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The Rich and Jesus

Matthew 19:16-30 recounts the story of a rich young man who came to talk to Jesus about eternal life. There are various dynamics that play out in this story.

Jesus relates that there is none Good but One. The Jews believed that commandment-keeping was the ticket to eternal life. In this story Jesus demonstrates that none can keep them perfectly enough. Jesus tells the young rich man that in order to be *perfect* he must sell all that he owns, give his wealth to the poor, and come and *follow* Jesus.

The young man leaves in sorrow because he can't or won't do this.

What is going on here? This is *not* a story to prove that the Law is to be kept. It is *not* a story to prove God hates the rich or that the rich will not inherit eternal life. It is *not* a directive to abandon one's family and possessions.

The Gospel is demonstrated here in the fact that Jesus offers Himself. He offers an identity that the rich young man can have *in* Jesus and the new life this brings.

But the young man is tied to himself, his possessions, his way of life, his friends, his standard of living, his philosophy of life, his status and pleasure in the world, and his covetousness, all of which represent a false god of Idolatry. He is so tied to these things that he is unable to give it all up and believe and receive new life by following Jesus.

Jesus then shows that this same thinking is consistent with all rich people who *trust* in themselves and who feel self-sufficient. It would be just as impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle as it would for a rich man to enter into eternal life *through his riches*.

Jesus shows that a rich person entering eternal life is possible with God.

The poor have everything to gain by believing who Jesus is and following Him. Materialism has benefited them so little, it is easier for them to see the value of what Jesus offers—a life of love, joy, peace, hope, etc..

God does not dislike the rich. He loves them just as He loves everyone else. (John 3:16-17). But He realizes that their wealth often ties them to this world in ways that are difficult for them to give up. They can simply trust in their riches and see no need to replace that trust with trust in Jesus.

The Good News is that death is the great financial equalizer. Many knees will bow before Jesus after death when God can finally get the attention of the “previously” rich.

It really boils down to where does one place his or her trust? In wealth, or in Jesus?

Jesus asks that a person be willing to give up all that ties them to this world and follow/believe Him. Anything short of this is placing another god before Him. Anything short of this is idolatry.

Once again we see in this story the truth of John 14:6 where Jesus says “I am the way, the truth,

and the life, no one comes to the Father but by *me*.”

~ *Paul Kurts*