



The Man Who Missed Out

Mark 10:17-22; Mark 10:22 "He went away."

Here is the story of a life as it is told in three words, "He went away." This short sentence tells the tragedy of a soul. You cannot read it without feeling a touch of heartache. These words are as lonely as sitting by a fireside that is cold, waiting for steps that never come --"He went away."

It's not that Jesus put two hands on his shoulders, turned him about, and pushed him away. It was not that Jesus saw stains in this man that would make discipleship an impossibility. Nor did Jesus read his yesterday and tell him that its soiled pages would make it impossible for him to have a promising tomorrow. "He went away" on his own --no one chased him away.

This young man, with all the courtesy of a good mannered upbringing, turned his back on Christ and refused to follow him. His story is one of the most disappointing in the New Testament. We know of no other person who came into personal contact with Jesus during his earthly ministry who was richer in possibilities. No story of any disciple begins more hopefully than the story of this man. One moment he is running courageously to meet Jesus; he is even kneeling at the feet of Jesus. The next moment he has gone away. How disappointing. His superb worth makes the missed opportunity more pathetic. He is an example of how "kneeling" is NOT the same as "following."

Look at the tremendous assets he brought with him to the interview.

First, there is the wealth indicated by the name he has come to wear --he was the "rich young ruler." Material wealth is in his hands. Henry Ward Beecher once said, though, "Riches are not an end of life, they are an instrument of life." Money is condensed energy; it is pent up force. If consecrated to God, it may be an instrument of endless good. Listen to what that great philanthropist Andrew Carnegie had to say about money, "The fundamental idea of wealth is that surplus wealth should be considered as a sacred trust to be administered by those into whose hands it falls, during their lives, for the good of the community." If consecrated to God, money may be an instrument of endless good.

Then, he was a ruler. That is, he belonged to the aristocracy; he was a "blue blood." He was a member of that class that was later to crucify Jesus. How much he might have done to win those of his social standing if he had only stayed and followed Christ. When power is used for good, it is a wonderful, marvelous, admirable thing. Edmund Burke said, "I know of nothing sublime which is not some modification of power." We all have some power; like money, we may spend it to help or to hurt.

Better still, he was young; he was standing at the morningtide of life. It is a fine thing to come to Jesus at any time. It is great to be born again even if that wonderful decision takes place when we are old. It is better to give the last brief inch of life's flickering candle to Christ, than to never come to Christ at all. But, how much better to give him an entire life! He was young. His was the privilege, therefore, of giving his life to the Lord Jesus starting at the first day of spring to the very last day of winter.

Christ wants our old age; but how intensely he yearns for our youth. "Remember now, your creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when you shall say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). This man brought many assets with him.

Secondly, this young man was possessed of a noble restlessness; he was in the grip of a fine discontent. Now, there is much of our discontent that is unworthy. This is often true when we are dissatisfied with what we have. Such dissatisfaction is, as a rule, not the mark of bigness, but of littleness. It is not the mark of unselfishness, but the opposite. This young man was not simply dissatisfied with what he had. He had already discovered that things were powerless to meet his deepest needs. He already had things; after all, he was the *rich* young ruler. This young man was dissatisfied with what he was --he was discontent with himself. Though rich in things, he knew that he had not attained the best. He was looking wistfully toward the heights.

We have hope for this kind of person, while the self-satisfied drive us to despair. If you have learned as much as you want to learn, you are not likely to learn more. If you are as good as you want to be, you will certainly not get any better. If you are as high up the hill as you care to be, then you are not likely to climb any higher. Self-satisfaction stops us on the road of life. It means arrested development; however, dissatisfaction opens the way to progress.

This young man was lured by the heights. That was the secret of his restlessness. Had he responded, he would have found an abundant market for service and usefulness. For, walking with Christ is like making a journey into new country. It is like climbing a mountain where the air gets more crisp with every step, and the sight more splendid! Happy is the person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Happy is the one whose dissatisfaction sends him or her to Christ.

Not only was this young man possessed of a noble restlessness, but he was an eager seeker after that which could give him rest. How earnest he was. We read that he ran to Jesus. Contrary to what you may have thought before, this man realized he was lost --that is, he realized he needed to be saved. His question was, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" This young man was an earnest and enthusiastic seeker after Christ.

He was also a man of great courage. He ran down the road after Jesus when nobody else was running. That, in itself, was a very courageous piece of conduct. It is easy to run with the crowd; it is hard to run alone. It is easy to stand with a group; but, it is hard to stand alone. Perhaps the greatest difficulty for Christians today is that they have been so used to thinking that they are in the majority, that it scares them to death when they look about and find that they are indeed on the narrow road with many fewer fellow

travelers than they had hoped for.

Of the few that *were* about Jesus, not one was in this man's social circle. These were not aristocrats --this handful of fishermen. The master himself was not. What courage it took for this "blue-blood" to go down the road before the gaze of the crowd and get down on his knees before a man who had the calloused hands of a carpenter.

Then, this young man was reverent. Reverence is a fine virtue that is none too common. It is a mark of moral fitness. It is the roadway to knowledge in every department of life. This young man in spite of culture, and wealth, and position still knew how to bend the knee. He still knew how to pray. He was reverent.

Finally, he was morally clean. When Jesus put to him the moral law, he was able to answer, "All this have I observed from my youth." He was not lying or playing the hypocrite. Jesus, who could see his heart, did not rebuke him for the answer. He accepted the statement. He appreciated his fine moral worth and gave him high approval. "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him." Do not stumble at the fact that Jesus had a peculiar love for this young man. Do not think for a moment that because he is the savior of the world, he looks with the same eyes upon the pure and upon the filthy; upon the peacemaker and the warmonger. Do not think for a moment that he looks upon the foul mouth with the same favor as the clean mouth. As far as we are from perfection, we do not look upon each with equal favor.

Christ loves all with an everlasting love; but, he looks with a peculiar love upon those possessed of the high moral worth that belonged to this young man. The Bible is not against morality, it only warns about the futility of using it as a substitute for grace. Grace saves, while morality cannot; yet, that does not make morality evil. While we don't want to make a religion out of morality all by itself, there is no denying that morality is a vital, integral part of our Christian religion. I'm not so sure that Christ would join in the chorus of those who have criticized the "do gooders" (as they like to call it), or those who have tried to foster *humane-ness*, or human rights. It's not that these things are valueless, it is just that we fall short of them, and therefore need grace to take up the slack to get us by in this world and take us safely to the next. No! Morality has great value --the Christian should never rail against it.

However, in spite of all these fine assets, there was a lack in this young man's life. He was a humanist and *humane-ness* is not bad; it is just that it is not enough. Yet, we certainly don't want to discourage the good traits that he had, just because he had a lack. He admitted as much when he came to kneel at the feet of the master. In fact, we all do admit it each time we come to church. When Matthew tells the story the young man asked, "What lack I yet?" I have wealth, position, decency, and morality --I am even religious. Yet, there is a lack in my life; I have, somehow, missed the highest; I have not found the best. What is the matter?

Jesus agreed with the young man. He did not tell him that he was a bit morbid, or that he was being unfair with himself. He said, "One thing you lack." With all your fine qualities and virtues, you still lack one thing.

What was the thing this young man lacked? The answer is, he lacked life --he was short on spiritual life.

He was religious; but, his religion was not that essential something that means the life of God in the soul. He was a church member, but he had never been born again, He was moral, but he had not yet seen the need for grace. He had a thousand good qualities, but had never laid hold on him who came to give abundant life.

Yet, here he is, kneeling at the feet of him who is a specialist in the realm of life. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Jesus is telling him the way out of his lack. He makes it plain: "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, --and come, take up the cross and follow me."

What is the response? --Gladness, that the way is now plain? Not at all --"He went away."

This brings us to the reason for his lack. He lacked life because he lacked a willingness to pay the price for life. Jesus read his heart; he knew what stood in his way. He knows what stands in your way and mine. It may be a trifle; it may be something very worthwhile. Yet, whatever it is, if it keeps us from saying "yes" to Jesus Christ, then it has left us lacking. The rich young ruler wanted to be a Christian; yet, he did not want to be one intensely enough to pay the price. Therefore, "He went away." This side of the gospel is often ignored --the cost of becoming a Christian. The "freeness" of the gospel is advanced, while the cost is avoided.

This side of the teaching of Jesus is not so popular. Jesus taught that becoming a Christian is a costly thing, "Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). If it were not for the cost and the cross of following Christ, more people would be following. So, there is the costly side, as well as the free side of the gospel --lest anyone be disillusioned. There are some aspects in which it is *better* to be a Christian --but *harder*. If you're not finding it hard to be a Christian, then you're probably not taking your Christianity very seriously. You're not "taking up your cross."

This man did not become a disciple. Instead of receiving life, "He went away." Where did he go? What did he gain by going away? I think we all know that eventually, he died (everybody does), losing, of course, his power, his position, and his possessions like we all do. Yet, presumably if he kept to his course, he also lost Christ. The Christ who yearned for him, now yearns for you and me. The Christ who invited him, now invites you. Your response to the invitation remains yet to be written. What answer will you make? Will you just go away from Christ? And if you go away, where will you go? The Psalmist wrote, "To whom shall we go but unto Thee? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

There is an old gospel song that says, "Where could I go? Oh, where could I go --needing a refuge for my soul? Needing a friend to help me in the end --where could I go but to the Lord? That is the main question that leads to life --that is, leads to a "good life." Where could I go --but, to the Lord?

"I'd rather have Jesus." Jesus is light, Jesus is truth, Jesus is love, Jesus, is kindness, Jesus is grace, Jesus is humility, Jesus is forgiveness, Jesus is everything I need. Don't reduce Jesus to an "imaginary friend!"