

## Sermon on The Rich Young Man

Lessons: Exodus 20:1-17  
Mark 10:17-30  
Doctrine of Life 66

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“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.' " And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me." But he was saddened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” (Mark 10:19-22)

Two weeks ago we read the parable of the prodigal son, concentrating our focus not on the prodigal son, but on the unprodigal son, the one who stayed home and faithfully served his father; the one who was never rewarded with a feast so that he might make merry with his friends. We noted the similarity between the sinners and tax collectors and the prodigal son, and between the scribes and Pharisees and the faithful son, and noted that the Lord was speaking to both.

In the story of the rich young man, there is likewise a similarity between him and the faithful son in the parable. Like the faithful son who had kept all his father's commandments, the rich young man also kept all of the commandments of the Decalogue from his youth. It is likely that this rich young man was also a Pharisee as he is called a rich young ruler in the Gospel of Luke, and many of the Pharisees were rulers. In the parable, the father says to his faithful but angry son, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours." To the rich young man, who had kept all the commandments from his youth, the gospel says that the Lord loved him, and then said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me." We do not know the response of the faithful son to his father's words, but we do know the response of the rich young man, for we are told that he went away sorrowful because he had many possessions.

As we read in our lesson from the Doctrine of Life 66, the Lord loved this young man because he had kept the commandments from his youth, however, he urged him to sell all that he had and to take up the cross and follow Him, because the Lord could see that this young man lacked three things, "namely, that he had not removed his heart from riches, that he had not fought against lusts, and that he had not yet acknowledged the Lord to be God." The Lord could see into this young man's heart, he could see the good that was there. This young man was dedicated to living according to the commandments of the Word. He was faithful to the teachings of his religion as he understood them.

But the Lord could also see that this young man's heart and love was divided, for he loved his possessions too much, he had not fought internally against various lusts, and while he was able to acknowledge the Lord as a good teacher, he was not yet able to recognize or acknowledge the Lord to be God. This young man was in fact a good Pharisee, the type who Lord urged to "cleanse the inside of the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also." (Matt. 23:26) Note that it is said that the Lord loved this young but imperfect man. In a similar way the Lord loves all of us, and in a similar way he urges all of us to sell what we have, to give to the poor, to carry the cross, and to follow him. How should we understand this?

First we should understand that the Lord's instructions to this rich young man have a deeper meaning than what may appear on the surface. So we read in the Apocalypse Explained 934 and 864:

*These things are ...meant by the Lord's words to the rich man, who questioned Him concerning eternal life, and said that he had kept the precepts of the Decalogue from his youth. The Lord is said to have loved him, and to have taught, that one thing was wanting in him - to sell all that he had, and take up the cross. By selling all that he had, is signified that he should give up his religious ideas, which were traditions... and that he should also relinquish the things of his proprium (that is) loving self and the world more than God, thus leading himself. By following the Lord is signified to acknowledge Him alone and to be led by Him. (Apocalypse Explained 934)*

*... To follow the Lord is to be led by Him, and not by oneself. ... Everyone who does not thus shun and turn away from evils, is led of himself. But it is otherwise when evils are removed, which is effected when a person shuns them because they are infernal. Then*

*the Lord enters with truths and goods from heaven, and leads him. (Therefore) a person's love or affection can be reformed only by spiritually shunning and turning away from evils; and this is a shunning and turning away from them because they are infernal. From these things it is ... evident what it is to follow the Lord. (Apocalypse Explained 864)*

*... By taking up his cross, is signified to fight against evils and falsities, which are from oneself. (Apocalypse Explained 934)*

Fighting against evils and falsities in oneself involves undergoing temptations. Thus taking up or bearing a cross means undergoing temptations. The Lord was telling this young man, and us, that we need to acknowledge the Lord and must undergo temptations in order to have eternal life in heaven.

Now the young man, after receiving the Lord's instruction, went away sorrowful because he had many possessions and his heart was in the love of those possessions. Later in the same story the Lord said, "*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.*" (Mark 10:25) Some in the Christian world have taken this to literally mean that the rich will not enter heaven and that only the poor will do so. After all, didn't the Lord say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" However, the Lord was referring to the poor in spirit, not to being poor in regard to possessions and wealth.

Those who are poor in spirit are those who see that of themselves, they have no spiritual knowledge. The poor in spirit know and acknowledge that they are lacking in good and truth, and at the same time they are desiring to receive such good and truth. To those who are in such acknowledgment from the heart, who see that of themselves they are spiritually poor, the Lord is able to give riches. We see this taught in the Word in these words:

"To be spiritually poor, and yet to be rich, is to acknowledge in heart that one has no knowledge nor understanding nor wisdom from himself, but that he knows, understands, and is wise wholly from the Lord. In such acknowledgment are all the angels of heaven, wherefore they are also intelligent and wise, and this in the same degree in which they are in the acknowledgment and perception that this is the case. ... Because they know and acknowledge this, and wish and love it to be

so, Divine truth, from which comes all intelligence and wisdom continually flows in from the Lord. This they receive to the degree that they are affected by it, that is, love it.

He who is spiritually poor is nevertheless rich, because he is in the spiritual affection of truth. ... The spiritual affection of truth receives and takes in spiritual truths, which are the truths of the Church from the Word. The spiritual affection of truth has no other source than the Lord, because the Lord is Divine Truth in heaven and in the church, for Divine Truth proceeds from Him." (Apocalypse Explained 118.)

When we come to see that we have no wisdom from ourselves, when we have taken up the cross and followed the Lord, we then realize that the Lord alone is the source of all good and truth. Then we are able to be enriched by the Lord, and receive true intelligence and wisdom. This is the "treasure in heaven" that the Lord referred to. This is a treasure that is spoken of in Arcana Coelestia 5651 where it is said:

"...when a person is gifted with truths he is perfected in intelligence and wisdom; and when he is perfected in intelligence and wisdom he is blessed with happiness to eternity."