

The Greatest Possession

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Each of us is to come to Christ with uncompromised commitment to His gospel.

The scriptures speak of a rich young ruler who ran to Jesus, knelt at His feet, and, with genuine sincerity, asked the Master, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” After reviewing a long list of commandments this fellow had faithfully kept, Jesus told the man to sell all his belongings, give the proceeds to the poor, take up his cross, and follow Him. The boldness of this directive caused the young ruler—in spite of his expensive sandals—to get cold feet, and he went away sorrowing because, the scripture says, “he had great possessions.”¹

Obviously, this is an important cautionary tale about the uses of wealth and the needs of the poor. But ultimately it is a story about wholehearted, unreserved devotion to divine responsibility. With or without riches, each of us is to come to Christ with the same uncompromised commitment to His gospel that was expected of this young man. In the vernacular of today’s youth, we are to declare ourselves “all in.”²

In his characteristically memorable prose, C. S. Lewis imagines the Lord saying to us something like this: “I don’t want ... your time ... [or] your money ... [or] your work [as much as] I [just] want You. [That tree you are pruning.] I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want ... the whole [thing] down. [And that tooth.] I don’t want to drill [it], or crown it, or [fill] it. [I want] to have it out. [In fact, I want you to] hand over [to me your] whole natural self. ... [And] I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my ... will shall become [your will].”³

All who speak in this general conference will all be saying, one way or another, what Christ said to this rich young man: “Come unto your Savior. Come completely and wholeheartedly. Take up your cross, however heavy it may be, and follow Him.”⁴ They will say this knowing that in the kingdom of God, there can be no halfway measures, no starting and stopping, no turning back. To those who requested permission to bury a deceased parent or to at least say goodbye to other family members, Jesus’s reply was demanding and unequivocal. “Leave that to others,” He said. “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”⁵ When difficult things are asked of us, even things contrary to the longings of our heart, remember that the loyalty we pledge to the cause of Christ is to be the supreme devotion of our lives. Although Isaiah

reassures us it is available “without money and without price”⁶—and it is—we must be prepared, using T. S. Eliot’s line, to have it cost “not less than everything.”⁷

Of course, we all have some habits or flaws or personal history that could keep us from complete spiritual immersion in this work. But God is our Father and is exceptionally good at forgiving and forgetting sins we have forsaken, perhaps because we give Him so much practice in doing so. In any case, there is divine help for every one of us at any hour we feel to make a change in our behavior. God gave Saul “another heart.”⁸ Ezekiel called on all of ancient Israel to cast off her past and “make ... a new heart and a new spirit.”⁹ Alma called for a “mighty change”¹⁰ that would cause the soul to expand, and Jesus Himself taught that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”¹¹ Clearly the possibility of change and living at a more elevated level has always been one of the gifts of God to those who seek it.

Friends, in our present moment we find all manner of divisions and subdivisions, sets and subsets, digital tribes and political identities, with more than enough hostility to go around. Might we ask ourselves if a “higher and holier”¹² life, to use President Russell M. Nelson’s phrase, is something we could seek? When doing so, we would do well to remember that stunning period in the Book of Mormon in which those people asked and answered that question so affirmatively:

“And it came to pass that there was no contention among all the people, in all the land ... *because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.*

“And there were no envyings, nor strifes, ... nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

“There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but *they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.*

*“And how blessed were they!”*¹³

What is the key to this breakthrough in contented, happy living? It is embedded there in the text in one sentence: “The love of God ... did dwell in the hearts of the people.”¹⁴ When the love of God sets the tone for our own lives, for our relationships to each other and ultimately our feeling for all humankind, then old distinctions, limiting labels, and artificial divisions begin to pass away, and peace increases. That is precisely what happened in our Book of Mormon example. No longer were there Lamanites, or Jacobites, or Josephites, or Zoramites. There were no “-ites” at all. The people had taken on just one transcendent identity. They were all, it says, to be known as “the children of Christ.”¹⁵

Of course, we are speaking here of the first great commandment given to the human family—to love God wholeheartedly, without reservation or compromise, that is, with all our heart, might, mind, and strength.¹⁶ This love of God is the first great *commandment* in the universe. But the first great *truth* in the universe is that *God loves us* exactly that way—wholeheartedly, without reservation or compromise,

with all of *His* heart, might, mind, and strength. And when those majestic forces from His heart and ours meet without restraint, there is a veritable explosion of spiritual, moral power. Then, as Teilhard de Chardin wrote, “for [the] second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”¹⁷

It is then, and really only then, that we can effectively keep the second great commandment in ways that are not superficial or trivial. If we love God enough to try to be fully faithful to Him, He will give us the ability, the capacity, the will, and the way to love our neighbor and ourselves. Perhaps then we will be able to say once again, “There could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.”¹⁸

Brothers and sisters, I pray we will succeed where that rich young man failed, that we will take up the cross of Christ, however demanding it may be, regardless of the issue and regardless of the cost. I bear witness that when we pledge to follow Him, the path will, one way or another, pass by way of a crown of thorns and a stark Roman cross. No matter how wealthy our young ruler was, he wasn’t wealthy enough to buy his way out of a rendezvous with those symbols, and neither can we. For the blessing of receiving the greatest of all possessions—the gift of eternal life—it is little enough that we are asked to stay the course in following the High Priest of our Profession, our Day Star, Advocate, and King. I testify with obscure Amaleki of old that each of us is to “offer [our] whole souls as an offering unto him.”¹⁹ Of such determined, steadfast devotion, we sing:

Praise the mount; I’m fixed upon it;
Mount of thy redeeming love. ...
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above.²⁰

In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1. See Mark 10:17–22.
2. 2. See Omni 1:26.
3. 3. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1960), 153.
4. 4. See Mark 10:21.
5. 5. See Luke 9:62.
6. 6. Isaiah 55:1.
7. 7. “Little Gidding,” in *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (1963), 209.
8. 8. 1 Samuel 10:9.
9. 9. Ezekiel 18:31.
10. 10. See Alma 5:9–14.
11. 11. John 3:3.

12. 12. Russell M. Nelson, "Closing Remarks," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2019, 121.
13. 13. 4 Nephi 1:13, 15–18; emphasis added.
14. 14. 4 Nephi 1:15.
15. 15. 4 Nephi 1:17.
16. 16. See Mark 12:30.
17. 17. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future* (1975), 87.
18. 18. 4 Nephi 1:16.
19. 19. Omni 1:26.
20. 20. "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Hymns* (1948), no. 70. The text was written by Robert Robinson.