

THE NARROW WAY TO LIFE ETERNAL

– MARK 10:17-31. – AUGUST 26. –

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." – Matt. 16:24.

THE PICTURE presented in this lesson is that of a young man, a Jew of a prominent family, a ruler, who, seeing Jesus going forth on a journey with his disciples, came to him running, fell on his knees before him, and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus did not immediately answer his question, but sought first to prepare the way, so that when the answer was given it would have the greater weight. He therefore inquired, "Why do you call me good?" Is this simply a mark of courtesy, or do you recognize the fact that there is only one standard of goodness, which is represented by God the Father, and that in calling me good, therefore, you are not only recognizing this divine standard but recognizing me as a teacher whom God approves? Thus paraphrased our Lord's language would signify to the young ruler, This teacher claims to be of God: his claim is either true or false; he is therefore either a true or false prophet. I have called him Good Master or Good Teacher. If I have been sincere, if this is the result of my previous investigation of his teachings, I ought to be ready to accept whatever answer he will give me as divine direction, and should promptly obey.

Not waiting for a reply to his query, but content with leaving the suggestion before his mind, our Lord proceeded to answer the original query, saying, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother." Matthew's account of the incident informs us that our Lord added the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." – Matt. 19:19.

THE LAW COVENANT STILL IN FORCE

Some have queried why our Lord did not answer the young man as we today would answer him, saying, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, confess your inability to keep the divine Law perfectly, believe on the Lord Jesus as the one who has redeemed you and whose robe of righteousness you may receive by faith and thus become acceptable to the Father, and then make a full consecration of your life to the Lord. We answer that such a full statement of the matter was not yet due to be promulgated, because our Lord Jesus had not yet finished his sacrifice, and it was not yet possible for anyone to have access to the Father through the merit of that sacrifice. Before any could thus come to God it was necessary that our Lord should finish his sacrifice and rise from the dead and ascend on high, "there to appear in the presence of God for us" as our representative, appropriating to us [believers] his merit, justifying us before the Father.

The Law Covenant which had been given to Israel sixteen centuries before was still in force, because our Lord Jesus had not yet "nailed it to the cross." (Col. 2:14.) Hence it was necessary that our Lord's answer should be in line with the Law Covenant still in force. For this reason he directed the young man's attention to the Law, showing that the way to eternal life was by the keeping of the Law, as God had promised. But we see through the teaching of the New Testament what the Jews as a people had failed to discern, namely, that by the deeds of the Law no flesh could be justified in God's sight, for by the Law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20.) In other words, the intention of the Law was first of all to test our Lord Jesus, and to demonstrate his perfection in that he would be able to keep it; and secondly, it was to prove to the Jews and thus to all men the impossibility of any one but a perfect man fulfilling the terms of the Law Covenant. The value of thus proving to them their inability to meet the divine requirements was to show them the necessity for getting eternal life as a gift from God through

Jesus Christ, and not as a reward of their own good works, which were short of the divine requirement and could never justify them.

When the young ruler replied, "All these things have I observed from my youth up," the Lord looked lovingly upon **[R3843 : page 268]** him. He was a model young man, such an one as all lovers of truth and righteousness delight in. Our Lord loved him, loved his endeavors to keep the Law, and loved his manifestation of humility and earnestness in coming as he had done in a public manner to ask the way to life eternal. Evidently the young ruler had his misgivings as to whether or not he was up to the divine standard, even though outwardly observing the requirements of the Law. Quite probably he felt fairly satisfied, but perceiving the deep spirituality of the teachings of Jesus he thought he would like to have the confirmation of this great Teacher, his assurance that the Law was all-sufficient, and that his obedience to it in the manner claimed guaranteed him life everlasting.

The conclusion of our Lord's recitation of the Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," was a part of the usual formula of statement amongst the Jews, and it had probably lost much of its intense and deep signification because so commonplace. The young ruler evidently neglected to attach to the words their only meaning; he was thinking of the more specific definitions of the Law, neglecting this more comprehensive statement, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Our Lord, always gentle toward those who manifested a right attitude of heart, those who were sincere inquirers after the way of eternal life, did not rudely call the young man's attention to his defects by saying, "You are a liar; you know very well that you do not love your neighbor as yourself, and your wealth indicates this, for there are many poor all about you, and if you love them as yourself you would be endeavoring to do for them." On the contrary, Jesus realized that selfishness had become ingrained in the fallen human nature, that this young man

was really far above the average of men in his nobility of character, in his desire to be just toward his fellows.

The young man was blinded by the customs of his time, and Jesus proceeded to open the eyes of his understanding in a most gentle manner, saying, "One thing thou lackest: Go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me."* Here was the crucial test; every Jew ready and willing to sacrifice his earthly belongings and to become a follower of Jesus would be accounted worthy of transfer from the house of servants under Moses to the house of sons under Christ. The actual transfer of all such took place at Pentecost, when the Father acknowledged them as no longer of the house of servants under the Law Covenant, but as members of the body of Christ, begotten of the holy Spirit to heavenly things and to life eternal.

*The words, "Take up the cross," are not found in the Sinaitic and Vatican MSS.

The young man, so full of confidence a few moments before, found that the great Teacher had probed his heart in its one vulnerable spot – he had not sufficient love for God and for his fellows. During the past eighteen centuries the same test has proven many good, honorable, wise people to be unfit for the Kingdom. In other words, the tests for joint-heirship in the Kingdom are so high that the majority of mankind even amongst the most moral, the most enlightened, the most reverent, fail under the test and miss the Kingdom.

It is proper enough for us to inquire if the test for membership in the Kingdom is too severe. Has God fixed too high a standard – an impossible one – or one impossible at least to the majority of mankind? We reply that to the majority of Christians this whole matter is beclouded by the false doctrines received from the "dark ages," which tell us that this young ruler, because he did not

become a follower of Christ, would go to an eternity of torment, notwithstanding his many admirable qualities of heart and life – because although willing to be just and honorable and upright in his dealings with his fellow men and reverential to his God, he was unwilling to sacrifice his earthly possessions and to become by all disesteemed, a follower of Jesus the Nazarene, despised of men. According to that standard would not almost the entire human family be properly considered as surely en route for eternal torment? How few there are who forsake all, consecrating life and time and every interest to the Lord and his service as followers of Jesus!

If these few who are to inherit the Kingdom are the only ones who will get eternal life, then indeed there are few that will be saved. But when we take the Scriptural view of this matter, that the Lord at the present time is seeking out from amongst men a very elect, a very select, class to be joint-heirs with his Son in the Millennial Kingdom as his "Bride," and that the specific work of that Kingdom will be the bringing of order and righteousness and restitution blessings and opportunities of eternal life to all the human family – then and then only can we understand this matter, and see not only the justice but also the wisdom and the love of the divine arrangement in the entire procedure. Then we are prepared to appreciate the privilege we now enjoy of becoming followers of Jesus, forsaking all that we may be his associates and joint-heirs in that glorious Kingdom to come.

"HE WENT AWAY SORROWFUL"

The young ruler had no complaint to make. The one whom he had acknowledged to be the good Master, the great Teacher, had showed him in a few words from the Law just **[R3844 : page 268]** where he stood – the utter futility of his endeavor to justify himself under the terms of the Law Covenant. What he needed to know, but what he did not stop to inquire, was how could he do

this? What power or assistance could be rendered him by which he could overcome his innate selfishness, his greater love for himself, and hence his desire to keep the great possessions he already enjoyed and to add thereto? Had he said to the Lord, "Master, I perceive that I am not what I thought I was – you have found in my heart selfishness, contrary to the divine standard, which I did not know was there. Can you help me over my difficulty? It seems too great a sacrifice for me to make."

In reply to such words the Master no doubt would have said, "What I propose is not so unreasonable as you surmise. If you give your heart completely to the doing of the will of the Lord in this matter I can point out to you step by step how you can accomplish it: but the consecration, the determination on your part to do this to the extent you are able to do it is necessary first. Then my grace, my assistance, will be sufficient for you and enable you to accomplish **[R3844 : page 269]** those good desires of your heart." If the young man had then proceeded to say, "Lord, I do consecrate everything to be your disciple and to get the eternal life, hard as it may be. I accept your promised assistance in the matter. Now how can I begin?" Our Lord probably would not have told him to sell everything that he possessed immediately, but to begin with doing all the good that he could find to do, using time and judgment and intelligence to ascertain the best ways of using all that he possessed, not as his own, but as wealth which he had consecrated to the Lord and his service – the Lord's wealth, the Lord's property, the Lord's time, the Lord's influence.

Some of his money might have been expended at once for the Lord and his apostles, and thus he might at once have begun to have a share in the harvest work then in process. But, you say, Were the Lord and the apostles in need? We answer, No. The Father saw to it that a sufficiency of means was provided for the work, and similarly he has always cared for the interests of his cause. He is not dependent upon the generosity of humanity. He is

pleased to use human generosity and thus grant a blessing to those who seek to render a service to his cause; but his cause would not be left destitute if none appreciated the privilege, for the gold and silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills belong to him who has the supervision of his own work. – Psa. 50:10; Hag. 2:8.

It is the same today. That young man would have had a privilege in connection with the service of the Truth. And it is still a privilege for any of us who possess this world's goods to have our means used in the Lord's service. We are not to think that we are carrying on the Lord's work, and that he could not get along without us; but, reversely, are to consider that he has no need of either us or our means; that it is a great privilege we enjoy to have the opportunity of casting influence, time, money, everything we possess, into the Lord's treasury, for use in his service. Whatever could not have been done for the Lord's cause directly could have been done for the poor of the Jewish nation, who indirectly represented the Lord's people, so that anything done for them because they were the Lord's would be so much which the Lord would accept as being done unto himself, and would appreciate and ultimately acknowledge and reward.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE RICH

When the young man had gone away sorrowful – declining to have the eternal life which Jesus was offering on the only terms now attaching to the offer – Jesus looked around upon his disciples and followers and noted afresh that they were for the most part ignorant, unlearned men and the poor of this world, and he said to them, "How hardly [with what difficulty] shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God." We read that the disciples were amazed at this statement. As they looked about them they well knew that the most prominent in religious circles were the rich, either in mental, social or physical riches. If the great, the learned, the Doctors of the Law, the prominent Pharisees, the rulers

in the synagogues, the members of the Sanhedrin, etc., who constituted the wealthiest portion of the nation – if these would not get into the Kingdom of God, which the whole people had been waiting for for centuries – if these, whom they supposed to be the ones most ready for that Kingdom, and who claimed to be the only ones ready, and that all others were unfit because unholy, what must they think of the Kingdom – who would be in it anyway?

Noting their astonishment Jesus made the matter still more emphatic, saying, "Children [simple, unsophisticated ones], how difficult it is for them who trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of God!" Here our Lord defines the difficulty: it was not merely the fact that a man had been born wealthy or that by some peculiar means he had acquired great wealth – not these conditions would hinder him from getting into the Kingdom; but it would be the fact that he would love these riches and trusted in them that would hinder his faith in God and his love for God and his dependence upon God and his learning the lessons of faith which the poorer would have many more opportunities for learning.

THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE

Our Lord emphasized the matter, saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." The thought is not that all of the Lord's people should be penniless, dependent upon the charity of others, but that they must all be so fully consecrated to the Lord and to his service that they will not be their own – that their possessions, whatever they may consist of, riches of knowledge or wealth of money and houses and lands, or wealth of reputation and honor of men – all must be consecrated to the Lord, to be used in his service, to be sacrificed as our belongings if we would have a share with him in the Kingdom. We must not blind our eyes to these specific terms; if we do there will some day be an awakening to the fact that the opportunities which are ours have passed from us and are

lost to us, and we will find that others have entered into the Kingdom and we have failed.

Our Lord's words indicate what is elsewhere set forth throughout the Scriptures most explicitly, namely, the necessity of sacrifice. The Royal Priesthood alone will constitute the Kingdom class, and, as the Apostle declares, every priest is a sacrificer and must have something to offer. (Heb. 8:3.) We have nothing of ourselves that would be fit to offer to God or that he would be willing to accept: every sacrifice upon his altar must be without blemish, and we by nature are blemished, children of wrath as are others. (Eph. 2:3.) Hence first of all we must receive from the Lord Jesus, from our Redeemer, through faith, the robe of his righteousness to cover our blemishes, to make us fit and acceptable for the altar of the Lord, and then we must follow the Apostle's directions, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, your reasonable service." – Rom. 12:1.

When we sacrifice ourselves wholly and unreservedly it includes not merely our hearts, our wills, our intentions, but all they can control – our mortal bodies, with whatever are their belongings, health or strength, time or talent, influence or money. Whoever makes this consecration has the promise of divine assistance in carrying it out – whoever fails to make such a consecration can have neither part nor lot in the Kingdom. **[R3844 : page 270]**

Our Lord's words with respect to the camel and the needle's eye are illustrated by the accompanying sketch of a city gate with a small panel door therein. These small doors were called needles' eyes. When the gate of the city was closed at sundown for fear of robbers, etc., the watchman guarded merely the needle's eye and admission through it was designedly tedious to prevent the intrusion of enemies. We have never seen one of these gates, but

have heard that it is possible for a camel to squeeze its way through on its knees provided the load be first removed from its back, but for the truthfulness of this we cannot vouch. In any event the Lord's thought is evident: no rich man can enter the Kingdom. The only way one can enter it is by becoming poor, nothing; – by sacrificing everything, and this would include riches, social, political and financial; and thus, whatever his previous condition, he must cease to be rich in his own name and title and possession ere he could be accepted by the Lord as fit for the Kingdom. The spirit of the Royal Priesthood must be one of self-sacrifice and not one of selfishness. The great work of the future will be the blessing and uplifting and assisting of the world, and the Lord now seeketh for the "very elect," such as will manifest a sympathy of heart-desires in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Kingdom he is about to establish. All others will be excluded.

THE KINGDOM THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

Where then would be the hope for the rich young ruler and the many of our day who intellectually and socially and in a monetary way are wealthy, and who do not exercise faith nor make the consecration to the Lord, without which they could have no part in the Kingdom? What provision has God made for these? We answer that "Jesus Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man," that "he is the propitiation for our sins [the sins of the Church, who now accept him and forsake all and become his followers], and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2.) A benefit must come to all mankind through this great sacrifice for sins, which God himself has arranged for. The rich young **[R3845 : page 270]** ruler and all the families of the earth are to be blessed, and the time for their blessing is specifically stated by the Lord to be under his established Kingdom. Only a very elect, select class of faithful sacrificers will constitute that Kingdom. These, with the dear Redeemer, on the spirit plane, will

constitute the seed of Abraham, through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

Under the reign of that Kingdom Satan and sin and selfishness will be dethroned. In various ways conditions amongst men will be so changed that wealth will not have the same strong bondage upon mankind that it now has; knowledge will be so increased that all may have it freely, fully; the good things of life will be made so common, so general, that all may enjoy them; name and fame will go only to those who merit them. Under those new conditions we may see the young ruler glad to have life eternal through acceptance of the divine arrangement. Sacrifice will not be possible then nor will it be required, even as the angels of heaven are not required to sacrifice. Only Christ Jesus, our Lord, and the Church, his Bride, are put under this severe ordeal of test, invited to become sacrificers of their interests; and to them is granted the exceeding great and precious promises of God, and to them will be given the great exaltation to glory, honor and immortality by which they shall not only be superior to mankind but also far above angels, principalities and powers and every name that is named – next to the Father. – Eph. 1:21.

This is what our Lord meant by his statement, With men it is impossible, but not with God. This was said in answer to the disciples' query, "Who then can be saved?" It was not then time to explain that in God's plan various salvations are provided for – that first comes the special salvation, and that finally will come the general salvation, which will make it possible for such as this rich ruler and others who love righteousness and hate iniquity to attain eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. According to the Law no such thing was possible, but God made possible this plan of salvation through Jesus, who not only fulfilled the requirements of the Law for himself but sacrificed himself for those who were condemned under the Law, so that God might be just and yet the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus – not only of those who are

now called in the election to the high calling, the heavenly calling, but to those also who will have a share in the great work of restitution uplift which will follow the establishment of the Kingdom.

"WHAT SHALL WE HAVE?"

A new idea respecting the exclusiveness of the Kingdom offer was reaching the apostles, and Peter, the spokesman for them, called attention to the fact that although they were not wealthy they had forsaken all that they did possess to become the Lord's followers, and therefore he desired an assurance that he and his associates would be in the Kingdom. Our Lord's reply was surely amply satisfying to his dear followers: he assured them that no man that hath left either home or brethren or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for his sake and the Gospel's sake but would receive again an hundred fold now in this time, with persecutions, and ultimately in the world to come such will receive also eternal life. There was encouragement in this to the apostles, and there is encouragement also to all who are the **[R3845 : page 271]** Lord's people today. The suggestion is that the more we leave, the more we sacrifice, the greater our present loss for the Kingdom's sake, the greater will be our reward both now and hereafter. O, if we could only have this thought well in mind continually how we would vie with one another in our endeavors to spend and be spent in the service of so gracious a Master and in so glorious a mission and with so grand prospects and rewards.

Our Lord's words being true it is very evident that some who receive little of the Lord in this present life and who have but faint prospects respecting a share in the Kingdom in the future have themselves to blame. They should ask themselves, What have I sacrificed? What have I left, for the Lord's sake, for the brethren's sake, for the Father's sake? The stipulations are specific, hence those who have nothing to sacrifice can have no reward. But who

has nothing to sacrifice? We know of none so poor that he could not sacrifice something, and the poorer we are the more diligently should we strive to find something to render unto the Lord our God.

In this connection we are to remember that the thing which the Lord most appreciates and the thing which is most difficult for us to sacrifice is self. Hence we read, "A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise." (Psa. 51:17.) If we have given our hearts to the Lord we have given him all that we possess, and he will see to it that this shall cost us enough to test the loyalty and sincerity of our sacrifice; and as we see the test coming day by day we are not to be intimidated, but to remember that the Lord has promised that greater is he who is on our part than all they that be against us, and again that his grace is sufficient for every time of need. Hence, as trials and difficulties, pain and sorrow and persecutions or slanders shall come upon us, we are to rejoice and be exceeding glad (1) That these indications of our being in the hand of the Lord as pupils in the school of Christ are evidences that we are of the elect who are being shaped and polished, fitted and prepared for places in the Kingdom. (2) We are to remember that all these trials and difficulties rightly met, loyally responded to, are working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We are, therefore, to take the spoiling of our goods with patience, with joy, knowing that in heaven we have enduring riches, enduring friendships, enduring knowledge and blessings of every kind.

But even in this present life how much the Lord grants us to enjoy: our enjoyment will be proportionate to our loyalty of spirit in the sacrificing. If we love much, and are prompt and liberal in our sacrificing, we will in turn be loved much by the Lord, be blessed and comforted, as he has stipulated, an hundred-fold more than all our distresses. Who are these who have an hundred-fold more than they give to the Lord? Who are these whose joys are

more than an hundred-fold greater than their sorrows, trials and difficulties, pains and disappointments? They are the elect of God, whom Jesus is not ashamed to call his brethren.

MANY FIRST SHALL BE LAST

"Many that are first shall be last; and the last first," are the concluding words of our Lord in this lesson. What did he mean? His words stand related to the recorded discourse just preceding. The rich young ruler, the priests and Scribes and Pharisees and wealthy generally, appeared to the disciples to have much better opportunities for the Kingdom than would the less learned, the less noble, the less influential and the less wealthy fishermen and tax gatherers, etc. Yet the latter, though seemingly less favored of God, seemingly handicapped by lack of influence, etc., were really advantaged. It was easier for them to humble themselves, to sacrifice earthly interests and ambitions, to make a complete consecration of themselves to the Lord than for those who had greater advantages every way. On the contrary, as we have seen, position, honor of men, wealth and education were all barriers to becoming disciples of Jesus. Thus those who were first or most prominent apparently in opportunity were really less favored, while those who had less opportunity were really first or most favored from the divine standpoint.

"FORSAKING ALL"

Let us guard against a mistaken view of our Lord's words respecting father, mother, houses, lands, etc. Our Lord certainly did not mean that we should sacrifice others in order to be his disciples. Our Golden Text expresses the thought we would enforce: it is ourselves that we are to deny, ourselves that we are to sacrifice. Hence in making our consecration and in our endeavor to carry it out we are to remember this, and to deal justly and lovingly with those who are dependent upon us and for whom we are responsible by ties of nature. For instance, the selling of houses

and lands, the forsaking of these, would not mean that the Lord would have us deprive our families of necessary comforts and temporal provisions. Other Scriptures show this distinctly, that he that provides not for his own – for those for whom he is the responsible caretaker, – is worse than an unbeliever. It would be worse for any of the Lord's people to neglect the ties of duty than for an unbeliever to do so, because with his higher light and sounder spirit of mind he should appreciate the situation more clearly than do others, and therefore be more just in his dealings with those who are properly dependent upon him.

This does not mean, however, that we should yield to the whims and fancies of friends or neighbors or parents or children in respect to our course as the Lord's followers. We are not men pleasers – and the only one who has the right to command us and the only one we have a right to obey is the Lord Jesus. If, therefore, a man finds that he has made proper provision for his children or for his parents, so that they suffer not in respect to a reasonable share in life's necessities and comforts, it is for him and not them to decide how his time and energy and further means shall be spent. He is not to seek to amass wealth for them, he is not to consider that wealth already entrusted to him belongs to them. He is to understand that he has one responsibility toward them as a father or as a son and another responsibility toward the Lord, and that the Lord is not only willing but commands that the responsible duties of life shall be fulfilled by him. *Whatever* is more than this in his possession he holds merely as a steward, for use in the Master's service.

Let us then, dear friends, whatever our station, remember that there is only one narrow way to the Kingdom, and that it is open only during this Gospel age, and that the [R3846 : page 271] highway of holiness belongs to the next age. While rejoicing that the world, now unwilling to travel the narrow way, will have the glorious opportunities of the highway by and by, let us rejoice

that the great favor of God respecting this narrow way has been brought to our attention, and that it is our privilege to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, with the assurance of his assistance all the journey through to the farther end, and with the gracious promise of life eternal and participation in the Kingdom. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself [let him sacrifice himself, his personal interests, ambitions, etc.], and take up his cross and follow me."
