

Almost a Disciple

Text: Mark 10:17-31 (See also Matt. 19:16-22; Lk. 18:18-23)

Introduction:

1. In this passage we read of a man who came seeking the Lord Jesus Christ but who ended up turning away on account of his possessions. All three Gospel accounts reveal that he was in possession of great wealth. Matthew's Gospel reveals that he was a "young man" (Matt. 19:20) and Luke reveals that he was a 'ruler' (Lk. 18:18).
2. It contains a powerful challenge to those who would seek Christ for salvation. It also contains helpful principles for the ministry of soul-winning that the believer can learn from observing Christ the Master soul-winner.
3. We will divide the text into three portions for our study.

Look firstly at...

I. THE ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST (VS. 17-22)

A. The Seeking of the Young Man (Vs. 17)

1. It was fervent (Vs. 17a)
 - a. 'running' = he was eager and earnest to meet Christ.
 - b. 'kneeled' = he was humble and respectful towards Christ.
Remember, he was a rich ruler so this was no small gesture.
2. It was faulty (Vs. 17b)
 - a. "Good Master" = his understanding of Christ's goodness was deficient as we will see. He viewed Christ merely as a good teacher, one who had wisdom and one whose standard of goodness could be achieved through self-effort. Matt. 9:16 "what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"
 - b. "what shall I do" = his focus was on what he could do to achieve his own salvation. He had been a zealous adherent of the legal code of the Pharisees and yet he sensed something was lacking. This is the common problem of mankind to turn to self instead of the Saviour to try and find the answer of salvation.
 - c. Remember! It's not about what you can do but about what has been done for you! "It is finished" (John 19:30). Romans 4:4-5 "Now to him that worketh..."

B. The Sifting of the Young Man (Vs. 18-20)

Christ, unlike too many soul-winners today, was not interested in a superficial outward profession with no inner substance. Christ was consistently sifting men and bringing them face to face with the realities of their sinful hearts, bringing them to the point of decision. Christ sifted this man in two key areas:

1. Concerning his understanding of the Lord (Vs. 18).

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- a. Christ's question is not a denial of His Deity. The issue was not whether Christ is good or not. The issue was this man's faulty understanding of goodness.
 - b. Christ makes it clear that goodness is not a human achievement but a Divine attribute. He is therefore confronting the seeker with the implications of calling Him good. If Christ is truly good, then that makes Him God! This is a bold affirmation of Christ's Deity consistent with His other claims but it is evident that this man is not prepared to accept this as the next time he addresses Christ he drops the word 'good' out of the title (Vs. 20).
2. Concerning his knowledge of the Law (Vs. 19-20).
- a. Christ quotes several commandments from the second table of the law that deal with one's relationship with his fellow man. Christ was not affirming this man's works-based system but rather seeking to use the law as the school master to lead him to Christ (Gal. 3:24).
 - b. The man's faulty understanding of the law is highlighted when he claims "all these have I observed from my youth." His understanding was similar to the Apostle Paul in his pre-conversion days. He thought that a strict outward conformity to the law was what was required and failed to understand the true spiritual nature of the law. "An answer more full of darkness and self-ignorance it is impossible to conceive." (Ryle)

C. The Stumbling block to the Young Man (Vs. 21-22)

1. The Divine Diagnosis (Vs. 21)
 - a. The Look from Christ (21a)
 - i. A searching look – 'beholding' The man's claim was exposed by the searching eyes of Christ. Christ saw right into the depths of the man's heart and knew the reality of his inner life and need.
 - ii. A rebuking look – our external show of righteousness is quickly penetrated by the eyes of Christ.
 - b. The Love of Christ (21b)
 - i. Love shone through the eyes of the Lord towards this man. Christ's heart towards sinners is revealed so touchingly. The word 'loved' "denotes not mere emotional affection but that high spiritual love which, regardless of the worthiness or unworthiness of the one loved, desires his highest welfare." (Hiebert)
 - ii. Note: This verse refutes the theory of Calvinism that God only loves the elect. "We deny that all mankind are the object of that love of God which moved him to send his Son to die..." (John Owen)
 - c. The Lack pointed out by Christ (21c)

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- i. It was Christ's love that led him to point out the idol that was on the throne of the man's heart that stood in between him and salvation. Real love is connected to the truth and is uncompromising. Christ put his finger on the chief idol of the man's life. "His root sin was that his wealth had usurped the place of God in his life." (Hiebert)
 - ii. Christ's words contain the twin truths of repentance and faith. In order for this man to receive salvation, he had to turn from his idols and put his faith in Christ in whom alone is salvation. For this man it was his wealth but it can be many different things depending upon the individual.
 - iii. Isaiah 55:6-7 *"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: **Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts:** and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."*
 - iv. Note: The danger of much "gospel preaching" today is that it side steps repentance toward God. In effect, the sinner is told he can keep his idols and still add Jesus and eternal life to his life!
2. The Damnable Decision (Vs. 22)
- a. "sad...grieved" = the response of the man's heart was one of sorrow. He should have joyfully accepted the terms! The gain would have far outweighed the cost!
 - b. "went away" = how tragic! He turned his back on the Saviour and salvation. He turned his back on Divine love and forgiveness. He chose earthly riches over eternal riches; religion rather than redemption and ultimately therefore, hell rather than heaven.
 - c. Scroggie: "He wanted God, but not at the cost of his gold; he wanted life, but not at the expense of luxury; he was willing to serve but not to sacrifice."
 - d. Challenge: What decision will you make? Please choose Christ rather than your sin!

Look secondly at...

II. THE EDUCATION FROM JESUS CHRIST (VS. 23-27)

Christ now turns His attention to His disciples and uses what they have just witnessed to teach them an important lesson in the ministry of reaching others with the Gospel.

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A. The Problem of Riches (Vs. 23-25)

1. The declaration (Vs. 23)
 - a. “how hardly” = with what difficulty
 - b. “have riches” = riches make it hard for a person to enter the narrow gate. Riches tend to make a person less conscious of his spiritual need. There is a definite link between the affluence and materialism of our nation and the general indifference to the message of the Gospel.
 - c. In the young man, “wealth revealed its power beyond most other things in life to work a deadly effect upon the will when a seeker is confronted with the demand to choose between it and the kingdom.” (Hiebert)
 - d. Maclaren: “Riches may become a hindrance to entering the kingdom...That danger besets those who have them and those who have them not. Many a poor man is as much caught in the toils of the love of money as the rich are.”
2. The clarification (Vs. 24)
 - a. The disciples were shocked at Christ’s statement. They held the common misconception of the day that wealth was a sign of Divine favour. “The dominant Jewish view was that riches were an indication of Divine favour and a reward for piety.” (Brooks)
 - b. “trust in riches” = Christ further clarifies the truth of His statement and gets to the heart of the issue. The sin is not in the having of riches but in the trusting in riches. Riches are deceitful (Matt. 13:22) and have a way of luring the soul into a sense of complacency about spiritual things. This false reliance on wealth almost always comes with its possession.
 - c. Note: There is a challenge for the Christian here also concerning the need to have the right perspective on material wealth. “...*if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.*” (Psalm 62:10) 1 Tim. 6:6-10 “But godliness with contentment is great gain...”
3. The illustration (Vs. 25)
 - a. Christ uses a startling word picture to further impress upon his disciples the truth of his statement.
 - b. H.S. Paisley “It is easier for the camel, the largest animal known in Palestine, to go through the eye of a common needle, the smallest opening known, than for one who trusts in riches to enter the kingdom of God.”

B. The Perplexity of the Disciples (Vs. 26)

1. Their emotional response (Vs. 26a). They were in utter shock and astounded beyond all measure by Christ’s words. This reveals there was a problem in their thinking otherwise they would not have been so shocked!

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2. Their verbal response (Vs. 26b). They begin to question among themselves “Who then can be saved?” The impossibility of salvation from a human standpoint dawns upon them not just in relation to the rich specifically but all men generally.

C. The Power of God (Vs. 27)

1. Salvation is impossible with men (Vs. 27a)
2. Salvation is possible with God (Vs. 27b). God has the power to transform men through His work of salvation.

Look thirdly at...

III. THE ENQUIRY TO JESUS CHRIST (VS. 28-31)

A. The Disciple’s Request (Vs. 28)

1. Peter’s claim – “we have left all”. In contrast to the rich young ruler, they had been willing to forsake all to follow Christ.
2. Peter’s question – “what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27). Peter and the other disciples were interested to know what their reward would be for following Christ.

B. The Disciple’s Reward (Vs. 29-30)

1. For the Apostles personally (Matt. 19:28).
2. For the Christians generally (Vs. 29-30)
 - a. The sacrifices made (29)
 - i. Sacrifice of Property – ‘house’
 - ii. Sacrifice of Family – “brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children”
 - iii. Sacrifice of Country – “or lands”
 - b. The rewards received (30)
 - i. Rewards now (30a)
 - The blessings of God’s provision and care.
 - The blessings of God’s family.
 - Note: This is not teaching the prosperity Gospel concept. That is made clear by the words “with persecutions”. There are hardships and afflictions that best the pilgrim on his journey through this life but how much greater are the blessings he experiences!
 - ii. Rewards in eternity (30b)

C. The Disciple’s Reminder (Vs. 31)

Conclusion:

1. What stands between you and Christ? What is holding you back from receiving salvation?
2. As believers are we living for now or eternity? Have we been deceived by the deceitfulness of riches?