

## The Rich Young Ruler - Part I

The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Hatoor is about the rich young ruler whom Jesus met on the road. The Gospel reading is Mark 10:17-31. This story is also found in Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30. Here in Part I, we focus on the meaning of the ten commandments.

**Gospel Reading** - Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother.” And he answered and said to Him, “Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.” Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever 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 sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! 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.” And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.” Then Peter began to say to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You.” So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:17-31).

In this gospel reading, the rich young ruler asks, “Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” And Jesus replied, “You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother.” Jesus in effect here, was placing His Divine seal of approval on the ten commandments given to Moses in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:1-17).

St. Augustine once said, “Love God and do as you please.” Now St. Augustine’s statement is excellent, but it’s far too general. It’s like a football field without goalposts. “Love God and do as you please” sounds great, and it is great, but the truth of the matter is that love needs to be defined. The boundaries of love need to be established and this is exactly what the ten commandments do! They define love. They establish the boundaries of love!

The ten commandments help make love concrete. Each one of the commandments expresses love in its own way:

1. Love God by acknowledging the one true God as God - 1st commandment.
2. Love God by showing respect for Him - 2nd commandment.
3. Love God by spending time with Him on the Lord’s day - 3rd commandment.
4. Love your parents - 4th commandment.
5. Treat yourself and other people with reverence - 5th commandment.
6. Respect marriage and the gift of sexuality - 6th and 9th commandments.
7. Respect other people’s property - 7th and 10th commandments.
8. Always be honest - 8th commandment.

Jesus was asked one day (Matthew 22:34) which of the commandments was the greatest. And Jesus’s response was, “Love God with all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. That is the first. The second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39). Somebody figured out that we have 35 million laws in the books today to enforce the ten commandments. Jesus on the other hand reduced even the ten to two: love of God and love of neighbor. And these two boil down to one commandment: love!

Thus, we see that love is the greatest commandment! No one can enter heaven without it, for heaven is par excellence the place of love! Love shows reverence for God, self, and others. Love is at the very heart of every single commandment. Whether we read the ten commandments in Exodus or here in the Gospel of St. Mark, they are the same. It is the call from God to learn how to truly love!

Love acknowledges the one true God as God. Love shows respect. Love spends time with God on the Lord's day. Love honors parents. Love treats oneself and all people with reverence. Love respects marriage and the gift of sexuality. Love does not steal. On the contrary, love gives and gives again and again. Love does not kill, even if murder today is euphemistically referred to as "pro choice," love does not kill. Love does not commit adultery, lust does! Love does not covet, greed does! Love is always honest. As St. Paul says so beautifully, "Owe everyone nothing except love"! (Romans 13:8)

Ted Turner of CNN recently made up ten commandments of his own, which someone jokingly called "The Ted Commandments." Ted Turner calls them "ten voluntary initiatives." And in doing so, Ted Turner declared the ten commandments of the Bible to be obsolete. This is not new, really. Invariably, those who declare themselves against organized religion, for example, do exactly the same thing. They set themselves up as "gods" and write not only new commandments of their own, but also their own new "Bible" to suit their own tastes and their own sins. Ted Turner said, "Nobody pays attention to the ten commandments anymore because they're too old." Well, the law of gravity is even older, but we better not disregard it by jumping off the Empire State Building. We would be sorry we did!

A very important word in the ten commandments is the personal pronoun *thou*. God says, "Thou Shalt" and "Thou Shalt not." It is important to understand that God addresses each one of the commandments to us very personally with that personal pronoun *thou*.

God dignifies each one of the commandments with this personal *thou*. So God is not giving these commandments to a mass of humanity! He is addressing you and no one else in a very pointed and personal way - *thou shalt*, and *thou shalt not*. We need to realize this, otherwise the ten commandments may seem very cold and impersonal to us. And if they do seem impersonal, it is because we do not hear that personal pronoun *thou* addressed to us by God with each one of those commandments. Not only do we need to know the commandments, but more importantly, we must also know *personally* the Lord Jesus who stands behind these commandments. We need to fall in love with Him first, then keeping the commandments will be a joy and not a burden.

Someone once gave this speech at a commencement ceremony at Duke University a few years ago:

"We have actually convinced ourselves that slogans will save us: shoot up if you must, but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whom ever you wish, but use a condom. No!

The answer is No, No, No! And not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or dying in an AIDS ward, no because it is wrong! Because we have spent over 5000 years as a race of rational human beings trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder, it is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not The Ten Suggestions!"

So the young man says in the Gospel reading today, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus says to him, "But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

Consider the following prayer: "We thank you Lord for the goal posts of life. Help us to hear Your loving thou in each of the commandments. Keep us united to You as the branch is united to the vine, that we may have the power to love You by keeping the commandments and to find life in them. And if we haven't kept the commandments, help us to repent like the prodigal son and return to You, the waiting Father, to experience the warm embrace of Your forgiveness and love."

Finally, we close here with this great verse from the Gospel of St. John: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. Then My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

Glory be to God forever. Amen!