

Title: Almost Saved

Text: Luke 18:18-28

The rich young ruler “almost” made it to eternity. In an article written by Greg Morse of Desiring God Ministries he says this, “His condemnation on judgment day will punctuate the unhappiest story ever told. Never will a smile so drain of its color; never will hope shatter from such heights; never will victory retreat so ruthlessly; never will hell devour a victim so dejected and amazed as when the Almost Christian is led away to the lake of fire.”¹ The rich young ruler was basing his eternity on his good works, his intentions, his own self righteousness.

Almost is a word that we often use, both in the negative and positive contexts. I almost stepped on a snake. I almost fell of the ladder. I was almost in a car accident. It is also used in a negative way. In fact, I looked up the word almost in Websters Dictionary and it’s defined as, “not quite, very nearly.” I almost made it to the gas station. I almost finished my test in time. I almost made it to work on time. I almost made it to church today. I think the most common way I’ve used this term is watching Texas football, they almost won that game. But almost isn’t enough, it’s close, it’s near, it’s right at the door step, but it’s still not enough. Truly as you grow older you may understand the ole saying, “almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

The truth is today that almost doesn’t cut it when it comes to eternity. “The Almost Christian. He was almost saved. He almost escaped the wrath of God. He almost found joy forevermore in the God who was almost his God. Almost.”² Lot’s wife almost escaped the wrath of God, “But his wife, from behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.”³ So close, so near to safety, almost. Pharaoh’s army almost made it back to shore, “The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh’s entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained.”⁴ They may have seen the dry land, they almost made it, but drowned in the sea. Judas almost made it as well. He ate with Jesus, saw the miracles, the wonders, and kept the disciples money, but in the end he killed himself. He almost repented. But he repented to men instead of God. Almost.

Matthew Mead writes in his book in the 1600’s, “And that is how far it is possible a man may go in a profession of religion and yet, after all, fall short of salvation; how far he may run and yet not so run as to obtain.”⁵ Thus we have the reality of our text today. The rich young ruler had went nearly all the way in keeping the commandments, obeying its rules, and yet, one thing held him back, his wealth. It wasn’t his wealth that kept him from eternal life, it was where he placed that wealth in his life, above God.

Notice in vs. 21, “all of these things I have kept from my youth.” This was his hope. What he had done. This is where some of you are today. You can name all the times you have come to church, all the right words, all the important external things. You know to say grace before meals. You make sure you say the

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved>; accessed 8.29.23

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved>; accessed 8.29.23

³ Genesis 19:26; NASB95

⁴ Exodus 14:28; NASB95

⁵ <https://www.amazon.com/Almost-Christian-Discovered-Matthew-Mead/dp/1601786735>

right things, to the right people. You ask what do I need to do? What am I missing? And He tells you and you don't like it. Jesus gave the man the corrective action to have eternal life, vs. 22, **"One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."** Notice it was only one thing. His wealth. His possessions. His god. His hope. And it may be only one thing for you. One sin you like, one thing you don't want to give up, one thing you will exchange for eternal life, cf. Matthew 16:26. For many it's likely pride. You've been an external Christian all your life.

For the young man in our text it was his wealth, which had him. It may not be wealth for you. But whatever it is, why are you holding on to it? Jesus told the young man to sell it. No one knows what God would have blessed him with after this, it's not there in the text so I won't add something that's not there. But at the heart of the matter was a little god he loved, he cherished, he adored, and it was the one thing keeping him from eternal life. He almost had eternal life.

Jesus said if you get rid of this one thing, you **"shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."** On another note, it was King Agrippa after listening to Paul in Acts 26 when he said that Paul **"almost persuaded him to become a Christian."** Almost. If the rich young ruler would have given up the very thing that had ahold of him, he would have had treasure in heaven and been born again to follow the Lord. But, he had great wealth, and he went away sad.

We would be foolish here today to not to examine our own lives, to not ask the question "is it I?" At the last supper after Jesus told of the one who would betray them, **"And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?"**⁶ If you aren't looking at your obedience and to what, your love and to what, then I would be concerned. I know we all know these verses in Matthew 7:21-23 so well, or at the very least, we have heard them taught on many occasions, **"Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."** This text hinges on the one doing the will of the Father. The one who is obedient. The one who is molded and shaped by the Scriptures, who is chastened by the Lord. It's more than just a few words coming from your mouth.

Examine yourself today to see who you obey. Examine what you know about God. Do you have a high view of God in your life? Family? The fact is your view of God may be distorted by bad theology you have heard from bad preachers or teachers. Notice in our text vs. 18 the question that was asked, **"Good teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** Herein lies one problem, he was seeking what he could do.

Jesus first corrects his view about goodness, only God is good. Then He laid out the commandments, which one was to obey. And did he obey? Yes, he did. He kept them all. Now why would you think he is not a good man? Matthew Mead also notes in his book concerning this very text, **"Alas, how few go thus far! And yet, as far as he went, he went not far enough. He was almost, and yet but almost a Christian."**⁷

⁶ ESV

⁷ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved>; accessed 8.30.23

It should be noted that obedience to Christ is essential to saving faith, James 2:17, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." However, external conformity is no sure sign of internal change. The fact is this man turned from eternal life and His promise of heavenly treasure out of a love for this present world and his stuff. Paul warns Timothy of such as well, "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica."⁸ Such was the case of the young ruler, vs. 23. It's important to note, he was willing to do almost anything to be saved, but give up what he loved. Such is the case today. Many want to follow Christ, but they count the cost, and the chose to exchange the temporal for the eternal.

Jesus' response was directly at him when he saw he was sad. He explained how his riches were his hope and that was a burden that would bring him to hell. He condemned what he placed above God. It may not be wealth for some of you today, but there may be something you are clinging too. Almost.

The five foolish virgins come to mind as well as almost being ready. According to the ESV Expository Commentary, "Jewish weddings could last all day. After an initial ceremony filled with dancing and mirth at the bride's home, the wedding party would return to the groom's home for the wedding proper and feast to follow. This usually occurred at night."⁹

Lamp

The bridegroom delayed, the five wise had enough oil to light the lamp, but the five foolish didn't. According to Matthew 25:6, "But at midnight there was a shout, Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Almost having enough oil the foolish ones asked for some from the wise. You see they had the oil, the lamp and it appeared they were prepared. Again Matthew Mead notes, "You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it even till the bridegroom came; they go to the very door of heaven and there, like the Sodomites, perish with their hands upon the very threshold of glory. They were almost Christians, and yet but almost; almost saved, and yet they perished."¹⁰ Thinking they had enough, they were short. Maybe just a little, but they were short. Almost had enough.

There is a great danger in "feeling" saved. I want to express with the greatest of all care, salvation is not based on how you feel. It's not even based on what you do, but what He did. Isaiah says that the nation delights to "draw near to God"¹¹ yet they remain far off. Reading the Bible and attending church may make you feel good, but those feelings wane and ultimately prove the deep unbelief in your life.

John Newton asked this often, "Tis a point I long to know, Oft it causes anxious thought; Do I love the Lord, or no? Am I his, or am I not?" It is not my intention to cast doubt upon your salvation. My intention is to look at what you believe. Is it you and what you have done that you are counting on? The Scriptures teach us to examine ourselves, 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless

⁸ 2 Timothy 4:10; NASB95

⁹ ESV Commentary; <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved>; accessed 8.31.23

¹⁰ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved#3-desiring-salvation-five-foolish-virgins>; accessed 8.31.23

¹¹ Isaiah 58:2; NASB95

indeed you fail to meet the test!¹² Have you just made an external commitment? Consider this, "We read of disciples forsaking Christ by the thousands after a single meal, brothers forsaking Paul for the pleasures of the world. We read of Demas and Balaam; King Agrippa and Festus. We read of the earliest churches claiming the name of life when dead, assuming themselves rich and without spiritual need when they were poor, blind, and pitiable."¹³ Many go to judgment feasting on vague hopes and strong delusions. Many go so far and no further.

What are we to do? How do we know? We have a fallen nature that strives against us daily. Throw off every weight and sin; cast yourselves daily upon his mercy; take heed to how you live, what you love, and how you walk. Colossians 1:10, "so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Colossians 2:6, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Walk is a lifestyle, behavior. A new man will walk differently than the old. Ephesians 5:15 tells us how we should watch how we live, and truly born again Christians do, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise." Examine yourselves to make sure you are His; make every effort to make your calling and election sure; work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

If your walk doesn't concern you, I doubt you're His. Watch yourself. Deny yourself. Seek Him in every aspect of your life. Quit trusting in your own self righteous acts of "I have done" and say "Lord you have done." Martin Luther said, "*Faith must spring up and flow from the blood and wounds and death of Christ. If you see in these that God is so kindly disposed toward you that he even gives his own Son for you, then your heart in turn must grow sweet and disposed toward God. . . . We never read that the Holy Spirit was given anybody because he had performed some works, but always when men have heard the gospel of Christ and the mercy of God.*"¹⁴ I think Galatians 2:20 sums up the examination, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

True saving faith doesn't know an almost savior, who almost atoned, who almost died, who almost rose again, but one that did die, did make atonement, is coming again, and by faith and repentance, which is reflected in your life, walk, and talk is evident.

¹² ESV

¹³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/almost-saved>; accessed 9.1.23

¹⁴ <https://www.amazon.com/Reformation-Still-Matters-Michael-Reeves/dp/1433545314>