

Prayer

Great Lord and merciful Father; we speak to You not by any right, but by Your invitation. Receive our prayers for friends and for family, for those who suffer and those who face trials, for people who try hard to do Your will and people who feel they fail. All Your people Lord, who You have made according to Your will; all of us who follow You need a touch of Your grace and the liberty of Your Spirit. Bless us we pray as we commit to You: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Gifts of the Spirit

Pray for a Biblical understanding of the priority of love in the exercise of all spiritual gifts (as in 1 Corinthians 13). Pray that all God's people might be open to God's gifts.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about advertising and its influence on young people*
- *Pray for young people who know nothing but a life of crime*
- *Give thanks for the fellowship of believers throughout the world*

Meditation

How can anyone praise God in the midst of suffering?

Except by faith in one who suffered and whose spirit was never broken!

How can anyone have faith in God in a world of scepticism?

Except by acknowledging the fact that human reasoning tends to be faulty!

How can anyone accept that the Bible reports the truth?

Except by respecting the lives of those who have read it, and lived it!

How can anyone respect a God who won't always do miracles?

Except by perceiving that the Creator works according to His plan, not ours!

How can anyone believe that God is love when everyone suffers?

Except by discovering that He suffers alongside us, but is not defeated!

Or to put it another way;

How can anyone just ignore what Christian faith has been saying for years?

Except by putting their heads in the spiritual sands of a materialistic world!

Bible Study - Matthew 19:16-22

¹⁶ Then someone came up to Jesus and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to gain eternal life?' ¹⁷ He answered him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One alone who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' ¹⁸ He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; ¹⁹ Honour your father and mother; and also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' ²⁰ The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still need to do?' ²¹ Jesus answered, 'If you wish to be perfect, then go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will

have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me.’²² When the young man heard these words, he went away in grief, for he had many possessions.

Review

Jesus was approached by a man with a sincere, but possibly misguided, question. At the end of the passage we learn that he was a young man, perhaps from a wealthy family, for it would have been all but impossible for a young person to have amassed wealth from trade or any commerce in those days (19:22). His question was quite natural; God had blessed his life, and he appeared to be someone who was genuinely seeking how to do what was right with his life. As expected of one who was a wealthy person in Jewish society, he would have been involved in various good deeds, and hearing of the radical new teaching of Jesus, he wanted to know from Him what else he should do, ‘to gain eternal life’ (19:16).

Good deeds, and the One who is Good However, Jesus’ outlook on life was quite different from his, and Jesus challenged him directly about the very question he asked, ‘why do you ask me about what is good?’ (19:17). Jesus went on to explain that ‘goodness’ was not located in deeds, but in God himself; ‘One alone who is good’ (19:17). This is an important saying of Jesus, and one that has been neglected too often. Jesus teaches that goodness is not ours to claim or ascribe, it is God’s, and our job is to honour God and also to honour each other, which is exactly what Jesus moves on to say to the young man, referring to the Ten Commandments.

Which Commandments? When Jesus went on to tell the man to ‘keep the commandments’ (19:17), the young man must have felt uneasy, because He had just been challenged. In order for us to understand why, we need to remember that a Jewish person in Jesus’ day would have known the 10 commandments by heart. Now, the 10 commandments break into of two halves. The first four speak of a person’s duty to God (Exodus 20:1-11), and the fifth to tenth commands are about ones social duty, starting with duty to parents (Ex 12), then concerning murder (Ex 20:13), adultery (Ex 20:14, stealing (Ex 20:15), false witness (Ex 20:16), and finally covetousness (Ex 20:17).

Most commentators regard the list that Jesus gives in our text as merely representative of the commandments, focussing on the second list of social requirements which were clearly the general topic of conversation between the young man and Jesus. I do not believe this to be the case. If you look carefully at what Jesus said, you will notice that He listed all the social commands together with the famous moral command to ‘love your neighbour’ from Leviticus (19:18), but crucially, He missed out the tenth command, ‘You shall not covet’. Anyone familiar with this would immediately notice that Jesus missed this; so it is highly likely that Jesus did this on purpose, intending to draw out of the young man the real answer to his question.

A missing commandment The young man, I believe, immediately spotted the missing command, but in response to Jesus, He said ‘I have kept all these’ (19:20). This would be fairly easy to say; however, the lack of the final command must have raised his suspicions, and this led to his further question ‘what more must I do?’ (19:20). Was there something about this last command that Jesus was drawing to his attention? Jesus’ response (19:21) identified the young man’s problem exactly. The desire to remain rich depends upon the desire to have what other people have and do what other people with similar means do; and this constitutes one form of sin covered by the tenth commandment, against covetousness. The response of the young man to Jesus’ words therefore indicated that he was simply not prepared to ‘go and sell all (his) possessions’ (19:21), and he therefore stood condemned by the tenth commandment.

Will you follow me? There are two parts to Jesus’ answer to the young man about ‘what else’ he should do. He told him he had to deal with his riches and his problem of

covetousness, and then ‘then come and follow me’. There are only a few people to whom Jesus said these words personally, and everyone except this young man was obedient to the call. It is reported that the young man went away ‘in grief’ (19:22). This grief could have been simply a result of discovering that this Jesus was not the Messiah he had hoped for, or, as is more likely, he was unwilling to pay the price of leaving behind his worldly wealth for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life. He began by asking for eternal life, but was not prepared to forsake the privileges of this life in order to gain it.

It remains a tragic truth to this day that many people walk away from Jesus with the same grief. Generally, the church does not turn such people away, and the call ‘to give away all things’ to follow Jesus is regarded by many people as merely a special type of call to which a few respond but to which everyday Christians do not aspire. This represents a tragic misunderstanding of the whole call of Christ, let alone this text. Jesus calls people to follow him individually and completely, and this is the call to which we respond and by which we are judged. Each of us needs to be careful about our own call to yield all things to the one who has called us, and we can only respond to it by faith and in humility by asking the Lord to show us what to do with what He has first given us. This is a highly challenging text.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what circumstances have you heard people suggest that ‘being good’ is somehow ‘the right thing’ for someone who follows Christ?
2. Do you believe you have been called to ‘surrender everything’ to God, or give everything away in order to be a disciple?
3. Is it enough to say that Jesus asks us to give ourselves completely in order to be a disciple? What else does Jesus require of His disciples?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There was a time when I felt that I had indeed given all things in order to follow Christ’s call, specifically when I gave up everything in order to offer for the ministry of the church. However, I have since discovered that this call is an on-going one to which I need to respond on a regular basis. This is very challenging. It means that I must constantly assess the things God has given me and make sure that I give them over to the Lord so that He can direct their use. This is a demanding call, but very necessary.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Much of this study has been about discipleship. Check over the study again and make one or two notes about what parts of this passage challenge you, and write down what you feel about them.*
- *Pray for those who are rich and who find it hard to relinquish all things into God’s hands. There are many within the church who do, but some find it very hard, and they deserve our prayers.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, grant us the courage to respond to Your call whenever and however it comes. May we not be afraid to trust ourselves and our families into Your hands, and follow Your lead for every part of our journey in this life. In this way, may we walk with You, Lord Jesus, into eternal life. AMEN