

The Rich Young Ruler - Part II

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 II, we focus more on the problem of the rich young ruler and Jesus's proposed solution to his problem.

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).

1. **One Thing You Lack** - In this gospel reading, after the rich young ruler told Jesus that he kept the commandments, Jesus replied, "One thing you lack". Just "one thing" can make all the difference in the world. It often takes no more than one thing to alter the outcome of human events. For example, on the night of the Normandy invasion in World

War II, Hitler had taken a sleeping pill and left word not to be awakened. *One* sleeping pill to a large extent determined the outcome of World War II. Just “one thing” can make a difference in our spiritual life as well. It may make the difference between an abundant life and a futile life. This was certainly true about the rich young ruler who came to see Jesus in this gospel reading.

2. **Inner Discontent** - Though he was rich and a ruler, he was not thoroughly satisfied, and this is why he precisely approached Jesus. Christian psychologists believe that spiritual dissatisfaction with ones self is often a sign of spiritual growth. They suggest that such dissatisfaction is being urged by the Holy Spirit within to move us to a new level of spiritual growth. This means that we must not try to adjust ourselves to the present level but to heed the spurs within that would drive us upward. In other words, God will not be satisfied with our current state, but sometimes fills our hearts with a huge emptiness until we begin to seek what the rich young ruler in the gospel reading called “eternal life.”
3. **What Shall I Do?** - The rich young ruler asks Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” For the first time in his life, the young man heard someone speak to the deepest needs of his soul and then he asked, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Then Jesus responded to him by saying, “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.” Notice here that Jesus did not recite all of the ten commandments to the rich young ruler. Jesus only recited 6 of the ten commandments, the ones that have to do with love and respect of neighbor. However, Jesus did not recite the first four commandments that deal with the love of God, since the rich young ruler did not keep these commandments!

When the rich young ruler heard Jesus recite the commandments that deal with love of neighbor, he responded by saying, “All these I have kept from my youth.” With what pride he must of uttered these words! But when Jesus heard this, He said, “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.” Upon hearing these words, the young man became sad, for he was very rich. He left, never to walk with Jesus again!

4. **The Major Test** - Just “one thing” kept the young man away from God: his possessions! He boasted that he had kept all of the commandments. Then Jesus tested him. Jesus began with the first of all commandments: “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

This is where the young man's status collapsed. Though the young ruler claimed to have kept all of the commandments, the fact is that he didn't even keep the first commandment! The young ruler *did* have other gods before the true God. Tested at this point, the Gospel says, "But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." Now the young man understood that the way to the heart of God is through the surrender of all other loves to a first love for God. However, his love, like that of many, lay in material things. Just "one thing" stood in the way of his reach for the kingdom, but that "one thing" was enough to make him lose it!

5. **Sell All that You Have** - To solve the young man's spiritual problem, Jesus tells him, "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." It is important to understand here that this was a prescription for a particular person with a specific need. Jesus was *not* laying down poverty as either a requirement or an ideal for everyone. He was not condemning all possessions. For example, there is no record that Jesus ever told James and John to give away their fishing boat, or that He told Mary and Martha to sell their house in Bethany. Jesus was the Good Physician, and did not prescribe the same pill for every patient!

This young man had allowed his possessions to build a wall between him and God. Jesus, "who saw what was in man," realized this with a glance. And this is precisely why He said, "Go and sell whatever you have." The words of our Lord here are not only a prescription but they are more like a surgical operation proposed to the young man. For Jesus is not only the Good Physician, He is also the Good Surgeon! Jesus believed in drastic remedies when the trouble was deep-seated and acute. So He says, in effect, "If your wealth causes you to sin, cut it off." This young man was so shackled by his possessions that nothing less than surgery would suffice!

What is that "one thing" in our life that keeps us from God? Whatever it is, Jesus says that we should treat it as a cancer. Get rid of it immediately, no matter how painful the separation, and "come and follow Me."

To some, this "one thing" may be drugs, alcohol, sex, anger, violence, or dishonesty. Whatever it is, we better leave it alone before it eats into the fiber of our will power and becomes a fatal illness, killing our capacity to decide for ourselves. To some this "one thing" may be success. It destroys the finer strains of character, making them arrogant,

snobbish, and ungrateful. To some, this “one thing” may be money. It can narrow a person’s outlook in life and bring him to the point where he sees everything and everyone in terms of the dollar!

6. **Socratic Versus Platonic Ethics** - “One thing you lack” says Jesus. Why should Jesus condemn the young man for lacking “one thing” when he kept everything else? Socrates claimed that a person was morally acceptable if the evil points in his life were balanced by good points. In fact, many religions around the world adopt this view. Christianity does not operate this way! Plato, on the other hand, completely disagreed with Socrates. Plato taught that personality, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest link. The ladder that lacks a rung or two is a useless thing, and a boat may sink if only one plank is rotten, though all others are sound and watertight. Christianity is very much Platonic and not at all Socratic. To obey the Lord 99% of the time where it is easy to do so is no great matter. The real test lies in obeying Him 100% of the time, which is the much harder task. One sin can ruin an otherwise moral life. This is precisely why the Apostle James says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10-11).

7. **The Closed Door** - “One thing you lack” says Jesus. Some of us have a certain room in our house that we do not want God to enter. We keep it walled up with concrete! For the young ruler, this room was his world of finance. He did not want Jesus to enter this room. Perhaps for us, this room may be occupied with this overpowering ambition to plow our way to success in our career no matter how much time it takes away from our spiritual life. For some, it may be an old sin that we refuse to confess. For some, it may be lust and pornography for which we are determined to give free rein no matter what happens and no matter what the cost. For some, it may be a bottomless hatred towards others which comes between us and God and robs us of our peace and spirituality. We tell ourselves that God can have everything, but not this one thing!

In other words, we make religion another one of the departments in life. We have the social department, the intellectual department, the recreational department, the department of politics, economics, business, science, and then we have the department of religion! It seems that the worst possible thing we could do today is to let the department of religion

intrude into the other departments. We hear it said, for example, that we should not mix religion with politics or business. Each one belongs to its own realm. This is precisely what the young ruler in the gospel reading today was trying to do. He thought that God belonged only in the temple. God had no business to be involved in the world of finance. But Jesus insisted that God belongs in *every* department of our life, that all the rooms in the house of our life must be open to Him! He keeps knocking on the one closed door. Christ says, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

8. **Come, Follow Me** - When the Lord met Andrew, Matthew, James and John, Peter and the other Apostles, He extended them an invitation and said "Follow Me." We read that the disciples "left everything and followed Jesus." This exact same invitation was extended by Jesus to the rich young ruler in today's Gospel reading. Jesus did not extend this type of invitation to everyone He met. There are many who requested to follow Christ after they were healed and Jesus just told them to "Go your way." Invitation to Apostleship was not for everyone. Thus, Jesus's invitation to the young man here is very special. The young man was invited to become an Apostle like Matthew, Peter, and John. What an invitation! However, the young man declined. If the young man had accepted Jesus's invitation, we would be honoring him today as a great apostle, but as it is, we don't know even know his name! "One thing" kept him from God - his love of possessions.

What is that "one thing" in our life? Is it some sin we refuse to let go? Is it some part of our life we refuse to surrender to God? Is it some love that we place above our love for Christ? Whatever it is, Christ's message to us is simple: Even one sin, as long as we do not forsake it and seek God's forgiveness, can keep us out of the kingdom of heaven! If we look at that rich young ruler man in today's gospel reading and say, "that's me," we will then be made aware of that "one thing" we still lack and turn it over to Jesus to gain eternal life!

Glory be to God forever, Amen!