

LOVABLE, BUT LACKING

Mark 10:17-22

As the earthly ministry of Christ was drawing to a close, He was proceeding along the highway to Jerusalem for the last time. As He approached the city, a young man detached himself from the crowd, came running to Christ and knelt at His feet, as an expression of utmost respect, as if he were in the presence of a venerated rabbi, and asked him, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The fact that he came running to Christ proved that he was so deeply in earnest that he did not want to lose the opportunity of consulting Him. His kneeling before Christ indicated that he was ready and willing to be taught by Him. Such deference on the part of a ruler was rare.

I. A Striking Ruler.

Of all those who came face to face with Christ while He was here in the flesh, none was more fascinating than this cultured and aristocratic young man. It is doubtful if any young man ever displayed brighter promise than he. He seems to have had everything that one might desire.

This young man was well-born. It is fine to have an excellent family tree, provided you are not constantly reminding somebody of it. However, it is well to remember that if anybody climbs high enough in any family tree he will find some things that are not desirable.

This striking and winsome person was young. He faced life with shoulders unbent by burden-bearing, and with eyes undimmed either by years or by tears. Among the glories of youth are frankness, idealism, strength, enthusiasm, adventuresomeness, optimism and trustworthiness.

"How beautiful is youth! how bright it gleams
With its illusions, aspirations, dreams!
Book of beginnings, story without end,
Each maid a heroine, and each man a friend!"

Of all young people who have ever lived those of this generation have more opportunities, privileges, material possessions and means of achieving knowledge than God has ever entrusted to any generation. What science has wrought staggers the imagination. We can fly higher and faster, shoot harder and farther, dive deeper and longer, hear and see more, and produce and possess as no other generation in the history of mankind.

The fact that this young man was a ruler would seem to indicate that he was approximately thirty years of age, for that was the minimum age of a ruler. He was in the very prime of his young manhood, probably about the same age as Christ. It was to his credit that he had availed himself of the opportunity to win the favor of his fellowmen. He also won the admiration and praise of the lovers of the best in life.

This young ruler possessed many praiseworthy virtues. His seriousness was one of the first signs of his greatness. His temperament was amiable. His disposition was admirable and lovable. He was unusually discerning. His stainless character and reputation were above reproach. He was high-minded and noble-spirited. His morals, habits and conduct were most commendable. He was justly proud of his clean record. He was reverent in spirit, but, like many others, his piety was purely negative. The only thing about which he could boast was the evil which he had not done.

Moreover, this young ruler was wealthy. He had many possessions, but that fact speaks of great opportunity and grave peril. Of course, no amount of money can satisfy the deep

longings of the human heart. Yet wealth is not something to be despised. Nowhere does the Word of God condemn wealth. It only condemns the wrong use of money. Money may be the source of vast good or of much evil. It is dangerous only when people relate themselves to it in the wrong way. Trusting in riches and putting money before God is sinful. That was why Christ said, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" Wealth is relative, and the principle of trusting in riches applies to rich and poor alike.

II. A Strange Request.

This young man had position, possessions, prominence, prestige and power, and yet he was neither happy nor satisfied. He had good character, social standing, fine temperament, noble aspirations and a clean record. He was lovable, but lacking. He was conscious of the fact that there was something lacking in his life. There was a craving in his heart for something which he did not have. Dissatisfaction and unrest haunted his spirit. He was not displeased with what he had, but he was dissatisfied with what he was. He had not obtained that for which his soul was longing.

Despite his high social standing, the young ruler did not make any attempt to conceal his sense of need or his admiration for Christ, as many others did. He did not seek for a private interview with Christ, as Nicodemus did. Eager to get to Christ ere He left his vicinity, he ran down the road after Him, unmindful of the ridicule of the crowds and caring not what anybody thought or said He was not ashamed to be seen in the presence of Christ. What commendable courage he displayed!

Having heard about eternal life, and knowing that he did not have it, this young man was interested in learning how he might obtain it. Confident that Christ possessed this information, this striking ruler knelt at His feet in utmost respect and veneration. When we consider the social difference between the young man and Christ, we are impressed by the beautiful humility which his act of kneeling exhibited. All of us can certainly learn much from his humble spirit. How we wish there were more humility before Christ and more reverence for the things of God today!

When this young man knelt at the feet of Christ he said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He certainly deserved commendation for going to the right person for information on the subject of salvation. He went at the right time, while he was young, and still had a life as well as a soul to be saved. He went in the right spirit. His haste indicated that he considered the matter of obtaining eternal life very important, and that he realized that time and opportunity were slipping away rapidly.

His request contained an admission that he did not have eternal life, but that he was interested in obtaining it. Believing that eternal life was the supreme good, the young man wanted to know what he could do to inherit it. He was anxious to be saved, to escape the punishment of hell and to enjoy the bliss of heaven. His question revealed the fact that he thought eternal life could be obtained through his own efforts. It also proved that an uninstructed person can display much ignorance in remarkably few words. His ignorance was indicated by his idea of the ability of man. He thought that eternal life could be obtained or earned through doing. Like many today, he did not know that eternal life has never been received by anybody except as an outright gift. The idea of doing something for which God will impart eternal life as a payment has kept millions from possessing what God gives only by grace through faith. Salvation has never been earned by works. God's Word says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). Note that this ruler referred to eternal life as an inheritance. An inheritance is always free and is never earned by works. "What shall I do?" implied that he thought perhaps one more deed on his part would enable him to obtain eternal life. The law of inheritance is never operative on the ground of doing. By the deeds of the law flesh cannot be justified in the sight of God.

III. A Startling Reply.

Notice how Christ answered the man's question. He first directed his attention to the commandments, which he had been trying to observe in the belief that nothing else would be required of him. It is noteworthy that the commandments which Christ mentioned dealt only with the man's relation to man. In his lack of knowledge of himself, the man claimed to have kept all of these commandments.

The Saviour wanted him to see that eternal life is not something bestowed upon one as a recompense for moral excellence or for faithful service. No man has ever been saved because of what he did to or for his fellows. Although some people are teaching salvation by works with new vigor and viciousness, it is still true that nobody has ever been able to save himself.

Furthermore, morality cannot save a soul. If such had been possible then this young man would have been saved. This man was so good, so moral and so pure that Jesus actually loved him when He saw him and yet, in spite of his morality, he was lost. He was a fine fellow -- clean, moral, prominent and rich, but he was a lost man.

Mark says, "Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

Jesus looked upon him. That does not mean that He merely cast His eyes toward him, but that He gave him one of those long, fond, gazing looks which indicates affection. He looked lovingly and longingly upon him. What was in that look of Jesus? Admiration? Yes, but there was love in that look also. He saw infinite possibilities in him. How wonderful it is that Jesus loves us!

"I am so glad that Jesus loves me!
Jesus loves me! Jesus loves me!
I am so glad that Jesus loves me!
Jesus loves even me!

Jesus was attracted to the youth. His honesty, sincerity, aspiration and willingness to be taught made him lovable in the eyes of Jesus. Jesus saw great possibilities in him; possibilities of splendid service in the Kingdom of God if only He could win him to discipleship and complete submission to His will. Christ saw more in him than the others could see. He always has an eye for our best points. Others look for the worst. He sees more in us than others do.

Jesus loved him because of his clean life, on account of his desire to be good and for the marvelous possibilities of his life and for what He might be able to do with him in the work of His Kingdom.

He had so many fine qualities, but he had one fatal lack: "One thing thou lackest." Eternal life was the one thing this fine fellow lacked. He needed an experience of grace with the Lord Jesus Christ. He needed salvation of soul. His riches were between him and the Lord. Jesus struck directly at the idol of his heart and He required instant and absolute dethronement. He commanded him to sell what he had and give to the poor because in his case his possessions were standing in the way of that which was supreme, which was eternal life.

IV. A Sorrowful Result.

Christ always demands the thrones of our hearts, the first place in our lives, the center of our affections and the goal of our existence. The young ruler allowed his

possessions to stand between him and eternal life. "He went away grieved: for he had many possessions."

When he asked the question, it was natural to suppose that he would willingly do whatever might be required of him in order to obtain the blessing of eternal life. Such, however, was not the case. When eternal life was offered to him on terms so different from what he had expected, he declined it. He would willingly have undertaken some extraordinary work if thereby he could have merited eternal life, but he would not have it on any other condition. He wanted the blessing, but he must have it on his own terms and in his own way. Consequently, he did not get it because he would not meet the conditions laid down by the only one who had eternal life to offer. What an opportunity he lost! He went away in sorrow, without Christ, without salvation and without any hope of heaven. And it was all due to the fact that he refused to yield his will to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did the wrong thing when he turned his back on Christ. The eager look passed from his face and the shadow of a great disappointment darkened his brow as he turned away.

1. It was the sorrow of disappointment
His hopes were baffled and beaten to the ground.
2. It was the sorrow of discovery.
He discovered that there was something which he loved more than eternal life. He preferred to do without eternal life and retain his possessions, rather than to give up his wealth and to receive eternal life.
3. It was the sorrow of disquietude.
He was not angry, indignant, resentful or scornful, but he was grieved at the demand of self-surrender. The test was too severe for him. His countenance fell. His heart sank within him. Conscious that he was missing much, he turned his back upon the offer of eternal life and went out from the presence of the Master. He made the greatest possible sacrifice that one can make, namely, that of eternal life. No blessing can be compared to eternal life. Before it all else sinks into insignificance. It is the one matter of chief concern. Therefore, get rid of whatever is keeping you from surrendering to the Lord Jesus and obtaining eternal life, regardless of what it may be. Whatever you do, don't make the mistake this fine young man made in wanting the blessing of eternal life or salvation, but refusing it except on his own terms and in his own way. Faith in Christ is the mighty power that opens the vast treasures of the Saviour's love and wipes out all the consequences of sin and fills the soul with joy unspeakable. Won't you yield your will to the will of Christ by accepting Him, confessing Him and dedicating the remainder of your life to Him, as now we sing the hymn of invitation

"Wherever He leads I'll go,
Wherever He leads I'll go,
I'll follow my Christ who loves me so,
Wherever He leads I'll go."