

DIFFICULTIES OF THE RICH

– JUNE 21. – MARK 10:17-31. –

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." – Luke 16:13.

IT MUST have been an enthusing sight for the disciples of Jesus to see a rich young ruler run after the Master and, on overtaking Him, fall down on his knees at Jesus' feet, saying, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" – a very hopeful subject, we all agree. The Good Teacher did not answer the question directly; but for the benefit of the young man, and of others who have since read the narrative, He inquired why the title "good" was applied to Him. He would have the young man notice, and would wish all to notice, that everything that is really good must in some way be of God and in accordance with God.

There were only two ways in which Jesus could be viewed. Either He was, as He claimed, the Son of God come into the world on a special mission in the interest of humanity, and therefore a servant of God; or, on the other hand, if He was not, He was a deceiver, misrepresenting Himself and deceiving the people, and was bad, very bad. Jesus wished the young man to consider the force of his own expression and to decide at once this important question, upon which so much would hinge.

Not waiting for a reply, Jesus proceeded: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor thy father and thy mother." The young man replied: "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth." And Jesus, beholding him, loved him and said unto him: "One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up thy cross and follow Me."

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN?

What did Jesus mean by telling the young man that the way to everlasting life was the keeping of the commandments? We would not so tell him now. On the contrary, we would tell him that he could not keep the commandments perfectly, and that his only hope for everlasting life would be through the exercising of faith in Christ and His sacrifice for sins.

Why did Jesus point to the Law? We reply that the Law Covenant was still in force in Israel, as it had been for more than sixteen centuries. God's promise to the Jews was respecting the Law. "He that doeth these things shall live by the doing of them." Righteousness was to be the condition of everlasting life. All the Jews understood this; and this young ruler confessed that he so understood, and that he had been striving to live according to this rule. Yet he realized that he was dying, like the remainder of the race. Therefore his query. Jesus' answer signifies, "You should not strive only to keep the Law, and no more; you must be a sacrificer, and take up your cross and follow My example."

We are not hastily to suppose that Jesus meant that the riches should be given away recklessly or indiscriminately. Had the young man agreed to the terms and asked the Lord how he could best distribute his wealth, we doubt not that the Lord would have said to him, "Give it all to God; and then, as His steward, distribute it according to the wisdom which God will give you and according to His providential leadings." Even this full surrender of earthly possessions would not be sufficient for one who would gain a place in the Kingdom class. He must do more; he must become active in the Lord's service, take up his cross, practicing self-denial, and follow on patiently in the narrow way of self-sacrifice, in the footsteps of the Redeemer, even unto death.

After the close of the Jewish Age, Jesus would not have suggested the possibility of everlasting life through keeping the

Law, but rather would plainly have stated the impossibility of any imperfect person's keeping the Divine Law perfectly and the necessity of having the imputation of Christ's merit to cover his imperfections. Only thus can the righteousness of the Law be "fulfilled in us who are walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

SORROWFUL! FOR VERY RICH

The young Jewish ruler was anxious to do God's will, but not sufficiently anxious to be accounted worthy of membership in the Little Flock. He was willing to do right, to do justly, but unwilling to sacrifice. Jesus and all of His followers, on the contrary, engaged to sacrifice their lives, even unto death. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

The riches of the young ruler were not of themselves harmful. God is very rich; Abraham of old was very rich. The difficulty was that the young man had set his heart upon the riches, so that when the testing time came as to whether he loved riches or God more, he demonstrated that he loved God and the Divine will less than he loved his earthly property. He forsook the opportunity to do the greatest good, and thus turned his back upon a membership in the Kingdom class. We are not, however, to understand that there is no hope for that young man, who had such a noble character that Jesus loved him. In due time he will be getting necessary lessons. Even while missing the Kingdom opportunities, he may be one of the multitude who will be blessed by the Kingdom.

Jesus points out this test, saying: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The call of this Gospel Age is to be servants of God at any sacrifice, with the assurance that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," and find the path to glory, honor and immortality in the footsteps of Jesus a very rugged one. God has purposely put the matter so that we cannot be servants of wealth and servants of God at the same time. He wishes to bring

us to the testing point. With all of this class now being called out of the world to be sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, the test is "God first." We should have no idols – either wealth or fame or selfish ease – which might attract our devotion away from God and tempt us to ignore the rich blessings which He is now offering to the faithful.

FEW RICH IN THE KINGDOM

The rich young man's failure to become a disciple on Jesus' terms furnished a text for Jesus. He said to His disciples: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" How difficult it will be for any rich man to get into the Kingdom class!

The disciples were amazed at this; for, of the great bulk of those who were claiming to be the holiness people of their day, very few were Jesus' disciples. The richer Jews were chiefly associated with the Pharisees. How, then, could it be that few rich would enter into the Kingdom? Was it not a mistake? Could Jesus mean it?

But Jesus emphasized His teaching, saying: "How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom! It is easier for a camel to go through the Needle's Eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." – Matthew 19:23,24.

A CAMEL THROUGH A NEEDLE'S EYE

The illustration regarding "the eye of a needle" used by our Lord was unintentionally spoiled by our translators. **[R5466 : page 158]** How many have looked at an ordinary cambric needle, and have noticed the smallness of the eye and the impossibility of a camel's going through it, and then have felt perplexed!

The Needle's Eye referred to by Jesus was the name given to a small gate or opening in a large gate in the city wall. The gates of Jerusalem were closed at night for protection against robbers, and watchmen were on duty. The gates were not allowed to be opened until morning, lest a considerable number of armed men might enter and pillage the city. An arrangement was made, however, for travelers who failed to reach the gate before it was closed. The smaller gate, the Needle's Eye, was just large enough to permit a camel to go through after it had been unburdened – its load removed. Thus understood, Jesus taught that as a camel could go through the Needle's Eye, or smaller gate, only by having its load removed, so a rich man could enter the Kingdom of God only by renouncing his burdens, giving up all to the Lord.

All this placing of the rich, the favored class, apparently at a disadvantage as compared with the poor, or disfavored class, caused amazement to Jesus' disciples. They inquired, "Who, then, can be saved?" The rich seemingly had all the opportunities of time, influence and money to enable them to give more and better service to the Lord than could others; and if they would have such difficulty in getting into the Kingdom, how would it be with others, less favored apparently? Jesus answered that "all things are possible with God." That is to say, if the rich man's heart be pleasing to the Lord – if he be honest-hearted and humble, and his riches alone stand in the way – the Lord would know how to show him His will in respect to their use; or if this did not avail, the Lord would know how to strip him of his wealth, even as the master of the camel would unload his beast to permit him to pass through the Needle's Eye.

Many have had this very experience. They have been rich in honors of men, in social standing or in a financial sense; and God, in love and mercy, has stripped them of all these, giving them the necessary lessons, fitting and preparing them for a share in the Kingdom. With God this is possible. He knows how to overrule all

things for good to those who love Him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength.

"WE HAVE LEFT ALL"

St. Peter seemed to get the thought that joint-heirship with the Master in the Kingdom would mean a full surrender to God – a leaving of all and a yielding up of all – in order to a close approach to God and full acceptance by Him. St. Peter said: "Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee."

Jesus did not fully endorse St. Peter's statement. He knew about Judas, who had not nearly left all. He knew about St. Peter himself – that some self-will still remained, and that self-preservation would lead him to deny his Master. But the answer that Jesus gave fully covered the question, not only for the Apostles, but for all who have become followers of Jesus from that day until now. He said:

"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands – with persecutions; and in the world [age] to come, eternal life."

What a broad promise, and how abundantly fulfilled in its earthly respects to many! The persecutions they are sure to get; but everything sacrificed for the Lord's cause is compensated a hundredfold in the present life. How gracious the Divine arrangements; and then beyond, the everlasting life and, if faithful, a share with the Master in the Kingdom!

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last first." In other words, many possessing great privilege and opportunity for Divine favor and exaltation to the Kingdom will fail to embrace

the opportunity, while others, naturally less favored, will gain the great prize of glory, honor and immortality. Again, we might say that those who first had the opportunity of becoming disciples of Jesus at His First Advent will not on that account (except the Apostles) have any pre-eminence or advantage over others of the Lord's followers in the future, nor did they have here.

