

Can We Leave It All Behind?

One of the hardest things I ever had to do was to move from Mobile, Alabama to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. I had to leave everyone that I knew and the familiarity of the streets in my neighborhood. I had to leave the school where I had been Junior Class President, President of the National Honor Society, and President of the Chorus. I was leaving my job, my home, and my girlfriends. To be honest I didn't leave because of Jesus or the good news in fact I don't believe I was familiar with this passage of scripture although I did go to church. But I received many times over what I left behind because I believe God wanted me here in Pennsylvania.

There was another sort of leaving that took place when I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal savior and stopped some of the behavior that I had been doing. Again I left behind some friends; some language, some jokes, and some activities. But all of them were replaced by many more friends, a new way of talking, better jokes, and activities that were just as stimulating and less dangerous.

In the scripture lesson today a man is encouraged by Jesus to sell everything that he has accumulated and give the money to the poor, "Then you will have treasure in heaven." Jesus says. Then after doing that he is to come and follow Jesus. It is a shame that this man was not able to do what Jesus asked of him because he had the potential to be one Jesus' greatest disciples. You might not agree with me on this but, there is biblical evidence that suggests that the great names of the bible all had to leave behind everything in order to achieve that greatness. Can you think of someone in the Bible that had to leave everything in order to do what God what wanted them to do. Abraham, Adam and Eve, Noah, Ruth, Esther, and in the New Testament all of the disciples and the apostle Paul.

Our nation's history has examples of what can happen when people are willing to sacrifice everything for a cause. There really is no better example of what can happen when people like the leaders of the American Revolution leave everything behind, home, family, and possessions and fight to obtain something that had never seen before. Because of their efforts we are here today living in a country that is free.

What could have happened for that rich young man if he had been able to give it all up to follow Jesus? How might his life have been different? Could he have been like Peter or Paul? Could he have been the first Bishop of Jerusalem like James or been the last living disciple like John? We don't know what kind of a life he left behind because what was first in his life could not become the last. We do know that at this point in his story, he chose treasure on earth instead of treasure in heaven. Was he lost for all eternity? I like to hope that eventually the rich man realized his mistake and repented.

As I told the children, it's not how good we are, or how much we have that saves us---the young man in the scripture lesson had both good behavior and many possessions—it is our faith in Jesus that will take us to eternity. The disciples heard Jesus say, "Come and follow me," and they had the faith to do just that. Their lives were changed and their lives changed the world. The man heard Jesus say, "Come follow me," and he chose not to because he couldn't bear to lose what he had and didn't believe that God would give him even more.

What about us who have heard the passage today? Have we given up everything so that we could follow Jesus or are we still trying to hold onto something of this world? Now that we know that whatever we sacrifice will be restored to us times 100 how can we value anything above Jesus and the Gospel? Look at what it says in the epistle to the Hebrews chapter 4 verses 12 through 16 ¹² For

the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any doubleedged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet he did not sin.

16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb 4:12-16 NIV)

I'd like everyone to bow their heads and close their eyes. If you are willing to rededicate your life to Christ today would you just raise your hand? Keeping your eyes closed let us pray: Dear gracious and loving God, you proved your love for us by sending us your Son to save us. Help us now in this moment to accept this gift and allow Jesus to indeed become our most valued possession. Let your Word alive and active search our inner most being so that whatever we value above Jesus can be moved to last place that Jesus may be first. This we ask in His most precious name Amen.