We might think that thief now has treasure in heaven. And yes, he does. But even better, Jesus has treasure in heaven. He is the one who sold all He had. He gave to the poor, to poor sinners like you and me, and the thief. And Jesus will have treasure in heaven, and that treasure is you.

Don't just say, "Jesus died on the cross for sinners." Say, "He died for me." Say, "He lived for me...He rose from the dead for me." Because you are His treasure. And He gave up everything for you, to gain for you a place with Him in heaven for all eternity.

Now that's why you want to keep the Commandments. Not to gain points with God, but because you love God. What He did for you is everything. Because of Jesus you can live with assurance and you can die with certainty. You are forgiven of all your disobedience. Every one of you is forgiven. Not "if" you do something. You are forgiven, period, because of Jesus. He declares it, and He is your God.

So you can leave today very much the opposite of how the man in our text left Jesus. He left disheartened because he had great possessions. You can leave with joy, and assurance, and peace, because you have Jesus. Amen.