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This Week at the Creek

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Eternity

Mark 10:17-31
October 22, 2006

There was this diamond expert who just happened to be seated on an airplane next a woman wearing a huge diamond on her finger. The man finally introduced himself and said, "I couldn't help but notice your beautiful diamond. I'm an expert in precious stones. Please tell me about that stone." She replied, "This is the famous Klopman diamond, one of the largest in the world. But there is a strange curse that comes with it." Now the man was really interested. He asked, "So what's the curse?" As he waited with bated breath, she replied, "It's Mr. Klopman."

Some of you may wish to reevaluate your diamonds on that basis! But seriously, the true curse of any kind of valuable possession is its capacity to steal our hearts and souls. The rich young ruler is one of those unique characters from the Bible that has come to represent greed. So unwilling was he to part with earthly wealth that he sold his soul in order to keep his money. He wanted to be saved – but not at the expense of losing his possessions. One of the first things that impresses me about this story is that the rich young ruler was so near to the Kingdom. He asked all the right questions; he understood the Law; he understood Jesus' teaching. But in the end, his love of his stuff kept him out. And so we see him as a moral coward.

But frankly, that conclusion is too simple. As I reexamined this story, I found some good things about this young man. I'm impressed, for example, that having talked with him only a few minutes, Jesus looked at him and loved him. That doesn't sound like a scathing criticism to me. Plus we need to remember that to this young man Jesus wasn't the Son of God; He was simply a new prophet with an exciting message, a magnetic personality, and eyes that gripped you when you spoke to Him. He wasn't yet known as the Messiah. At this point,

not even His disciples looked upon Jesus as such – much less knew Him as the resurrected Lord.

So what if, for the sake of argument, we championed the cause of this underdog and reassessed his character a bit? And then – but only then – will we take another look at his fatal flaws. So first let's look at the positives. These are things that brought him to the Master, qualities that made him interested in Jesus' teachings.

The first positive thing is that he was **courageous**. Though rich and young and prestigious, he didn't care who saw him run to meet Jesus. Unlike Nicodemus who hid behind the cover of night to talk privately with the Lord, this man came to Jesus in broad daylight, overcoming any fear or hesitation of being seen with Him.

Are you at least as courageous as this man in your faith? Because if you're really interested in eternity, it will color everything you do from this point on. You'll courageously strive to handle every situation with integrity and fulfill each of the commitments you have made. You'll be consistent as you serve God, wanting to be just as faithful in little things as in the big things. You won't worry about trying to impress God with huge accomplishments that impress other people. You'll know that if God has called you to a mundane task and you're faithful to it, He'll be as pleased with you as if you had won the Nobel Prize. For even when no one else notices your courageous obedience, God does – and He applauds you for it.

The second positive thing is that he was **humble**. Again, even though rich and young and prestigious, he humbly bowed before Jesus. He knew he was in the presence of both holiness and greatness. And though this young man himself was highly respected by others – perhaps not only because of his wealth but also for his dedicated obedience – he poured out all his energies to show his respect for Jesus.

Are you at least as humble as this man in your faith? Even though everyone has different abilities, every single person has same potential to please God. God creates us with a variety of needs, desires, interests, talents, and opportunities. But these things don't define what we'll be. They're like the bricks, lumber, wallboard, shingles, and tiles we might see piled on the road near a construction site. It's what we make from the raw elements of our personalities that defines who we are – and this is where priorities and choices are crucial. Concentrate on humbly using your unique talents the best you can. God is looking to see how well you invest toward eternity what He has given you. So start each day by thanking God for giving you another day of life and asking Him to show you how He wants you to live it.

The third positive thing is that he was **religious**. Unlike so many others, this young man knew there was something of God in this special prophet known as Jesus. Though devoted and obedient to God's law himself, he knew that with Jesus he was in the presence of someone who could explain the very way to eternal life.

Are you at least as religious as this man in your faith? If you are, you'll try

to keep an eternal perspective in mind in every situation. Remember that your eternal calling has already begun and that the ways you live your life now will carry over into your life in heaven. When you don't understand a situation, ask God, who has the big picture in mind, to give you His peace about it. Study your motives and pray that God will help you act from a pure heart. Arrange your priorities around loving God and loving people. If you strive to do that, every aspect of your life will fall into place in ways that please God.

Those are some of the positives; but now let's look at the negatives, those things that made him turn away from the Master. Keep in mind that no one is worthless; any person can always be held up as a bad example!

The first negative thing is that he was looking for a rule to keep. He wanted something cold and hard and fast that he could do – something definitive and clear and frankly easy. In fact, his whole purpose for going to Jesus was to see what he could do to get eternal life; unfortunately, he left seeing what he was unable to do. For what Jesus requires of all true disciples is their dedicated devotion and commitment. He allows no distractions and refuses to be our second priority.

The classical story of Faust by Goethe has become part of our Western heritage. Faust was a man who longed for romance, academic success, and wealth. Unable to find these on his own, he made a pact with the devil. If he could be granted his wishes, have his true worth made public and enjoy its fruits, then he would give his soul to the devil. Sure enough, he enjoyed marvelous romances, fabulous successes, and much wealth. But when his day of reckoning came, he was unwilling to keep his part of the bargain. I can't help but wonder if there's a parallel here. We put the Lord off by promising, "Just one more of this and one more of that and then I'll be willing to go with you, Jesus." Are we not like little Faustus wanting to have it our way? "After all," we claim, "we deserve it!" But what will we say to Jesus when He comes to claim us? That He was somewhere down the list of our priorities?

The second negative thing is that he loved his money. There once was a man who loved gold. When he inherited a fortune, with joy he redecorated his bedroom. He put gold parchment wallpaper up, hung yellow curtains, and had a golden colored rug and a yellow bedspread. He even bought some yellow pajamas. But one day he got sick and came down with, of all things, yellow jaundice. His wife called the doctor, who made a house call and went up to his bedroom for an examination. After a long while, the doctor finally came down, and the wife asked, "How is he?" "Don't know," said the doctor. "I couldn't find him." How many people today are absolutely absorbed in and lost in a world of greed and materialism?

We must not let our possessions or money or any other barrier keep us from following Jesus. We must remove all hindrances to serving Him fully. If Jesus asked if you could give up your house or car or level of income or position on the ladder of promotion, your reaction would reveal your attitude – whether your stuff is your servant or your master. Jesus said it's difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom because they, having their needs more than met, often

become self-reliant. When they feel empty, they buy something new to try to fill the void that only God can fill. Their abundance and self-sufficiency become their deficiency. So it is that the person who has everything on earth can still lack what is most important – eternal life.

The third negative thing is that he **walked away**. At that moment of truth, he made a critical decision: he chose his earthly wealth over a heavenly eternity; he chose the mundane status quo over an exciting eternity of following Jesus. And he sealed his decision by walking away – albeit with a fallen face of sadness. It's apparent that he knew that he'd made the wrong choice, but still he walked away.

A past issue of *Fortune* magazine quotes Ross Perot: "Guys, just remember, if you get lucky, if you make a lot of money, if you get out and buy a lot of stuff – it's gonna break. You got your biggest, fanciest mansion in the world. It has air conditioning. It's got a pool. Just think of all the pumps that are going to go out. Or go to a yacht basin any place in the world. Nobody is smiling, and I'll tell you why. Something broke that morning. The generator's out; the microwave oven doesn't work. Things just don't mean happiness."

Like the rich young ruler, eternity awaits your ultimate **decision** to follow the Lord – and that without any hindrances or distractions and without anything else out-prioritizing it. Your life here is brief compared to the amount of time you'll spend in the heavenly realm you can't see right now. How will you decide?

Let us pray: Lord, help us to push aside every hindrance and distraction that may keep us from following You. Place Your strength behind our every decision – every day – to follow You with our whole-hearted devotion. In Your name we pray.

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