



## 12TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW SEPTEMBER 4

### THE GOSPEL READING

#### Matthew 19:16-26

[Riches and the Kingdom]

*At that time, a young man came up to Jesus, kneeling and saying, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which?" And Jesus said, "You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have observed; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.*

*And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, 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." When the disciples heard this they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

### THE SERMON

After Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples on Mount Tabor, the Lord started to



GREEK ORTHODOX  
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

teach them what it means to follow Him. He teaches them the meaning of the Kingdom of God. And how the values of God are sometimes different or opposite of the values of this world. In this passage, the Lord Jesus teaches us that total dependence on God is the key to constant communion with Him.

The rich young man wants to know more about the Lord's teaching on eternal life. He asks, "Good Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" The answer to this question is crucial since having eternal life is the greatest human hope. We all know that this life will one day end, and so, in the very depths of our hearts, we wish to understand how we can have eternal life. The rich young ruler, despite his youth, was wise enough to go right to the heart of the matter.

The Lord Jesus, instead of answering him right away, responds with another question, as He often does. Jesus is drawing out a deeper consideration from the young man. The rich young ruler calls Jesus a "good teacher." The Lord then asks, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God." Jesus is drawing attention to the fact that He is indeed the Good Teacher, and the rich young ruler could see why: because not only is Jesus the Messiah, but He is the only true Good One, that is, the Son of God.

The Lord continues, "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." Here, the Lord teaches the young man by reminding him of the Ten Commandments (found in the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament). God gave the commandments to Moses. The first part of the Ten Commandments refers to the *love of God* ("You shall have no other gods before Me" as found in Exodus 20:3, and the following verses). Jesus Himself is God, so after pointing that out to the young ruler, He mentions the second part of the commandments, which relates to the matters of *love of neighbor*.

God loves us infinitely, so when we respond with love to Him, we express that by keeping His commandments and living the way He teaches us to live. Jesus refers to this in the New Testament, and He gives the commandments a deeper perspective. He shows that the commandments are not a matter of purely external actions, but a matter of the heart. The commandments, by themselves, do not carry as much weight if they are not understood as an invitation for a higher life, a life with Christ. And a life that struggles for Christlike virtues like love, goodness, and compassion.

For Christians, the commandments are fulfilled when they are done through love and for love. Jesus is our role model, and He is perfect. He sets the ultimate bar that a human being can reach, and when this seems unattainable for us, He gives us hope. Whatever we think is impossible can be made possible by the grace of God.

Jesus' call to the young man gets at the root of the matter in his life. God knows us personally, and because of His love for us, He gives us the specific prescription which grants us healing so that we can be united with Him. Jesus says, "If you would be perfect, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had

great possessions. The Lord does not call each of us to sell all we have, but He knows that this is what that young man needs for his life.

Jesus says, "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." The image of a camel going through the eye of a needle is a simple analogy of impossibility. Apart from the love and grace of God, we cannot find eternal life. Whether rich or poor, we close ourselves to Him when we love anything more than the God who loves us. It is not a matter of how much money or possessions we have, but it is a matter of the heart. It is a question of what is our greatest treasure: The Lord or possessions of this life? Jesus invites us to imitate Him, and place Him at the center of our lives.

When counseling a rich man, Saint Kosmas Aitolos did not ask him to give alms to the poor, which would have been very easy for him. Instead, he asked him to fast since he had to deny himself and keep from the food readily available. By contrast, when counseling a poor man, he did not ask him to fast, which was easy for him because he lacked food, but to give alms out of his poverty. God always provides us with the medicine we personally need to grow in His love.

The rich young ruler was self-sufficient, and Christ called him to become like a child, and to desire nothing but the Lord himself, to trust Him fully. Saint Basil the Great says, "He does not tell us to sell our goods, because they are by nature evil, for then they would not be God's creatures; He, therefore, does not bid us cast them away as if they were bad but distribute them; nor is anyone condemned for possessing them, but for abusing them."

The commandment to follow Christ with all our hearts applies to all of us. We are all called to love Him above all things. Have Him always at the center of our lives so that everything we do flows from the love of God. Some people are called to a more literal application of the passage. There was another rich young ruler named Anthony, a native of Egypt, born in the year 250. At about 20, he walked into a church and heard the words of Christ in this passage. He was seized by those words, sold his inheritance, and took up the life of a hermit. Eventually, he became known as the father of monasticism, and we know him today as Saint Anthony the Great. Not all of us are called to serve Christ in that exact way.

We are all called to follow Christ, regardless of our position in life, regardless of our possessions. The ultimate question is: What is our *greatest* treasure? If it is Christ, then we love God above all things, and the love of God will flow to us and through us to bless others. Becoming dependent on God, like a child is to its mother and father, is key to communion with Him. Even when we seem to struggle and stumble, let us always remember that all things are possible because of God's infinite love.

Follow us    @goarchDRE

Subscribe & read other sermons at: [religioused.goarch.org](http://religioused.goarch.org)