

SERMON - MATT. 19: 16-26, THE RICH YOUNG MAN - GIVEN SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2017

In today's Gospel our Lord is cautioning all of us about undue attachment and reliance upon anything more than on God. In today's Gospel, specifically the example given is of a young man who is unduly attached to and reliant upon his wealth. Were his first and foremost reliance upon God, then his greatest treasure would not be his gold and silver, but instead his first love and the true treasure in his heart would be God. He would then be the same as one who possesses nothing. It is necessary for our treasure to be God and not anything earthly, whether it be riches, property, possessions, and even family and friends. God must be number one in our hearts. Only then can the road to the Kingdom of Heaven be opened to us. In such a case, riches would not hinder this young man, but they in fact would help him, for they would provide the means for charitable works. If a person is wealthy, it means that they have the means to help more people. What a blessing it is to have more, so that we can share more and give more to those who are in need. But whatever we have, even if it is a little, whatever we give has great value, if it is given freely with love and sacrifice. Every time we give it is like we made a mortgage payment on our home in the Kingdom of Heaven. In Luke 21:1-4 it says, : "He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.'" So to give unto salvation does not mean to give merely what is extra or left over, but true giving involves sacrifice.

"Tzedakah" is the Hebrew word for the acts that we call "charity" in English: giving aid, assistance and money to the poor and needy or to other worthy causes. However, the nature of tzedakah is very different from the idea of charity. The word "charity" suggests benevolence and generosity, a magnanimous act by the wealthy and powerful for the benefit of the poor and needy. The word "tzedakah" is derived from the Hebrew root Tzadei-Dalet-Qof, meaning righteousness, justice or fairness. In Judaism, giving to the poor is not viewed as a generous, magnanimous act; it is simply an act of justice and righteousness, the performance of a duty, giving the poor their due.

Giving to the poor is an obligation in Judaism, a duty that cannot be forsaken even by those who are themselves in need. Some sages have said that tzedakah is the highest of all commandments, equal to all of them combined, and that a person who does not perform tzedakah is equivalent to an idol worshipper. This is probably hyperbole, but it illustrates the importance of tzedakah in Jewish thought. In Judaism, tzedakah is one of the three acts that gain us forgiveness from our sins.

Giving to the poor in Christianity is necessary for all Christians and necessary for our salvation, for the wealthy and even for those who are in need themselves, such as the widow with the two copper coins that our Lord spoke about. However, giving must not be done merely as an obligation or attached to some kind of legalistic requirement, and especially not because we want earthly recognition or anything else in return. The reward we seek is the joy in our hearts to help those in need, to relieve in any way we can the suffering of another human being. Our giving must be done freely and with love, and not grudgingly or merely out of obligation. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 St. Paul says, "The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who reaps bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Proverbs 19:17 says, "He who is generous to the poor makes a loan to the Lord; He will repay him his due." Some people make it a habit of donating to the needy box before church on Sunday. Some people have a needy box at home, and as a family, the children as well, contribute to it and as a normal practice and from it give aid to various charities. Sometimes charities provide a collection box, such as the IOCC coin boxes that we used in Church and in

Church School last year. Children who are taught from an early age to give grow up to be donors and good stewards because it is natural for them. It is an expression of their faith, love and also gratitude to God for the abundant blessings that God bestows upon us. Children who were never taught to give and who never themselves practiced giving often grow up to give grudgingly and with resentment and unwilling to sacrifice in order to give. More often than not they give out of obligation and are not the cheerful givers that St. Paul wrote about.

In Deuteronomy chapter 15 it says, : "...You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land, therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land." Amen.