

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XVIII. 18-27

<p>18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?</p> <p>19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none <i>is</i> good, save one, <i>that is</i>, God.</p> <p>20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.</p> <p>21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.</p> <p>22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the</p>	<p>poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.</p> <p>23 And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.</p> <p>24 And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!</p> <p>25 For 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.</p> <p>26 And they that heard <i>it</i> said, Who then can be saved?</p> <p>27 And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.</p>
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THE story we have now read is three times reported in the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all moved by the Holy Ghost to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. This fact should be noticed. It shows us that there are lessons before us which demand special attention. When God would impress on Peter his duty towards the Gentiles, He sent him a vision which was repeated "three times." (Acts x. 16.)

We learn, firstly, from these verses, *to what lengths men may go in self-ignorance*. We are told of "a certain ruler," who asked our Lord what he should "do to inherit eternal life." Our Lord knew the ruler's heart, and gave him the answer which was most likely to bring to light the real state of his soul. He reminds him of the ten commandments: He recites some of the principal requirements of the second table of the law. At once the spiritual blindness of the inquirer was detected. "All these," said the man, "I have kept from my youth up." An answer more full of darkness and self-ignorance it is impossible to conceive! He who made it could have known nothing rightly, either about himself, or God, or God's law.

Does the case of this rich ruler stand alone? Do we suppose there are none like him at the present day?—If we do, we are greatly deceived. There are thousands, it may be feared, in all our congregations, who have not the least idea of the spiritual nature of God's law, and consequently know nothing of their own sinfulness. They do not see that God requires "truth in the inward parts," and that we may break commandments in our heart and thoughts, even when we do not break them in outward actions. (Psalm li. 6. Matt. v. 21-28.) To be delivered from such blindness is one of the first things needful to our salvation. The eyes of our understandings must be enlightened by the Holy Ghost. (Ephes. i. 18.) We must learn to know ourselves. No man really taught of the Spirit will ever talk of having "kept all God's commandments from his youth;" he will rather cry with St. Paul,

“The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.” “I know that in me dwelleth no good thing.” (Rom. vii. 14-18.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, *what harm one master-sin may do to a soul*. The desires which the rich ruler expressed were right and good. He wanted “eternal life.” There seemed at first sight no reason why he should not be taught the way of God, and become a disciple. But there was one thing, unhappily, which he loved better than “eternal life:” that thing was his *money*. When invited by Christ to give up all that he had on earth and seek treasure in heaven, he had not faith to accept the invitation. The love of money was his master-sin.

Shipwrecks like this are sadly common in the Church of Christ. Few are the ministers who could not put their finger on many cases like that of the man before us. Many are ready to give up everything for Christ’s sake, excepting one darling sin, and for the sake of that sin are lost for evermore. When Herod heard John the Baptist, he “heard him gladly and did many things;” but there was one thing he could not do: he could not part with Herodias. That one thing cost Herod his soul. (Mark vi. 20.)

There must be no reserve in our hearts, if we would receive anything at Christ’s hands. We must be willing to part with anything, however dear it may be, if it stands between us and our salvation. We must be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, to make any sacrifice, and to break any idol. Life, we must remember, eternal life is at stake! One leak neglected, is enough to sink a mighty ship; one besetting sin, obstinately clung to, is enough to shut a soul out of heaven. The love of money, secretly nourished in the heart, is enough to bring a man, in other respects moral and irreproachable, down to the pit of hell.

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, *how great is the difficulty of a rich man being saved*. Our Lord declares this in the solemn comment which He makes on the ruler’s case: “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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.”

The truth which our Lord lays down in this place is one which we may see confirmed on every side. Our own eyes will tell us that grace and riches seldom go together. “Not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” (1 Cor. i. 26.) It is plain matter of fact, that comparatively few rich men are to be found in the way of life. For one thing, riches incline their possessors to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world; for another thing, the rich man is seldom dealt with faithfully about his soul: he is generally flattered and fawned upon. “The rich hath many friends.” (Prov. xiv. 20.) Few persons have the courage to tell him the whole truth. His good points are grossly exaggerated; his bad points are glossed over, palliated, and excused. The result is, that while his heart is choked up with the things of the world,

his eyes are blinded to his own real condition. What right have we to wonder if a rich man's salvation is a hard thing?

Let us beware of envying rich men, and coveting their possessions. We little know what we might come to if our desires were granted. Money, which thousands are constantly wanting and longing for; money, which many make their god; money keeps myriads of souls out of heaven! "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare." Happy is he who has learned to pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," and is really "content with such things as he has." (1 Tim. vi. 9; Prov. xxx. 8; Heb. xiii. 5.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, *how mighty is the power of God's grace*. We see this in the words which our Lord addressed to those who heard Him speaking of the rich man's danger. They said, "Who then can be saved?" Our Lord's reply is broad and full: "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." By grace a man may serve God, and reach heaven in any condition of life.

The Word of God contains many striking instances in illustration of this doctrine. Abraham, and David, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, and Josiah, and Job, and Daniel, were all great and rich; yet they all served God, and were saved: they all found grace sufficient for them, and overcame the temptations by which they were surrounded. Their Lord and Master still lives, and what He did for them He can do for others. He can give power to rich Christians to follow Christ in spite of their riches, as well as He did to rich Jews.

Let us beware of allowing ourselves to suppose that our own salvation is impossible, because of the hardness of our position. It is too often a suggestion of the devil and our own lazy hearts. We must not give way to it. It matters not where we live, so long as we are not following a sinful calling; it matters not what our income may be; whether we are burdened with riches or pinched with poverty: *grace*, and not *place*, is the hinge on which our salvation turns. Money will not keep us out of heaven if our hearts are right before God. Christ can make us more than conquerors; Christ can enable us to win our way through every difficulty. "I can do all things," said St. Paul, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Philip. iv. 13.)

NOTES. LUKE. XVIII. 18-27.

- 18.—[A certain ruler asked him, &c.] The connection between the history of the rich ruler and the verses which immediately precede it ought not to be overlooked. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all relate it as following the account of our Lord's sayings about little children. It seems intended to show us how a man may miss heaven for want of a childlike indifference to worldly riches.

The man before us appears to have been one of a far better spirit than the Scribes, and Pharisees, and Sadducees. He was anxious about salvation. He had evidently a feeling of respect for our Lord. Yet through love of money, his one besetting sin, he lost his soul.

[*What shall I do to inherit.*] The literal rendering of the Greek words in this place brings out the legality of the ruler's mind more forcibly than our translation. It would be literally translated, "What, having done, shall I inherit?"

19.—[*Why callest thou me good?*] The paraphrase of Whitby on this verse is worth noticing: "Why givest thou me a title not ascribed to your reverend rabbins, nor due to any mere man? Thinkest thou there is anything in me more than human, or that the Father dwelleth in me? This thou oughtest to believe if thou conceivest the title 'good' doth truly belong to me, seeing there is none good but one, that is God."

20.—[*Thou knowest the commandments.*] Gualter here remarks that our Lord treats the ruler as a wise physician treats a sick patient: He administers the medicine most likely ultimately to conduce to his spiritual health. He addresses him in the way most likely to bring him to self-knowledge. As the ruler spoke of "doing," Jesus begins by speaking of God's commandments.

[*Do not commit adultery, &c.*] Let it be noted that our Lord does not recite the commandments in the exact order in which they are given in Exodus. It is a singular fact that in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament the seventh commandment is put before the sixth.

22.—[*Yet lackest thou one thing.*] The process by which our Lord convinces the ruler of sin should not be overlooked. He shows him that whatever he might think of his obedience to the second table of the law, he was certainly a breaker of the first table. He did not keep either the first commandment or the second. His money was his God, and he was guilty of covetousness, which is idolatry.

[*Sell all...distribute...poor.*] We are not to understand that our Lord meant all Christians to do what He here enjoins the rich ruler to do. The language of Peter to Ananias contradicts the idea. (Acts v. 4.) Reason itself shows that if all acted on this system, idleness would be encouraged, and all men would ultimately come to poverty. "If any man will not work," says St. Paul, "neither shall he eat." (2 Thess. iii. 10.)

Our Lord prescribed according to the disease before him. It was a case of desperate and idolatrous love of money. There was but one remedy: "Sell all, and distribute." Like St. Paul and his companions on board ship, he must cast overboard the lading of the ship if he would save his life.

23.—[*When he heard...very sorrowful.*] We hear of this ruler no more. Some have conjectured that after all he obeyed our Lord's commands, and became a disciple. It seems far more probable that he could not stand the test which our Lord imposed on him, and lost his soul. St. Mark says, "He went away." (Mark x. 22.)

24.—[*They that have riches.*] These words should always be compared with the fuller account of this history which St. Mark gives. He says that our Lord repeated this saying twice, and on the second occasion said, "How hard is it for them that *trust* in riches to enter into the kingdom."

25.—[*It is easier for a camel, &c.*] Some commentators have laboured to prove that the word we translate "camel" ought to be rendered "a cable." The alteration wished for seems needless. The expression used by our Lord was probably proverbial, and familiar to His hearers. The camel was the largest animal which the Jews were accustomed to use, and a "camel passing through a needle's eye," according to some rabbinical writings, signified a thing absolutely impossible. Michaelis says that a similar proverb, about an elephant passing through a needle's eye, is in use in India.

Harmer remarks, "In the east the doors are frequently made extremely low, sometimes not more than three or four feet high, to prevent the plundering Arab from riding into the inner

court. Still they train their camels to make their way, though with difficulty, through these door ways. It was probably in allusion to this practice that this proverbial expression was formed.”

27.—[*Things...impossible, &c.*] This is a general proverbial expression. But the application is clear and plain. The salvation even of a rich man is possible with the grace of God.