

A CERTAIN RULER'S QUESTION

Luke 18:18-27

Intro: It is interesting to see how prominent men were attracted to the Lord Jesus. Nicodemus was one; this man was another. But, as we look through the Gospels, we can see the truthfulness of Paul's statement at the end of 1 Cor. 1 -- that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (v. 26). He did not say, not any, but "not many"!

Nicodemus was both a ruler of the Jews and a Pharisee. This man was a "ruler," probably of a synagogue -- the one in charge of the physical arrangements of the synagogue services.

He would have been like Nicodemus, both religious and devout, but probably was chosen because he was wealthy.

Like Nicodemus he came with questions -- BUT unlike Nicodemus, he does not seem to have been as attracted to the Lord as Nicodemus was. He came to find out what he could do for himself so that he could have "eternal life."

Note first:

~~I. THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE LORD AND THE RULER (Luke 18:18-27).~~

A. His question (v. 18).

We probably do not need to make too much of the word, "inherit" used by Mark and Luke; Matthew uses have (ἐχ(ω)).

His question, like Nicodemus' coming to the Lord, expressed dissatisfaction with his present state -- a lack of assurance that he had eternal life.

The emphasis was on what he could do -- which was wrong, too. Salvation is not our work.

But the one hopeful thing in his question was that he called the Lord, "Good -- Good Master," or Teacher. And the Lord questioned him on this. Had he seen evidence in the Lord that He was more than a man? Did he believe that He was God?

But the ruler did not respond.

B. The Lord's answer (v. 19).

After the Lord made the brief inquiry about the word, "good," He proceeded to answer the ruler's question.

But, if we are interested in dealing with people as the Lord did, it is important to notice two things that the Lord did not do:

- 1) He did not rebuke the ruler because of the way he phrased his question.
- 2) He did not give him the right answer.

What did He do? He gave him the answer he knew that he expected to hear. Matthew adds one ("love thy neighbor") which Luke does not include, which probably means that the Lord included them all.

Remember, too, that the Lord is dealing with a Jew. And Paul wrote to the Galatians in 3:21, "for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law."

But what did God do in the Law? He did not give a Law which would be possible for man. He had to give a Law that was acceptable to Himself!

How did it work out?

Listen to Paul again: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, . . ." (Rom. 8:3).

And so Paul writes again, "Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

C. The ruler's response (v. 21).

How had he done?

Notice how he condemns himself by what he says. If what he said were true, then why had he come to the Lord? He claims to have a perfect record, and yet by his question he admits that he does not have eternal life. What kind of talk is this?

It is the talk of one who is spiritually blind!

But notice how the Lord responds when He could have exposed the inconsistency in what he said.

D. The Lord's second answer (v. 22).

How gracious the Lord is, and yet how quickly he gets down to the problem! He knew that the rich ruler was not really interested in what he could do; he wanted to know how much he would have to pay!

The Lord also knew that there was one thing standing in

in the ruler's way -- and that was MONEY!

Is this the right answer?

It was here! The Lord might talk to Nicodemus in a different way. Paul might be more direct with the Philippian jailor. But this was the right word for the rich ruler.

What was the result?

E. The ruler's response (v. 23).

First he was "very sorrowful; for he was very rich."
Both Matthew and Mark tell us that he "went away."

So if you think that results stand above faithfulness to the truth, you do not want to do what the Lord Jesus did. But if you have your eye on the truth and on pleasing the Lord, then there are some important lessons here.

Concl and Appl: What are the lessons?

1. The Lord refused to water down the truth for the sake of results.
2. The Lord was seeking to show this ruler that what he needed was not something to do, but to come to the Lord. There are four verbs used here: "sell . . . distribute . . . come . . . follow ME."

The Lord was seeking to knock away all of the props so that this man would have nothing left but the Lord -- Who was all he really needed anyway!

3. The Lord taught in vv. 24, 25 that the more a person has, the more difficult it will be for him to be saved. This raised an agonizing question from the crowd, "Who, then, can be saved?" Wealth will open lots of doors, but not the door to eternal life! To the people, the words of our Lord closed the door to all! And that is what he intended for it to mean!
4. Verse 27: Salvation is only "possible with God"! This is the whole point of what the Lord was doing. He could have said this at the beginning, but He didn't. Instead, He did as we have read.

What were the results? There is no evidence that there were any. The important thing is faithfulness to the truth. God searches the hearts. May He give us wisdom in dealing with those who need Him! Though he did everything right, they did not come.