Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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Simple Faith, Mark 10:17-31

When I served as a pastor of a church in Virginia, a retired man named Cecil frantically stormed into my office, announcing "I've lost everything, I've lost everything!" I welcomed him into my office and asked him to tell me how he had lost everything. He told me that he had everything invested in Enron his retirement, savings...he continued by saying that he had lost everything. I asked him if he had lost his faith in God He said, "No." I asked him if he had lost his family? He said, "No." I asked him if he had lost his health? He said, "No." Then he responded, "Maybe I haven't lost everything, just all my money."

My heart went out to Cecil who was totally invested in Enron. This memory of a man who lost all his material wealth can cause us to reflect upon where does our security come from in life? Is it our money, our 401k, . . . or does our security for this life and the next come from Christ alone. Jesus asked the young man in our passage to go and sell all that he had; sell everything and give it to the poor. How would you have responded if Jesus asked you to go and sell everything and give it to the poor?

Commentary Lesson

People respond to this story differently, depending on their socioeconomic status. For some, the story is discouraging. If someone who had been committed to living justly and experienced Jesus' love walks away sad, who can follow Jesus? For others, the story is encouraging. It explains the difficulty they have in dealing with wealthy people regarding some issues of Christian social teaching. Even a well-meaning wealthy person may balk at having to spend on behalf of the poor or oppressed that is at such a high cost to them. A wealthy man who faithfully observed the Mosaic Law and sought to live for God still had a spiritual hole in his heart. He lacked a genuine desire for eternal life. His approach to Jesus was sincere perhaps, but clumsy. He refers to Jesus as "good". Jesus balks at this telling him that God alone is good. Jesus was not declaring that he was not God nor good, but that this was not the way to approach a rabbi v.18. Jesus puts it back on the rich man. He knows the commandments. The rich man reveals that he has kept these from childhood v.19. In v.21 Jesus, surely discovers something in this wealthy man that he is drawn to - "Jesus looked at him and loved him." Jesus loves everyone. But there was something about this man's thirst for God that Jesus greatly appreciated. But Jesus told this man who was so close to the Kingdom of God, v.21b "One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me." In the ancient world, the resources needed for daily living were in limited
supply (as in the case in much of the world today). If one person had more, other people had less. Jesus' words to the rich man indicate that in order to become Jesus' follower he must abandon his exploitative lifestyle. He went away sad, "because he had great wealth" v.22. It is interesting to contrast the enthusiasm with which he approached Jesus and the sorrow with which he walks from Jesus' presence.

It is easy to suppose that the story of the rich man illustrates an actual event from the life of Jesus. It calls to mind the commitment of unusual persons like St. Francis of Assisi who stripped himself of every stitch of the rich clothing his cloth merchant father had given him, or Mother Teresa, who gave up a "comfortable life" in a religious order to help those abandoned to die on the streets of Calcutta. Such saints are not "loners." Others join vision and enrich the world. Like Jesus and his disciples, those who give up everything enter into a special relationship with the rest of the community: They depend on the hospitality described in Jesus' instructions to his disciples (Mark 6:7-13).

Do you have a simple faith in God? How determined are you to follow Jesus no matter the cost? The cost for the rich man appeared to be overwhelming. He went away sad because of his great wealth.

This idea is not found in scripture, but I wonder what if on the way home the rich man changed his mind and decided to sell everything and follow Jesus. He goes home and tells his wife and she leaves him because he insists on selling all his wealth and giving it to the poor. The rich man tells his father that he will be selling his portion of his father's business and give it to the poor. His father disowns him. The rich man, who had everything, is suddenly living on the streets, just trying to find enough food to survive. The rich man hears that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem. He travels to the city but he's starving, so he does something he had never done before, he stole food from a market. He was not a very good thief. The Romans arrest him. The Romans are ruthless and set on making an example of this once rich man. He is tried and found guilty. The rich man is condemned to be executed. But what he doesn't know is that along with him Jesus was crucified. This once rich man cries out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus announced to this man who once thought he had everything - "Today you will be with me in paradise." Only in losing everything, did he discover that claiming Jesus in faith does he truly have everything.

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