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**THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**

**POSSESSIONS AND THE KINGDOM**

Golden Text.—Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.—Luke 12:15

**THE LESSON AS A WHOLE**

Approach to the Lesson  
None of the evangelists professes to give the complete story of the earthly life of our Lord Jesus, but only so much as fulfills his purpose. Thus Matthew leaves out much between our Lord's departure from Galilee (Matt. 19:1) and what he records immediately thereafter. This includes the great Judean ministry recorded by John in chapters 7:11 to 10:39, and the ministry east of the Jordan given in Luke 13:22 to 17:10. There is even an indication in Luke 17:11 that our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem was a circuitous one through Samaria and Galilee.

Our lesson chapter finds Jesus near the end of that long journey, and in Perea, called in Matthew 19:1 "the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan." Here it was that He answered the Pharisees on the divorce question (vs. 3-12). Here He blessed the little children (vs. 13-15). And here He had that sad meeting with the rich young ruler, who showed by his turning away from Jesus that he loved wealth more than life. Once again a harmony of the Gospels should be consulted to compare the accounts given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is Mark who tells us that the young inquirer ran and knelt (chap. 10:17), evidence of his eagerness and his deep respect for Jesus. It is from Luke's account that we know the young man was a ruler (chap. 18:18). This is one of the most disappointing incidents in the whole story of Jesus' ministry. We have no way of connecting him with any who later followed Christ, but we can only hope that he did come to himself, like the prodigal son, and discover that his riches were only husks.

Verse by Verse  
Matt. 19:16.—"Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" This seeker after life was going on the belief that it was bestowed as the reward of some meritorious deed or deeds. He addressed Jesus as a teacher only.

Verse 17.—"Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." This is a correct translation of the parallel passages in Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19, but here the Revised Version is better: "Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good." The young man spoke of a good thing, but Jesus affirmed that all goodness centers in one personality—God. "Keep the commandments." See Romans 7:10; 10:5; Leviticus 18:5.

Verse 18.—"Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt . . ." Jesus was giving the Law to one who was bent on being saved by the Law. Here He cites the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:13-16).

Verse 19.—"Honour thy father and thy mother: and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Here Jesus quotes the Fifth Commandment, and then swings away from the Decalogue to Leviticus 19:18. Notice that all these have to do with one's relations to his fellows.

Verse 20.—"All these things have I kept . . . what lack I yet?" Ignorant of the deeper sense of the Law (see Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28), this young, moral man believed he had kept the Law, but was still conscious of a lack. The Law never gives assurance.

Verse 21.—"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell . . . and follow me." The Lord was pushing him farther along the Law road to show him that it did not lead to salvation, but to condemnation. Here He put His finger on the inquirer's weakness—love of wealth.

Verse 22.—"He went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." The "Law" road, the road of "what good thing" was too

much for him, as it is for us all. His wealth was after all more to him than eternal life!

Verse 23.—"A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." Not because wealth is in itself evil, but it tends to pride and carnal security, and lays hold of men's hearts.

Verse 24.—"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." Some hold that our Lord was here referring to the wicket gate which allowed pedestrians passage when the great gate of the city was closed; others insist that He was speaking literally of a needle. It is not worth making a point of issue. In the one case it would be a painful process, requiring removal of the camel's load. In the other case a physical impossibility is involved. Both well describe the case of the rich man.

Verse 25.—"Who then can be saved?" In the disciples' eyes, the rich were the hopeful ones for the Kingdom of God, for they considered wealth a mark of the blessing of God.

Verse 26.—"With God all things are possible." Thus the door is not barred against the rich, but is as wide open as to all others, and the grace of God is sufficient to overcome the handicap of riches.

The Heart of the Lesson  
To see this rich young ruler (v. 22 and Luke 18:18) running and kneeling (Mark 10:17) to Jesus would have made your heart glad. His open, earnest face and his eager question surely gave promise of a good follower of the Lord and a valuable asset to the apostolic band.

Nevertheless, there was that in his question which betrayed a false ground of hope. A young man of good character by all earthly standards, he could think of no other way of life than that of personal merit, and he was sure that he was quite able to perform the demands if only they were clearly stated. The instructions of the scribes and Pharisees were so involved and so trivial, and after all so lacking in authority and assurance, that no one could know with certainty the way of life from them. Perhaps that is why he came to Jesus, who spoke "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29).

Seeing that the young man was quite committed to salvation by merit, Jesus bound him over to it. Were not the Commandments "to life"? (Rom. 7:10; Lev. 18:5.) Jesus' answer really amounted to this: Since you think you can attain life that way, you have the answer already! Keep the Commandments.

But, with all his adherence to the Law, the youth was dissatisfied. "What lack I yet?" he asked in a tone of near despair. For that is always where the Law leaves us. We are always lacking. So the Lord pushed him to the blind end of that road. "You would be perfect? You would earn eternal life? You would be saved by some good thing? Then sell all, give all, and follow me."

The young man was found out. He could not go that road. All unknown to himself, he had lived in a perpetual breach of the Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." And now his covetous heart was finding him out. He had professed to keep the Law, but the First Commandment—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me"—was finding him guilty. He preferred gold before God! If the First and Last Commandments were closing in on him, of what worth was his boasted observance of all the others? So he went back to his possessions, and— But we shall not finish the sentence, in hope that some later day that which is impossible with man, but not with God, actually occurred, and the camel went through the needle's eye, to life everlasting.



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