

**"SORROWFUL, FOR HE HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS."**

– MATT. 19:16-26. – DEC. 2. –

"Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!" – Mark 10:24.

OUR LESSON relates to what for centuries has been called "The Great Refusal." The rich young ruler, whose name is not given, altho possessed of an abundance of the things of this life longed for an assurance of everlasting life. As a Jew he knew the Law; he understood that God had made with this nation, and with no other, through Moses the mediator, a covenant, under which everlasting life might be attained. He perceived, however, that even the best men of his nation had failed to gain eternal life under this covenant – that all had died. He had heard of Jesus, and that "never man spake like this man," and he knew that in many respects his teachings were of a very positive character, and that his manner and instruction were not like those of the scribes and Pharisees, uncertain and equivocal; – that he taught as one having authority, and knowing what he taught to be true. He hesitated to go to this Teacher, but finally, seeing him leaving a house in his own neighborhood, he ran out hastily and point-blank put the question: "Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal [everlasting] life?"

Instead of answering his question directly our Lord inquired why he thus addressed him as "good." Jesus' words do not imply, as some have surmised, a denial of being good. Rather, he would impress upon the young ruler the import of his own language, that when he got his answer he might appreciate it the more. Our Lord's words might be paraphrased thus: Are you addressing me as Good Master from the heart, or only as a complimentary salutation? If you really believe me to be good, you must believe in me as a teacher sent of God – the All-Good. More than this, you must believe my testimony, that I proceeded

forth and came from God, that I am the Son of God. If my testimony is untrue in any particular I am not good at all, but a falsifier, a hypocrite, a blasphemer. If, then, you call me Good Master from the heart, and believe that I am the "sent of God," the Messiah, you will be the better prepared to receive my reply as the divine answer to that question.

Without waiting to require that the young man should commit himself definitely on the point involved, but content with merely raising the issue in his mind. our Lord proceeded to answer the question.

We are not to understand our Lord's answer to this young Jew, at a time when the Law Covenant was still in force, to be the same that he would give, or that we should give in his name, today, in reply to a similar inquiry. The young man was living under a covenant of works, of which the Apostle declares, quoting from the Law itself, "He that *doeth* these things shall *live* by them." (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5.) The New Covenant had not yet been sealed with our Lord's [R2728 : page 346] precious blood, and hence it was not operative toward this young ruler or anybody else at this time. Our Lord could not properly direct the young man's attention to any other procedure than the keeping of the conditions of the Law Covenant which was still in force. Anyway, this was what the young man inquired: "What good thing must I *do* that I may have everlasting life?" It was for this reason that our Lord did not say, as we should say today in answer to such a question: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – believe that he died for your sins, and arose for your justification, and accepting him as your Savior, as the Mediator of the New Covenant, present your life in full consecration of all its talents, powers and opportunities to the Lord's service.

Our Lord did point out to the young man the only way to life everlasting then open – the keeping of the Law. He well knew that the young man could not keep this Law perfectly, and hence could not obtain everlasting life through it; but he would bring the matter [R2728 : page 347] before his attention in the most favorable form to be comprehended – without preaching the New Covenant or any other

feature of the divine plan not yet due to be announced. Hence the form of his reply.

The Law was divided into two parts or tables, the first relating to Jehovah and the second to the neighbor. Our Lord ignored the first of these, realizing that the young man, so far from desiring to make or worship idols or another god, was seeking to know and to do the will of the true God. Our Lord would bring the answer down to the simplest possible proposition, and hence referred merely to the commandments respecting duty toward his fellow-creatures, and got the response that so far as the young man had discerned the matter he had kept the Law; but altho he kept its outward form he realized that something was still lacking. He had no evidence that he had received any special blessing of eternal life, and wished to know of the Master what hindered, what he lacked of being a perfect man, keeping the Law and meriting the reward of that Law, life everlasting. No wonder Jesus, looking upon him, loved him; everybody who loves righteousness loves those who are righteous, or who are striving to the best of their ability to come up to the mark of righteousness, – perfection.

### **THE GRACE OF ALL GRACES.**

Then Jesus told him plainly, "One thing thou lackest." You have been endeavoring to keep God's Law, and have done well, so far as the outward is concerned; but the spirit of the Law you have not apprehended at all – the spirit of the Law is *Love*. "The whole Law is comprehended briefly in one word." "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." (Rom. 13:9,10.) You have been getting the outside, or shell of the divine command, but have entirely overlooked the precious thing in it, the kernel, the essence, – love to God supremely and love toward your fellowman as toward yourself. Let me prove this to you, by suggesting that you demonstrate your love for your neighbors by disposing of your property for the assistance of poorer ones. Then consecrate your life in loving devotion to God's service, and come with me as my disciple, taking up the cross of self-denial thus involved.

The test was a crucial one, and manifested clearly the distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Law. The cross was too heavy for the rich young ruler. He had gotten the answer to his question, but oh! it was so different from what he had anticipated. He had felt comparatively well satisfied with himself, altho realizing that something must still be lacking. He had rather expected Messiah's commendation, and perhaps some further advice, but nothing so radical. It was too much for him; he went away exceeding sorrowful, says Luke; his countenance fell, says Mark; it was a sore disappointment. For the time being he could not think of accepting the Master's prescription, the dose was too bitter, and he must at least think the matter over well.

Whatever course this young ruler may have subsequently taken we are not informed; but of one thing we may be sure; he had learned a great lesson respecting the scope and significance of the Law. He had ascertained the impossibility of his attaining eternal life under the Law Covenant.

It will be seen that we totally disagree with those who claim that the condition of this young man and our Lord's words to him apply to all young men or to those possessing wealth – tho the spirit of the matter is applicable to all, under the different conditions of the New Covenant. The New Covenant says to us, rich and poor, "Christ died for us, according to the Scriptures." He not only met the requirements of the Law, and fulfilled that Covenant and annulled it, but additionally he sealed and ratified the New Covenant under which he, its Mediator, can apply to all who come under its provisions through faith whatever share of his merit is necessary to make good the weaknesses and imperfections of our flesh to which our hearts, our minds, do not assent. Accordingly, even if when some come to Jesus to inquire the way of eternal life, they should be unable to say, as did this young ruler, "All these things have I done from my youth up," – if it should be even necessary for such to confess with shame, "All these commandments have I violated," nevertheless, the provisions of the New Covenant are such that even the vilest sinner who has turned from sin and who at heart

desires henceforth to walk in the way of righteousness, and who, repenting of the sins of the past, gladly makes such restitution as is within his power – all such are accepted in the Beloved One, and reckoned as justified freely from all things, from which the Law could not justify them.

Then such are invited, as was the young ruler, to come, take up their cross, and follow Jesus – come, prove, demonstrate, their love for righteousness, their devotion to God and every feature of his will; come, crucify self and selfishness, and receive into their hearts instead the spirit of God, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of love. Not merely to love their neighbors in word, but in deed and in truth, so that so far from wishing to steal from them, or to kill them, or bear false witness against them, or to do any other evil toward them, their hearts' desire would be the reverse of these, to do them good, to bless them. God is Love; the spirit of his Law is Love; and the spirit of his faithful Son, Jesus, is Love. Love is the holy spirit, of which the Apostle declares, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ **[R2728 : page 348]** [love, in some measure] he is none of his." Under the New Covenant, if the heart be full of love, it is acceptable with God even tho the heart may not be able at all times to control the flesh in respect to every thought and word and act, and to show forth through it this holy spirit of love which rules paramount in the heart.

The New Covenant is God's agreement, under which he accepts, through Christ, the intentions of our hearts as tho the same were actually and fully demonstrated in our lives; and certainly our hearts' desires will find expression through the flesh in large measure, tho not always perfectly. Thus our hearts may to some extent be read by our fellowmen, tho not perfectly, while to our heavenly Father they are an open book. Moreover, the love which enters and fills our hearts expands them and crowds out more and more of the natural and selfish propensities, crossing this natural, or earthly will with the heavenly one, the new mind. Thus gradually making progress in the new way, the Lord's saints

are growing in knowledge and in grace, and more and more are having the love of God *shed abroad* in their hearts.

### **"TRUST NOT IN UNCERTAIN RICHES."**

Our Lord took advantage of this episode to impart a lesson to his disciples, showing them the danger of riches – any kind of riches, honor of men, political influence, many and large talents or abilities, social standing, fine education and material wealth – for one may be rich in any of these senses. "It is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven." (Revised Version.) Our Lord does not here undertake to explain why there would be greater difficulties for those possessing riches to enter into his Kingdom, but from other scriptures we learn the reasons, and why it is that the heirs of the Kingdom will be chiefly found amongst the poorer classes. "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty." (1 Cor. 1:26,27; Jas. 2:5.) The rich are "called," in one sense of the word, but not in another; they are equally invited but they are much less likely (than others who are poorer) to accept the Lord's invitation and to present themselves according to the *terms* of the Kingdom call. In this sense of the word "called" only those who accept the call are meant; and they then divide themselves into two classes – those who make their calling and election sure, and obtain the Kingdom, obtain a part in the first resurrection to glory, honor and immortality, obtain a place with Messiah in his throne, to share with him in his Millennial Kingdom; and others who do not make their calling and election *sure*, either by becoming reprobates, and subjects of the Second Death, or by a failure to manifest a sufficiency of zeal in the race for the prize, and on this account being remanded to the class known as the "great company," who must come through great tribulation, washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb. – Rev. 7:9-15.

It is well that we note carefully what are the hindrances of these "rich," preventing them from having so favorable an opportunity as their

(in earthly respects) less favored brethren. (1) The possession of [R2729 : page 348] earthly good things, "riches," is less favorable to the development of faith, without which it is impossible to be pleasing to God. (2) These earthly advantages are more likely to develop pride, a serious barrier to every grace, and an impossible barrier as respects the Kingdom, which can be attained only through humility. (3) Riches of any kind bring with them friends and associates of the earth, whose hearts being generally out of sympathy with the Lord and the Kingdom will constitute them adversaries to the new mind, from whose influence it will be the more difficult to break completely away. (4) And summing up all of the foregoing, those possessed of such earthly riches have proportionately more to sacrifice than those who are poorer in these respects; and the greater the things sacrificed the greater the difficulty in performing the sacrifice.

However, on the other hand, it may be said that whenever one who is rich in this world's goods (talents, etc.) does present himself a living sacrifice to the Lord and his service it witnesses to a deeper heart-loyalty than if he were poorer. It implies a greater sacrifice, and it implies also the exercise of greater opportunities in the Lord's service. The servant who has five talents and who uses them faithfully, and doubles them, accomplishes a greater work than the servant who, having one talent, uses it faithfully and doubles it, and our Lord's understanding of this matter is shown in the fact that according to the parable the one will have granted to him authority over ten cities, and the other authority over two, altho both will be commended – "Well done, good, faithful servant." – Matt. 25:14-30.

If we would look for illustrations showing wherein the rich (in talents, etc.) have been faithful, we would find at the head of the list our Lord himself, "who was rich, but for our sakes became poor." As he was richer than all others in every sense of the word, so proportionately his sacrifice was greater than that of all others in every sense of the word, and his honor, glory and power are greater. "He is Lord of all." "Him hath God highly exalted and given a name that is above every name."

Similarly the Apostle Paul was rich – if not in money and property, he was at least rich in education, in social advantages and privileges, and in [R2729 : page 349] life's opportunities; and we may say that since the Apostle so faithfully sacrificed all these earthly riches for the sake of the privilege of preaching the Gospel of Christ, his must have been a much larger sacrifice than that of the majority of men: and proportionately we anticipate that his reward in the Kingdom will be great because he counted these earthly "riches" but "loss and dross that he might win Christ and be found in him [a member of the Anointed One]." – Phil. 3:8,9.

So then, while we call attention to the fact that few will be in the Kingdom who have had great opportunities, privileges, property or other "riches" of this world, we nevertheless encourage those who possess this world's goods of any kind, to consider that they thus hold within their grasp grand opportunities which rightly used will yield riches of grace, not only in the life that now is but also in the life that is to come; working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, proportionate to their sacrifices and faithfulness in their stewardship.

We cannot wonder that the disciples were astonished to learn that few of the rich would enter the Kingdom, for did they not see on every hand that the rich had the more important places in the synagogues and in the offices of the Jewish system? Did they not see that comparatively few of the poor in this world's goods were rated amongst the saints? No wonder they inquired, where would the Kingdom class be found, if the rich were excluded? How, then, could the salvation which God had promised should come through his Kingdom ever be attained?

The time for explaining these features of the divine plan having not yet come, our Lord contented himself with merely assuring the disciples that they must leave such a question to the Father; that the truth of his statement did not imply that no Kingdom could be formed, but that with God the matter was possible, and that his original promise to Abraham



would be fulfilled, a Kingdom class be selected, and the blessing of salvation be communicated through it. To have told them of the rejection of the Jewish nation, all except the "remnant" of believers, mainly the poor, and to have explained to them that the elect Church, the elect Seed of Abraham, would be completed from amongst the Gentiles, of a similarly poor class as respects this world's advantages, would have been going beyond what was then due to be explained, – beyond what the disciples would have been able to comprehend at that time; and hence our Lord, using the true wisdom from above, refrained from saying more than would be to their advantage to know – leaving such information, as he explained to them subsequently, for unfoldment to them by the Comforter – the holy spirit which would come upon them at Pentecost. – John 14:26.

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