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We start out the Gospel Lesson with a young man running and throwing himself in front of Jesus. This is quite a different situation, here was a rich young aristocrat, throwing himself at the feet of a penniless prophet. He demands, "Good Teacher" and Jesus immediately tells him, "Flattery will get you nowhere. Don't call me good, save that word for God." This was like a big bucket of cold water being poured on this young man's enthusiasm. Jesus was saying, "Stop and think; don't get carried away by your excitement in this moment of enthusiasm. Stop and consider what you are asking and what the costs are."

Then he told the young man that he could not become a Christian by devotion to him, he must put his devotion to God. Jesus wanted him to realize that a personal attachment to him wasn't what he needed; but he needed to have his personal attachment to God. Jesus was the pointer, pointing to God. He always emphasized God as the head.

Jesus brought forth the commandments that would lead to a decent life. All are negative commandments: You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not defraud. Except for the last commandment, *honor your Father and Mother*. And [the young man's] answer was, "I have kept all these commandments."

This was true but what Jesus was asking was, with all of your wealth, what good have you done? With all of the money that you could have given away, what good have you done for others? What have you done or gone out of your way to comfort, strengthen and care for others? That is where this man fell down.

Now Jesus confronted this man with a challenge. Get out of this wealthy, do-nothing mindset and take everything that you have and start doing for others, spend everything you have doing good. The problem was this man had great possessions he had never figured on giving away, and when it was presented to him, he couldn't do it. It was true that he had never stolen or defrauded anyone, but he had never been compelled or could he compel himself to be generous and give to others. It may be respectable never to go against those commandments, but it is Christian to give to others and to help them. In actuality, Jesus was asking this man one question; "How much do you want Christianity? Do you want it enough to give your possessions away? Do you want it enough to do for others and help them?" But the man had to answer, "I want it, but not as much as all that." It was the failing of the man to not want Christianity enough.

Jesus, according to the Bible, loved him. He looked at him with an appealing look, not of anger, but an appealing look of love. There was a challenge of moral courage, pulling the man out of his comfortable settled life and to the exciting life of a real Christian. I am sure then Jesus had a look of grief, the grief of seeing a man choose not to be what he had the opportunity to be. Jesus looks at us with an appealing look of

love and with the challenge for us to have the courage to boldly take up the Christian way of life.

Jesus said to his disciples, "How difficult it is for someone who has money to enter the kingdom of God." Aristotle defined money as being, "All those things of which the value is measured by coinage." Now the disciples are confused because Jesus is turning their beliefs and Jewish standards upside down. This Jewish morality was simple; prosperity was the sign of a good man. If a man was rich, God must have honored and blessed him. Wealth was proof of excellence of character and of favor with God. It is no wonder the disciples had the feeling that to have riches was a sure ticket to heaven, according to the Jewish standard. The dangers that Jesus saw in prosperity and of having material things is that we have such, and interest and concern for it that we cannot think beyond, or think of leaving it. These make it difficult to die. The danger of possessions is that they fix our thoughts and interests to this world.

Another look at this: If our main interest is in material possessions, it tends to make us think of everything in terms of price. A mother wrote this interesting letter to a newspaper. Her children had been brought up in the loneliness of the hills, away from other people. When they moved to town, the children changed very considerably, for the worse. In her letter she asked this question: "Which is better for a child's upbringing, a lack of worldliness but with better manners and sincere and simple thoughts, or worldliness and its present day habit of knowing the price of everything and the true value of nothing?" If material things are our main interest, we will think of what money can get, and we will forget the true values in this world are far more important than money. There are things in this world more valuable than money can buy, they are more precious than money can buy. It is fatal to believe that everything worth having has a monetary value.

Jesus would tell us that prosperity can very easily make people arrogant, proud, self-satisfied, worldly. It takes a certain person to bear it worthily. We will always be judged by two standards. How we got our possessions, and how we use them. Will we use what we have selfishly or will we use them generously? The reaction of the disciples was that if what Jesus was saying was true it was almost impossible to be saved in heaven. Then Jesus stated: "If salvation depends on a person's own efforts it would be impossible for anyone, but salvation is the gift of God and all things are possible to God. Those who trust in the saving power and the redeeming love of God can enter freely into salvation." This is the foundation of the Christian faith.

Almighty God we seek your guidance on being true Christians. Open our hearts and minds to do your will.

Amen.