

## Achy Breaky Heart

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Luke 18:18-23

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The words of a wealthy man came to mind this past week while I was at Annual Conference in Pittsburg. This man said something that I think echoes in the hearts of many from time to time. I know I spoke them once, and perhaps you have as well. Like this wealthy man, many of us wonder “What should I do to inherit eternal life”.

The story of this wealthy religious man is found in Luke chapter 18. *Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: “Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>19</sup> “Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “Only God is truly good.<sup>20</sup> But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.’”<sup>21</sup> The man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”<sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard his answer, he said, “There is still one thing you haven’t done. Sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”<sup>23</sup> But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very rich.*<sup>1</sup> (Luke 18:18-23)

Something was persistently nagging this man. Each day he felt an emptiness and a thirst. Yet nothing he did seemed to work. The void could not be filled; the thirst could not be quenched. Oh he tried though. He spent years going to church, being a good son, being a good husband, and being a good citizen. But at the end of the day, when his head rested upon his pillow, that emptiness still remained. In spite of all that he had done, he still had that achy, breaky heart.

We want to cheer when he finally comes to Jesus. We know that in Jesus he will find rest for the ache within his heart. Can you hear it? Can you hear the longing in his question? “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” But what Jesus says at first seems a bit odd. He reminds this man of God’s commands, as if to say “You’re the religious leader. You should know this answer”. In response the man cries out, “That’s the whole point Jesus. I keep going to church. I try to be a good

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<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Lk 18:18-27). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

husband. I try to be a good citizen. I do all that I can to please others. And yet I still feel empty inside. I do all of this and yet I feel like God is miles away from me. I don't know what to do". Hearing the desperation in this man's heart, what Jesus says next might seem judgment, but it wasn't. Jesus spoke these words in love. Jesus discerns that the love of money has come between this man and God, in spite of his exemplary life, and in spite of all his religious practices.

You'd think this man would be thankful. After all, the reason for his heart ache has finally been answered. You expect him to say, "That's all? The nagging feeling within me is because I hold on too tightly to my money instead of God?" You'd think he'd been grateful. But our cheers turn to sorrow when we realize that this religious leader was not going to let go of the one thing that stood between himself and God.

The issue is not money, don't misunderstand this. It was not possessing riches that stood between this man and God, but *being possessed* by riches and *trusting* them instead of God. His wealth gave this man a false sense of success and security, which is why Jesus spoke such convicting words.

Most of the time people speak poorly about this religious leader. But I want to point out that he did at least one thing right. He knew that something was wrong in his relationship with God. He had the sense that there was something more he needed to do to be at peace with God. Granted, he wasn't too happy with the answer, but at least he went looking. And that's what I think you and I have in common with this man. The fact that we are here today in church is a clear indication that we are asking the very same question. But I wonder how we might respond to the answer Jesus gives us. See, ask Jesus the same question and His answer will not be easy. As He looks at the ache in your heart, He will name it. He will reveal what stands between you and God. The lesson of this religious leader is a warning to everyone who wants to be a Christian. It will involve changes in your values and upset your lifestyle.

There is a lot of talk now days about who is a Christian and what it means to be a Christian. And I totally agree that anyone, no matter what kind of life they live, can find salvation through Jesus Christ. However, something in this encounter between Jesus and the Religious leader tells me that a person needs to do more than simply come to Christ. I believe Jesus is still beckoning us to become both a Believer and a Disciple.

To become a Christian a person needs to realize that "It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle" than it is for someone to be righteous enough to enter the Kingdom of God. God is the one who provides our righteousness through Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to understand that Jesus made this sacrifice. But to become a disciple, as demonstrated in this story, a person needs to be prepared to let go of the things that stand between them and God. To become a Disciple, or a follower of Christ, we must make a sacrifice. We must give up the things in our life that do not belong. We must stop certain habits, give up certain practices, change certain attitudes, and sacrifice our worldly nature in order to walk along side Jesus as one of His disciples. But see, so many of us won't. So many of us have the same problem this religious man had. We have trouble letting go of the things in this world.

For this religious leader, it was money. But truthfully, it could be anything. It could be many things. Whatever it is, you have that achy, breaky, heart because you're holding on to something that has come between you and God. And don't think you're immune simply because you've spent your whole life in church. Being religious does not make someone a Disciple of Christ. And, just because you've let go of one thing doesn't mean Jesus won't reveal something else a little while later. The closer you draw to God, the more of the world is revealed in us.

You're here today probably just as desperate as this man was. Something's wrong in your life, and you just don't know what it is. Even after church you go home just as thirsty as you were when you came. My friend, something stands between you and God. And if you will let Him, Jesus is prepared to show you what that is. I just hope you won't make the same choice this man did; to walk away sad because he chose to hold on to that one thing rather than take hold of God.