

There is a lot of talk these days about influenza. Particularly the H1NI virus. Churches are looking to protect their memberships in the flu season as pastors forego shaking hands. Now these ministers are bumping you with their fists, or patting you on the shoulder. Ushers are passing out purell, so that you can clean up your hands before and after worship. A few health care workers and children have gotten their shots, but the majority of us look to be unprotected this flu season. Some of us may be a bit fearful about not having a vaccination. 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 oneday. 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 offer him help in improving his life just as you might take a cooking class to become a better cook. Jesus could have kept on walking and ignored this man just as we might ignore people who blatantly tell us how they think everything will be OK for them in the end because they are trying their best and are not as bad as most people around them. Instead of ignoring him Jesus asked the man, "Why do you call me good? No one is good- except God."

Do you see what Jesus is trying to do for this man with this statement? He wants him to realize that his concept of goodness does not even begin to measure up to how good God is. I have seen grade school basketball coaches encourage kids by telling them "That's good defense!" or "Way to go!" even though their defense wasn't even close to what it should be. We live in a world where we applaud each other for our kind acts and our goodness even though it is so far from what God's standard of good is.

There is only one person who is good in the highest sense and that is God. His love is perfect and pure and holy. That was the love that the people saw in Jesus. That was the love this man saw in Jesus, but he did not even begin to understand how pure and perfect Jesus was and how far he was from that standard of perfection. While we applaud Warren Buffet's efforts to give 30 billion, even his best efforts to give will always be far from perfect and far from God's standard. Your most loving acts of kindness to your husband or wife this past week, your mom and dad, your brother and sister, your neighbor across the street, were beautiful to behold, even done out of love for Christ, but always imperfect. They can never be the source of our salvation. The prophet Isaiah tells us: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."

Jesus does not walk away from this fellow but worked even more personally with him by

holding up the mirror of God's law to help him see his faults and weaknesses. "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 expects of us. Can you imagine anyone ever saying, "I have honored and obeyed my parents as God wanted me to since the time I was a young man?" I have asked children in catechism the question, "Do you honor and obey your parents?" Some of the kids look down in shame, others look up and proudly nod their head "yes." But then when the question is asked, "Have you obeyed your parents perfectly at all times?" The kids shake their heads "no." Such an understanding of God's law condemns us all.

Jesus is not finished with this man. He wants him to come to see himself for what he truly is, a lost and condemned sinner, without hope of eternal life. That is why Jesus takes it to the next level. Notice again these touching words, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." If you really love people you will share the truth with them that all their best efforts to live a good life will never measure up to God's standard on judgment day. 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.

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.

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 in such a way that I have loved the Lord with all my heart, all my mind, all my strength, and used my money to love my neighbor as myself?" 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? 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 point a finger 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?" Who has loved the Lord with all their heart? Who has loved the neighbor as much as you love yourself? Who has given perfect love and obedience to parents? Who has been totally honest in business deals and taking tests? The answer that comes back is the same all the time. No one. Who then can be saved? No one if they are trusting in their own performance.

But now Jesus shares some good news: "*With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.*" Nothing is impossible with God! Friends, 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? 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! Getting to heaven is impossible for all of us on our own. But getting us to heaven is very possible with God. Eternal life costs far more than what you can pay. You don't need a system, you need a Savior. You don't need a resume, you need a Redeemer! 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! "*That was easy.*" That's right, now we can say "*That was easy*" too! 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. And it would be impossible to inherit eternal life. Except for one thing. Except for Jesus. Except for the fact that Jesus has made everything possible. Instead of wondering what we have to do to get to heaven, God wants us to trust that Jesus has *done it all* for us! "*That was easy.*" Because of Jesus, we can say: "*That was easy.*" 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.*" You were dreading coming to church this morning, because you thought you would just get made to feel guilty? Well, hey, you just finished listening to the whole sermon. And now that you have I hope that you feel that "*that was easy.*" Because of a Savior who looks at you and loves you. **Amen.**