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What Do You Still Lack? Matt 19:16-22  
GPBC  
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Introduction – Today’s text is a familiar encounter between Jesus and a young man asking a question about a most important matter. This encounter has a truly tragic ending. We’ve already read v22. This young man walks away from Jesus.

Jesus is the answer to the question of eternal life, and only Jesus. Remember our Treasure Verse – John 11:25 – I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. What makes this story so devastatingly tragic is that this young man is so close to the only answer for what he is seeking. (1) He has an audience with Jesus, the One who gives eternal life. (2) His belief system contains some truth. He is aware that life continues beyond the grave. He knows he needs to prepare in this life for the next life, and he realizes the next life never ends. (3) Even with all his wealth he is aware of his own mortality.

He is so very close to possessing eternal life and yet he is so very far from it. He’s got the right desire. He’s even tried to live an honorable life. There’s just one thing, one thing that he lacks. And that one thing in the end will prevent him from obtaining and enjoying life everlasting.

This tragedy is repeated throughout history and in our own time, maybe with some of us who are gathered here today. There’s one thing in our lives that we cling to. We hope and we think that if we can get everything else in the right place, we’ll be fine, we’ll be right with God. If we’re 90% there, or even 99%, surely this one thing won’t matter. And yet that one thing does matter because it matters so much, too much, to us. As long as we keep clinging to that one thing, we’ll never know the fullness and joy of eternal salvation. He had the right question, “What do I still lack?” he just couldn’t resolve himself to the right solution and let that one thing go. May the Lord graciously work in our lives today as we study this text together so that our story won’t end in the same tragic way. May we enter eternity clinging to Christ rather than clinging to that one thing.

## I. The Failure of Obtaining Salvation Through Pursuing Good Works

- a. This young man had the right goal in sight, but he was on the wrong path to obtain it. “what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” He wanted eternal life. He knew he needed eternal life. But he was pursuing salvation on the wrong path. He thought he could obtain it by good deeds. He thought he could reach eternal life through doing good works, living an outstanding moral life. If he accomplished enough good, he could outweigh any bad he may have committed. He thought he could work his way, earn his way, to heaven.
  - i. Moralism, that is, being a good person, and legalism, that is, rigidly adhering to God’s law to the satisfaction of our own standard, are both dead ends. In moralism we compare ourselves to others. In legalism we compare ourselves to our own standard of God’s law. Neither will ever succeed in taking you to heaven. Both will utterly and miserably fail.
  - ii. (moralism) Rom 3:28 says “For we hold that one is justified (declared to be right with God) by faith apart from the works of the law.”
  - iii. (legalism) James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”
  - iv. Our good will never outweigh our bad. We can’t reach heaven by being the best person we can be or by keeping as many commandments as we can keep.
- b. Now in v17 Jesus answers his question in a way that allows him to keep thinking he’s on the right track. Now why would Jesus do that? Why wouldn’t Jesus immediately say, “You’ve got it all wrong. You can’t get to heaven by doing good deeds”?
  - i. As Jesus responds to this man, He is leading him to realize his current path is futile. Jesus structures their dialogue in such a way that the young man will be able to conclude and see for himself why his direction will fail him in the end.
- c. V17a – But first Jesus does throw up a red flag. Jesus challenges his direction. He’s asking about a good deed that he can do, but he should be looking to God for eternal life, not himself. He won’t earn eternal life, but God does give eternal life. And furthermore, God is standing right in front of him. There is only one who is good. There is only one without sin.

- d. V17b – The next words from Jesus allows this man to follow the logical, biblical conclusion to his current direction. “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”
  - i. Jesus is referring here to the Old Covenant and He’s teaching this man the same lesson God was teaching in the OT. In Gen 2, the opening of the law, God told Adam and Eve, “Don’t eat this tree and you will live. Eat this tree and you will die.” In Deut 30, the closing of the law, Moses tells Israel, “If you will keep God’s commandments and love Him, you will live, but if you turn from following God, you will die.”
  - ii. Adam and Eve turned from the Lord and over and over again Israel turned from the Lord. The lesson is clear. The only way to be saved by keeping the law is to always perfectly keep the law and that we can never do. The law was never meant to save. It was meant to prove to us that we can’t save ourselves. We need a Savior.
- e. So if the young man was tracking with Jesus he would have immediately realized he can’t keep all the commandments. He needs another path to salvation. But like us and like all sinners, he instead looks for a loophole and asks “Which ones?” Moralistic legalism creeps in again. It is our default position. As if not every law of God is essential. Some can be discarded. Surely, you don’t have to be perfect to be righteous. Surely if you keep the main ones or the big ones, the little ones won’t matter.
- f. And so Jesus takes him a step further down this failing path of good deeds and law-keeping and tosses out 6 commandments. Commandments 5-9 of the Ten Commandments and one of the two umbrella commandments found in Leviticus. Commandments 5-9 have to do with loving your neighbor, so the summary commandment “love your neighbor” covers them all.
  - i. Notice Jesus leaves out the first big four of the Ten Commandments, which have to do with loving God.
  - ii. The young man replied, “All these I have kept.” In other words, this man has lived a pretty good life when it comes to loving your neighbor. He’s got half of the commandments down. He’s in good shape horizontally (man to neighbor), it’s the vertical dimension (man to God) that’s the problem.

- iii. And he knows something is still missing. He knows deep in his heart that even though he has an exemplary life when it comes to his neighbor something is still lacking when it comes to God.

- II. Jesus Identifies the One Thing Standing Between this Man and Eternal Life
  - a. He's got one thing in his life that he loves more than God. He has spent his whole life loving his neighbor and rejecting God as his treasure. He's an idolater. His wealth, his status, his comfort and security in this life is the thing he treasures most.
  - b. So Jesus now helps him identify his idolatry, he helps him see that for all of his good works, he's still not right with God because he's holding on to his possessions rather than clinging to God.
  - c. "If you would be perfect" that is, if you would be whole, if you would find what is missing, if you would be right with God – go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor. Get rid of it. Let that one thing go and you will have what you are seeking. Jesus answers his initial question in v16!! But to do that good deed you have to love God more.
  - d. Jesus follows the command to sell your possessions with a wondrous promise that directly answers his initial question – What good deed must I do to have eternal life? Get rid of your idolatry. Give it to the poor. Make God your treasure. And if you do that you will have eternal life – you will have treasure in heaven!
  - e. No greater promise – no greater reward. The treasure God had for him in heaven was far more than all of his wealth on this earth. Tragedy of tragedies, this man forfeited the eternal joy and bliss and eternal treasure of heaven for earthly treasure that can never fill the void in his heart and that he will one day lose. In a reversal of the famous missions quote by Jim Elliot, he lost what he would never lose for something he could never keep.
  - f. And to show that you have replaced your idol with love for God, Jesus said, "and come, follow me." Be my disciple. Give your life to me and follow me all the way to glory.

Conclusion – Well we know how it ends. When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. It was just too much for Jesus to ask

for his all. He was sorrowful because this wasn't the answer he wanted to hear. He wanted a list. He wanted to earn his way. He wanted to be moral enough to gain God's approval. But the one thing he didn't want was to lose his treasure. And for that one thing, he missed life everlasting and free.

What is your one thing? Maybe it's possessions. Maybe it's being your own master. Maybe it's clinging to sin, your friends, reputation, pride, a relationship. What is the one thing in your life that up to this point you just won't let it go. God can have everything else, but not this one thing! You can follow this young man today and walk away and miss life eternal or you can give it to God today and find in Him far more than what you've been clinging to. Whatever it is, it won't give you life – but Jesus will!