

## **"But Nothing Happened"**

Call to Worship: Psalm 32:1-2

1st Scripture: 2 Kings 5:1-19

2nd Scripture: Mark 10:17-22

Hymn #164- *Angels From the Realms of Glory*

Hymn #147- *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

Hymn #152- *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

### **Introduction**

Last Sunday, I sought to open up the whole concept of faith, by considering the spiritual implications of a healing miracle that Jesus had performed. In considering the condition of the blindman, the desperate way in which he sought to gain the ear of Christ and the willingness of Christ to extend mercy to this man (by healing him), hopefully we were able to get an illustrative picture of the way in which sinners can connect to and find reconciliation with God in and by Jesus Christ.

This morning, I want to tap into another historical event, surrounding the life and ministry of Christ, which I believe can help us get a better understanding of the concept of "repentance," which is another critical element that must be found in all who are to be saved. To be sure, there is no salvation to be found, where repentance is not present in some form. Indeed, repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, when it comes to obtaining salvation. Well, this morning, we will hopefully get an illustrative glimpse of what true repentance actually looks like in the life of the redeemed Christian.

And finally, I hope also to address the dilemma, put forth by those who say, "Look, I do believe in Jesus and I have sought Him in prayer...but nothing happened. I guess I'm just not one of the elect." What do you do, when you are concerned about the possibility that you just might not be one of God's elect? How does one find the assurance of salvation, in the context of a salvation that is granted only to those sinners whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world? Stay tuned, and we will seek to address this dilemma as well.

## **I. The Rich Young Ruler's Dilemma**

Our text takes us to a time when Jesus was walking down the road with His disciples, when suddenly, a young man charged toward Him, fell down on his knees before Jesus and asked a very good and heartfelt question. Now, before we get to the question, let's just note that this young man's reverence and posture before Jesus, particularly as a wealthy man (as we will see in a few moments), is commendable. I say this, only to note that his intentions seem sincere and honorable for the moment. And so, that said, what does the man ask?

"Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And so, the man asks a good and genuine question. He presumes that Jesus is a teacher, who has a knowledge of spiritual matters, and he, like anyone else in the world, would like to know how he can live forever in heaven.

Now, Jesus's answer is profound, because He, knowing the heart of all men, already begins to address this man's main problem. And so, He prefaces His answer by addressing the man's false assumption that anyone can be naturally good in the sight of God, since all men are born with a sin nature, in accordance with the nature of our first parents, Adam and Eve, who fell into sin and took the whole human race with them in that sin. And so, Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is God." Now, understand, Jesus is not denying that He Himself is good, because after all He is both God and a sinless man. However, He is addressing this man in accordance with what he understands about Jesus, namely, that Jesus is a man. The young man here, does not know who Jesus really is, and so, his calling Jesus "Good Teacher," is based on the assumption that any human being can actually be good. This is especially important because of what this young man actually thinks about himself, which we will see in a few moments. It is important for anyone, who would wish to inherit eternal life, to begin with the understanding that "I am not good, I am not worthy, and I could therefore, never do anything on my part, to inherit eternal life." And so, the Lord is here addressing this man's distorted understanding of the doctrine of Man.

Moving forward then, Jesus tells the man how one can obtain eternal life, and this will further expose the young man's woeful understanding of human nature, and his own heart, for that matter. "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not

steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'" And so, Jesus here gives the man a list of the commandments that make up the Second Table of the Ten Commandments, which if a man keeps perfectly, he can obtain eternal life. In other words, He holds out the Law before the young man, which ought to drive the young man to abase himself, seeing that no man has kept or ever will be able to keep the Moral Law, because we have a sin nature, which actually compels us to violate these very commands. But again, one who is blinded to this reality; one who assumes that any man can be good, might miss reality in the general nature of the commands, which will drive our Lord to be more specific in a moment. But suffice it to say for the moment, brethren, that, in theory, if one kept the Ten Commandments perfectly, that would be a legitimate means of salvation. However, we know that no one could do that ("No one is good but God"), because we are all born sinners. We inevitably sin because we have a sinful nature, and so, that way, which is a valid way, is blocked by the consequence of the fall of man.

How then does the young man respond? "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Clearly, this young man is deceived. He is sincere, but he is blind and deceived to reality. And obviously the Lord knows this. In fact, He pities the man, and looks compassionately at his state. Notice, we are then told that Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus saw the utterly broken condition of this man, like we might look upon a rabbit (on the nature channel) who is hopping along, right toward a venomous rattlesnake. Jesus felt compassion for this man, and this led Him to say, what He knew would sting the man, but what He also knew was that which this man desperately needed...to see the truth of his own sin.

And so, Jesus carries this man's conscience from the comfortable realm of generalities and right into the corner of very specific conviction for very specific sin. It wasn't that this man was innocent even of all that he thought he was innocent of (although he probably was a decent, moral man in some sense), but there was a very specific idol that ruled this man's life, and Jesus, out of love for him, would now put his finger on that idol. The affirmation of this man's depraved nature, and the affirmation of what Jesus had just said about God alone being good, comes in these words, "One thing you lack. Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (vs. 21).

Now, what is Jesus saying here? Is He saying that for anyone to obtain eternal life, he/she must sell all of his/her possessions and follow Him? Is this a doctrine that affirms a possessionless Christianity, where Christians are not permitted to own anything beyond the bare necessities? No, that is not the main point of this text. The Scriptures do address the attitude that we ought to have toward worldly possessions, but that is not the primary point of this particular text. What then is He saying here, by these words?

Jesus is saying to this young man that whatever is more valuable to him than God; that whatever has taken the place of God in his life, must be removed, so that God would be first in his heart. You see, first and foremost, this is primarily a first Table of the Law issue. It is God speaking to His people Israel, as it were, after the Exodus, saying, "I am the Lord your God who has redeemed and called you out of Egypt...You will have no other gods (no idols) before Me!" And this young man, who was very wealthy, was in love with his riches. He was an idolater, and if he were to truly embrace Christ by faith, he needed to repent and turn away from this all encompassing idolatry. And therefore, out of love, Jesus sought to expose the great idolatry of this man's heart; his bondage, as it were, so that he might remove that which was truly keeping him from his God. Should the man embrace this conviction, he could be led to find true joy, and everlasting fulfillment in the greatest treasure of all, which was right in front of Him, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, he exhorted the man to let go of his temporal earthly riches; to crucify them by selling his precious possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor, so that he might have eternal life and riches, in following Christ! And so, this was a fork in the road issue for this man, and there was no other way that he could be saved, no matter what verbal confession he might make concerning Christ....even on his knees! Indeed, a true confession of faith could only come out of a heart that turns away from idolatry and toward Christ. How then does the man respond?

In verse 22, we are told, "But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." This man went away sorrowful! You see, he wanted eternal life, but he wanted it on his terms. He wanted to remain an idolater, while grasping eternal benefit from God. His heart could not let go of his possessions. He was a slave to them, and thereby, at the least, he could see that he was not the good man he thought he was. Indeed, no one is good but

One, God! And notice, Jesus doesn't stop him and change the terms, does He? He doesn't say, "Hey, wait! Just believe in Me with some cerebral faith and say this prayer, and you will be fine. You can be the carnal Christian. It's okay, as long as you don't curse or do drugs or murder. Just say this prayer. Just come before the altar here and believe and don't let anyone take away your assurance." No, Jesus drew the line in the sand, didn't He? In fact, after the rich man leaves, Jesus tells His disciples that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved." And why does He say this? Because the rich are generally consumed by material things and cannot escape that idolatry, barring a miracle of God, who alone can even bring a camel through the eye of a needle.

## **II. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Certainly, more can be said here, brethren, but let us conclude our time by considering a few closing thoughts and applications based upon what we have gone over:

Perhaps, some of you here this morning, upon hearing last week's sermon in particular (or the general call to believe in, and call upon Christ) might say, "Pastor, I have tried. I know that I am a sinner and that Christ is the Only way of salvation. I have called upon the Name of the Lord...but He still will not save me. You see, nothing happened. Nothing changed. I must not be one of the elect." Well, let me ask you a few additional questions, before helping you work through this. Let's do a little inventory for a moment, beyond expressing some form of faith, and beyond calling on the Name of the Lord, before we address the "but nothing happened" and "election" issue. Let me ask you...

1) Have you embraced a false gospel that has led you to believe that it is possible to believe into Christ without exhibiting any intent toward repentance of your sin? In other words, have you bought into the "easy believism" gospel (which is no gospel at all), which tells you that you can take Christ and His benefits while continuing on in your sin? If so, then therein lies your first problem. You cannot hold onto your sin; you cannot continue on, willingly embracing what you know to be contrary to God's Law, while seeking to embrace Christ. That is hypocrisy. Indeed, Christ alone can pay the price; He alone can be the substitute, who bears all of your sins against God, but there is no atonement for those who willingly continue on, committing the very

sins that have nailed Christ to the cross. In other words, Christ doesn't bid us, "Come to Me for eternal rest, while you continue to willfully spit upon me in your ongoing rebellion." And so, if "nothing happened," it might be the case that you have not repented toward God, in your coming to Christ.

Now, this is not to say that you must be perfect or without sin, when you come to Christ. That is impossible. However, you must be willing to part with your sins, and generally, as in the case of the rich young man here, there are certain sins that have dominated your heart, of which you must immediately repent, if you are to come to Christ in truth. Sometimes, people call upon Christ, and think that God will allow them to hold onto just one particular sin that they desire, not realizing, that that is the very idol, which God most wants to deal with, immediately. That's the clog in the drain of your sincerity. To be sure, you will always be fighting against sin (as a Christian), but generally, there is some ruling sin, which rests upon the throne of the heart of the sinner, which must be repented of, when coming to Christ. In the case of the young man here, it was his obsession with his possessions. You see, you can be prostrate before the Lord even, calling out to Him for salvation and eternal life, but if you do so, with no desire to turn from the wretched path you have been presently on, then don't expect Him to hear. [See also Luke 3:7-20]

2) Are you determined to follow Christ as Lord? Here, Jesus commands the young man to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, *and to take up his cross and follow Christ*. And so, here we see that there must now be a willingness to commit your life to following Christ, while crucifying whatever it is that stands in the way. That doesn't necessarily mean becoming a pastor or a missionary, but it does entail living a new life, with a new focus, governed by new God-glorifying motives, embracing God's ideals over your own. Have you embraced the Lordship of Christ over your life, or are you seeking a salvation that merely provides you with "fire insurance," allowing you to maintain your own independence? Have you lost your life, such that you would find new life in Christ? If not, that may be your problem. Jesus cannot be your savior without being your Lord. You cannot lay hold of His gracious heart, while cutting off His royal head! You must be willing to follow Him, if you are to receive the benefits that He freely gives through His sacrifice. To be a Christian, is to enter a new kingdom, which recognizes Christ as your king, submitting to His glorious reign. But friends, here's the kicker!

It is a privilege beyond all privileges, a joy behind all joys and a wonder beyond all wonders, to make such a commitment. Nobody who has ever done so (in truth), has ever, ever regretted it! Serving under the authority of Christ is like a street bound boat gliding upon the water for the first time! It fits, it makes sense, it's right and proper...and it is all fulfilling! Oh, if only the rich man could have seen past the finite, deteriorating, rotting dust of his temporal possessions!

3) Finally, we close by addressing the "nothing happened," "maybe I'm not one of the elect" issue. So, you've (1) Seen that you're a sinner, unworthy of God's grace, you've (2) come to see that Christ alone can save you from your sins, you've (3) called upon His Name for salvation, you've (4) willingly repented of your sins, and you've (5) been willing to submit to the reign and authority of Christ by following Him, but "nothing happened." What then? Let me give you a two part response to this:

a) Know that if you have sought the Lord in truth, then that is evidence that you are one of the elect. The Scriptures teach us that no one naturally seeks after God (Rom. 3). One who truly seeks Christ has already been sought by Christ, because no one can come to the Son, "unless the Father who sent Him, first draws them." So, if you seek Christ, then you are one of the elect! Jesus has promised that anyone who comes to Him, He will by no means cast out. Calling upon Christ in truth, is the very means that God uses to bring His elect to Christ. And so, if you have sought Christ with the sincerity that we have already considered, then you can rejoice in what God has graciously done in you, because the natural man, who is spiritually dead, can never know such a desire by his own strength. He's dead!

b) But "nothing happened." Well, let me let you in on a secret here. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that "something" recognized by the senses will happen. Do some people sense immediate peace or assurance when they come to Christ? Sure, but there's no guarantee that that will immediately happen. So, what then do you do? Simply follow him and wait upon Him. No matter what, stay the course. Get into His Word, pray continually, be baptized, join the local church...follow Him, no matter what you feel. Act in faith, and in due time, you will find the comforting assurance that accompanies the promises given in His Word. But note, even that comforting assurance may wax and wane (at times), which is why we must ultimately, simply believe what His Word tells us, about us and Himself. In other words, just believe what He says,

and rest your hope and your faith and your very life on *His* Word. And in doing so, you will not be put to shame. But, don't wait to get zapped in some way. Don't wait for some sensual experience to take place. Simply believe and go forward in faith, doing whatever He commands. [Ex: Naaman the leper refused to believe because it seemed too simple. He was looking for more, but God is found by a simple faith, which dips oneself into the Jordan River seven times, if He so orders that]. Just follow Him!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Romans 10:6-13