

Daniel Waldschmidt – Mark 10:17-27 – No One is Good ... Except God

Usually it's a good idea to stay away from absolute statements.<sup>1</sup> Absolute statements are usually false. For example, a kid says to his parents, "We never do anything fun!" And the parents want to say, "Really? What about when we went to the movies last week or when I spent all that money to go on vacation last month? We never do anything fun?" Or when a couple is in marriage counseling they usually make a lot of absolute statements, "We never spend any time together." "You never tell me you love me." "You never appreciate what I do." Absolute statements tend to be exaggerations. They tend to actually be false. Which is why it is very shocking that Jesus in the gospel today makes an absolute statement: No One is Good.

And you want to say, "Really, Jesus? I know plenty of good people! I like to think that I'm a pretty good person." And Jesus says "No. No one is good." And what Jesus says is even more shocking when you consider that the person Jesus says this to, is by our standards a good person. You would want to have this guy as a neighbor. You would want to have this guy as a friend. You would want to have this guy in your church.

He's humble. He falls on his knees before Jesus. He wants to know how to get into heaven. He's even polite towards Jesus. "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus will often answer a question with another question because he wants to get people to think. And he wants this man to think harder about what is good and who is good.

"Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone." Jesus says when you think about how to get to heaven you need to rethink your notion of good, "No one is good."

Jesus next gets him to think about the commandments. The commandments are God's standard for what is good. "You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" And the man says, "Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy."

And on a surface level that was true. He hadn't physically murdered anybody. He had not cheated on his wife. He had never broken into someone's house and carried away their stuff. He had never lied under oath in court." AT a surface level of the commandments he had indeed kept them.

But this man must not have been present for Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says that there is more to the commandments than just the surface level. For example Jesus says, "You've heard that it was said 'You Shall not Commit Adultery.' But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Have you ever looked at a woman lustfully? You're not good. No one is good. Or Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.' But I tell you love your enemies." Can you honestly say that you love your enemies? No one is good.

And Jesus goes on, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor." I teach the commandments in catechism. And when Martin Luther explains the commandments, he always gives something we shouldn't do and something we should do. For example, in the explanation to the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, "You shall not steal" Luther says, "We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income." And you say OK, I can understand that I should take his property, but I should also "help him to improve his property and means of income?" Jesus says, "You really want to be good? You really want help your neighbor? Sell everything you have and give it to the poor." No one is good.

Did you notice that Jesus left a few of the commandments out? Listen again to the commandments that Jesus listed: "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother." What commandments did Jesus leave out? The first three commandments, right? The first three commandments are the ones which have to do directly with God. "You shall have no other gods." "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God." "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy."

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this sermon is borrowed from a sermon preached by WELS pastor Jonathan Hein.

One time someone asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment in the law?" And Jesus said "The greatest commandment is this: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind." When Jesus told this man, "Go and sell everything you have," he was forcing this man to make a choice. What do I love more? Do I love God or my stuff. I'm sure that this man loved God. He wanted to go to heaven. He definitely loved God. But the commandment is not just to love God. The commandment is to love God with all of your heart and all of your soul and all of strength and all of your mind. This man's face fell when he realized he would have to choose between his stuff and God.

And then Jesus says, "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." Imagine a camel. And now imagine a needle to use for sowing. It's impossible, for a camel to go through the eye of a needle and it's impossible, for a rich man, or any man to get into heaven. Because no one is good. The disciples ask the natural question, "Well, then who can be saved?" And Jesus answers, "With man this is impossible. But not for God. With God all things are possible."

You see we have a problem. No one is good. And you have to be good to get into heaven. Remember the movie Apollo 13? I remember there is one scene in that movie when the astronauts needed more carbon dioxide filters. But the only ones they had left were square and they needed to fit them into a small round hole. So there one scene where the scientists in Houston are trying to figure out how to fit a square peg into a round hole.

God needed to do more than fit a square peg into a round hole. He needed to fit a camel through the eye of a needle. He needed to take us who are not good and somehow find a way for us to be in heaven. How did God do it? He himself came down to earth. He himself became a human. He was born of a woman.

This conversation that Jesus has with this man is very ironic. Because Jesus says, "No one is good ... except God alone." The man spoke better than he knew. Jesus is good. Because Jesus is God. Jesus came down to earth and he was good. He was only person in the history of the world that was good. The first commandment had never before met a person who kept it. And Jesus did keep the first commandment. He loved his Father with all his heart and all his soul and all his strength and all his mind. I heard a pastor say once, "Jesus told this man to sell his things. Big deal. Jesus gave up the skin off his back. Jesus hung on a cross because he loved his Father." Jesus died on the cross not just because he loves you but because he loves his Father. Jesus loved God. Jesus good.

And here is how God fit the square peg through the round hole. Here is how God fit the camel through the eye of a needle. He took all of your sins and he put them on Jesus. He let Jesus perfect goodness count for you. So when God looks at you. He sees someone who is good.

Jesus' command here is specific to this one man. He doesn't tell us to go sell everything we have. But imagine for a moment that you really do have absolutely nothing. Imagine that you go into your WELLS FARGO or your CHASE bank account and you see that you have \$0.00 in your checking and \$0.00 in your savings. If that were true, then you would have nothing. But you would still have everything, because you have Jesus.

It's fun to imagine what you would do if you were this man. On the one hand, you have to sell everything you have. But on the other hand, look what Jesus says, "Go sell everything you have and give to the poor ... then come follow me." Yeah you give up everything thing you have, but you get to be with Jesus!

Jesus told a story once about a man who found a treasure hidden in a field and he went and sold everything he had and bought that field. Who cares about all my stuff. I found this treasure in the field. Brothers and sisters, you have found the treasure in the field. You look at Jesus and you say, "Whom have in heaven but you. And earth has nothing I desire besides you."

But you'll go home today and you will find that you're not broke. That you do have stuff. But because Jesus is your treasure, you'll find that you can be much freer with the things you do have. You can use to help people who are in need. You can use it to generously support the work of the church. You found the treasure in the field so, you're free to good with the other stuff. Give thanks, to the LORD for he is good. Amen.