

# The Way

Second Series – Sermon Thirteen

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*The Way* is the opening Sermon in the second series of the *Unspoken Sermons*. MacDonald lays out the gospel in series one and now a dozen years later begins digging into the details of its workings. Jesus said of Himself, “*I am the Road [Way], also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him. You’ve even seen him!*” (John 14:6 MSG)

Jesus loved this young man before he came, while he was with Him, and after he walked away! Jesus was acting just like His Father did in the “Parable of the Dancing God” or *The Prodigal Son* in Luke fifteen. This heart and Life are our destiny as well, “. . . to be conformed to the image of the Son.” When our neighbors see us, who do they see? Jesus’ one great joy was making His Father known. So, when you saw Him, you saw His Father. The “One who is Good.” Jesus did this by losing Himself in the Father. This young man was on the Way, but was not yet willing to surrender himself!

As is everything else in the Universe, this story of the *Rich Young Ruler* is not about the young man, but about Jesus revealing Truth which is, of course, Himself.

## Outline

**Heart of Jesus** – He was not interested in Himself, but in His Father and His children.

**Being before Doing** – Knowing God is to be good.

**Objections** – The purpose of the commands was never that we would keep them.

**Realization of the Father** – The perfection, the realization of the Father, is eternal life.

**Rejection?** – Was the door closed to him? No, this is not the Jesus I have come to know!

**What’s Next** – He would have to humble himself as a little child and give himself to his Father.

**Union** – When a man has eternal life, he is one with God!

## Mark 10:17-18, 21 GNT

*As Jesus was starting on his way again, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good except God alone."...Jesus looked straight at him with love.*

## Matthew 19:16-21 GNT

*Once a man came to Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what good thing must I do to receive eternal life?"*

*"Why do you ask me concerning what is good?" answered Jesus. "There is only One who is good. Keep the commandments if you want to enter life."*

*"What commandments?" he asked.*

*Jesus answered, "Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; respect your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as you love yourself."*

*"I have obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else do I need to do?"*

*Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me."*

Three of the gospel accounts tell this story. Each is revealing a part, contributing to the whole account. Because of the fragmentary nature of the pieces they cannot be read without the candle of the Lord! Each piece without which we would fail to perceive and understand the truth about the life of Jesus. Jesus' thoughts, feelings, and plans revealed through how He lived. His inward nature and being revealed through His visible life.

The story begins in the Mark account with, "Good Teacher..." at which point Jesus interrupts the young man. He is going to tell us something about Himself. Jesus is always revealing Himself, at this and every moment, in every crisis, whether His or ours. This revelation is that His every thought and joy exists in the character, nature, and will of His Father.

## Heart of Jesus

The very joy of the Lord's life was wrapped up in His Father. The Father was everything to Him. Jesus always thought and turned to Him. In God was life! It was not for Himself that He came into this world. Jesus did not come to establish His power or influence. He came that we would know His Father. The One who was His joy and being! **He was not interested in Himself, but in His Father and His children. Being called "good" meant nothing to Him. He only wanted us to see the goodness of His Father. You call me good? You should know my Father!** Jesus would suffer and die to make the Father known. He

wanted us to love Him as He did. The Father was all to Him. “Why do you call me good?” “No one is good except God alone.”

## Being before Doing

Being interrupted, the young man returns to his original question, **“What good thing must I do to receive eternal life?” Whatever he thought “eternal life” was, was unimportant. It was something he knew he lacked and thought he could gain only by doing. When the thing he sought was a being. He could not have as a possession what must possess him.** He thought doing proceeded being. That is what this story is all about.

Jesus was not interested in isolated facts, calling them the truth, or random works. He was after good hearts, the source of everything that He treasured. This heart is alive, active, kind, and knowing. This heart is what He came to give. **Jesus cared nothing for theories or thoughts about morals or religious practices. He cared only about good people, not useful ideas, or even moral deeds except as the overflow of life. Life flowing through people in which love takes shape and is visible.** Jesus did not come to answer our philosophical questions, but to die to give us life. He would, however, respond to every broken person who asked, “How am I to be good?”

Jesus, having refused the “good teacher” greeting, now challenges the underlying question as well. He is the right person to ask, but is being asked the wrong question. **Doing a worthy thing is a small matter; a trustworthy Being is everything!** “Why ask about the good thing?” Why not ask about the beautiful Being, the origin of all virtue? God is the sole source of good. Isn’t it about Him he should be asking? God, through the power of Being, creates meaningful doing.

It is to God that we must awaken. Considering Him is the beginning of excellence. Doing good is just doing good. **Knowing God is to be good! Doing is not the goal that He is after, but being.** That is refusing the evil and choosing the good through an act of the will from the heart. Again, this flows from being, the very Being of God!

The question was not about doing or not doing something the young man knew was right. We are always to do what is right. His problem was with a possible unknown something he must do. So Jesus sends him back to what he knows to do — answering his question concerning the way to eternal life.

We have a part to play and this is a legitimate question to ask. Jesus has already hinted at the answer. The answer lies within God Himself. But the youth is not capable of receiving that at this moment, so he must remain more basic. “Keep the commandments if you want eternal life.” If keeping the commandments has nothing to do with entering life then why does Jesus answer him this way, and why were they given in the first place? Keeping the commands is his first task and is the path to eternal life!

Jesus clearly stated this, so it must be true. How can we dare say otherwise? Jesus is the giver of life, and this is what He tells us to do. The commandments are the beginning of the way. If the young man had kept all the commandments, would he not have eternal life? You see, following the commandments is the beginning, the door to life. It is not life itself, but the way to it!

## Objections

Jesus says nothing about the first commandments of the law, "Loving God." Why does He not answer as He did with the lawyer, that to love God is everything? Jesus had already shown him that this was the center of His life and pointed him in that direction, but he was not ready to receive it yet. He wants eternal life. **Eternal life being, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. This relationship is the purpose of the whole matter, not its' beginning, but its' eternal end!** But the youth is not capable of seeing it yet. It would be as if asking Jesus "How do you climb a mountain?" and the answer given is "Just place your foot on the top, and you will be there."

This answer would be the same as just saying, "Love God with all your heart and eternal life is yours." Answering in this way would be to make fun of him. Why? Because he could not see or do it! He was not capable of looking at this life even from afar! How many Christians are? How many know they are not? How many even care that they aren't? So Jesus gives Him something to do, something he can do. He must keep the commandments! When the young man asks, "Which?" Jesus gives him the second set of commandments, "love of neighbor," ending in the highest and most difficult one, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

But no man can keep the second any more than the first. Surely not, for why else were they given? Do not the words *keep* or *observe* mean anything? Anything if not qualified by the word perfectly? Is there nothing but perfect keeping?

"None that God cares about!"

I disagree that the idea of no keeping but a perfect one would satisfy God! I believe strongly that this is a lie from the enemy. Is a father not excited by his little one's first failing attempts to walk or pleased to witness the bold first steps of his full-grown son?

When Jesus makes clear what commandments he is discussing, the young man declares his faithful observance since his youth. Should we believe him? Jesus does and looks on him with love! Did the young man lie? Did Jesus think he had kept them perfectly? There is obviously an acceptable obedience that is less than perfect to God, in whom nothing is hidden. In this way, he had kept the commandments. The ones he had been working his whole life to follow. Nor, had he missed the point for which they were given.

**The purpose of the commandments was never that we would succeed in keeping them, but that we could not keep them! The harder we tried, the more they would seem to require. This failure would drive the youth to the source of life and seek from God the power to live.**

The young man reached the intended result. His observances had left him empty and desiring eternal life. The keeping of the law had served to develop a hunger that no law or its keeping could fulfill. They revealed how beyond him, they were to keep. How infinite they were in God's perfection.

## **Realization of the Father**

The young man, having kept the law, was ready to move forward. Jesus would not leave him stuck in the law. He had come to seek and to save. Jesus saw him in need of this perfection. The perfection most Christians don't think they need or want. The ideal that some long for with eternal hunger. **This perfection, the realization of the Father, is eternal Life!**

The young man desired this perfection. His next step forward was to sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and follow the Lord! His obedience here would bring about a great victory in him, and this victory to reach its full maturity would ask much more of him. But, this was undoubtedly the next step towards Life. If only he had taken it! The very act would have moved him from law to love. The very essence and vitality of Who is eternal life. The ongoing work of maturity, developing the awareness of his union with The Source of Life!

It is reasonable to suppose that the youth was not a lover of money. He was like most good men of wealth. He valued his possessions, looking at them as a good thing. He would have thought of them as a virtue, valuing more those who had them than those who didn't. The wealthy will have to change their minds on this. Better now than later; better freely than not.

**Jesus sought to deliver him from this wrong perspective and all the unreality accompanying it. You see, he was a slave. He was in bondage to whatever he could not give up that was less than himself.** Jesus could have taken them from him, but that would not have been helpful. Only the youth's exercise of will would have been a victory for both! So, would he choose freedom and life? Would he be delivered from the bondage of wealth? Would he allow the divine power in him to deliver him from the corruption in this world through lust? This lust is the desire or pleasure of having.

The young man would not!

## Rejection

Was Jesus premature in his challenge of the youth? Was the young man not ready? No, Jesus gave him the next step in his divine education. He could respond and be free. It was time for him to choose. Do you say then, "But he did not respond, he did not obey!"? Then it was time for him to refuse. He needed to no longer assume, but know where he was spiritually. He needed to face the confusion of soul and brokenness of heart that was to follow. Each of us has our moment of truth, accepting or rejecting, and know it.

**Then do we assume that the young man's refusal was final? Was he therefore lost because he closed the door of Life in the face of Jesus? Was the door now closed to him? No, this is not the Jesus I have come to know.** Nothing is ever lost! The story says he went away sorrowful. He had changed, but not yet repented. Would this confrontation, this encounter with the Word of Life, be more likely to increase or decrease his struggle? He had loved and kept the law. He was searching for eternal life, and he had met it in the face of Jesus Christ. How could he care less now for eternal life than before? Many who meet Jesus walk away. Some who were his disciples denied him. **Our weakness is not the limit of God's patience and power! And our lifetime not the end of our eternal being.** Obviously, he went away sorrowful. Clearly aware of the obstacle, his trust in riches was to his desire for eternal life. A rich man in faith he must become! I'm sure he would have gladly shared his wealth in the service of the Master. He would have gone with Him as a rich man. But as a poor man, free for the service of His Master, that he was not yet prepared to do!

## What's Next

How could he now return to the commandments now that he had refused the next step given him by the Lord, the giver of Life? The law, the tutor who leads us to Life, had led him to Jesus! Even though he

may try to return he will fail. He now knows the law points beyond itself. They cannot be kept when there is disharmony within. **He needs a clean heart to have pure hands. The power of a harmonious soul filled with the presence of Life. Free of the double-minded man, filled with the strength of love, not the effort of duty.**

One day the full weight of his decision will dawn on him, dawn on him with absolute clarity. Terrible will that day be! The day he refused eternal life from the very source of Life Himself! His time will come, but God alone knows the hour when he will be confronted with his loss. What a tragedy that will be to have missed the opportunity to walk, talk, and live with the Lord of Life!

Regarding his possessions more, as giving him standing in the world, a position of importance, of value in his own eyes. He knew and liked being looked up to; looked up to because of his wealth. Not understanding that wealth and possessions are but tools, and poor ones at that. To give up his wealth would be to become like his inferiors! Why should he not keep it? Use it in the service of the Master? What wisdom could there be in throwing away such a great advantage? **He could commit it, but not lose it! He could use it, but not give himself! He could not humble himself as a little child in submission and give himself to his Father!**

## **Union**

Finally, his idea of eternal life must have been small. Perhaps, the inferior view of just living forever. This view is the best most of us can grasp of eternal life. This idea is a mere shadow, hardly worth thinking about, even though correct. **When a man has eternal life, he is one with God! This union is the only way living forever would be worth doing!**

How miserable must his precious things and honor have been when he returned to them? He has met Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, face-to-face! Surely it wouldn't have been long before he gave them up, as Judas gave up the thirty pieces of silver. What agony of soul it must have been when he awoke to the fact he preferred wealth to Jesus! No one can have eternal Life without being freed from his possessions and himself. It is hard, but not impossible, for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God!

## **CLIFFNOTES VERSION WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES**

### **HEART OF JESUS**

He was not interested in himself, but in his Father and his Father's children. He did not care to hear himself called good. It was not of consequence to him. He was there to let men see the goodness of the Father in whom he gloried. ...'You call me good! You should know my Father!'

### **BEING BEFORE DOING**

What good thing shall he do that he may have eternal life? It is unnecessary to inquire precisely what he meant by eternal life. Whatever shape the thing took to him, that shape represented a something he

needed and had not got—a something which, it was clear to him, could be gained only in some path of good. But he thought to gain a thing by a doing, when the very thing desired was a being: he would have that as a possession which must possess him.

The Lord cared neither for isolated truth nor for orphaned deed. It was truth in the inward parts, it was the good heart, the mother of good deeds, he cherished. It was the live, active, knowing, breathing good he came to further. He cared for no speculation in morals or religion. It was good men he cared about, not notions of good things, or even good actions, save as the outcome of life, save as the bodies in which the primary live actions of love and will in the soul took shape and came forth.

The good thing was a small matter; the good Being was all in all.

To know God is to be good. It is not to make us do all things right he cares,

## **OBJECTIONS**

He wanted eternal life: to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, is to know God, and to know him is eternal life; that is the end of the whole saving matter; it is no human beginning, it is the grand end and eternal beginning of all things;

For the immediate end of the commandments never was that men should succeed in obeying them, but that, finding they could not do that which yet must be done, finding the more they tried the more was required of them, they should be driven to the source of life and law—of their life and his law—to seek from him such reinforcement of life as should make the fulfilment of the law as possible, yea, as natural, as necessary

## **REALIZATION OF THE FATHER**

Perfection, the perfection of the Father, is eternal life.

From this false way of thinking, and all the folly and unreality that accompany it, the Lord would deliver the young man. As the thing was, he was a slave; for a man is in bondage to what ever he cannot part with that is less than himself.

## **REJECTION**

Shall I then be supposed to mean that the refusal of the young man was of necessity final? that he was therefore lost? that because he declined to enter into life the door of life was closed against him? Verily, I have not so learned Christ.

But their weakness is not the measure of the patience or the resources of God. Perhaps this youth was never one of the Lord's so long as he was on the earth,

## **WHAT'S NEXT**

It needs a clean heart to have pure hands, all the power of a live soul to keep the law—a power of life, not of struggle; the strength of love, not the effort of duty.

He could devote it, but he could not cast it from him! He could devote it, but he could not devote himself! He could not make himself naked as a little child and let his Father take him!

## **UNION**

When he is one with God, what should he do but live for ever? without oneness with God, the continuance of existence would be to me the all but unsurpassable curse