

On Obeying the Law 10-11-15

So teach us, Lord, to number our days that we might take seriously the time we have here on earth. Prosper our work. We are dependent on You. Cause us to surrender to You that we might be touched by Your Love & truly live. Amen.

Interesting, interesting Gospel! Don't you want to psychoanalyze this rich young ruler? What does he want? First of all he asks Jesus what he must **do** to inherit eternal life. Inheritances are not based on what people DO. One inherits because of relationship –sons, daughters, nieces, nephews. Because Jesus can spot the heart of a person, Jesus sees this man as one who DOES. So Jesus tells the man what he must DO. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father & mother.'" Well, the rich young ruler says he has done this since his youth. This man obviously hasn't heard how Jesus, always interested in the heart, has expanded these commands – if you lust after a woman in your heart, you've committed adultery, if you've called someone a fool, you have committed murder.... oooo, guilty! The man has not caught the spirit of the law. One can think they are pretty self-righteous, but when you realize how despicable your heart is, you know you need help. You can't tell me this rich young ruler NEVER lusted in his heart, NEVER got ticked off at a person & called them an inappropriate name – not even in traffic? Jesus saw his **delusion** – the man actually believed he had kept the law. Nevertheless, Jesus looked at him & loved him. No condemning! Just love! He saw how diligent this man had been. Jesus saw the man thought it was about

keeping the law. So w/all His divine wisdom, what did Jesus do? He gave the man more to DO. “Sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; & come, follow me.” Sadly, the man couldn’t do it. He had a lot of stuff. His possessions must have given him some sense of security – maybe his identity was tied up in what he had.

When you hear scriptures like this, does it make you uncomfortable? Does it make you ask “Would I be willing to sell all I have & give it to the poor so that I could follow Jesus?” It may be important for us to be willing to sell all we have, but if we all sold everything we had & gave it to the poor & all lived on the streets, what good would that do? I do not think that’s the point of what Jesus is saying. I believe this is a command to a specific man at a specific time. Yes, we all have too much stuff. We all need to be aware of our greed. We all need to give to the poor, but we do not need to feel guilty for what we have. One Lutheran pastor used to moan in guilt, “I have 27 shirts!” He didn’t have to worry – nobody wants his shirts! He needs to go down to the Boys’ Club, etc. They have so many clothes they have to use front-end loaders to scoop them off the floor! We need to be grateful for the way the Lord’s blessed us & give when we are led to give - out of love. If we give out of guilt, it is never a blessing. And, it’s not like we never DO anything. We do lots of things, but not to inherit eternal life. Faith w/o works is dead, but we give out of love. Prayer of the Day: “By the work of Your Spirit.. lead us to serve You in willing obedience.”

But back to the rich young ruler. Notice what Jesus did NOT say to him. In His list of things the man should do, He did not say “Love the Lord your God w/all your heart, & w/all your soul, & w/all your mind, & w/all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus was speaking to a man who believed he’d kept the law. Jesus told him to do an action that was possible. “Ok, you think you’ve kept the adultery law, no fraud, no murder, no lying, etc., now sell all you have & give it to the poor.” The man couldn’t do it. He went away sad. People who think they can work their way into heaven need to come to the end of themselves – to the end of the lists that they can do **for** God. Hopefully the man went away & came to the realization “if it is up to me, I will never make it!” And hopefully, he headed back to Jesus!

If Jesus had brought up “Love the Lord your God w/all your heart, etc.,” don’t you think it would have been awkward if the man had said, “Oh, I do that too.” Loving isn’t necessarily about doing. Some say this story shows someone who loved his possessions – his possessions possessed him, and he needed to look beyond himself to loving others. But, here the rich young ruler is, standing in the presence of Jesus – Jesus is loving him, & it doesn’t change him. Why? Is he frustrated because he has been good all his life & he still lacking something? Does he think the only solution is doing something? Is his heart hard? Hebrews says hearts get hard by the deceitfulness of sin. We can be in to sin and rationalize it to the point that we still think we are pure. We are deceived – sin does that to us. Just because we’ve never had an affair,

doesn't mean we've never committed adultery in our hearts. Just because we haven't murdered, we have hated. And Jesus is ALWAYS after the heart! Always!! We all lack love in our own strength.

We may think it'd feel more secure if we could be good – if we could DO enough & we could say “See! I've been good. I deserve heaven.” But we know that's not the case. We all sin. It feels pretty tenuous – walking by faith does.

A significant point in this story is that in spite of the fact that the rich young ruler did not get it, Jesus looked at him & loved him. But what does it take to “GET IT?” God has to come to us in such a way that we know that we know that we know we are loved. God knows each one of you – and He knows just what it takes for you to know that you are loved, cherished – that God is crazy about you. Hopefully, you know God's love in a very personal way.

Jesus made His love known to me many years ago. I was w/a group of people of Moral Re-Armament – an outgrowth of the Oxford Movement in England, a forerunner of Up With People.” This group had a whole library of books written about MRA. I was an insecure English major w/a weak reading background. They'd ask me if I'd read this or that book.. No, No, No. How about Dr. Buchman's Secret? Oh yes, I've read that one – I'd read 2 pages. At a worship service one night, it was like the Lord posed the question, “Who are you that you have to lie to create someone

outside yourself to relate to others? Why can't you just relate? Be honest? Be who you are?" It was the first look I'd had at my lies. It was a peek at my sin – just a peek. Had the Lord come to me w/a whole battery of sin, I would have drown. Very quickly, I had a vision. I saw Jesus on the cross, laid out b/4 me. Horizontally. I saw His body wrench in pain. I knew the pain was real. I heard His voice, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." Suddenly, I knew divine love. I knew that if it had been me on the cross, I'd have cursed everyone in front of me. I'd have wondered why I was up there – yes, I sinned, but I didn't think I was as bad as most people. At that moment, seeing Jesus on the cross, my heart was pierced. I knew I was loved & forgiven. This was many years ago. Have I always felt His love? No. Have I always known I was forgiven? No. But I have always known where to go to get this love, to get forgiven. It is pure grace – it has nothing to do with being good, keeping the law on my own. It has everything to do w/receiving His love, receiving His forgiveness, asking for help, letting Him love me.

It can be frustrating because we cannot make this happen for anyone else. Yes, the Bible says God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Also, "if you seek Me, you will find Me, if you seek me w/your whole heart." But until someone else has a hunger for God, or, like the rich young ruler, hopefully burns out trying to gain access to eternal life on his own, there is little one can do. In the meantime, we walk, taking our sin seriously – not condemningly, just dealing w/it – confessing, receiving forgiveness,

and we walk in forgiveness towards others, love towards all – including ourselves.

Like my sister-in-law says, “I am worse than I ever thought I was, but I am loved more than I can comprehend.” It’s true. It doesn’t matter where we’ve been, what we’ve done, God is a God of 2nd, 3rd, 4th chances. Jesus looks at you and loves you!

My faith is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; No merit of my own I claim. But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.” Amen.