

**One Thing You Lack:
The Radical Demand to Sell All to Enter the Kingdom in Luke 18:18-30**

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Introduction

In Luke's story of the rich ruler is found a more intriguing, perplexing, and difficult requirement of Jesus to enter the kingdom of God, especially for the rich. A certain rich ruler draws near to Jesus and begins the conversation with the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life" (Lk. 18:18).¹ Jesus answers by telling the ruler to obey the second part of the Law, which speaks of concern towards other people (Lk. 18:20). The rich ruler replies that he has kept the commandments from his youth. Jesus responds, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Lk. 18:22). Why does Jesus require the rich ruler to sell all his possessions and give it to the poor? Is it a universal requirement for entering the kingdom or for committed discipleship? How does Luke interpret this detail? What is the Lukan emphasis concerning wealth in relation to the kingdom in this pericope (Lk. 18:18-30)?

With these questions, the aim of this essay is to isolate and determine Luke's unique contribution in the triple tradition—the requirement to sell all of one's possessions to enter the kingdom. In that Matthew and Mark also take up this story, we shall attempt to investigate how Luke interpreted it with Mark as his source. Along the way, we shall establish the context of the story and mark the editorial changes as found in Matthew and Luke. In this redaction analysis, we shall also attempt to draw out the Lukan emphasis by relating the results of the analysis with Luke's purpose in his gospel, to understand better his theological view. The ultimate aim then is to understand the Lukan theological import of the radical demand to sell all assets in order to enter the kingdom of God. In what follows, I will present the literary context against other accounts on possessions in Luke. The next section on synoptic contrasts should give us clues to a Lukan emphasis, while utilizing an exegetical approach in conversation with relevant scholarship.

Context

Luke sets this story against the backdrop of his definite concern with how people relate to their material goods relative to the kingdom. The Lukan interest is everywhere. In seeking the kingdom, the disciples are to sell their possessions and give to the needy (Lk. 11:41; 12:33). One must renounce all that he has before he can become Jesus' disciple (Lk. 14:33). He who has two tunics should share to him who has none, which principle also applies to food (Lk. 3:11). Matthew merely urges against turning away people who borrow (Matt. 5:42). Luke takes it one notch higher by urging lending to the needy, which to Luke is normal even for sinners, yet this time, "expecting nothing in return," but great reward from God (Lk. 6:34-35). One should not invite family, friends, and rich neighbors for supper, lest they repay her. Instead, she should invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind—people who could not pay back (Lk. 14:12-14). Salvation has come to the house of Zaccheus, because he gave half of his goods to the poor and promises to return four times what he took from anyone (Lk. 19:8-9). In two L

¹ All scriptural quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

materials, Luke warns about the danger of having possessions, which can lead to covetousness (Lk. 12:13-21). He further connects riches with hades, and poverty with paradise (Lk. 16:19-31). Since wealth chokes God's Word, the antidote is to use it as capital for an eternal gain in heaven (Lk. 8:14; 12:33-34; 16:9; 18:22).

The immediate literary context locates the story after two preceding accounts of the Pharisee and the tax collector, and the children that people brought to Jesus. To enter the kingdom of God, one should humble himself and become like a child (Lk. 18:9-17). The story of the rich ruler then follows, stressing the selling of all of one's goods as a condition for entry into the kingdom. Luke appears to use three metaphors to indicate the one theme of salvation, as R. H. Stein notes. The tax collector went back to his house "justified," being humble before God (Lk. 18:14). Child-like faith makes one "enter" the kingdom (Lk. 18:17). As our story unfolds, it is now the metaphor of "inheriting" the kingdom that gets on stage (Lk. 18:18).² In this light, entering into the kingdom is the same as inheriting eternal life and salvation (Lk. 18:26).³ The flow of Luke's presentation tells a storyline of how to enter the kingdom of God. It requires humility, child-like faith, and forsaking all forms of "security in life" based on material things, as J. Nolland aptly calls it. This story is placed right before Jesus' announcement of their trip to Jerusalem, in the impending horrors of the cross (Lk. 18:31). The giving up of all forms of material protection in life thus recalls the motif of renouncing all, while taking up one's cross daily for the sake of Christ (Lk. 9:23-27).⁴

Contrasts

Mark places the story of the rich man *after* the two accounts on Jesus' teaching on divorce and the little children that people brought to Jesus. He inserts it *between* the little children report and Jesus' foretelling of his impending death and resurrection (Mk. 10:13-16, 32-34). Matthew follows Mark in relating the teaching on divorce and the blessing of little children *before* his version of the rich man (Matt. 19:3-15). However, he places the kingdom parable of the landowner and his laborers *after* his story of the rich man, but *before* the third notice of imminent death and resurrection narrative (Matt. 19:16-20:19).

It appears that Luke followed Mark in including the children account right *before* the story of the rich ruler (Lk. 18:15-17). He then places his report on Jesus' approaching suffering and death *after* his account of the rich ruler (Lk. 18:31-34). Yet he digresses from Mark in setting an L material—the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector *before* the little children account (Lk. 18:9-14). Mark sets the divorce storyline *before* his report on the little children (Mk. 10:1-12). Another interesting Lukan editorial is the placing of the L material of Zacchaeus right *after* the account of Jesus' third prediction of the passion, indicating a contrast between the rich ruler and Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

The following table summarizes and clarifies the context of the story of the rich ruler, according to how Matthew, Mark, and Luke arranged and described it.

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (NAC 24; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 455.

³ E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 217; so—Stein, 455; Joseph H. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB28a; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 1196.

⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC 35B; Dallas: Word, 1993), 884.

<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Luke</i>
		The Coming of the Kingdom
		Unjust Judge (L)
Teaching on Divorce	Teaching on Divorce	Pharisee and Tax Collector (L)
Little Children	Little Children	Little Children
Rich Young Man	Rich Man	Rich Ruler
Landowner and His Laborers		
Jesus' Notice of Approaching Death and Resurrection	Jesus' Notice of Approaching Death and Resurrection	Jesus' Notice of Approaching Death and Resurrection
Mother of James and John	James and John	
Two Blind Men	Blind Bartimaeus	Blind Man
		Zacchaeus (L)

If we go back farther, we see a context for Luke's story of the rich ruler far different from that of Mark and Matthew. Luke places two more accounts before his report on the Pharisee and the tax collector and the children—the coming of the kingdom and an L material—the parable of the unjust judge (Lk. 17:20-18:8). In the coming kingdom narrative, the focus is on the suddenness and swiftness of the coming of Son of Man and the consummation of the kingdom. It will not occur however, within the lifetime of the disciples (Lk. 17:22). Luke touches on this theme again in the parable of the unjust judge, urging his readers to always pray and not give up praying. He applies the parable to the delay of the coming of the Son of Man, like the delay of the judge's decision. Like the judge, God shall surely answer the prayers of the faithful (Lk. 18:1-8).⁵ The coming kingdom narrative thus connects with the parable of the unjust judge. Taken together, Luke's report on the coming of the kingdom, the unjust judge, the Pharisee and tax collector, the little children, and the rich ruler are all connected in linear fashion to a key theme in this context—the kingdom of God. It is in this thematic backdrop of the kingdom as well as the general call of Jesus to self-denial, cross-bearing, and discipleship, which provides a Lukan context to Jesus' requirement to sell all in order to inherit eternal life (Lk. 18:26).

Several synoptic differences and signs in Luke's revisions may indicate possible answers to our question. Not to be overlooked is Luke's use of the word, ἄρχων,⁶ "ruler,"⁷ in identifying the rich man, as compared to Matthew's use of νεανίσκος, "young man" (Matt. 19:20). He was probably a ruler of the synagogue or of the Pharisees, magistrate, or an official of the high priest who stands "opposed" to Jesus, as L. T. Johnson suggests (Lk. 12:58; 14:1).⁸ Nolland connects the use of ἄρχων with Luke's stance on the role of the Jewish leaders in the trial and death of Jesus, implying "vested interests" that kept them from embracing the kingdom (Lk. 23:13, 35).⁹ Nonetheless, Luke links the ruler, not with those interests, but with his sole interest—his riches, which kept him from the kingdom. That his life is relatively morally righteous and that he felt "very sad," indicate

⁵ Stein, *Luke*, 441, 444.

⁶ The Greek text used in this paper is the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.

⁷ The Greek-English definitions in this paper are based on F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983). All literal translations are mine.

⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Vol. 3; SPS; ed. Daniel J. Harrington; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991), 276.

⁹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 885.

his genuine sincerity, perhaps setting him apart from the rest of the power brokers (Lk. 18:23). If the ruler were an official of the high priest, then he would belong to, or at least be connected with, one of the richest and most powerful class of first-century Jewish society—the chief priests. They control the offering of the sacrifices at the Temple and the commercial exchange that goes with such sacrifices and religious activities (Mk. 11:15-19).¹⁰ Luke’s use of ἄρχων is important, for it may well connect with the issue of possessions, and by implication, the power that goes with it, as a hindrance to the kingdom (Lk. 18:24).

In Jesus’ first call to obey the commandments, Luke adopts Mark’s words almost to the last word, as shown below, but with changes that give us clues to his emphasis.

<i>Mark 10:19-22</i>	<i>Luke 18:20-23</i>
<p>Mark 10:19 τὰς ἐντολάς οἶδας· μὴ φονεύσης, μὴ μοιχεύσης, μὴ κλέψης, μὴ ψευδομαρτυρήσης, μὴ ἀποστερήσης, τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα.</p> <p>Mark 10:20 ὁ δὲ ἔφη αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, ταῦτα πάντα ἐφύλαξάμην ἐκ νεότητός μου.</p> <p>Mark 10:21 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Ἐν σε ὑστερεῖ· Ὑπάγε, ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον καὶ δός [τοῖς] πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι.</p> <p>Mark 10:22 ὁ δὲ στυγνάσας ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ ἀπῆλθεν λυπούμενος· ἦν γὰρ ἔχων κτήματα πολλά.</p>	<p>Luke 18:20 τὰς ἐντολάς οἶδας· μὴ μοιχεύσης, μὴ φονεύσης, μὴ κλέψης, μὴ ψευδομαρτυρήσης, τίμα τὸν πατέρα σου καὶ τὴν μητέρα.</p> <p>Luke 18:21 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· ταῦτα πάντα ἐφύλαξα ἐκ νεότητος.</p> <p>Luke 18:22 ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἔτι ἔν σοι λείπει· πάντα ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον καὶ διάδος πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν [τοῖς] οὐρανοῖς, καὶ δεῦρο ἀκολούθει μοι.</p> <p>Luke 18:23 ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα περίλυπος ἐγενήθη· ἦν γὰρ πλούσιος σφόδρα.</p>

Remarkable differences are fascinating. All three traditions include commandments five, six, seven, eight, nine, except Mark, who includes the tenth¹¹—μὴ ἀποστερήσης, “not defraud” (Mk. 10:19). Luke and Matthew rightly exclude it, presumably since it is not part of the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:16-20). It is probably a variant of the command against covetousness.¹²

Luke shortens Mark’s ὁ δὲ ἔφη αὐτῷ· διδάσκαλε, “and he said to him, Teacher,” to simply, ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, “and he said,” dropping the addressee, “Teacher” (Lk. 18:21). He put the more appropriate aorist indicative active verb, ἐφύλαξα, “kept” (Lk. 18:21) over Mark’s rather awkward aorist indicative middle verb, ἐφύλαξάμην, “kept myself.”¹³ That the ruler claimed to have kept the Law in the active sense suggests a willing compliance to its requirements and rabbinic interpretation. It was not merely a personal action by

¹⁰ Peter H. Davids, “Rich and Poor” (DJG; ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 701. Striking is the similarity of the wealth and power of the high priestly clan of first-century Jewish society with the relatively well-off and powerful “chief priests” of Roman Catholicism in the Philippines—the archbishops and cardinals. The latter belongs to the more economically viable class, living in archbishops’ palaces, far removed from the poor masses of the land. They control all the monetary offerings and donations, as well as the commerce associated with religious activities, while the rest of the poor masses give of their meager income religiously. A good example of commercial activity is the rent earned from various businesses in commercial buildings owned by the archdioceses throughout the country.

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:43* (vol. 2; BECNT; ed. Moises Silva; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1479; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 1199.

¹² Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 1196; Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 886.

¹³ Stein notes Mark’s propensity for “incorrect grammar” and “colloquial expression.” Robert H. Stein, *The Synoptic Problem: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 52-53.

himself, as if doing his own religious thing by his own passion. It appears to be a dutiful observance of the requirements of his religion out of a firm conviction of its validity in one's life.

Luke also omits the genitive, personal pronoun, μου, "my," from Mark, thus making it literally read, ἐκ νεότητος, "from youth," instead of ἐκ νεότητός μου, "my youth." The time of youth is usually at the thirteenth birthday, when the boy took on more adult responsibilities under the law, including fulfilling all the commandments.¹⁴ Since that time, the ruler has dutifully kept the law. He sincerely believes and practices the religion of his ancestors. Yet all through this time, he lacked the assurance of eternal life.¹⁵

With Matthew, Luke further removes Mark's tender version of Jesus' reaction to the rich man, ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτόν, "and Jesus looking upon him loved him." Instead, Luke replaces that with the aorist active participle, ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, "and Jesus hearing" (Lk. 18:22). It is typical of Luke to detach emotion from Jesus (Lk. 5:13 and Mk. 1:41; Lk. 18:16 and Mk. 10:14). The emotional reaction of Jesus is immaterial to Luke's purposes. If the Markan events project Jesus in a more human way, the Lukan episodes of Jesus lack emotion, probably to convey both his portrait of Jesus and his concern for "assurance" to the readers of his period, as Fitzmyer suggests.¹⁶ B. Shellard develops this idea further in seeing a Lukan Jesus who is "in command of his emotions," like the Greek wise men. In that the Markan Jesus projects a "suffering Son of Man" and crucified Lord, the "exalted Son of Man" and ascended Lord of the Lukan Jesus¹⁷ reveal a seemingly unemotional Jesus projecting an air of strong resolve.

Another interesting detail is not found in the English versions. Mark uses no adverb in, ἔν σοι ὑστερεῖ, "one you lack" (Mk. 10:21). Yet Luke adds the adverb, ἔτι, "still, yet, even," in the statement, ἔτι ἔν σοι λείπει, "yet still one you lack" (Lk. 18:22). If Mark marks what is still lacking in the man's life, Luke here signifies what "still remains [to be done]" in the ruler's life.¹⁸ Though the reply of the ruler suggests sincerity with Mark, Luke seems to stress its superficiality¹⁹—the external observance of the law. The keeping of the law is to be internal than external—an observance driven more by one's love for God and neighbor, which is the substance of the Law. Yet this internal passion for God and neighbor as the true motivation for observing the law seems to be missing in the ruler. Instead, Jesus' reply and the ruler's response indicate that it is not love of God and neighbor that inhabits the throne of his life, but his wealth.²⁰ Luke presses a correction to such idolatry. He pushes the insistence on the part of Jesus against the very thing that rules the ruler's life.

Luke leaves out Mark's present imperative, ὕπαγε, "depart," (Mk. 10:21), but retains the aorist imperative, πώλησον, "sell," which is consistent with his emphasis on

¹⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (WBC35A; ed. Ralph P. Martin; Dallas: Word, 1989), 129; Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 1200.

¹⁵ Ellis, *The Gospel*, 217.

¹⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB28A; New York: Doubleday, 1964), 94-95.

¹⁷ Barbara Shellard, *New Light on Luke: Its Purpose, Sources and Literary Context* (London: T&T Clark International, 2002), 269-270.

¹⁸ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 886.

¹⁹ Stein, *Luke*, 457.

²⁰ Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (NIBC; ed. W. Ward Gasque; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1990), 273.

the demand to sell possessions for the kingdom (Lk. 12:33; cf. 11:41). Mark has, ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον, “sell as many as you have” (Mk. 10:21). Yet Luke adds the key word, πάντα, “all,” rendering it, πάντα ὅσα ἔχεις πώλησον, literally, “sell all as many as you have,” or better, “sell all that you have” (Lk. 18:22; cf. 5:11; 14:33, where Luke appends “all” to Mark). Mark’s simple, δός, “give,” becomes the more demanding, διάδος, “distribute,” from διαδίδωμι, which means, “to distribute, give out, assign,”²¹ perhaps indicating an extraordinary emphasis of giving out and assigning the goods to every poor person without exception. Luke uses the more elegant, plural form οὐρανοῖς, “heavens” (as Matthew), instead of οὐρανῶ, “heaven” in Mark.

Though derived from Mark, the double imperative to sell all his possessions and to give it to the poor reflects what Fitzmyer calls, “moderate” and “radical” attitudes of Luke towards material goods. Luke shows the moderate way of handing mammon by sharing it, using it wisely, and giving alms (Lk. 3:11; 16:8; 12:33). The radical way is by lending it without expecting payback, selling everything and giving it all away to the needy, and hating it (Lk. 6:35; 12:33; 16:13).²² The demand to sell all of one’s goods falls under the radical category. The demand is radical, for entrance into the kingdom requires the forsaking of anything that hampers true faith in God (Lk. 18:28).

The Markan condition to the man is only to sell as many of his goods. The Lukan obligation is more radical—to divest oneself of all possessions. Thus, Luke drives the knife right into the heart of the matter—the very great wealth that drives the ruler’s heart. The demand here is more than just keeping the Law of God, but giving up everything for the sake of the God of the Law (sell possessions) and for the sake of his neighbor (give to the poor). The demand to dispose wealth therefore mirrors the demands of the Law—loving God and neighbor and by implication, hating all else. Since the rich ruler cannot love both God and mammon, he has to hate one and love the other. In this case, the demand is to hate all his possessions and love God. The call to sell all, underscores the Lukan stress on the essence of a rich life, which cannot be defined in terms of material things (Lk. 12:13-21). It is a call to forsake unrighteous mammon in exchange for true riches (Lk. 16:11). The reward is treasure in heaven, which can only be gained by discarding the treasures of the earth. It is in the disposing of the treasures on the earth that secures the treasure in heaven. The question arises then as to whether Luke implies this demand to be a requirement for higher discipleship.

Fitzmyer places the Lukan attitude of the right use of material possessions under the demands of “Christian living.”²³ However, Nolland convincingly makes the case that it works both ways in dialectical tension. The promise of treasure in the heavens goes before the call to follow Jesus. In effect, the disposal of wealth gains heavenly treasure, but precedes discipleship.²⁴ The impossibility for the rich to enter the kingdom of God already nullifies the notion that the divestment of wealth is required for dedicated discipleship (Lk. 18:24-25).²⁵ Nonetheless, the call to dispose wealth is also part of the Lukan call to follow Jesus (Lk. 14:25-33). Attachment to wealth betrays a self-satisfied

²¹ Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

²² Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 249-250.

²³ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 241-247.

²⁴ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 886-887.

²⁵ Stein, *Luke*, 457.

consolation in riches without any need of God, as Luke portrays the rich fool (Lk. 12:16-21). Conversely, the demand to detach oneself from wealth, albeit literally, symbolizes a poverty of self-sufficiency, or a disentanglement which characterizes the poor in Luke's gospel—the rest of disencumbered humanity who serve no mammon and are therefore rich toward God. The rich and poor motif in Luke may well symbolize the lack of need of the kingdom for the rich and the need of God for the poor. In this light, the poor are truly the receivers of the kingdom (Lk. 4:18; 6:20; 7:22). Since the kingdom is for the poor in Luke, the rich are hence outside of the kingdom. The call to sell everything then is a “reversal of status,” as Johnson puts it, calling it a “conversion call.”²⁶ In just this context alone however, the two-fold call to sell all goods and follow Jesus, is the “added” radical demand for the rich ruler only, for his own particular mindset and situation, in that entry into the kingdom should not be encumbered by anything that stands in the way to faith in God. First-century Judaism already requires almsgiving and works of charity for the poor.²⁷ Yet the kingdom requires more—the total abandonment of all that holds oneself and complete confidence in the One who is about to suffer and die on the cross. The abandonment to Christ's demand facilitates entry into the kingdom of God.

Bock supposes that if selling all were the answer to inheriting eternal life, it would imply earning one's salvation, which contradicts humility and faith in the kingdom and Zacchaeus's model of selling only part of his wealth. He suggests that the requirement is meant to make the ruler humbly trust God.²⁸ Yet the very act of selling all as Christ demands already constitutes true faith and self-surrender to Christ, as W. Hendriksen well notes.²⁹ How one uses his possessions in Luke-Acts demonstrates how one responds to God, as Johnson has shown.³⁰ In the Zacchaeus account, Luke reports the tax collector telling Jesus that he gives half of his wealth to the poor, but not the whole of it (Lk. 19:8). To Zacchaeus, Jesus announces salvation (Lk. 19:9). The selling of possessions thus demonstrates the response of faith.³¹ Zacchaeus's act of giving half (not “all”) of his goods to the poor is an act of faith in Christ. The rich ruler's refusal to sell all (not just half of it), is an act of rejection of Christ.

The radical command still fits the Lukan context of selling all and giving alms in Lk. 12:33, which reflects the sense here, although without the “all.” In this radical category, the demand to sell all is designed to lead the ruler to faith in God. The basic call in this radical demand is the call to abandon everything for the sake of the kingdom—to redirect one's heart from the idol of wealth to true love for God and neighbor, which is required implicitly in the Law. To sell all and follow Jesus is to throw away all self-sufficiency and to transfer allegiance to the kingdom, which actually aligns with the humility and dependence demanded for entry into the kingdom. Lest we read Pauline theology into Luke (earning one's salvation), both the selling of all and faith in Jesus are compatible in Lukan thought, as Stein explains. For Luke, loving God with all one's heart and soul and loving one's neighbor as oneself *earns* eternal life (Lk. 10:25-37). It reflects

²⁶ Johnson, *The Gospel*, 277.

²⁷ Davids, “Rich and Poor,” 704.

²⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:43*, 1482.

²⁹ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 834.

³⁰ See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

³¹ Johnson, *The Gospel*, 200.

true faith in Jesus. If Lk. 18:18-22 reflects Lk. 10:25-37, the command to sell all and give to the poor then reflects the commandments mentioned in Lk. 18:20.³² Thus, to love one's neighbor is to sell all of one's goods. That Jesus told the rich ruler to sell all and follow him indicates that the ruler had not really obeyed all the commandments.

As to the question of whether this emphasis of the "all" is a universal condition for conversion and higher commitment, Luke tempers it in a later redaction. Luke substitutes Mark's πάντα, "all" (Mk. 10:28), with his τὰ ἴδια, "one's own" (Lk. 18:28), indicating the limited application of the radical requirement to the new situation of the rich ruler with regard to the kingdom of God. Taking the accounts of the rich ruler and Zacchaeus together, Luke apparently sets no universal norm for the total disposal of wealth as a condition of deeper discipleship.³³ Even the call to sell what you have and give alms is not universal, in that the disciples are still expected to provide for themselves moneybags "that do not grow old" (Lk. 12:33). The radical requirement to dispose all assets therefore must be understood against the framework of the "general call" of denying oneself, carrying one's cross, and following Christ (Lk. 19:23).³⁴

Hence, the promised "treasure" is not merely eternal life, for to obtain eternal life is to obey the commandments.³⁵ Since it is impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom, it can be inferred that the rich ruler has not really obeyed the commandments (Lk. 10:25-28). Thus, Jesus' radical demand for the ruler to sell everything is most likely to drive home the point that the ruler had not really kept the Law.³⁶ In that the two aspects of the same command—divest all assets and distribute to the poor, and then follow Jesus—make one gain eternal life, obeying the command must represent the way to entering the kingdom and eternal life (Lk. 18:18, 29-30).³⁷ Thus, the call to dispose all and give it all to the poor, and then follow Jesus, is a call to conversion—a call to enter the kingdom. The treasure then must symbolize the rewards of forsaking all for the sake of the kingdom—many times more than the houses, wives, brothers, parents, or children one has left behind (Lk. 18:29-30).³⁸

Finally, Mark has ὁ δὲ στυγνάσας ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ ἀπῆλθεν λυπούμενος, "but becoming gloomy over the word, he departed feeling sad" (Mk. 10:22). Luke has ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα περίλυπος ἐγενήθη, "but hearing this, he became very sad" (Lk. 18:23), indicating the extreme sadness of the rich ruler, compared to the unqualified sadness of Mark's rich man. This again indicates the deep sincerity of the man, though he belonged to a party of powerful people bent on eliminating Jesus. There is no mention of the man's departure from the scene. Yet the ruler definitely did not depart from his wealth.

Mark refers to the continuing hold of the great wealth of the young man, with his use of ἦν γὰρ ἔχων κτήματα πολλὰ, "for he is holding great possessions" (Mk. 10:22). Yet Luke has ἦν γὰρ πλούσιος σφόδρα, "for he was exceedingly rich" (Lk. 18:23), adding the adverb, σφόδρα, "exceedingly," or "very (much); extremely; greatly"—missing in Mark.

³² Stein, *Luke*, 456-457.

³³ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 125.

³⁴ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 887

³⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel*, 1200; Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 887.

³⁶ Stein, *Luke*, 457.

³⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34*, 887; Contra—Stein, who thinks that the treasure refers to eternal life and entering the kingdom (Lk. 18:18, 30). Stein, *Luke*, 458.

³⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:43*, 1481.

If Mark stresses the constant hold of possessions on the man, Luke emphasizes the great wealth that the ruler could not give up. If the pull of wealth stops the ruler from embracing the kingdom of God, it also keeps him from the embrace of the kingdom.

That Luke, with Matthew and Mark, focuses on the social part of the Decalogue is very significant, for it connects with Jesus's call to "distribute to the poor" (Lk. 18:22). The order of the commands is irrelevant for our purposes, but not its intent. Bock suggests that the commands related to people are a concrete measure of an "outward focus" on others, given the Lukan warning against a "self-focus" that comes from riches.³⁹ J. B. Green however gives a more compelling socio-economic angle. The ruler's refusal to sell all and give to the poor reflects a rejection of those outside the community of the wealthy. The sharing of goods through the giving of alms is a social decision in early Palestinian culture. To refuse to share it with the needy is to alienate oneself from them—an act that rebuffs the Lukan message of filling the hungry and sending away the rich empty (Lk. 1:52). Thus, at that moment the ruler rejected the poor, he also rejected the One who has come to proclaim good news to the poor (Lk. 4:18-19).⁴⁰

Conclusion

For Luke, possessions are dangerous, leading to covetousness, giving a false sense of autonomous security without any need of God, and keeping one from the kingdom of God (Lk. 6:24; 8:14). In the present pericope, Luke encapsulates this central concern. For those who claim allegiance to God and concern for their neighbors like the rich ruler, Luke presents the radical demand to abandon everything that encumbers true faith in God. This demand is not required of all, but only for those who need release from the entanglement of material wealth as a false security of divine comfort. Since possessions are a hindrance to the kingdom, to divest all assets for the sake of the kingdom therefore is to trust Christ. To hate mammon for the sake of the kingdom is to love God. To give it to the poor is to love one's neighbor. The good news of the kingdom belongs to the poor. Thus, to refuse to sell all and give it to the poor is to reject the kingdom. Conversely, to give to the poor is to accept the King of the kingdom of the poor. Such abandonment of all encumbrances for the sake of Christ assures admission into the kingdom.

³⁹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:43*, 1479.

⁴⁰ Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995),

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