

Discipleship With the Rich and Famous

Lesson #8 for February 22, 2014

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Genesis 13:5-6; John 3:1-15; Luke 19:1-10; Mark 4:18-19; Matthew 19:16-26.

1. This lesson is about the challenges of dealing with the rich and the famous. Are we afraid to try to share the gospel with the wealthy and famous? There were obviously many wealthy and famous people of God in the Old Testament. Think of Abraham, Lot, Job, Joseph, David, Solomon, and probably Daniel. How did they become wealthy? We expect most, if not all, of these men to be in heaven. So, why is wealth considered to be such a challenge when it comes to salvation? Is it because of what Jesus said in Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; and Luke 18:25 that “it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.” (*GNB*)
2. Who are the rich and famous to whom we should be witnessing in our day?
3. Read Deuteronomy 8:17-18. Does God intend for at least some of us to be financially well off? (The Pharisees?) But, there are also stories of individuals who made very bad use of their wealth in evil ways. Consider the case of Nebuchadnezzar. “Look how great Babylon is! I built it as my capital city to display my power and might, my glory and majesty.” (Daniel 4:30, *GNB*) He spent the next seven years in the wild living like an animal; he was insane during that time. Did Nebuchadnezzar ever learn his lesson? (Daniel 4:34-37)
4. Read John 3:1-15. Nicodemus had been impressed by what he heard from Jesus and especially by His cleansing of the temple. (See John 2:13-25; *DA* 168.1.) Nicodemus himself had been embarrassed and disappointed by what was going on in the temple. Nicodemus could not fully understand the power in the life of Jesus. He wanted to meet with Jesus to try to understand Him better. But, he realized that if he approached Jesus openly, there was a good chance that he would be despised by his peers among the Pharisees and other members of the Sanhedrin. So, he sought out Jesus at night in secret. He did not choose to follow Jesus openly even then; but, he kept his eyes and ears open. At their meeting, he could not quite understand what Jesus was asking of him.
5. However, he did use his logic, his power, and his influence on several occasions to thwart the Sanhedrin from taking action against Jesus. Finally, when Jesus was dead, he personally—with the help of Joseph of Arimathea and John the disciple—took down the body of Jesus and buried it with expensive spices which he himself provided. At that point, Nicodemus had become fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah; then he threw his lot in with the disciples. What convinced Nicodemus to believe in Jesus at that first encounter?

After the Lord’s ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus.

Nicodemus related to John the story of that interview, and by his pen it was recorded for the instruction of millions. The truths there taught are as

important today as they were on that solemn night in the shadowy mountain, when the Jewish ruler came to learn the way of life from the lowly Teacher of Galilee. (*The Desire of Ages* 177.1,2)

6. Read Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 5:27-32; and 19:1-10. Approximately one week before His crucifixion, Jesus passed through Jericho with a large crowd heading for Jerusalem and the Passover. Many in the crowd were excited because they believed that Jesus would become the new king of Israel. Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho, had heard the preaching of John the Baptist just across the Jordan River and knew about the preaching and teaching of Jesus. He was excited to learn that Jesus had accepted Matthew, a former tax collector, as one of His disciples. (*DA* 552-556)
7. Tax collectors were a very despised group among the Jews. They were regarded as traitors by the Jews since they worked for the Roman government. And unfortunately, many of them extracted more in taxes than they really needed to and pocketed the extra money. Thus, they were not only traitors but also thieving traitors.
8. But, Jesus recognized that they also needed salvation. Zacchaeus had already tried to mend his ways and return the money that he had taken unfairly. But, that was looked on as very unwelcomed behavior by his fellow tax collectors and even brought suspicion from those whom he had previously robbed. When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to Jericho on His way to Jerusalem, he had to see Him. Because Zacchaeus was short in stature, he ran ahead and climbed into that sycamore tree awaiting the passing of Jesus. What a surprise it was to him when Jesus stopped beneath that tree and said, "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today." (Luke 19:5, *GNB*) While the self-righteous Pharisees and priests—many of whom lived in Jericho—sneered and scowled, salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus. (The Essene community lived near Jericho.)
9. So, what are the hazards of being wealthy? It has been said that, "We don't own our things; our things own us." In some parts of the world, there is such a drive to keep up with the Joneses that people "Spend money they don't have, for things they don't need, in order to impress people they don't like." To the wealthy money quickly becomes a kind of idol. Someone once said, "Money isn't everything, but it is way ahead of whatever is in second place!" Money represents time and effort. It represents a part of our lives. And how we use it clearly represents what is most important to us.
10. Read 1 Timothy 6:10; Mark 4:18-19; 8:36; Luke 1:51-53; 6:22-25; and 16:13. Is it clear to each of us why the love of money is the root of all evil? Is that an overstatement of the truth? Is that true in our lives? How can we make sure that it does not ruin us?
11. Read Matthew 19:16-26; **Mark 10:17-31**; and Luke 10:18-30. This rich young man saw the mothers bringing their children to Jesus, and he was impressed. He wished for himself the same blessing that the children were receiving. As Jesus was leaving the area, he ran after Him in order to speak to Him. (Mark 10:13-17) He thought that he had done virtually everything necessary to earn salvation. (Wouldn't Saul/Paul have done and said the same in his early days?) And he wondered if this new Rabbi perhaps had one more thing that he could do to make certain of his place in the kingdom.

Jesus saw in this ruler just the help He needed if the young man would become a co-laborer with Him in the work of salvation. If he would place himself under Christ's guidance, he would be a power for good. In a marked degree the ruler could have represented Christ; for he possessed qualifications, which, if he were united with the Saviour, would enable him to become a divine force among men. Christ, seeing into his character, loved

him. Love for Christ was awakening in the ruler's heart; for love begets love. Jesus longed to see him a co-worker with Him. He longed to make him like Himself, a mirror in which the likeness of God would be reflected. He longed to develop the excellence of his character, and sanctify it to the Master's use. If the ruler had then given himself to Christ, he would have grown in the atmosphere of His presence. If he had made this choice, how different would have been his future! (*The Desire of Ages* 519.3) [Bold type added.]

12. Don't you think Judas was really excited to see this rich young man come to Jesus? What did the other disciples think? This rich young man was not the first wealthy person to be attracted to Jesus. We have already talked about Nicodemus and also about the women who supported Jesus and His disciples with their means. (Luke 8:1-3)
13. But, Jesus recognized that this young man had a plague spot in his character. His wealth was his idol. So, Jesus outlined a three-step process that the young man needed to follow: 1) He needed to sell his possessions; 2) He needed to furnish the poverty-stricken with those means; and 3) He needed to follow Jesus. Jesus had not asked Nicodemus to do that. He had not asked His disciples to do that. We are not aware that Jesus had asked anyone else to do that. Why did He ask such a thing of this young man? Jesus recognized that his love of self represented by his love of money and all that it could buy for him needed to be replaced by love for God. But, unfortunately, the young man was not prepared to make that sacrifice, at least, not then; and we do not have information about any later change in commitment.

How many have come to Christ, ready to cast their interests in with his, and, like the rich young ruler, earnestly desiring to inherit eternal life! But when the cost is presented to them,—when they are told that they must forsake all, houses and lands, wife and children, and count not their lives dear unto themselves,—they go away sorrowful. They want the treasures of heaven, and the life that measures with the life of God, but they are not willing to give up their earthly treasures. They are not willing to surrender all to obtain the crown of life. (*Review and Herald*, April 19, 1898 par. 14)

Christ made the only terms which could place the ruler where he would perfect a Christian character. His words were words of wisdom, though they appeared severe and exacting. In accepting and obeying them was the ruler's only hope of salvation. His exalted position and his possessions were exerting a subtle influence for evil upon his character. If cherished, they would supplant God in his affections. To keep back little or much from God was to retain that which would lessen his moral strength and efficiency; for if the things of this world are cherished, however uncertain and unworthy they may be, they will become all-absorbing. (*The Desire of Ages* 520.2)

14. How many of us have been presented with this same challenge? Would Adventists today have turned this man away? And what are we doing to help those who have the same problem that this young man had? Seventh-day Adventists have tended to be quite successful in evangelizing the poor, the needy, and the social outcasts. But, why have we been so unsuccessful at reaching out to the wealthy, the influential, and the famous? What do we have to offer them? As recorded in Acts 6:7 and Acts 15:5, what happened to some of the rich?

Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor; should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless, and they do little to open the eyes of those, who, blinded and

dazed by the glitter of earthly glory, have lost eternity out of their reckoning. Thousands of wealthy men have gone to their graves unwarned. But indifferent as they may appear, many among the rich are soul-burdened. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." He that says to fine gold, "Thou art my confidence," has "denied the God that is above." "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever)." Ecclesiastes 5:10; Job 31:24, 28; Psalm 49:7, 8.

Riches and worldly honor cannot satisfy the soul. Many among the rich are longing for some divine assurance, some spiritual hope. Many long for something that will bring to an end the monotony of their aimless lives. Many in official life feel their need of something which they have not. Few among them go to church; for they feel that they receive little benefit. The teaching they hear does not touch the heart. Shall we make no personal appeal to them? (*The Ministry of Healing* 210.1,2)

15. There is considerable evidence that wealthy believers played a very important role in sustaining the early Christian church. Some of them, like Nicodemus, became poor as they supported the work of the church. Will there be men and women who do that during the latter rain just as some did it during the early rain? Does the church need their money? Does God need their money?
16. Those of us who live in the wealthier countries of Europe, Japan, North America, and Australia/New Zealand and who have not had the privilege of living or working in one of the more underdeveloped countries may not realize that people in those societies consider all of us to be wealthy. Wealth is a relative term.
17. So, what approach should we take to the wealthy and famous in our day? It may not be possible for us to invite ourselves to their homes as Jesus did in the case of Zacchaeus! And it may be difficult for us even to have an opportunity to speak to them. Is this one reason why we have our health message and our health ministry? Absolutely! If we are doing our best to reach everyone around us, do you think God will bring us into contact with the people that we could influence?
18. When we pay a faithful tithe to the church, shouldn't that be an indication that as far as possible we will spend the rest of our money carefully in promoting God's work?
19. Why is money such a taboo subject to talk about? Do we know the financial and economic status of the members of our Sabbath school class? Or, our church? Do we know how to reach out to those who may be hurting financially? Have we done that in the past? Is that something that God expects us to do?
20. In what ways can we also reach out to those who are wealthy and famous? Isn't it time for those of us in the Seventh-day Adventist Church to develop new ways to reach out to them? What new ways can you suggest?

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