

Text— Matthew 19:16-30

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Without exception, all religions outside of true Christianity teach salvation by works. There are churches which falsely wear the label “Christian” while clearly teaching salvation by works, or salvation by one’s own works in addition to having faith in Jesus Christ.

Realize that all works-righteous religions have a list of do’s and don’ts, some of them even including God’s Ten Commandments, which they claim one can actually, perfectly keep to please God and thereby obtain eternal life— despite the fact it’s clearly stated in Galatians 2:16, “that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Indeed, no naturally conceived human being can be found righteous in God’s sight by his or her own works, for we read in Isaiah 64:6, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Yeah, in themselves, even our very best works are filthy in the sight of the high and holy God, because we who do the works are by nature sinful and unclean.

My friends, it’s true, and all-too-common, that sinful human beings go so far as to make up their own rules and regulations, in addition to God’s commandments, and then claim that if one follows such things, one earns points with God. They tell folks they can’t eat certain foods on certain days; or, they tell people to say the Lord’s prayer a certain number of times in a row, following a silly set of beads, to earn God’s favor; or, they tell individuals to travel to this or that city, making a pilgrimage, to thereby please God. Nevertheless, all such things are false teachings, which do nothing to truly please God or merit His favor!

Therefore, our sermon text will be beneficial for all of us to consider, as it reviews some facts concerning:

“HOW TO ACQUIRE ETERNAL LIFE”

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) What method of acquiring eternal life always fails, and why
- 2) What method of acquiring eternal life always succeeds, and why

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Prior to our Scripture selection we learn that Jesus, “departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.” (Matthew 19:1-2) At that time, Jesus spoke about marriage and divorce; then, the Savior showed His love for little children that were brought to Him, saying, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.” (Matthew 19:14-15) After blessing those little children, the events recorded in our sermon text took place— which we will presently enter upon.

Verse 16, ----- (Matthew 19:16)

We later learn from verse 20 of our Scripture selection that it was a young man who came and said unto Jesus: *Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

Furthermore, St. Luke’s account reveals the young man was a “certain ruler”— a person with a social position of rank among the people. (Luke 18:18)

Oh, the young man was respectful to Jesus, addressing Him as “Good Master”; but, consider the question the young man asked: *what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?* That question reveals the young man held the opinion he could earn eternal life by his own works.

Unfortunately, the same opinion remains common to this day, as was mentioned in the introduction to this sermon.

Verse 17, -----. (Matthew 19:17)

Think about Jesus' first words in response to the young man, for Jesus said to him: *Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.* Jesus thereby let the young man know that He knew that he – the young man – did NOT believe that He – Jesus – IS GOD! Oh, the young man held that Jesus was a “Good Master” – a very good Teacher of God's Word – but that's all. The young man did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah foretold of old, the Christ; the young man did not believe that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us; the young man did not believe in Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, the one true Savior of the world.

My friends, that young man is like all-too-many people today: people who hold that Jesus was a good teacher and nothing more; people who do NOT believe Jesus is true God and true man, but one Christ, the only Savior of sinners; people who fail to realize that Acts 4:12 relates, in reference to Jesus, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Jesus subsequently directly addressed the young man's question, *what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?* For Jesus answered, *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* Yes, if one would actually DO WHAT IS NECESSARY to have eternal life, one MUST perfectly KEEP – in thoughts, words and deeds – ALL the commandments God has given, “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” – declares Romans 10:5.

Verses 18 & 19, -----. (Matthew 19:18-19)

The young man's conscience apparently bothered him at least a little, for he desired some

clarification from Jesus concerning what commandments needed to be kept, because the young man asked, *Which?* And then, *Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

Note that Jesus mentioned five of the commandments from the second table of God's Law; then, Jesus gave a summary of the second table of the Law, when He said: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Oh, Jesus Christ is infinitely wise in applying God's Law, for Romans 13:10 relates, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Verse 20, -----. (Matthew 19:20)

Wow, there was no lack of self-esteem in that young man, for he answered Jesus, by saying, *All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?* Seriously? This dude actually held that he had kept the aforementioned commandments from the second table of God's Law perfectly!

My friends, there are people today who have the same high opinion of themselves as that young man had. Why, OUR OWN sinful flesh urges us to think the same way; and yet, Psalm 14:2-3 plainly informs us, “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Oh, even we Christians still sin daily in thoughts, words and deeds, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” – declares Ecclesiastes 7:20.

Looking at our sermon text, we again see that despite the young man's high self-esteem, his conscience was bothering him, at least a little, for he asked Jesus, saying, *what lack I yet?* Yeah, deep down that young man knew he was guilty of sin, despite his claim to have kept the commandments of the second table of God's Law from his youth up

until that present time.

Verse 21, -----. (Matthew 19:21)

The young man had asked Jesus, *what lack I yet?* Jesus lovingly answered him, saying, *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

Besides being true man, sinless man, Jesus is also true God; therefore, Jesus is omniscient, Jesus Christ is He, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."— reports Colossians 2:3. Accordingly, Jesus knew that the young man's first love was his worldly-wealth and position in society, not his neighbor. The young man had NOT even kept the second table of God's Law, let alone the first table, which Jesus summarizes in Mark 12:30, saying, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." Thus, that young man was headed for hell, since he was NOT a follower of Jesus Christ; that is, he did NOT believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, but rather, he trusted in his earthly riches and in himself.

Verse 22, -----. (Matthew 19:22)

Jesus had said to the young man, *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.* Jesus told the young man straight out what he needed to do! The young man needed to cease being a hoarder of worldly things; the young man needed to love the Lord rather than loving the things of this world; the young man needed to repent of his sins, turn to Jesus Christ in true faith, and follow Jesus by being fruitful in the faith. But what happened? Sadly, upon hearing Jesus' lovingly instructive words, *the young man... went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.* Oh, the young man refused to repent and regard the Lord Jesus Christ as His foremost love!

Hence, we see from the case with the young rich

man in our sermon text, what method of acquiring eternal life always fails, and why. We've seen that attempting to acquire eternal life by one's own works fails, because one cannot keep God's Law perfectly as God demands, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." declares James 2:10. And, in no uncertain terms, Romans 3:19-20 adds, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

Let us never forget we are all sinners who can never be saved by our own works, because all that we do is in itself stained with sin. Let us also beware of setting our hearts upon the things of this fleeting world, for 1 John 2:15-16 instructs, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." God grant that our greatest love is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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As we ponder our sermon text to its conclusion, let us see what method of acquiring eternal life always succeeds, and why.

Verses 23 & 24, -----. (Matthew 19:23-24)

Jesus' disciples were listening and observing everything that transpired between Jesus and the rich young man. The Lord then used the opportunity to instruct His disciples, for Jesus said to them: *Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

Observe the fact that Jesus emphasizes the

extreme difficulty for one who is rich in worldly-wealth to enter the kingdom of God, that is, to become a member of the Holy Christian Church on earth and subsequently safely enter heaven upon departing this life. It's very difficult because the rich folks' hearts are set on their societal position, money, and possessions. Such people are high on themselves in self-esteem!

Notice how Jesus really emphasizes the extreme difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of heaven, for He states: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* A camel is a rather large beast, while the eye of a needle is quite a tiny opening. No sinful human being can get a camel through a needle's eye!

My friends, we had best take the following words from 1 Timothy 6:6-10 to heart, so that we keep our priorities right: "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." God grant that we do not get caught up in the love of money and other things of this world; God grant that we fear, love and trust in Him above all things.

Verses 25 & 26, ----- (Matthew 19:25-26)

Upon hearing Jesus' words concerning the great difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God, Jesus' disciples *were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

It's as if the disciples were thinking: if the rich who have been so blessed with worldly-wealth cannot be saved, then who can be saved? After all, the

rich have all sorts of advantages in this world. Jesus then impressed upon His disciples that entering the kingdom of God is possible **ONLY WITH GOD**, for men cannot enter the kingdom of God by their own efforts, no matter how much worldly-wealth and societal position they have.

Let us never forget what the Holy Bible teaches us concerning salvation, that being: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (John 3:16-18; Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 12:3) Take it to heart: God does the saving, all of it!

Verses 27-30, ----- (Matthew 19:27-30)

The apostle Peter was never bashful about speaking up when he desired to know something, for, on behalf of all the disciples, Peter said to Jesus: *Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

Now, it's true that by God's grace the twelve apostles had left worldly things behind to follow Jesus. They had left possessions and family behind to travel about with Jesus, learn from His preaching and teaching, and subsequently go forth themselves preaching the Gospel to others.

Consequently, Jesus told the apostles straight out:

Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

grace! All thanks and praise be to our gracious God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

m.e.l.

Hence, rewards of grace awaited the faithful followers of Jesus Christ! Fellow Christians, rewards of grace await faithful followers of Jesus Christ to this very day, for Holy Writ relates in John 3:36 and Revelation 14:13, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him. ...Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." Therefore, the method of acquiring eternal life which always succeeds is: having God-given faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord! —That method always succeeds because it's based on the Lord's perfect work and NOT on any of our sin-stained works!

Notice the concluding words of warning in our sermon text, for Jesus says: *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.* Yes, those who are first-place in their own mind and heart with their high self-esteem, shall be last in God's kingdom since they will not even enter therein; while those who are last in their own eyes, those who know themselves to be wretched sinners who deserve nothing but God's wrath and damnation, but by God's grace believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, will be first in that they will enter the kingdom of God, having heaven as their eternal home.

Fellow Christians, let us be truly grateful to our gracious God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has chosen us as His own and seen to it we have been gifted with faith in Him, for we've seen from our sermon text how to acquire eternal life. We know we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ— faith which is itself a gift of God's