

Every year about this time, you see signs up at Walmart, or in your doctor's office, reminding you to get your flu shot. It is important to get a flu shot, especially if you are a senior citizen, since getting the flu when you are older can be devastating. In fact, older people have actually died from the flu. Jeanne and I need to get our flu shots soon. However, there is another flu bug out there, that is thousands of times more dangerous than H1NI. And it continues to infect and kill millions of people. The flu bug is called Affluenza. It is a belief within nice healthy people in our society that their niceness and generosity will get them into heaven. One such person with this sickness is a well known investor, named Warren Buffet. In the year 2006, Warren Buffett gave the largest charitable gift in the history of the universe. The gift was for \$30 billion dollars. It was targeted to improve the health, nutrition and education of the people in this world. The oracle of Omaha as he is called wowed the world with this gift. But Buffett remains afflicted with Affluenza. After he gave the gift, he commented, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way,". We applaud the man for his willingness to use his money to help other people, but we are appalled at his false hope of getting to heaven by being generous with his money. Today, you are going to get a preventative shot from God's Word which will be necessary to provide "Healing For Affluenza".

There is a little nursery rhyme that some of you may have learned when you were little children. "Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, "My, what a good fellow am I." There are people who sincerely believe that the blessings they receive in this life whether a plum in a pie or riches in this life are a direct reward from God for being good people. Such was the man who came to Jesus with these words, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He saw Jesus as a good teacher who could tell him how he can improve his portfolio of good deeds so he can be sure of an inheritance in heaven. He believed with all his heart that he was blessed with riches in this life because he has tried to be good. He also believed that if he tried his best he would someday inherit even greater riches in heaven.

Jesus could have ignored this man and let him go along with his false hope of inheriting eternal life. Instead Jesus says, "Why do you call me good? No one is good-except God alone." He calls Jesus good without realizing how good and pure and perfect Jesus was. He doesn't realize that a good and perfect and holy God cannot accept people and give them eternal life unless they measure up to his standards of perfection and holiness. Because God's goodness is so far above our goodness, Romans 3 says, "There is no one who does good." Warren Buffet can use his money to do good things for other people, but these deeds of kindness are never good enough to earn the favor and love of a perfect and holy God.

How good is good? Jesus tells the man, "You 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." When the man hears these words you can almost see a big smile come across his face as he says to Jesus, "Teacher, all of these I have kept since I was a boy." The guy is totally clueless when it comes to realizing how much God's law expected of him. The man looked at his life and honestly believed that he had done a good job of keeping the commandments because he was judging himself by human standards. If he had judged himself by God's standards he would have realized how poor and bankrupt he was. Jesus made it clear in the famous Sermon on the Mount that the sin of murder includes feelings of hatred and anger toward another person. Adultery includes lustful thoughts in the heart. False testimony includes bad thoughts about other people. Not always being truthful. Telling little lies. I cannot find anything in myself that I can offer God to make him love me and give me eternal life.

“Jesus looked at him and loved him.” Jesus did not turn away from this man in disgust for his foolish pride in his own goodness. Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus even looked at you and me when we lost in our foolish thinking and pride. He looked at us and led us to see how bankrupt we are without him, and how rich we are with him as our Savior.

Jesus tells him in love, "One thing you lack. Go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me." These words of Jesus were intended to open up the man's heart and help him see himself for what he truly was, a greedy and selfish person. We are told, "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth." He was willing to part with some of his money, but not all of it. The very mention of giving his money away caused him to well up inside with selfishness. This man had not kept the 1st commandment. He did not love God above all things.

I have a feeling I may have done the same thing as this rich man. Mark, are you willing to give up your Synod pension oneday of \$800.00 a month, your retirement savings, your house and both cars and follow me?

Have you ever seen money change people? What about Jack Whittaker, the man from West Virginia who won the largest Powerball lottery in the history of this country? Sure, he gave 20 million to charity and helped build three churches. But then his life was completely ruined by money. He reached his lowest point when his grand daughter died of drug overdose. His wife Jewel said that she wished he had never won, and if she had known what the money would do to their lives she would have torn up the ticket and thrown it away. Money can change people and turn them into monsters. Brothers and sisters fight over the inheritance and never speak to each other again. Or a person brags about how they must have done something right in life because of the money they have in the bank.

It is easy to see what money can do to others but much harder to see what has it done to me at different times in my life? Look back at your life and ask yourself, "Have I always used my money wisely? Have I been generous in sharing it actively to promote Christ to the world? Do you realize that if you own a home, two cars and have a retirement plan that you are among the top 2% of the wealthiest people in the world? We have computers, dish washers, flat screen televisions, refrigerators, golf balls and golf clubs. We are really materialistically rich.

When God's people entered the Promised Land the Lord warned them, "When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord." I can look down at this poor rich man who came to Jesus, or to poor Warren Buffet for thinking money can buy a place in heaven, or for poor Jack Whittaker for messing up his life with the lottery. Then the words of Romans 2 come to mind, "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things." Lord have mercy on me a sinner! Jesus looked around at all the disciples whom He had just shocked and said: *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.* It is hard enough to put a string through the eye of a needle, or even this piece of rope that I have in my hand, or this tennis ball, but a camel? That is utterly impossible.

The disciples get the point that Jesus is making. They ask the question, "Who then can be saved?" They realized that they had their moments when they thought too much about money just as this rich man. Examine any part of God's law this morning and apply it to your life. You find yourself asking the same question, "Who then can be saved?" The answer that comes back is always the same. No one! We lack what is necessary for God to accept us and love us. We are spiritually bankrupt people, if it were not for the riches we have in Christ.

Jesus speaks about these riches with the words, "With man this is impossible, but not with God. With God all things are possible." Our God has done impossible things or miracles that make us the richest people in the world. God used a miracle to create the world in which we live. Every bite of food and every swallow of water comes from the miraculous power of God to sustain human life. Friends, our God can do anything! Create the whole world in six days just by speaking "Let there be..."? "*That was easy.*" Part the Red Sea so that 2 million people could walk through it completely dry and safe? "*That was easy.*" Make the sun stand still for an extra day? "*That was easy.*" Taking on human flesh and being born into this world to a virgin? "*That was easy.*" Feeding 5000 people with a few loaves and fish? "*That was easy.*" Raising Lazarus from the dead? "*That was easy.*" Nothing is impossible for God! How about cleansing the whole world from sin by his Son's death on the cross? Every sin of greed or worry or thinking too much about money. Now, I'm not going to say that was *easy*, but with God, that was *possible!* How about creating faith in the hearts of people who couldn't care less about God? People like you and me? With God, that is *possible!* How about leading a rich person to heaven by bringing him to repentance, getting him to stop trusting in his deeds and riches, and trust in Jesus instead? Again, with God, that is *possible!* And how about bringing you and me to heaven by leading us to trust in Jesus for forgiveness? Yes, absolutely possible with God! Our God can even take greedy hearts and turn them into generous hearts that love to give money to help others.

God does not save us because of what we've done. Only a puny god could be bought with tithes. Only an egotistical god would be impressed with our pain. Only a temperamental god could be satisfied by sacrifices. Only a heartless god would sell salvation to the highest bidders. But only a great God does for his children what they can't do for themselves. The rich man's wealth could not buy him a place at the table of God. *But the banquet was already spread!* All he had to do was take and eat! And that's all we have to do, too, friends! Take and eat! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.

So many things in life are hard. It is hard dealing with Guilt. Failure. Fear. Uncertainty of the future. Death. Our own mortality. Wondering where we stand with God. Except for one thing. Except for Jesus. Guilt? Jesus took yours away. "*That was easy.*" Failure? God overlooks yours because of Jesus. "*That was easy.*" Fear? No reason to anymore because of Jesus. "*That was easy.*" Uncertainty of the future? Jesus gives us sure hope, so that no matter what happens here, we have life with Him to look forward to. "*That was easy.*" Death in the family? Our own mortality? Jesus rose from the dead! And so will we! "*That was easy.*" Wondering where you stand before God? No longer! Jesus put peace between you and Him! "*That was easy.*"

My friends. You are richest people in the world because you have Jesus. We have real riches in Jesus. May the Holy Spirit help you share these riches with everyone. Amen