

"ONE THING THOU LACKEST"

Mark 10:17 - 22

This graphic story is especially rich in thought and in practical instruction. It is one of the most intensely interesting and appealing, and yet one of the most tragically sorrowful, stories recorded in the four Gospels. It challenges the serious attention of all as it relates an incident which occurred near the close of the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

I want to speak about four things in connection with this story which are worthy of our most thoughtful and prayerful consideration.

I. A Striking Ruler.

This young man was one of the most fascinating figures in the entire New Testament. He was striking because he was young. Youth is always interesting because it is the time of physical strength, mental acumen, and spiritual acquisition. Not many young men ever displayed greater promise. He was well-born. It is fine to have an excellent family tree, provided that you are not constantly reminding somebody of it. It is well to remember that if anybody climbs high enough in any family tree he will find something hanging there that is not desirable.

The fact that this young man was a ruler would seem to indicate that he was approximately thirty years of age. He was probably about the same age as the Lord Jesus. He was in the very prime of young manhood. He faced life with his shoulders unbent by burden-bearing, and with eyes undimmed either by years or by tears.

This striking ruler possessed many praiseworthy virtues. His seriousness was one of the first signs of his greatness. He was both amiable and virtuous. He was unusually discerning. His temperament and disposition were admirable and lovable. His character and reputation were above reproach. His noble ideals had contributed much to his consistent life. His morals, habits and conduct were commendable. He was justly proud of his clean record. There were not any skeletons in the closet of his memory. It was to his credit that he had availed himself of the opportunity of winning the favor of his fellowmen. His manner of life had won for him the admiration and praise of the lovers of the best in life.

Moreover, this young man had great possessions. In itself, that fact speaks of great opportunity and grave peril. However, his wealth did not satisfy him; in fact, riches never guarantee satisfaction. Satisfaction is not the product of social status or monetary possessions, but it is derived from intimate fellowship with Christ. No amount of money can satisfy the deep longings of the soul. Yet wealth is not something to be despised. Money may be a source of vast good or of much evil. It is dangerous only when people relate themselves to it in the wrong way.

II. A Sincere Request.

Even though this young ruler had a splendid ancestry, a lovable disposition, a clean record, numerous possessions, a prominent position, an excellent reputation and noble aspirations, he was deeply conscious that he had not obtained that for which his soul was longing. He was lovable, but lacking. He still had a craving for something which he did not have. He was not displeased with what he had, but he was dissatisfied with what he was.

Having heard about eternal life, and knowing that he did not have it, he was interested in learning how he might obtain it. Confident that Christ knew the secret of how eternal life might be secured, the young ruler ran and knelt at His feet and said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" His question revealed the fact that he thought eternal life could be obtained through his own efforts. His thinking that eternal life could be secured by something that he himself could do revealed his woeful lack of correct instruction. He was wrong in thinking that eternal life could be obtained through works. Eternal life has never been received by anybody because of the works which they have done, but only and always as an outright gift. His question, "What good thing shall I do?" implied that the young ruler thought perhaps some good deed on his part would enable him to obtain eternal life. Seemingly he thought that he was prepared to do whatever was necessary to get it.

III. A Startling Reply.

In answering the young man's question our Lord directed his attention to the commandments which he had been trying to obey in the belief that God would not require anything else of him. It is noteworthy that when Christ directed his attention to the law itself, He mentioned only those commandments which deal with man's relation to man. In his lack of knowledge of himself, the man claimed to have kept all of these commandments. So Christ gave him a very simple and practical test to show him that he did not measure up as he thought, but that he was overestimating himself, which is a very easy thing for anybody to do.

Christ wanted the young ruler to know that eternal life is a gift and not something which God bestows upon a person for service he has rendered or for moral excellence he has acquired. No man has ever been saved because of what he did to or for his fellows. The most subversive subtlety of satan is to deceive people into believing that they are justified in God's sight through what they do. Christ made it clear that man cannot save himself. Although some people are teaching salvation by works with new vigor, and some with a viciousness today, it is still true that nobody has ever been able to save himself. The Bible says: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5); "For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Mark recorded the words: "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 shall have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross and follow me."

Christ looked upon the young man. This does not mean that He merely cast His eyes toward him, but that He gave him one of those long, fond, gazing looks which indicated affection. He looked lovingly and longingly upon him. What was in that look of Christ? 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!

In this young ruler Christ saw great possibilities. He saw in him the possibilities of splendid, useful and effective service in the kingdom of God if and when 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. Christ demanded him to dispose of his possessions because they were standing between him and salvation.

IV. A Sorrowful Result.

When the young ruler asked Christ the question, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?", 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, nobody is ever justified in committing soul suicide.