

One Thing Remains 11-25-18

Three of the Gospel accounts (Matthew 19:16, Mark 10:17, Luke 18:18) record Jesus meeting with a rich young (Matt.) ruler (Luke). In that conversations, the young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus' first reply is to keep the commandments. The young ruler tells us that he has kept the commandments from his youth; Jesus tells him then that "one thing you lack"; he needed to sell all that he had and give to the poor and follow him. With this news, the young man left in tears, as he had many things.

This interaction is interesting on a number of levels. It tells us that Jesus is God (He alone was good); it tells us that the Ten Commandments are not the basis (or even entirely included) in the law of Christ. It tells us that one cannot have eternal life without obedience to the commandments of God.

The remarkable thing about this young man is this: he is as perfect a person as we have met in the Gospel accounts. He has kept God's commandments from his youth; few can claim this. Jesus does not doubt him or accuse him of lying, suggesting that this claim is genuine. Indeed, there is nothing he needs to repent of in order to have eternal life. But something was missing in his life, and giving away his possessions was the only way to get it. Thus we can see that dispossessing his wealth was not the heart of the commandment, but a means to the end.

We know that Jesus does not command all to take a vow of poverty in Christ because of the number of faithful Christians who had wealth and kept it in the New Testament. Barnabas shared much, but assumedly also kept much. John Mark had a large home and servants (Acts 12:12-13) as did Lydia (Acts 15:14-15) and others. Instead, the idea here is that there was one thing he was lacking, a virtue or characteristic that would come if he parted with his many possessions.

What then was lacking? Was it believing he was perfect? Did he lack Humility? Was it not being willing to give to others? Did he lack Charity? Was it not being prepared to give up everything to pursue God? Was he missing Piety? Was it that his money was something that was front of God, like an idol? Was this an issue of Sanctity? Any of these things might be the one thing he was lacking.

Of course, the important point here is to make a self application. *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you"* (2Co 13:5). We need to ask ourselves if there is one thing we might be lacking before God, even after we have kept the commandments of God.

Are you lacking Humility (1 Peter 5:5-6)? Has it crossed your mind that "I am the best Christians because I break no commandments or I study the bible constantly". Do you think "I have worked hard and earned much"? Are you lacking Charity (Luke 12:33)? Do you help others, or say that "I simply cannot spare to help others financially or with my time"? Are you lacking Piety (Romans 12:10-12)? Jesus was heard for His piety (Heb. 5:7). Many mistakenly think that they are okay if "Jesus is a big part of my life", but that is not true. Jesus cannot be part of your life; He must be all of it. Do you lack Sanctity (Hebrews 12:14)? You might be religious but "like to have fun". If you try to serve God and mammon, you lack sanctity because of your false gods.

After the rich young ruler left, Jesus began to teach His disciples. He said that it is hard to get into the kingdom of Heaven. He said for a rich man (who trusts in wealth) it is especially hard. His disciples heard

this, and either considering the power of money or the young ruler's commandment keeping asked the question "who then can get in". Jesus told them a hard truth: with men, it is impossible. In other words, even for the best of people, there is always "one thing lacking". The Bible will repeatedly tell us that there are none righteous, no not one. All have sinned and fallen short, and if we say we have no sin, we are not speaking the truth. But then Jesus gave a second message to His disciples "with God, all things are possible".

Let us not misunderstand this lesson. Jesus was not saying that wealth in particular excludes a man from eternal life. There are many forms of "wealth"; time, possessions, ability, talent; the poet Emerson once said that "Health is the first wealth". Jesus was saying that NO ONE possesses the ability, of themselves or their power, to enter the kingdom. It is only by the grace and mercy of God one can have eternal life. It is by the necessary repentance of our life that we can be on the right path; no one is born to it.