

*Pastor Rich wrote a story for me to tell y'all while he is on vacation. It is based on our Gospel reading today, but just to be clear, Pastor Rich made up the ending. But he kind of hopes it's true.*

There once was a man; a very good man. He was raised in a good household. As a boy he obediently did all of his studies and homework well. He did all of his chores as best he could. He didn't talk back to his parents much. He tried to play games and sports by the rules. He was gracious when he lost and humble when he won.

As an adult he worked hard and gave an honest day's work to his employers. In life he thoughtfully made good decision. He didn't go out carousing and partying like some young men. Instead He studied the Scriptures, took part in civic events that uplifted the community and hung out with people of good character. He eventually wooed a chaste and decent woman and made her his wife. He took his family to worship regularly, gave his full tithe in the collection box, and attended church functions and festivals as recommended. He was a very good man.

Of course, all of this right living resulted in what one would expect. The man thrived. His hard work and honesty paid off in financial rewards. His networking with the noble leaders of the community led to prosperous business opportunities and his wealth increased. He indeed became a wealthy man that people looked up to; that people wanted to be like.

Like most good men, he kind of wanted people to say he was a good man. Not that he was vain or conceited but let's face it, everybody likes to have the good

picture they have of themselves reinforced by others from time to time. Plus he genuinely wanted to be a good man not just in front of other people, but before God Himself.

Then one day he heard that a great teacher and prophet was nearby, on the other side of the river from his home. Everybody had heard of this man and the miracles and wonders He had been doing. So the man travelled over and caught up to the teacher just as he was leaving the area. The man ran up in haste and knelt before the teacher and blurted out, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

He was surprised by his own question. It seemed kind of silly. He had been doing life right since he was a boy. According to the way he understood the Scriptures he was a good Jew, one of the people of God. He should have been self assured of eternal life in Abraham’s bosom. And yet, his own question revealed inner doubt as to if he was really saved.

The teacher responded, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

Well, this certainly seemed strange to the man. This man was a prophet of Yahweh and asks why He is being called good? Prophets and priests and Pharisees and those who follow the law must be good, right?”

His thoughts were interrupted as the teacher continued, “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”

Ah, now the teacher was speaking sense! The man joyfully and enthusiastically answered, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”

The teacher then stared at Him for a long minute with what seemed to be genuine affection—the look a father has when looking upon the child he adores. The man was beginning to feel a bit awkward about it when the teacher said, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

The man’s former joy quickly melted away into devastation and desperation as the full weight of the teacher’s words took hold.

“How could the teacher demand such a thing? I’m a good man! I’ve lived life righteously and I’ve received a right reward for a good life! I don’t want to give up the things I have! I shouldn’t have to give up the things I have!” The man felt like he should be angry that the teacher had the audacity to demand such a thing, but he wasn’t angry. He walked away full of sorrow with his emotions conflicted within him, because somewhere deep down, he knew what the prophet had spoken was true.

From that day forward the man’s life wasn’t as joyful and contented as it used to be. He went about the same daily tasks as before, but in the back of his mind he felt he was a failure. He still went to church, gave his offering, took care of his family and business. But he no longer could say to himself, “I am a good man.” Sometimes as he lay in bed at night the teacher’s words echoed in his mind, “No one is good except God alone.”

It was quite some time later that the strange, strange news came to the man’s town. That prophet and teacher had been crucified in Jerusalem. What’s more, it was said that he didn’t stay dead but that he had risen from the dead! Then one of the man’s disciples came into the synagogue proclaiming that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, was the Messiah, the very Son of God Himself come into human flesh to

bear the sins of the world on His cross and to His grave! He said this Jesus was indeed the only good and perfect man ever to be since Adam's fall, and because of His goodness He was the only perfect sacrifice to take away mankind's sin and condemnation. He said that all who believed in the risen Jesus were now given His perfect righteousness as a gift so that sinners—men who were not good—are made good and perfect in God's sight!

Somehow this word made perfect sense to the man. He was not good, never had been. He was a sinner who had always been trying to be good, but deep down knew he could not ever be good enough for God. The question he had asked Jesus made perfect sense now! But now that he knew the truth, what should he do?

The apostle had the answer: "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins."

That is exactly what the man did, he and his entire household. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew that salvation and eternal life were his that very day and he stood an heir of eternal life! He had never known such joy and contentment as a good man in Judea. But as a forgiven sinner in Christ he now had a peace which he couldn't ever put into words.

Life got rather strange after that. Most of the Jews stopped calling him a good man. He and all of the Christians became pariahs and outcasts from Jewish society. The men of good character in Jerusalem no longer wanted to know him. Even some of his own family cut ties with him. But that was all okay. He had a whole new family of brothers and sister in Jesus Christ.

The new Christian family began banding together to take care of one another as Jewish society started to turn against them. Everybody started selling their possessions and giving it to the church.

It struck the man funny and he laughed out loud. At one time Jesus had commanded him to do this very same thing to inherit eternal life and it was simply too costly of a thing for him to consider. How things had been turned on their head! Now he stood in Jesus Christ, baptized, forgiven and a full inheritor of God's everlasting grace. He didn't have to give up his possessions really. But he couldn't even think of holding onto them in light of the gifts of grace he had received out of God's mercy! With God, all things are possible!

The End.