

THE WORD OF JESUS STANDS FIRM

Without the Gospel, Jesus' word brings sadness and fear

With the Gospel, Jesus' word brings the joy of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Mark 10:17-27

TEXT: *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good-except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 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." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Have you ever read them? What were they about? If you've never read them you'll have to trust me when I say that these were 95 statements meant to discuss the dangerous errors that had permeated the teachings of the church so that few people heard, if ever, the Gospel. Yet they called themselves "Christian" and the "The Church" but there was no Gospel.

It was time, in God's mind, for another reformation. There had been others in the world's history. But this one would mark its beginning with this incident of October 31, 1517. And BECAUSE OF THE REFORMATION, THE WORD OF THE LORD STANDS FIRM.

We are used to hearing about the peace and joy that the name of Jesus brings. But without the Gospel, Jesus brings sadness and fear. Consider the incident recorded in today's Scripture text. Here is a man who runs up to Jesus and kneels before him. We would be thrilled to have more people running to our door, searching for Jesus and kneeling before our altar. With Jesus standing in front of him he asks, ***Good teacher ... what must I do to inherit eternal life?*** Everything seems in order and most appropriate. He was a Jew. They had the Law of Moses, the Temple worship and the Old Testament Scriptures whose inspired writers proclaimed the coming of God's Savior.

But this man's religion was a religion of good works. Jesus reveals this in masterful fashion: ***Why do you call me good? ... No one is good-except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'*** As a good Jew, you know the commandments. And yet you call me "good?" Only God is good!

Does this man know and believe Jesus to be the Holy Son of God? Does he say, God is good, and that is why I call you "good teacher" for you are the Son of God! No. Instead he says: ***Teacher, ... all these I have kept since I was a boy.*** Did he REALLY believe this? Yes! For that was what his religion and his rabbis taught. Jesus is good, he himself is good, and so are those who really try to be good.

But the rabbis had misled him. So Jesus lovingly told him the truth. The Bible says: ***Jesus looked at him and loved him. ...one thing you lack ... Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*** The Bible says: ***At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*** Without the Gospel, Jesus' word brings nothing but sadness and a "walking away" from God.

This was what the Roman Church and her popes were teaching in Luther's day. There was a teaching about Jesus, but there was no good news of the Gospel. Instead, the people were being taught that to know God and salvation you had to do what the church with its false teachings of purgatory, praying to the saints, doing works of satisfaction and obeying the pope. If anyone would say to the pope, ***Good teacher, ... what must I do to inherit eternal life...*** the pope would tell him: Be a good Catholic.

Jesus, however, out of love would say: ***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*** Mt 5 And then to make that truth sink deeply into our hearts and minds, he would come up with something that we must do which would be tailor-made just for me. For this wealthy man, it was that he sells all his possessions. What would Jesus command me to do that is impossible for me? What would Jesus command you to do that would be too great of a sacrifice? What would be my limitation on perfect obedience to the First Commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, body and mind?

Then ***Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*** His disciples got the point. The truth is that without God's intervention, no one can be saved.

We would give up on religion if there were no Gospel, and for many who try to be religious without the Gospel, that usually happens. In sadness, they walk away from Jesus. But with the Gospel, Jesus brings the joy of forgiveness, life and salvation.

That is why we Lutherans still observe the event of Luther's nailing of the 95 Theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg Germany on October 31, 1517. It marks the beginning of that movement by which the Lord graciously restored the preaching of the Gospel to the Christian Church on earth. Jesus' disciples got the point when he told them that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man, or anyone for that matter, to enter the kingdom of God. The Bible says: ***The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."*** In order for anyone to understand the Gospel of the Lord, two things must happen to the human soul. First, complete despair of any hope of finding peace before God from within; and second, the knowledge that God has indeed made salvation possible by what he has done FOR us through Jesus.

This is what Martin Luther insisted was absent from the teachings of the church of his day: the simple proclamation of what God says He has done for us in Jesus Christ. They TALKED about the Gospel and uttered the name of Jesus, but they were not PREACHING the Gospel in its truth and purity. They were saying JESUS, JESUS, without ever saying what it was that Jesus did for us.

Do you find that happening in churches today? Talking about what we should do or be doing in matters of faith rather than in what Jesus has done FOR US! That's what I need to bring joy and peace, confidence and love for God in my heart... not what I must do to be a Christian, but what God has done for me in Christ for my salvation. Then the Holy Spirit enlivens the heart with the joy and peace that seeks to say "Thank you, Lord! An now what can I do, not to enter the kingdom of heaven, but to say THANK YOU for doing the impossible through your blood and righteousness!

The other day my neighbor who was walking his dog somehow brought up the fact that he wasn't sure about where he was going when he died. I told him: But I know where I'm going when I die because God has told in his written word! But instead of listening to anymore, he immediately turned and walked away. So sad, for without the Gospel Jesus only brings sadness and fear. Who knows how many more opportunities he will have to hear what God has done for us!

Let us thank God for his servant, Martin Luther, and his willingness to risk his life to preserve the pure Gospel of the Lord so that our walk through this life will be the glad walk toward our eternal life in heaven! Amen.