

"Woe unto you that are Rich" (Luke 6:24)

Gospel Doctrine 2003 NT lesson 17

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Mark 10:17-22

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? [there is] none good but one, [that is], God. 19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. 21 Then 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 the cross, and follow me. 22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Luke 18:18 "a certain ruler". Luke's account makes it clear the person involved is one who not only affluent, but also politically well placed.

v18 - God has already told you what is good, why are you asking me the same question, calling me good? Jesus is telling him that what is required for eternal life has already been revealed by God. Jesus is not rejected the title of "good", he is pointing the man to God's revelation.

v21-22 Note the contrast of "follow me...went away grieved". This is the typical response of those who are wealthy, which Jesus comments on in the next verses.

Mark 10:23-27

23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? 27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men [it is] impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

v23 "hardly", the Greek term "duskolos" translates to "distressingly sick" or "painfully ill". The most literal translation would be "ill-food".

v25 There are various interpretations on this verse to attempt to explain the rather odd statement. One of the more popular traditions is there is a night gate in the walls of Jerusalem that is so narrow and tight a burdened camel has to be entirely unburdened in order to get it through, and this is the figurative needle eye Jesus is referring to. The popularity of this reading is such that one of the actual night gates in the walls of Jerusalem has been dubbed "the eye of the needle" by those catering to Christian tourists. However, this reading is completely unsupported by Jewish tradition or any kind of historical record or fact. Its just a Christian tradition.

The second popular reading is there was a mistake in the text and the Aramaic term "kamelos", which translates to "rope", was changed to "kamilos", which translates to "camel". Thus, Jesus is saying, "It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle". This is further pushed by the ancient presence of some rather large needles used in constructing rugs out of camel hair.

The third reading is simply that Jesus' intent was to present something impossible. Namely, trying to fit the largest land animal known to them through the smallest opening known to them. This reading is contextual given the substance of v. 26-27 where the disciples effectively say "This is impossible, then who can be saved?" and Jesus says "It is impossible for natural men, but it is not impossible for those who love God."

v27 The IV/JST on this verse is in the footnotes and does a considerable amount to explain what Jesus meant.

Mark 12:13-17

13 And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in [his] words. 14 And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see [it]. 16 And they brought [it]. And he saith unto them, Whose [is] this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. 17 And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.

These Pharisees and Herodians, whose allegiances are with the Romans, are trying to trap Jesus and get him in trouble with the ruling Romans. Jesus' response is to point out to them they are mixing their Gentile political allegiances with their Jewish religious ones. If they buy into the Roman system, then they have to pay their dues. But, this still doesn't release them from their obligations as Jews.

Mark 12:41-44

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. 42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. 43 And he called [unto him] his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: 44 For all [they] did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, [even] all her living.

The widow's offering of a mite is a greater offering than those of the rich men because it is all she has, and yet she is still is more concerned about those who have even less than she does.

Beyond this, the simple fact there is a widow living in poverty and making such an offering is an indictment on the rich men. These wealthy men ought to be using their wealth to help those in need, rather than making offerings that are quite small compared to their wealth. The Law requires people with the means to support the most vulnerable people in society:

Deut. 14:28-29

28 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay [it] up within thy gates: 29 And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which [are] within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

That this widow is in poverty shows the wealthy men are not observing the Law of Moses.

Luke 12:13-21

13 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. 14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? 15 And

he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Jesus' initial comment in v. 14 is a rebuke aimed at the Pharisaical Rabbis. They had come to usurp the rightful role of the temple priests and Levites when it came to judging difficult matters among the Israelites:

Deut. 17:8-10

8 If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, [being] matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the LORD thy God shall choose; 9 And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: 10 And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee:

The man is observing the custom of asking a Rabbi, but that tradition violates the Law of Moses. So, Jesus rejects the practice.

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? 18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, [and] be merry. 20 But God said unto him, [Thou] fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So [is] he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Jesus then goes on to comment on the covetousness of the man who approached him and asked the question, by giving a parable of a selfish wealthy landholder. The context of this parable is that the Law requires people to be generous with the produce of their crop:

Deut. 24:19-21

19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. 20 When thou beatest thine

olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. 21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean [it] afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

This wealthy landholder has had a huge crop this harvest, but rather than leave it in the fields for those who are in need, he builds a bigger barn to fit it all in there for himself.

Luke 12:31-34

31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. 32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus tells them that if they keep their perspective on the kingdom of God, then all their material needs will be met and they will not have to worry about any of it. It is more important to focus on spiritual treasures than earthly ones. The message here is a straightforward distillation of the covenant blessings and curses given to Israel in the Law of Moses:

Deut. 28:1-14 (Lev. 26:1-13) Blessings of the covenant

Deut. 28:15-44 (Lev. 26:14-46) Curses of the covenant

As long as Israel worships the Lord spiritually, then they will be blessed with the bounty of the earth. But, if they forget the Lord and worship the work of their own hands, then they will be cursed in will suffer.

Luke 16:1-8b

1 AND he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. 2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. 4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. 5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors [unto him], and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? 6 And he said, An

hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. 7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. 8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely:

This meaning of this passage is obscure because the ancient history is not immediately apparent. The steward was the one who negotiated the terms of lending of the rich man's goods, that was his job, the service he provided. For doing so, he obtained a commission, that was his cut. The "bill" included the original debt plus the interest, which contained his commission (this is the same as when we borrow money today, what we owe is the amount we borrowed plus the interest, the total includes both). When he reduced the bill amount, he was eliminating his commission from it. He was shortchanging himself in order to get in good with the rich man's debtors. This is why the rich man commends the unjust steward in the end. In the beginning he was unjust in how he spent his master's wealth, but in the end he was wise in how he dealt with his own wealth.

Luke 16:8c-12

for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. 9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. 10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. 11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true [riches]? 12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?

Jesus castigates the Jews for being less wise than their Gentile neighbors when it comes to dealing with their material things. And if so, and they are dealing with their material things unwisely, then why would the Lord trust them with the more valuable spiritual things?

Verse 9 is better posed as a rhetorical question. Jesus isn't telling them they can obtain the kingdom of heaven by using their material things wisely, so he asks the rhetorical question to make that clear. What he is telling them is to be wise in their spiritual things, just as this unjust steward is wise in material things.