

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The rich young man certainly seemed sincere. He presented himself nicely. He was likely an alumnus of the right school, well dressed and well groomed, from the right part of town. He greeted Jesus using a title of honor. He knelt before Him. He asked what he must do to inherit eternal life. As they say in the business world, “he interviewed well”. Were the Lord of the Church a secular employer, perhaps the young man would have fared better.

But the Lord of the Church is no human resources director. He is not impressed by résumés on expensive paper or by personal pedigree or by flowery speech or by pages of accomplishments. He sees past all of that. The Lord knows men’s hearts. So He answers the rich young man by citing Commandments of the Second Table. To the Lord’s assertions, the rich young man answers well.

In love, the Lord then gives him a simple directive. The Lord’s Command is of the First Table. If indeed the young man had lived and done as he said, He would have had no trouble complying. The faith that truly loves neighbor first loves God. But this eager, bright man who strives to serve his neighbor worships a false god. He practices civil righteousness, but His god is his money.

So at Jesus’ Words, spoken in love, the man grew sad and left. He had to choose between cross and earthly wealth. He could not part with his mammon. So he turned his back on the Christ

and went away – which is only to say he acted on what he had always believed. He left the true God and returned to the god in which he had trusted all along, his wealth. Although he had learned to feign piety, he had never really kept any of the Commandments.

It is easy to talk about the rich young man. He isn’t here to defend himself, and the Scripture records his rejection of the Christ. But we understand the rich young man because each of us has done the same as he did. We have striven to appear to others as if we are righteous, all the while being well aware of our secret faults and desires.

Speaking honestly, none of us could say with confidence of the Commandments of the Second Table “all these I have kept from my youth”. And more, as if that weren’t condemning enough, the rich young man’s question is one that we too have asked: “What shall *I* do that I may inherit eternal life?”

These words reveal his unbelief. It is not wrong to desire eternal life, each of us desires that. But to preface the question with “What shall I do...”, reveals the pride and arrogance of the hardened heart. Each of us, like that young man, has put great trust in our words and works, and in our heart of hearts we have come to believe that our works, “what I do”, really does merit God’s reward.

Repent. For the Lord Himself says “No one is good but One, that is God.” To trust in works or money, intelligence or pedigree, piety or your religiosity, is to break the First Commandment. It is to turn your back on the True God and

return to the god in which your fallen flesh has trusted all along – yourself.

But take heart. For God says “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” And you may boldly say “The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear.” For even after hearing the rich young man’s prideful sales pitch, still Jesus loved him. And so does the same Lord love you.

It is Christ Himself that had a sinless nature, being in very nature God. And He freely forfeited all that He had, and gave Himself for the poor – for poor miserable sinners. It is He that was lifted up on the cross, to do the work that no other man could do. It is what He did that merits eternal life.

In that selfless act, in that act of mercy and grace, He won for you the life that no fallen man can earn. He did what was necessary for you to inherit eternal life. In Him, all your transgressions, both of the First and the Second Table, are forgiven.

In Christ, all the Commandments are kept – not abolished, but fulfilled. So you have grace, by which you may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.

God looks at you, and He loves you, for when He looks at you He sees His Holy Son. He sees the Blood of Christ in which you are washed, the Blood that you are given to drink. And by faith in that Blood the obedience of God the Son is credited to you.

And, this day, like the rich young man, you come to Christ and kneel before Him, and open your mouth. But when you do, He places Himself in your mouth, and streams Himself across your lips. The Christ that died for you fills you. The Christ that rose for you enters you.

So you can say with the Apostle “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear...” And so eternity is yours, because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

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