

“Many Possessions”
Mark 10:17-22
October 14, 2012

17 As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ” 20 He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21 Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Over the last few weeks, I have been packing my office and moving things home. Before beginning to pack, however, I went through my files. My rule in determining what to keep and what to throw away was based entirely on use. If I had not opened or used the file recently, I disposed of it.

Before you think that doesn’t sound so bad, let me give you an idea about what I have kept down through the years. When I moved here, I finally disposed of my college notes. When I first moved into ministry, I used those notes a great deal. By the time, I was ready to move here, however, I had not used them in a long time. Therefore, I threw them away.

In packing this time, I used the same principal as before. If I had not used it in a while, I got rid of it. Over the last few weeks, I disposed of my files from college, my Master of Divinity degree, and my D. Min.

Why do I mention this housecleaning task? Today’s text speaks of the need for disposing of some very special things. Over the next few minutes, we are going to decide what we can learn from Jesus and the lesson he taught to the rich young man.

The encounter begins as many of them do. The text says, **“As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”**

Have you ever noticed how much photographers and reporters try to ambush those they are covering? This tendency led to tragic results with Princess Diana. She was trying to escape those who were following her and taking pictures of her. Recently, there was an incident with Kate, Prince William’s wife.

When I think of this tendency, I think of gnats. They don’t really do harm. They are just aggravating as they buzz about our heads.

In today’s text, it is not a reporter who lobs in the question. It is a rich young ruler. He described Jesus as being a good teacher. He then asked, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

We’ll get to Jesus’ answer in just a moment. Let’s start by talking about the question. Have you ever heard of someone trying to make themselves look good? This is especially true during political campaign. I mourn the day that campaigns became so adversarial. At one time, people didn’t throw the accusations or mud as much as that happens today.

The rich young ruler thought he was in good shape. I suspect that he asked the question because he felt like he already knew the answer. He was setting Jesus up to give him praise.

If we are honest, we are sometimes like the rich young ruler. We want to be praised for what we do. We want the recognition. Rather than doing things in secret, we do them in public. We want to look good as well.

Jesus offers an interesting response to the young man. The text says, **“18 Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’”**

Does this response seem off the wall to you? Do you understand the point that Jesus is trying to make? I have to confess that for years I thought that Jesus was being unnecessarily harsh in his response. Then the Holy Spirit gave me some insight into what Jesus had to say.

Jesus is saying that only God’s motives are pure. In Reformed theology, we realize that we are totally depraved. Paul said it well in Romans 3:23. He writes, **“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”**

If only God’s motives are the only ones that are pure, what does that say about our motives? It says that our actions are tainted by sin. It means that we always act in our self-interest. That is easy for us to see in the rich young ruler. It is more difficult to see in ourselves. Others see it, but we dismiss them as petty or jealous.

Jesus then moves on to the question. The text says, **19“You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’ ”**

Jesus gives the rich young ruler a quick review of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were the basis of all Jewish laws. Of course, the Ten Commandments along with the Law in Leviticus had expanded to over 600 rules to be followed.

The rich young ruler had this covered. Notice how he responds. The text says, **“20 He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’”**

The young man had set the scenario up well. He had Jesus right where he wanted him. I can imagine a smile crossing the face of the man as he answered Jesus. He had gotten in some important concepts. I suspect he is waiting Jesus' response to the what he has said. After all, he had spent a lifetime following and being obedient to the law.

Jesus then responds to his latest statement. The text says, **“Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’”**

Notice how Jesus felt about the young man. He could have condemned him. He could have laughed at him. He perhaps could have judged him harshly. Yet, Jesus did none of those things.

What did Jesus do? He had compassion for him. Out of that compassion, Jesus offered the real answer to the man's question. He told him to go sell everything and give the money to the poor. Then he invited the man to follow him.

The man had asked a question. Jesus answered in a way that was unexpected. Yet at the same time, Jesus also loved him.

Now the ball is in the young man's court. The text says, **“When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”**

Are you shocked at the young man's response? Did you expect him to do whatever Jesus told him? Was there only one answer that he sought? Did that answer not come?

This rich young man owned much. Some would have suggested that he owned way too much. He didn't own those possessions. The possessions owned him. They stood firmly between what the man wanted and what Jesus wanted for him.

This story begs a question. What stands between you and God? Is it possessions? Is it family? Is it a job? Is it a house or a car? Is it money in bank?

All of us have something that stands between us and God. Are we going to allow that to dominate our lives as it dominated the life of the rich young ruler? That answer will dominate our spiritual lives. What is your answer? What is mine?

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