

First Lenten Service
Lenten Theme: “Fall on Your Knees”

Text: Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷As 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?” ¹⁸“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹You 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.’” ²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” ²¹Jesus 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.” ²²At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” ²⁴The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁷Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” ²⁸Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!” ²⁹“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Even the Erring Kneel

The Gospels are full of stories in which people kneel before Jesus. As I prepared this series, I had a very hard time picking out only a few of the stories. Most of the people who kneel before the Lord are those who are repenting of their sins or in great need. They see Jesus as their Savior and want to receive His help.

But this story is different. The rich young man who knelt down before Jesus didn’t come to receive anything from Jesus. He wanted to offer something to Jesus. He thought that he had done enough to deserve heaven. At the end of the story we see that Peter was starting to think that he deserved heaven because of what he had given up for Jesus. As we look at this story this evening, I would like to look at how even the erring kneel.

I. In the first part of the text we see how the rich young man was proud of what he had done for God.

He knelt before Jesus with the question, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Actually, this is a very common question. In Luke 10:25 there is a scribe who asks Jesus, the very same question, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Jesus then goes on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. On Pentecost the crowd asked Peter, “*Brothers, what shall we do?*” (Acts 2:37) In Philippi the jailer asked Paul and Silas, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (Acts 16:30) Throughout the Bible people were asking how they could save themselves.

Jesus had an interesting answer to this young man. He said, “*Why do you call Me good? No one is*

good – except God alone.” Then Jesus recited the commandments. Then the young man said, *“Teacher, all these I have kept since I was a boy.”* There we see the problem. The young man came to Jesus with the question, *“What must I do?”* However, he thought that he had already saved himself. He believed that he had already kept all of the commandments.

It is very tempting for us to be like that young man. We look at the commandments, and we think that we have kept them pretty well. We have never gotten into any trouble. We aren’t as bad as a lot of people that we know. We think that we are pretty good, maybe even good enough to earn eternal life.

The next sentence is very interesting. It says that Jesus looked at the man and loved Him. The scribe who asked this question in Luke’s Gospel was trying to test Jesus, but this man was sincere. He wanted to receive eternal life. In His love for the man, Jesus showed that he wasn’t as perfect as he thought. He said, *“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.”* Jesus knew exactly where this man’s weakness was. He loved his riches. The man walked away very sad. Suddenly he realized that he loved his riches more than God. He could not save himself.

When we think that we have earned our salvation, Jesus has a way of showing us that we are not as good as we think. It might be our wealth as it was for this man, but it could be a whole host of things. There are temptations that each one of us struggle with. We would like to say that we have earned our salvation, but those commandments show each one of us our sins. In His love for us Jesus shows that we cannot save ourselves. Like the rich man we realize that there are things that we have loved more than God, and we have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves.

II. In the second part of the text we see how Peter was proud of what he had given up for Jesus.

Jesus told the man to give away all his possession and then to follow Jesus. He went on to say how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. That got Peter thinking. He remembered how they left everything to follow Jesus. He even made it a point to remind Jesus, *“We have left everything to follow you.”* Jesus answered by saying that what we have given up for Him in this life will be given to us many times over in the life to come, but then he added, *“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”* This was a warning against pride in the things that we have given up for God.

There is a difference between what the rich man and Peter were offering Jesus. The rich man trusted in what he did for Jesus. Peter was trusting in what he had given up for Jesus. That is a temptation that we can fall into also. We are tempted to remind God of what we have given up for Him. It might be our offerings, what we have given up for lent, it might be time that we have given or talents that we have used. It might even be ways that we were ridiculed for our faith or suffered because we are a Christian.

We might think that it must be worth something, but God’s people don’t keep track. In Matthew 25 the righteous answer Jesus, *“Lord when did we see You hungry and feed You or thirsty and give You something to drink or a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit You.”* Those people didn’t remember what they did or gave

up for Jesus. Such deeds and sacrifices are only made out of love for Jesus. They are not done to earn our salvation. Like the rich man in the end we realize that our deeds aren't all good. As Peter would soon find out, he would rather deny Jesus than risk his life. There are also things that we are willing to give up.

III. But Jesus accepts us by His grace.

Jesus loved that young man. I don't believe that the end of the story is recorded here. Eventually, that young man came to believe that He couldn't do anything to inherit eternal life. It was a free gift, which Jesus had won for Him on the cross of Calvary. Peter wept bitterly after he denied his Lord. He realized that he had not been willing to give up everything to follow Jesus. Yet, at the Lord's resurrection he heard Jesus' words of forgiveness. On Pentecost when the crowd asked Peter, "Brothers, what shall we do?" His answer was, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38) When the jailer asked Paul what he must do, Paul answered, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved – you and your household.*" (Acts 16:31) The Bible doesn't point us to our deeds or sacrifices to be saved or even for the certainty of our salvation. It points us to Jesus. It reminds us that He gave His life for the forgiveness of our sins, and He rose as our Savior. We are not saved by any of our deeds, but by grace, but God's undeserved love through Jesus Christ.

Here we see how even the erring kneel before Christ. They kneel to offer Him their deeds and sacrifices for the assurance of salvation. Jesus has a way of saying, "No thanks." We often say that it is better to give than to receive, but that is not the case when it comes to kneeling before Jesus. We don't come to Him to offer our deeds and sacrifices, but to ask for His forgiveness, help, and salvation. By grace He gives us these gifts and then He enables us to do deeds and make sacrifices which are for His glory, not ours.

May God give us that repentance and faith that looks to Christ and not to ourselves for our salvation.

Amen.

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