

WHAT WILL KEEP YOU FROM FOLLOWING JESUS?

By James B. Bowers and Mark Beard

Text: Matthew 19: 16-26

■ In Jules Verne's novel *The Mysterious Island*, he tells of five men who escape a Civil War prison camp by hijacking a hot-air balloon. As they rise into the air, they realize the wind is carrying them over the ocean. Watching their homeland disappear on the horizon, they wonder how much longer the balloon can stay aloft.

As the hours pass and the surface of the ocean draws closer, the men decide they must cast overboard some of the weight, for they had no way to heat the air in the balloon. Shoes, overcoats, and weapons are reluctantly discarded, and the uncomfortable aviators feel their balloon rise. But only temporarily. Soon they find themselves dangerously close to the waves again, so they toss their food. Better to be high and hungry than down on a full belly.

Unfortunately, this, too, is only a temporary solution, and the craft again threatens to lower the men into the sea. One man has an idea: they can tie the ropes that hold the passenger car and sit on those ropes. Then they can cut away the basket beneath them. As they sever the very thing they had been standing on, it drops into the ocean, and the balloon rises.

Not a minute too soon, they spot land. Eager to stand on terra firma again, the five jump into the water and swim to the island. They live, spared because they were able to discern the difference between what really was needed and what was not. The "necessities" they once thought they couldn't live without were the very weights that almost cost them their lives. (Larson, 113)

In our text today we will look at someone who failed to see the difference between what he needed and what was dragging him down. He is known simply as the "rich young ruler."

I would like to point out the significance of at least three of the "Rich Young Ruler's" *actions*.

1. He came to the right person.
2. He asked the right question.
3. But he made the wrong decision,

I. HE CAME TO THE RIGHT PERSON (v. 16a).

“One (the rich young ruler) came to Him (Jesus)”

A. There is great wisdom in acknowledging Christ.

Although he was probably a ruler of a synagogue, and possibly risking his position in the Jewish society, **he publicly came to Jesus. He publicly acknowledged Him** as “good” which was saying, in essence, that he believed Him to be from God.

B. However, unless we accept Christ as our Savior and Lord we cannot have eternal life.

His mistake was that he **came to Jesus looking for eternal life based on “works” not faith.** He said in v.16, *“What good thing shall I do?”*

He was willing to accept a “work” but not a Savior and Lord.

■ According to the *Chicago Tribune*, in the summer of 1994, Marcio da Silva, a love struck Brazilian artist, was distraught over the breakup of a four-year relationship with his girlfriend, Katia de Nascimento. He tried to win back her love by a gesture of great devotion. He walked on his knees for nine miles. With pieces of car tires tied to his kneecaps, the twenty-one-year-old man shuffled along for fourteen hours before he reached her home in Santos, Brazil. He was cheered on by motorists and passersby, but when he reached the end of his marathon of love thoroughly exhausted, the nineteen-year-old woman of his dreams was not impressed. She had intentionally left her home to avoid seeing him.

Some people try similar acts of devotion to impress God and earn salvation. Like Katia de Nascimento, God is not impressed.

(Larson, 94)

II. HE ASKED THE RIGHT QUESTION (v. 16b).

“What good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?”

A. There is great wisdom in desiring truth.

It is interesting that he knew the Law but he needed more. People will never be satisfied with a set of laws. Why? Because what they need is a relationship with their Creator.

B. But to obtain eternal life we must act on that truth.

In v.20 he asks, *“What do I still lack?”*

He is still looking for a “work” to do. Jesus doesn’t mention the commandments to show him how to be saved *but to show him that he needs to be saved.* Jesus is trying to show him that he needs a new starting point— not a new commandment.

■ Max Lucado writes, “Trying to make it to heaven on our own goodness is like trying to get to the moon on a moon beam; nice idea, but try it and see what happens.” (Lucado, 140)

He had made so many right moves...

III. YET, SADLY, HE MADE THE WRONG DECISION (v. 22).

“But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful.”

A. Christ calls us to make a decision between *the world and Him.*

The problem is that too many people are like the following young girl when it comes to making this choice.

■ “Once a young man proposed to his girl as they sat looking over the beautiful lake. “Darling, I want you to know that I love you more than anything else in the world. I want you to marry me. I’m not wealthy. I don’t have a yacht or a Rolls-Royce like Johnny Green, but I do love you with all my heart.”

She thought for a minute and then replied, “I love you with all my heart, too, but tell me more about Johnny Green.” (Hewett, 342)

B. Christ calls us to a decision between the *eternal and the temporal*.

As long as we are holding on tightfistedly to the here and now, the tangible and the temporal we can not receive all that God has for us. Someone wrote:

■ One by one God took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Till I was empty handed,
Every glittering toy was lost.

And I walked earth’s highways grieving
In my rags of poverty
Till I heard His voice inviting
“Lift those empty hands to me.”

So I turned my hands toward heaven,
And he filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
Till they could contain no more.

And At last I comprehended,
With my stupid mind and dull
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full. Anonymous (Swindoll, 56)

CONCLUSION

If the following story teaches us anything, it teaches us that knowledge and truth are useless unless acted on.

■ It was a 99° September day in San Antonio, when a ten-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked inside a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and had foam on her mouth.

It had become a life or death situation when Fred Arriola, a wrecker driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free.

Was he heralded a hero? “The lady was mad at me because I broke the window,” Arriola reported. “I just thought, *What’s more important—the baby or the window?*”

Most questions of priority are not between something important and something trivial, rather, between the important and the most important. (Larson, 188)

What do our *actions* say about what we consider important? What, if anything, will keep you from following Jesus?

References

Hewett, James S. (Ed.). (1986). *Illustrations unlimited*. Wheaton ILL: Tyndale.

Larson, Craig B. (Ed.). *Illustrations for preaching and teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Larson, Craig B. (Ed.). (1996). *Contemporary illustrations for preaching and teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Lucado, Max. () *No wonder the call Him savior*. Multnomah Press.

Swindoll, Charles R. (1986) *The trinity*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

