

Three Obstacles Which Block The Way To Heaven.

Text: Matt 19:16-26

Suggested Hymns:

263, 344, 303, 305, 347

1) Legalism or self-righteousness

2) The love of money

3) Despair of God's power and mercy

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 19:16-26, ¹⁶ *Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* ¹⁷ *So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

¹⁸ *He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, " 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'* ¹⁹ *'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

²⁰ *The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"* ²¹ *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* ²² *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

²³ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."* ²⁴ *"And again I say to you, 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."*

²⁵ *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"* ²⁶ *But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text tells us of a young man who came to Jesus full of expectancy, but left thoroughly disappointed. This is not an isolated case.

Remember the time when Jesus said, ⁴⁸ ***“I am the bread of life. ...”*** ⁵¹ ***“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”*** Then we read a little later in John 6:66, ⁶⁶ ***“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.”***

Herod was also disappointed. Initially he was glad when Pilate sent Jesus to him because he hoped to see some miracle done by Jesus, but Jesus answered him nothing,¹ and so he was also disappointed.

After Jesus fed the 5,000, and the people realised the miracle that Jesus had done they said, ***“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”*** ¹⁵ ***Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone.*** They were disappointed that Jesus left them.

Even the disciples were in danger of being disappointed as we read in Luke 24:21, ²¹ ***“But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened.”***

Jesus spoke of disappointment very early in His ministry as we read in Matthew 11:2-6, ² ***And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples*** ³ ***and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?”***

⁴ ***Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:”*** ⁵ ***“The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”*** ⁶ ***“And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”***

Since then untold multitudes have been disappointed in Jesus. For the same reasons today many people refuse to enter the Church, and many leave the Church. Why is this? What are the causes? Our text tells of *Three Obstacles which Block the Way to Heaven*. Let us consider these in turn. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The First Obstacle That Blocks The Road To Heaven Is Legalism Or Self-Righteousness.

This was the case of this young man. Listen to the claims of this foolish, self-righteous person, *“Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?”* ¹⁷ *So [Jesus] said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.”*

¹⁸ *He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’* ¹⁹ *‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”*

²⁰ *The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth.*

Luther ridicules this man by writing, *“Ring all the bells and come to see this wonderful man who has kept all the commandments from his youth.”* Of course, this young fool had not even begun to keep the commandments of God, not to speak of keeping them all from his youth.

This is the first obstacle which keeps people from heaven, the religion of works or of the Law, which causes people to think that they can earn heaven by their own efforts. Scripture says in Romans 3:23, ²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* And in Job 14:4, ⁴ *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one!*

And in Genesis 8:21, ... *the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.* And in Psalm 143:2, *For in Your sight no one living is righteous.* 1 John 1:8 states our condition very clearly. ⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Therefore we must stop saying, *“God, I thank You that I am not as other people are,”* and learn to say: *“God be merciful to me, a sinner.”*

This is what the Psalmist says, as we read in Psalm 51:1-10, *Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.* ² *Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.* ³ *For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.* ⁴ *Against You, You only, have*

I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.

⁵ *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.* ⁶ *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.* ⁷ *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* ⁸ *Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice.* ⁹ *Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.* ¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a [right] spirit within me.*

We need to confess our sins as the prodigal son did, as we read in Luke 15:21, *'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

2. The Second Obstacle That Blocks The Road To Heaven Is The Love Of Money.

Jesus knew the heart of this young man. He knew that he was a servant of mammon. His outward obedience to the Law he had practised, not to please God, but to gain and safeguard his money.

Jesus applies the tests and gets the reaction that reveals the servant of mammon. Our text says ²¹ *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* ²² *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

What a liar this young man was! Actions speak louder than words. Just before he had claimed to love his neighbour as himself, but now he refuses to relieve the suffering of his neighbour. Scripture says in James 2:15-16, ¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,* ¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*

Such conduct reminds us of Judas, who said *"Greetings, Rabbi!"* and kissed Jesus, but at the same time betrayed his Master.² Instead of being an obedient child of God, this young man was a hypocrite. And what made him like this? The love of money.

Let us take to heart what Jesus said after the shame of this inquirer became all too evident, *“Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ “And again I say to you, 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.”*

How true what the apostle writes in 1 Timothy 6:10, *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

This love of money made Judas what he was. We read in John 12:6, *“This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.*

Think also of Gehazi in the Old Testament. We read in 2 Kings 5:20-27, *“But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, “Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him.”*

²¹ So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, “Is all well?” ²² And he said, “All is well. My master has sent me, saying, ‘Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.’”

²³ So Naaman said, “Please, take two talents.” And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. ²⁴ When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed.

²⁵ Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, “Where did you go, Gehazi?” And he said, “Your servant did not go anywhere.” ²⁶ Then he said to him, “Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants?”

²⁷ *“Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever.” And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow.*

Then there was the case of Ahab who wanted Naboth’s vineyard. It was an inheritance, and Naboth would not sell it. Ahab was sad so his wife Jezebel arranged for Naboth to be killed. Then the Lord sent Elijah to Ahab and said, *‘Thus says the LORD: “Have you murdered and also taken possession?”’ And you shall speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours.”’³*

Some of the most respectable people also live in this shameful sin. We read in Matthew 23:14, ¹⁴ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.* And in Matthew 23:25, ²⁵ *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.*

Let us examine ourselves in light of the parable in Luke chapter 12. *“The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ “And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ “So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ “And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’*

²⁰ *“But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ ²¹ “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

3. The Third Obstacle Which Blocks The Road To Heaven Is Despair Of God’s Power And Mercy.

This obstacle threatened to take possession of the minds of the disciples. Our text says, ²⁵ *When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?”*

When they heard Jesus declare that it is impossible for a rich man to gain heaven by his own or by any mere human effort, they concluded that it is altogether impossible.

It was this despair which ruined Saul,⁴ Ahithophel - David's counsellor who conspired against him,⁵ Judas,⁶ and many more.

Jesus reminded the disciples of the fact that what is impossible with man is still possible with God, ***“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”*** Look at the grace and power of God. There is no sinner whom God cannot save. When men were helplessly lost, God found a way to save them, even the worst of them, by that miracle of all miracles, as we read in Isaiah 7:14, ***Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.***⁷

Here, then, is the key which opens the door to heaven for all: John 3:16,¹⁶ ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*** We also read in Isaiah 1:18,¹⁸ ***“Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.***

Away, O sinner, therefore, away with your self-righteousness, away with your natural love of money, away with your doubt of God's power or mercy. God saved David, Manasseh,⁸ and Saul of Tarsus.⁹ God can and wants to save you too.

Remember God's Word written by Paul, in his letter to Timothy. ¹⁵ ***This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.***¹⁰

Do not be as that unbeliever mentioned 2 Kings 7:1-20. Let not unbelief cheat you, as it did with some people as mentioned in Hebrews 4:2, ² ***For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.***

Let us turn to the Crucified, look to the Lamb of God, and heed the Gospel call!

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,

Today Thy mercy calls us
To wash away our sin,
However great our trespass,
Whatever we have been;
However long from mercy
Our hearts have turned away,
The precious blood can cleanse us
And make us white today. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 23:8-9

² Matthew 26:49

³ 1 Kings 21:1-26

⁴ 1 Samuel 31:4-6

⁵ 2 Samuel 17:23

⁶ Matthew 27:5

⁷ See also Luke 1:37, Rom 8:3

⁸ 2 Chronicles 33:11-20

⁹ Acts 9:1-19, Acts 13:9

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 1:15-16