



"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..."
Mark 10:45

Trying to Bargain With God

When the young man approached Jesus, he fell on his knees and called Jesus, "Good teacher." He had been raised in a wealthy, politically astute family and knew that, to a Jew, extreme flattery would go a long way in getting what you want. And today, he wanted to be acknowledged for how well he had lived so far.

As a wealthy and devout Jew, he had learned that he was assured of God's eternal blessing. But he wanted acceptance from this suddenly popular preacher. He wanted Jesus to praise him for his faithful life so far. So he asked Jesus a simple question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

But he never expected Jesus' answer. Especially after he boasted that he had faithfully kept every moral commandment. But, instead of Jesus praising him, his pride was shattered with an unexpected response. Jesus told him to "Go and sell all you have and give to the poor." (Mark 10:21)

With this statement, his confidence crumbled. His face fell. He had no snappy response. He loved being rich too much to give it up. So he slowly walked away from Jesus, unwilling to do what Jesus had asked.

We are never told why the young man asked Jesus this question. He may have wanted spiritual validation, as I noted above. Or he could have been genuinely interested in becoming a disciple. But when Jesus invited him to become a follower, he was unwilling to make the sacrifice.

A "Do" Question With a "BE" Answer

So let's look at this encounter and see what we can learn to help us on our journey.

This man was obviously very wealthy and devout in his faith. But his superior air was influenced by two prevailing beliefs. First, Jews believed that wealth was a sign of spiritual blessing. They also believed that Jews would automatically inherit the Kingdom of God unless they forfeited their birthright through some egregious sin.

But his question to Jesus about earning eternal life also revealed something deeper. He believed that God's Kingdom and eternal life could be bargained for on human terms. Even though he had followed the commandments, he wanted to "pad his resume" and earn more eternal brownie points. So he asked, "What must I DO to earn eternal life?"

But Jesus answered the man's "DO" question with a "BE" answer he wasn't expecting. The man asked Jesus if he could make a deal. He asked, "If I DO this, will you DO that?" But Jesus turned his world upside down by asking him to BE someone he could not – to BE a disciple willing to give up what he loved most to follow Jesus.

Giving away his wealth required a complete change of theology. It meant admitting the worthlessness of his fabricated "goodness" and relying entirely on God's unlimited grace. Sadly, he could not make that deal on his own terms. And neither can we.

BE-ing "Good Enough"

As a teenager, I was a lot like this prideful young man, but without the wealth. A pastor friend challenged me to receive the gift of Jesus Christ as my personal savior. I responded that it did not seem fair. I thought I needed to do something to be good enough. To earn the right to come to Jesus.

But after months of prayer, study, and discussion, I began to understand that Jesus loved me as I was. He offered himself on the cross, not because I was good enough to deserve it. But because I could never be good enough. Jesus offered me a free gift called grace.

Romans 5:8 states it this way, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." That's what the rich young man did not understand. Jesus asked him to sell all he had, not because it was a great charitable act, but because Jesus knew that his wealth was his roadblock to a relationship with Jesus.

What's your roadblock to a deeper relationship with Jesus? Are you trying to bargain your way into Heaven? Or gain favor with God? Are you hoping that all of your DOs will equal the BE that Jesus wants? That will never happen.

As the great Billy Graham often said, Jesus asks us to come as we are to the throne of grace. Only then can the finished work of Jesus on the cross cover our sin and make us good enough.



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