

Luke 18:18-27, The Rich Young Ruler

We see today in the account of Jesus' interaction with the wealthy ruler a classic example of what today is referred to as 'cross cultural communication.' In particular it showcases *the* most difficult aspect of cross-cultural communication: not the understanding of terms and concepts, but the understanding of context. That is, to know not just *what* the person from another culture is saying, but *why* they are saying it, because the reality is that if you don't understand the *why* – you cannot really understand the *what*.

Make no mistake, while Jesus may be talking to Jews from his region, he is from a country, a kingdom most of the Jewish leaders like this man have never been to, and have no knowledge of – the kingdom of God. While he is using words, phrases and other communication tools such as analogies and parables they are familiar with, it is very clear from the large amount of interaction we have recorded between them that while they understand what he is saying, because they have no experience with where he is from – the kingdom of God – they don't understand *why* he says what he does. And therefore they don't understand really, *what* he is saying.

St. Luke (as with St. Mark in his account of this event), shows us in this record of Jesus meeting with the rich young ruler that he, like the other Jewish leaders and teachers, wrongly assume the Law of Moses to be the kingdom of God (and therefore salvation).

... I'd like to discuss today three things about the kingdom of God that is revealed to us by Jesus in this account.

First: The kingdom of God is just that – the kingdom *of God*– not the kingdom *of man*. It is of God not of man.

We see this in the young rulers error that man, independent of God, is virtuous – seen here in Jesus correction of him calling him (a mere man) good. Only God is by nature good. Man was created to be a vessel of God's goodness. To be (as the Fathers say) by grace what God is by nature. The implication is that to ascribe doing or being good apart from God is pride and therefore, in the kingdom of God is not really good. The virtues, independent and apart from God are simply *not* virtues. When St. Paul talks about the righteous gentiles outside the Law in Acts 2:14 who do "by nature" the commandment of the Law he doesn't mean they're doing it on their own without God, but that they are submitting to the conviction of their consciences where God is guiding them. They are being led from within their hearts – which is why he places them as superior to the Jew who obeys the Law he has heard with his ears.

... This leads us to the second reality of the kingdom of God:

Second: Being *within us* the entrance to the Kingdom of God is 'internal.'

It begins and ends *in us*. It is internal and therefore it is personal and spiritual. Like almost all the Jewish leaders the Rich young ruler does not understand this. When Jesus asks him if he has kept the Law he's not talking about having committed murder and adultery – obviously he hadn't or he wouldn't be a ruler in Israel, in fact he wouldn't be alive - he would have been stoned according to the Law! What he's really asking him with these questions is the state of his heart and soul: specifically if he has anger and lust, if he's lied in his heart and coveted his neighbors possessions, ever been resentful of his parents, etc.

The young man doesn't understand this because he thinks the kingdom of God is external and legal. So he says, I've always done this, I've always been faithful to the Law, which he equates with the kingdom of God. But the reality is that he has spent all his time at the gates of the kingdom – which is the legal, external observation of the Law – and never been inside. Never gone within his heart to the kingdom because he had no access to it. By considering himself to be righteous because he kept the external, legal requirements, (like many Christians today who see themselves as God's saved and elect), he has no need to repent - and certainly no need to maintain repentance. ...and where there is no repentance there is no faith, and there is no entrance into the kingdom of God without faith.

And because Jesus loved him (as we see in Mark's account), he tries to wake him up, to show him he hasn't even begun to know and follow God. That his legal, external understanding of salvation has left him at the gates of the kingdom, and that he'll never get inside, never gain entrance until he repents and enters by faith in God rather than by his "having kept the law since his youth."

He has been mastered and his soul has been darkened and diseased by his faith in money. Jesus isn't testing him, as our great physician he's diagnosed him as being spiritually terminally ill. Being addicted to money and possessions Jesus is giving him the way to heal his soul of this passion and enter the kingdom of God. He's showing him, and providing the way for him to really experience the kingdom of God – of salvation. To be released from the prison of the passions that he knows he's been in - otherwise why would he have sought out Jesus and asked him how to be saved? He knows something's not right – something's wrong in him and with him but he can't get to it.

...And that leads to our third reality of the kingdom of God.

Third: While it is impossible for us to get there on our own and only comes through pain ... The Kingdom of God is (and always has been) worth the price of the cross we pay to gain entrance.

As Jesus says to the disciples regarding the kingdom, it's not just when we die and face God, but here and now. If the young ruler had repented instead of going away he would have seen that what he gave up was incomparably inferior to what he would have gained following Christ. As Jesus taught earlier in Luke (12) "where our treasure is there our hearts will be." It is therefore an inescapable reality if we sacrifice and accept the pain of saying no to these passions we love and turn away from them toward Christ, we will – *in this life here and now* – experience the kingdom of God. Experience the peace and joy, the happiness of being loved by God through Jesus Christ and His Church. This is the love of Romans 8 the world and all the powers of darkness cannot separate us from. This is the love that makes the Apostle Paul say, '*I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*' (Eph. 4:7, 8). He saw what the rich young ruler failed to see, and just as tragically what many today in the Church who take confidence in their Orthodoxy rather than their repentance fail to see: that Jesus Christ "didn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."