

"WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED"

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The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus said to his disciples, "Most assuredly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again I tell you, 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." When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:20-26 WEB

Christ's parable of the Rich Young Ruler presents a vital question: How can people of great wealth enter into the kingdom of God? The questioner was a wealthy young man of obvious piety and integrity who based his hope upon strict observance of the law. But he still had doubts, hence his question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" In his usual manner, Jesus immediately discerned his real problem, which was not disobedience of any kind to the law, but a prideful, complacent spiritual dependence upon his wealth. Jesus "called his bluff," so to speak, by commanding him to do the one thing he could not---surrender his destructive attachment to money.

This obviously perturbed the disciples, who asked: "Who then can be saved?" What they really meant was "How can it be so difficult for anyone with as many legalistic religious credentials as this rich young man to earn his way into God's kingdom?" Jesus replied: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

So what is it that enables people of riches and wealth to enter the kingdom of God? Some of the more radical adherents of what we know as liberation theology answer this question by claiming that due to God's "preferential option for the poor" Christ and salvation can only be found through immersion with the poor and incorporation of their faith and other spiritual attributes. They thus assume that in some manner the poor have the personal and group values and attitudes necessary for salvation.

The disciples feared that rich people could not enter God's kingdom due to their supposedly many sins, including greed, lust, arrogance, pride, dishonesty, oppression of others, and faith in their wealth as a source of salvation. In their concerns over legalistic qualifications for entrance into the realm of God they lost sight of the higher law of mercy and grace that transcends lesser human goals. That's why Jesus said "With men this is impossible, but with God all

things are possible."

So, we have a seeming conflict between the obvious preference of Jesus for poor, humble folk and the promise that somehow God could include even the very wealthy in his kingdom. Great wealth does not in itself constitute sin. The potential for sin found in great riches arises from personal attitudes toward money and possessions and the all-too-common practice of depending upon them for protection and personal meaning in life, as the Rich Young Ruler was obviously doing. Sin arises from the manner in which wealth is gained through human oppression and injustice, or the manner in which it is used for enslavement and empowerment of the rich over the poor.

Jesus said that riches were an obstacle to entrance into God's kingdom when they were wrongfully used, thus becoming a form of idolatry. When rich persons surrender their idolatry of total dependence on money they thus can assume some of the highly-rewarded values already possessed by many of the poor---humility, faith, hope, and righteousness or right relationships with God, man, and the earth. Then they become fit for entrance into God's kingdom.