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WHAT LACK I YET?

– MARCH 10, MARK 10:17-27. (MATT. 19:16-30; LUKE 18:18-30). –

**Golden Text – "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."
– Matt. 6:33.**

WE have in this lesson an illustration of the great difficulty of getting a full, fair view of one's self. Hence the value of every applied test of character. These tests open our eyes to our real condition of heart as we could not otherwise realize them. Sometimes the test comes in the shape of a searching question which leads the thoughtful to a close scanning of his ways – as, for instance, the Lord's repeated question to Peter – "Lovest thou me?" Sometimes it is a direct showing of the line of duty through difficulties and dangers from which the flesh shrinks; and sometimes it comes in tempests and storms of persecution which prove the heart's loyalty to God and its powers of endurance. But in whatever shape the tests of character are applied to us we have reason to be thankful for their good office in the better acquainting us with our own hearts.

This young man who came to Jesus inquiring, What lack I yet? was, evidently, one who was in many respects very exemplary. From his youth up he had carefully observed the divine law, and had sought scrupulously to fashion his character in conformity to its precepts. And [R1774 : page 48] now he had heard the teachings of the Galilean claimant to the Messiahship and had observed the testimony of his miracle – the power of God witnessing to the truth of his claims. And, notwithstanding the persecuting spirit of the rulers and teachers in Israel against the Lord and all who believed in the validity of his claims, he came to him openly, saluted him with that reverence due to so great a teacher, and sincerely inquired what he should do to inherit eternal life.

The inquiry, especially under these circumstances, indicated most commendable candor, thoughtful consideration, and realization

that by the deeds of the law no flesh had yet gained the life it promised for obedience, and faith in the new and wonderful teacher to show him more perfectly the way of life. All of these were most promising indications of discipleship. "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him." A life of moral purity, sincerity, thoughtfulness and truth had left no marks of degradation but had given to the countenance that frankness and nobility which always accompanies a transparent character.

The Lord's reference to the law brought the quick response, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" He was anxious for a perfect conformity to the will of God; and so anxious that he manifested his willingness to bear reproach for it in thus coming to Jesus. That was a long step in the direction of full consecration to God. His heart was very nearly right; but still there was a lack; his attitude, although he did not realize it, was not that of entire consecration to the will of God; and in answer to his sincere inquiry the Lord sought to show him wherein he lacked, what was the weak spot in his character.

This he did by applying a test which instantly discovered to him the fact that he loved self more than either God or his neighbor; consequently that he had failed to keep the law in those two important principles upon which hang all the law and the prophets – viz., supreme love to God, which manifests itself in singleness of purpose to do his will and please him; and love to the neighbor as to self, which in the present age implies self-sacrifice and daily cross-bearing in imitation of Christ.

"And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions." No doubt the heart of Jesus was sad also when he saw the blight of selfishness and self-will attacking that promising half-blown rose of character. A crisis had come in the young man's life which he failed to pass successfully, and thenceforth the beauty of character so far attained must surely decline. We hear nothing of his subsequent conversion, but in all probability he remained in

sympathy with the Jewish teachers and partook more and more of their spirit of opposition to Christ and his teaching.

"And Jesus...saith unto his disciples,...How [R1775 : page 48] hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God!" He had been showing the way into the Kingdom – the way, not for this young man only, but for every man who would lay up the treasure of such a hope. Every aspirant to the Kingdom must travel this narrow way of sacrifice, and with one motive of supreme love to God and desire to bless his neighbor as himself. He must go, and sell all that he has and give to the poor, and take up his cross daily and follow Christ. The simple significance of this to all of us is a life of loving devotion to the good of others, along the lines of God's plan and prompted primarily by love to him. "Go, sell *all that thou hast*" – all thy possessions, all thy time, all thy reputation, all that hitherto has been dear to thee; and then, having dropped all the weights of earthly ambition, take up thy cross and follow Christ; for the labor of love and sacrifice for others will not bring its due reward of gratitude in this age, but, on the contrary, it will bring ingratitude and even persecution, as it did to our Master. But, no matter, "the servant is not above his lord:" like the apostles who followed closely in his footsteps, we should be able to say, "Being reviled, we bless; being defamed, we entreat; being persecuted, we suffer it."

It should be considered also that to follow Christ is not to make unwise disposition of our possessions and talents, but, as wise and faithful stewards, to use them to the best possible advantage in his service. To feed the poor would not necessarily mean to feed the hungry with the bread that perisheth, but first, rather, to feed the spiritually hungry with the bread of life. In a word, it signifies to spend self for the highest good of others, not looking for any present reward, except a sense of the Master's approval.

The Lord indicates that though it is very difficult for the rich to enter into the Kingdom, it is not impossible. With men, it might seem

impossible that a man could have riches and use them conscientiously; – be a sacrificer. Riches of any kind – whether of money, or reputation, or friends, or anything upon which the heart has been set, form such barriers to the formation of truly noble characters – after God's own heart – that the natural man, unaided by divine grace, cannot surmount them. But, nevertheless, however insufficient we may feel in ourselves, we need only to remember that "our sufficiency is of God:" it is

" When thy weakness leaneth
On his might, all seems light."

No matter how heavy may seem the cross, how severe the trial, or how weak we feel in consideration of it, if we simply and sincerely surrender ourselves to God, he will carry us through: with him, with his grace and guidance, it is possible for the weakest and the most severely tempted and tried to make their calling and election sure. He will infuse courage into fainting souls; he will apply the balm of his consolation to wounded hearts; he will grant wisdom to him that asketh it; and he will furnish the armor of God to every true soldier of the cross. O blessed promise! With God it is possible to enable even those tempted with the subtle influences of riches of any kind to run the race of self-sacrifice with diligence and patience to the end.

Then let the sincere inquiry of every child of God be, "What lack I yet?" Surely there is none so perfect that he lacks nothing. And when in answer to our inquiring prayer the Lord applies some test to prove our standing before him, let us bravely determine that by his grace we will not draw back; for it is written, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him;" and again, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." – Heb. 10:38; Luke 9:62.

"You cannot manufacture a conscience out of expediency, the voice of conscience says not. It is better not to do so; but – Thou shalt not."

"It is the crushed olive that yields the oil, the pressed grape that gives forth the wine; and it was the smitten rock that gave the people water. So it is the broken, contrite heart that is most rich in holiness and most fragrant in grace."

"We have two ears and but one tongue, that we may hear much and talk little."

"We are in hot haste to set the world right and to order all its affairs. The Lord hath the leisure of conscious power and unerring wisdom, and it is well for us to learn to wait."
