

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

19:16-22

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Transcript

These verses detail a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and a young man who came to him to inquire about the way to eternal life. Like every conversation recorded in the Gospels between our Lord and an individual, it deserves special attention. Salvation is an individual business: every one who wishes to be saved must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul. We see for one thing from the case of this young man that a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved. Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed; he comes not to plead about a child: he comes about his own soul. He opens the conference with the frank question, "Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Surely we might have thought, "This is a promising case: this is no prejudiced ruler or Pharisee: this is a hopeful inquirer." Yet, by and by, this very young man goes away sorrowful, and we never read a word to show that he was converted! We must never forget that good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God. We may know the truth intellectually; we may often feel pricked in conscience; we may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls and shed many tears; but all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine saving work of the Holy Ghost. Unhappily this is not all that must be said on this point. Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even positively dangerous if we content ourselves with them, and do not act as well as feel. It is a profound remark of that mighty master on moral questions, Bishop Butler, that passive impressions, often repeated, gradually lose all their power action often repeated produce a habit in man's mind; feelings often indulged in, without leading to corresponding actions, will finally exercise no influence at all. Let us apply this lesson to our own state. Perhaps we know what it is to feel religious fears, wishes and desires. Let us beware that we do not rest in them. Let us never be satisfied till we have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts that we are actually born again and new creatures; let us never rest till we know that we have really repented, and laid hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel. It is good to feel; but it is far better to be converted. We see for another thing from this young man's case that an unconverted person is often profoundly ignorant on spiritual subjects. Our Lord refers this inquirer to the eternal standard of right and wrong, the moral law. Seeing that he speaks so boldly about doing, he tries him by a command well calculated to draw out the real state of his heart: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." He even repeats to him the second table of the law; and at once the young man confidently replies, "All these have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?" So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them. He seems thoroughly unaware that the commandments

apply to the thoughts and words as well as to the deeds, and that if God were to enter into judgment with him, he could not answer him one of a thousand" (i) (Job 9:3). How dark must his mind have been as to the nature of God's law! How low must his ideas have been as to the holiness which God requires! It is a melancholy fact that ignorance like that of this young man is only too common in the church of Christ. There are thousands of baptized people who know no more of the leading doctrines of Christianity than the veriest heathen. Tens of thousands fill churches and chapels weekly, who are utterly in the dark as to the full extent of man's sinfulness. They cling obstinately to the old notion that in some sort or other their own doings can save them; and when ministers visit them on their death-beds, they prove as blind as if they had never heard truth at all. So true is it that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him" (i) (1 Corinthians We see in the last place from this young man's case that one idol cherished in the heart may ruin a soul forever. Our Lord, who knew what was in man, at last shows his inquirer his besetting sin. The same searching voice which said to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call thy husband" (i) (John 4:16) says to the young man, "Go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor." (i) At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money. He cannot stand the test. He is weighed in the balance, and found wanting. And the history ends with the melancholy words, "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (i) We have in this history one more proof of the truth, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (i) (1 Timothy 6:10). We must place this young man in our memories by the side of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and learn to beware of covetousness. Alas, it is a rock on which thousands are continually making shipwrecked. There is hardly a minister of the Gospel who could not point to many in his congregation who, humanly speaking, are not far from the kingdom of God, (i) but they never seem to make progress. They wish, they feel, they mean, they hope, but there they stick fast! And why? Because they are fond of money. Let us prove our own selves, as we leave the passage. Let us see how it touches our own souls. Are we honest and sincere in our professed desire to be true Christians? Have we cast away all our idols? Is there no secret sin that we are silently clinging to, and refusing to give up? Is there no thing or person that we are privately loving more than Christ and our souls? These are questions that ought to be answered. The true explanation of the unsatisfactory state of many hearers of the Gospel is spiritual idolatry. We need not wonder that St. John says, "keep yourselves from idols" (i) (1 John 5:21).

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