

160 Straight to the heart

We read in Mark 10.17 - " there came one running, and kneeled to Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?". He was certainly keen! - and his coming to Jesus so publicly and humbly showed his high hopes for a trustworthy answer from Him, perhaps an answer which in part would be a commendation as to what a fine fellow he already was!

In the parallel passages of this incident (in Matthew 19 and Luke 18), we learn a little more about him: he was a young man, a "ruler" (this is the same word as used for Jairus, who was "a ruler of the synagogue", Luke 8.41); he was very rich, with great possessions. So clearly he was well-known and a man of some status in his community. Yet here he was, running, then kneeling before the Lord and blurting out his question.

After making the point about only God being good, Jesus referred to the commandments, which the young man quickly claimed to have observed for years (verse 20). Was this the moment when he expected a very welcome, very public "pat on the back"? - allowing him to go on his way with an enriched status that could sit very nicely alongside his other riches!

Then we read (verse 21) that Jesus - "beholding him, loved him". What spiritual depths there are in those few words! - for Jesus now simply "knew" this young man, through and through, and loved him. In view of the words that followed, Jesus' love turned out to be nothing soppy, for Jesus then did what He always did, by going straight to the heart of this young man's situation: "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".

There it was, this man's great and real need exposed by the Lord, in front of the onlookers. And it was exposed, not because Jesus was trying to "bring him down a peg or two", but because He loved him, and was bothered about him, and wanted him to get things right. What Jesus said cut this young man to the heart, even though it was spoken out of deep love and real concern. We read - "he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions" (verse 22).

This young man was evidently getting many things right in his life, but ended up on the receiving-end of a straight-to-the-heart "spiritual review" from the Lord Himself. This would have been the last thing he was seeking or expecting, and it

clearly hurt, but it was for his benefit, and if he acted upon it, there would have been so much blessing for others as well as for himself.

At the start of this year, do we have the courage to ask the Lord for a similar "spiritual review"? Will we give Him the time to take a good, long, honest look at our lives? - and then, in His love for us, to go "straight to the heart" in His telling us what changes need to be made?

For how easy it is for us to keep to the busy rhythms of our lives, and simply not to notice that those lives may have become far less effective in the Lord's service than we would wish or assume. No. Our time, gifts and money, our friendships and relationships, and our energies and efforts - let them all at times be "spread before the Lord", for His inspection, and then for His instruction.

The Lord told that rich young man what to do, and we do not know his response. Perhaps he found reasons to reject what Jesus had told him, and tried to forget the whole encounter for the rest of his life; or perhaps he paid heed, and obeyed, and went off and did it.

We finish this time with Jesus' three final instructions to him: "Come, take up the cross, follow me" (verse 21) - simple words involving the setting of the human will to keep with the Lord, through thick and thin.

Please God, that young man did just that, and so too may we.

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