

## Mark: 10:17–31

### From Catena Aurea:

17. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18. And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.

19. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother.

20. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, one thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

23. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

24. And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

26. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

27. And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible,

**THEOPHYLACT.** I wonder at this young man, who when all others come to Christ to be healed of their infirmities, begs of Him the possession of everlasting life, notwithstanding his love of money, the malignant passion which afterwards caused his sorrow.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. in Matt. 63) Because however he had come to Christ as he would to a man, and to one of the Jewish doctors, Christ answered him as Man. Wherefore it goes on: And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but the One God. In saying which He does not exclude men from goodness, but from a comparison with the goodness of God.

**THEOPHYLACT.** Therefore the Lord intended by these words to raise the mind of the young man, so that he might know Him to be God. But He also implies another thing by these words, that when you have to converse with a man, you should not flatter him in your conversation, but look back upon God, the root and fount of goodness, and do honor to Him.

**ORIGEN.** (in Evan. tom. xv. 14) For in that He loved, or kissed him, He appears to affirm the truth of his profession, in saying that he had fulfilled all those things; for on applying His mind to him, He saw that the man answered with a good conscience.

**THEOPHYLACT.** And when he has sold it, to give it to the poor, not to stage-players and luxurious persons.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (ubi sup.) Well too did He say, not eternal life, but treasure, saying, And thou shalt have treasure in heaven; for since the question was concerning wealth, and the renouncing of all things, He shews that He returns more things than He has bidden us leave, in proportion as heaven is greater than earth.

**THEOPHYLACT.** But because there are many poor who are not humble, but are drunkards or have some other vice, for this reason He says, And come, follow me.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (ubi sup.) And the Evangelist adds the cause of his grief, saying, For he had great possessions. The feelings of those who have little and those who have much are not the same, for the increase of acquired wealth lights up a greater flame of covetousness. There follows: And Jesus looked round about, and said unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.

**THEOPHYLACT.** He says not here, that riches are bad, but that those are bad who only have them to watch them carefully; for He teaches us not to have them, that is, not to keep or preserve them, but to use them in necessary things.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (ubi sup.) But the Lord said this to His disciples, who were poor and possessed nothing, in order to teach them not to blush at their poverty, and as it were to make an excuse to them, and give

them a reason, why He had not allowed them to possess any thing. It goes on: And the disciples were astonished at his words; for it is plain, since they themselves were poor, that they were anxious for the salvation of others.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (ubi sup.) Or else, after saying difficult, He then shews that it is impossible, and that not simply, but with a certain vehemence; and he shews this by an example, saying, It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

**THEOPHYLACT.** It may be that by camel, we should understand the animal itself, or else that thick cable, which is used for large vessels.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (ubi sup.) And the reason why He says that this is the work of God is, that He may shew that he who is put into this path by God, has much need of grace; from which it is proved, that great is the reward of those rich men, who are willing to follow the discipline of Christ.

**THEOPHYLACT.** Or we must understand that by, with man it is impossible, but not with God, He means, that when we listen to God, it becomes possible, but as long as we keep our human notions, it is impossible. There follows, For all things are possible with God; when He says all things, you must understand, that have a being; which sin has not, for it is a thing without being and substance. Or else: sin does not come under the notion of strength, but of weakness, therefore sin, like weakness, is impossible with God. But can God cause that not to have been done which has been done? To which we answer, that God is Truth, but to cause that what has been done should not have been done, is falsehood. How then can truth do what is false? He must first therefore quit His own nature, so that they who speak thus really say, Can God cease to be God? which is absurd.

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28. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

29. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's,

30. But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

31. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

**GLOSS.** (non occ.) Because the youth, on hearing the advice of our Saviour concerning the casting away of his goods, had gone away sorrowful, the disciples of Christ, who had already fulfilled the foregoing precept, began to question Him concerning their reward, thinking that they had done a great thing, since the young man, who had fulfilled the commandments of the law, had not been able to hear it without sadness. Wherefore Peter questions the Lord for himself and the others, in these words, Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

**THEOPHYLACT.** Although Peter had left but few things, still he calls these his all; for even a few things keep us by the bond of affection, so that he shall be beatified who leaves a few things.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** (Hom. in Matt. 64) But it seems to me that by these words He intended covertly to proclaim that there were to be persecutions, as it would come to pass that many fathers would allure their sons to impiety, and many wives their husbands.<sup>1</sup> Again He delays not to say, for my name's sake and the Gospel's, as Mark says, or for the kingdom of God, as Luke says; the name of Christ is the power of the Gospel, and of His kingdom; for the Gospel is received in the name of Jesus Christ, and the kingdom is made known, and comes by His name.

**THEOPHYLACT.** For a wife is busied in a house about her husband's food and raiment. See also how this is the case with the Apostles; for many women busied themselves about their food and their clothing, and ministered unto them. In like manner the Apostles had many fathers and mothers, that is, persons who loved them; as Peter, for instance, leaving one house, had afterwards the houses of all the disciples. And what is more wonderful, they are to be persecuted and oppressed, for it is with persecutions that the Saints are to possess all things, for which reason there follows, But many that are first shall be last, and the last first. For the Pharisees who were first became the last; but those who left all and followed Christ were last in this world through tribulation and persecutions, but shall be first by the hope which is in God.

### **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

#### **10:17 What Must I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?**

##### **The False Premise of the Question.**

Hilary of Poitiers: The young man became arrogant through the observance of the law. He did not recognize that the consummation of the law is Christ. He assumed he could be justified by works. He was

not aware that Jesus had come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and that the law could not save except through justifying faith. He questioned the Lord of the law and the only begotten God as if he were an ordinary teacher of precepts that were written down in the law. Hence, the Lord rejected this declaration of a spurious faith, because the question was put to him as if he were merely a teacher of the law. He replied: "Why do you call me good?" In order to make known how much he was to be recognized and acknowledged as good, he declared: "No one is good but God only." He would not have rejected the attribute of goodness if it had been attributed to him as God. On the Trinity 9.16.

### **10:18a Why Do You Call Me Good?**

#### **On Rightly Naming the Good.**

Ephrem the Syrian: The rich man called Jesus "good," as if he were offering him a favor, just as some favor others with honorary titles. [The Lord] fled from that by which people favored him, so that he might show that he had received this goodness from the Father through nature and generation, and not [merely] in name. "Only one is good," [he said], and did not remain silent, but added, "the Father," so that he might show that the Son is good in just the way that the Father is good. Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron.

#### **Later Errors Echo the Same False Premise.**

Hilary of Poitiers: He who is by nature God of God must possess the nature of his origin, which God possesses. The indistinguishable unity of a living nature cannot be divided by the birth of a living nature. But the troublers of church unity, under cover of the saving confession of the gospel faith, are subversively trying to take captive the truth by undermining it. By forcing their own interpretations on words spoken with other meanings and intentions, they are robbing the Son of his distinctive unity [with the Father]. On the Trinity 9.2.

#### **How the Skewed Premise Shapes the Reply.**

Hilary of Poitiers: A complete understanding of the reply must come from the reason that prompted the question, for the answer will be directed to the matter that led to the inquiry.... He voiced his objection to the title of "good master" in such a way as to challenge the faith of the questioner rather than the designation of himself as a master or as good. On the Trinity 9.2.

### **The Overturning of the Premise in the Question.**

Jerome: The question is something like a priest who, while inwardly despising his bishop, yet continues to address him openly as “bishop.” Whereupon the bishop answers, “To you I am not the bishop; you may leave my presence.” Homily 53.

### **10:18b No One is Good But God Alone**

#### **The Incomparable Goodness of the Son.**

Origen: There is no other secondary goodness existing in the Son than that which is in the Father. So the Savior himself rightly says in the Gospel that “none is good save one, God the Father.” The purpose of this statement is to make it understood that the Son is not of some other ancillary “goodness,” but of that alone which is in the Father; whose image he is rightly called. For he neither springs from any other source than from original goodness itself (if that were so, there would seem to be a different goodness in the Son from that which is in the Father), nor has the goodness that is in him any dissimilarity or divergence from that of the Father. Accordingly we ought not to imagine that there is some kind of blasphemy in the saying that “none is good save one, God the Father.” These words are not to be taken as a denial that either Christ or the Holy Spirit is good. But, as we said before, the original goodness must be believed to reside in God the Father, and from him both the Son and Holy Spirit undoubtedly draw into themselves the nature of that goodness existing in the font from which the one is born and the other proceeds. If then there are any other things called good in the Scriptures such as an angel, or a man, or a servant, or a treasure, or a good heart, or a good tree, all these are so called by an inexact use of the word, since the goodness contained in them is accidental and not essential. On First Principles 1.2.13.

#### **Defining the Good.**

Origen: The good, then, is the same as the one who incomparably is. Over against good is evil or wickedness. Over against the one who incomparably is, is merely that which is not. So it follows that evil and corruption are, finally, that which becomes nothing. This, perhaps, is what has led some to affirm that the devil is not created by God. In respect that he is the devil he is not the work of God, but he who is the devil is a created being, and as a creature nonetheless remains a work of God, since there is nothing created that is not created by God. Think of it this way: A murderer is not a work of God insofar as he

murders, while we may still say that insofar as he is a human being, God made him. Commentary on John 2.7.

### **Complete Goodness Belongs to God Alone.**

Gregory Nazianzen: The words, “None is good” are a reply to the young ruler who was testing him and had borne witness to his goodness as a human being. Consummate goodness, he meant, belongs to God alone, though the word “good” can be derivatively applied to human beings. Oration 30, On the Son 13.

### **God’s Goodness Distinguished from Other Goods.**

Augustine: God, therefore, is uniquely good, and this he cannot lose. He is good. He is not good by sharing in any other good, because the good by which he is good is himself. But, when a finite human being is good, his goodness derives from God, because he cannot be his own good. All who become good do so through his Spirit. Our nature has been created to attain to him through acts of its own will. If we are to become good, it is important for us to receive and hold what he gives, who is good in himself. Letter 153, To Macedonius.

## **10:19 You Know the Commandments**

### **Commands That Lead to Life.**

Augustine: The rich man asked the good teacher what he should do to gain eternal life. He regarded the good teacher as a man and nothing more (as distinct from the assumption that He is good as God incarnate). Hear the good teacher respond to him: if he wishes to enter into life, he should keep the commandments; that he should remove from himself the bitterness of malice and wickedness; that he should not kill, or commit adultery, or steal, or bear false witness, in order that dry land may appear and bring forth the honor of mother and father and the love of our neighbor. Confessions 13.19.

## **10:20 All These I Have Observed from My Youth**

### **Rationalizing Observance.**

Jerome: He who declared that he had observed all the commandments had already yielded to the power of riches from the very outset. Letter 118, To Julian.

### **Feigned Responsiveness.**

Augustine: But the young man went away sad, so anyone can see how far he kept those commandments of the law. I think he spoke with more pride than truth when he answered that he had kept them. Letter 157, To Hilarius.

### **10:21a Go, Sell What You Have and Give to the Poor**

#### **How Wealth Obstructs Discipleship.**

Jerome: This is why those who are rich find it hard to enter the kingdom of heaven. For it is a kingdom which desires for its citizens a soul that soars aloft free from all ties and hindrances. "Go your way," the Lord said, "and sell" not a part of your substance but "all that you have, and give to the poor"; not to your friends or kinsfolk or relatives, nor to your wife or to your children.... When once you have put your hand to the plough, you must not look back. When once you stand on the housetop, you must think no more of your clothes within. To escape your Egyptian mistress, you must abandon the cloak that belongs to this world. Even Elijah, in his quick translation to heaven could not take his mantle with him, but left in the world the garments of the world. Letter 118, To Julian.

#### **Inward Intent.**

Augustine: I who write this have greatly loved the total devotion of which the Lord spoke when he once said to the rich young man: "Go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and come, follow me." I have so loved it that I have indeed acted upon it myself, not by my own strength but by his assisting grace. The apostles were the first to follow in the practice of this complete self-giving. One who gives up both what one owns and what one desires to own, gives up the whole world. Letter 157, To Hilarius.

### **10:21b Follow Me**

#### **Performing the Good.**

Hilary of Poitiers: He exercises the duties of goodness when he opens the treasures of heaven and becomes himself a guide to them. He abhors whatever is offered to him merely as a man. Yet he makes it clear that he is no stranger to those qualities attributed to God. While recognizing the one God as good,



he himself speaks of and performs those very actions which are characteristic of the incomparable power, goodness and nature of God. On the Trinity 9.17.

### **10:22 He Went Away Sorrowful**

#### **God Saves Only the Willing.**

Clement of Alexandria: God provides a fairer wind for more willing souls. But if they early abandon their eagerness, the wind which God provides is thereby obstructed. For to save the unwilling is an act of compulsion. But to save the willing is the act of one showing grace. Salvation of the Rich Man 21.

#### **The Burden of Choice.**

Augustine: He did not follow. He just wanted a good teacher, but he questioned who the teacher was, and scorned the identity of the One who was teaching. "He went away sad," bound up in his desires. "He went away sad," carrying a great burden of possessiveness upon his shoulders. Tractate on John 34.8.

### **10:23 For Those Who Have Riches**

#### **The Rich Need Not Despair.**

Clement of Alexandria: Let this teach the prosperous that they are not to neglect their own salvation, as if they had been already foredoomed, nor, on the other hand, to cast wealth into the sea, or condemn it as a traitor and an enemy to life, but learn in what way and how to use wealth and obtain life. Salvation of the Rich Man 27.

#### **Whether in Merely Having Wealth One Tends to Love It Inordinately.**

Augustine: Such, O my soul, are the miseries that attend on riches. They are gained with toil and kept with fear. They are enjoyed with danger and lost with grief. It is hard to be saved if we have them; and impossible if we love them; and scarcely can we have them, but we shall love them inordinately. Teach us, O Lord, this difficult lesson: to manage conscientiously the goods we possess, and not covetously desire more than you give to us. Letter 203.

## **10:25 Eye of a Needle**

### **Whether the Rich Can Be Saved.**

Clement of Alexandria: The Savior by no means has excluded the rich on account of wealth itself, and the possession of property, nor fenced off salvation against them, if they are able and willing to submit their life to God's commandments, and prefer them to transitory things. Let them look to the Lord with steady eye, as those who look toward the slightest nod of a good helmsman, what he wishes, what he orders, what he indicates, what signal he gives his mariners, where and when he directs the ship's course.... If one is able in the midst of wealth to turn from its mystique, to entertain moderate desires, to exercise self-control, to seek God alone, and to breathe God and walk with God, such a man submits to the commandments, being free, unsubdued, free of disease, unwounded by wealth. But if not, "sooner shall a camel enter through a needle's eye, than such a rich man reach the kingdom of God." Salvation of the Rich Man 26.

## **10:27 All Things are Possible with God**

## **10:29 There is No One Who Has Left House or Brothers**

### **The Spiritual Sense of Leaving the Family.**

Clement of Alexandria: Do not let this passage trouble you. Put it side by side with the still harder saying Jesus delivered in another place in the words, "Whoever hates not father, and mother, and children, and his own life besides, cannot be my disciple." Note that the God of peace, who exhorts us to love our enemies, does not arbitrarily require us literally to hate or abandon those dearest to us. But if we are to love our enemies, it must be in accordance with right reason that, by analogy we should also love our nearest relatives.... But insofar as one's father, or son, or brother, becomes for you a hindrance to faith or an impediment to godly life, one should then not collude with that temptation. Attend to the spiritual, rather than the fleshly, meaning of the command. Salvation of the Rich Man 22.

## **10:30 Receive a Hundredfold**

### **Blessings Within of the New Family of God.**

John Cassian: For he who for the sake of Christ's name distances himself from his particular beloved father or mother or child, and gives himself over to the purest love of all who serve Christ, will receive a hundred times the measure of brothers and kinsfolk. Instead of but one he will begin to have so many fathers and brothers bound to him by a still more fervent and admirable affection. That this is so you can prove by your own experience, since you have each left but one father and mother and home, and as you have done so you have gained without any effort or care countless fathers and mothers and brothers, as well as houses and lands and most faithful servants, in any part of the world to which you go, who receive you as their own family, and welcome, and respect, and take care of you with the utmost attention. Conferences 3.24.26.