

What are your priorities?

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Preacher: Callum Macdonald

[0 : 00] I'd like us this evening to turn for a short while to the passage read in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10.

And we can read again at verse 21. And Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, You lack one thing.

Go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.

Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. He went away sorrowful.

When we look at the Scriptures, especially in the Gospels, we read of the many encounters that are recorded for us between a whole host of different people and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 16] And when we are familiar with these encounters, we realize that not every encounter with Christ proved to be an encounter that was profitable in the experience of those that met with him.

Now that might surprise you. Maybe I'm not putting it in the right way. Or I would hope that any encounter with Christ would be a profitable one.

But it doesn't necessarily follow. Because a person can encounter Christ in different ways. And you can encounter Christ and his people today.

I'm sure if you meet somebody who's a professing Christian, there's a sense in which you're meeting Christ. And if you're a Christian, that's a good encounter.

How often have I heard that being said by Christian people? They've gone to town perhaps, gone to Stornoway, and they met a Christian there.

[2 : 31] And it's gladdened their heart. Whatever their mission was, whatever their purpose in going there was, it was of secondary importance because of the benefit derived from meeting somebody that was a fellow Christian.

It can happen anywhere. It can happen in the workplace. It can happen just as you're going about your normal everyday business.

And when Christ speaks to you through somebody who is Christ's, it's an encounter with Christ.

And yet there are people who meet Christians and they do not profit from it.

They do not benefit from it. In fact, if anything, these people sometimes would speak of it as a counterproductive encounter.

It might stimulate ire, stimulate anger, stimulate opposition, because it may be that they spoke, these Christians spoke, to the person who's not a Christian of their souls.

[3 : 47] Preciousness. Or encourage them to be more attentive on God's house. Maybe there are people who are irregular in attending God's in the church.

And all you have to say to a person like that is, why don't we see more of you? And sometimes there's a bad reaction to that. Now this person met with Christ.

And it's an important encounter because each gospel writer, well, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this encounter for us.

So it must be of some significance. But it's a sad encounter because it reminds us of the way some people are, despite their encounter in Christ, face to face, something that you would expect to be productive, something that you would expect to be to their advantage.

We read that this person went away disheartened. Disheartened by what Christ had to say to him.

[5 : 02] And we need to find out what it was that Christ said to him that caused him such grief.

Someone, I think, here is before us who is building upon a false foundation.

And Christ is someone who has come to him and reminded him of what needs to be true before the foundation is suitable for building on.

It's a heartbreaking picture of somebody who... And you know this, over the generations there have been people and they have been motivated to come to church, to come to the Bible, to come to God's people, even to come to Christ in prayer.

And what they've heard has not pleased them. What they've been told has not been something they've wanted to hear.

And when that happens, it's a very sad outcome. If anybody comes looking for something from Christ and they go away empty-handed, then something's not quite right.

[6 : 39] When I was looking at this, I was trying to think of ways to handle it. And all I'm going to do is work my way through it with you. Just ask a few questions. And with this sort of background to it, if you like, remind ourselves of this, the way that many of us place import on the wrong things.

We look at certain times as if one thing in particular is of the utmost import.

And if that one thing fails, our whole life crumbles. Our whole demeanour changes.

Our whole purpose for living has changed dramatically. You know, I'm sure every one of you have been looking at the news bulletins in recent times.

And you've seen the outcome, for example, of floods, of raging fire, most recently volcanic eruptions.

[8 : 04] People have been driven from their homes and they've been forced to leave all their property, all their possessions behind. And you see them, first of all, react to the situation that they're in.

And the first response, perhaps, is thankfulness that they've been taken out of the danger. Caused by the event that they're fleeing from, whether it's fire or flood or whatever.

And it's an instinct, and it's only right that a person would be thankful that they're spared, that they've not lost their lives. And then hard on the heels of that, there is the realisation that although they've been spared, they've lost everything.

That's what they say. They've lost everything. And you can sympathise, you can understand, because, well, they've lost their homes.

They've lost their property. They've lost everything that was of value to them. That word, everything, becomes the key word.

[9 : 25] But they haven't lost everything. They've retained their life. But they're thinking at times as if everything was caught up in things.

Whatever these things are, my everything was in my property. My life's invested energy was caught up in all these things.

And you can understand that. You can sympathise with them. You can appreciate what they're saying. But the perspective is an interesting one for all that, because there's more to our life than just things, whatever these things are.

However valuable they are to us, however precious they are to us, as things, they can be replaced with other things.

Sometimes, anyway. Although there's some things that cannot be reinvented. I remembered when I was looking at this, a story told about Matthew Henry.

[10 : 40] Some of you will know the name of Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry was a preacher of the gospel from many years ago. I've told the story a few times, because I think it's an interesting story which tells us something about perspective.

Matthew Henry was, as well as being a commentator, and a famous commentator, whose commentaries filled many a bookshelf. He was a preacher. And on occasion, I think he was preaching somewhere away from his home.

And he was, in those days, he was on horseback, going to wherever it was. Going to or coming back, I'm not sure. It doesn't matter. And as he traveled, he encountered robbers.

I don't know if there were one or many, but he was stopped. And the story is told by himself and is recorded in his diary.

And this is how he put it. Let me be thankful because I was never robbed before. Let me be thankful because they took my purse.

[11 : 56] They did not take my life. Let me be thankful because they took my all. It was not much. Let me be thankful because it was I who was robbed and not I that did the robbing.

It's all a matter of perspective, is it not? Yet it's so difficult for us, humanly speaking, to put ourselves in such a position where we can deal with circumstances in that way.

And here was this person. And he came to Jesus. And he expected Jesus to deal with him in a way that whatever it was that brought him to Jesus in the first place would be responded to in a way that he was content to have it responded to.

In a way that he was content to have it, have Jesus' response in his favor. We need to know what matters to us.

I think that's perhaps the main point of this sermon. We need to know what matters. And this man, we know that he was rich and we know that he had great wealth, but the wealth is not the problem.

[13:28] And I think that's where we get sidetracked. Read the story. It's given the title of the rich young man. The focus is on the richness of this man, the wealth of this man, his attitude to the wealth, but not really.

I think we're distracted by that thought. Because the man could easily have been poor and the poverty could have been a problem.

There's a book in the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs, and it speaks of a man there called Eger. And this is what he said, Give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

What was true about this man was, he had wealth. He was not poor, but he had no life.

[14:36] He was not spiritually in tune with God. I want us to consider this man from that perspective.

The first thing that you can say about him, I'm sorry, I always get a row at home because my introductions are so long. Just ignore the introduction.

Well, I don't want you to ignore it, but pretend it wasn't as long. Look at the main part of it. You could safely argue that this man had religion.

Could you not? This man had religion. According to himself, he knew the commandments and he kept them.

That's his own opinion. He knew the commandments and he kept them. This reality stands out.

[15:34] Like many others, his religion was far from enough. Now, that's strange. You would expect religious people to be good people.

You would expect religious people to be right with God. You would expect religious people to have all it takes to be content with religion that they had.

And the reality for this man is that whatever the religion he had, and he is religious, he knew the commandments, he kept the commandments according to himself.

And yet, he did not know God. He did not know God. How can I say that? How can I be as bold and suggest that this man did not know God?

Well, if we remember the teachings of the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Paul tells us something. And he tells us very plainly that there are certain circumstances where we can determine that a man is without God and without Christ and without hope.

[16:54] That's the order that Paul uses. And it is possible to come to this and only this conclusion concerning this man by reflecting on the place that God had in his life.

And the fact is, as far as this man was concerned, God was not first in this man's life. Something else had been given the priority.

The suggestion is that it was wealth. But it could be anything. It could be anyone. And if anything or anyone takes the place of God in our life, then we are not right with God.

We are not right with Christ. We are not in possession of the hope of the gospel. Now, that is perhaps where perspective comes in.

We read that this man had much. But we read also into what he had, that he lacked something.

[18:15] So if he lacked something, he did not have all. If you have everything, there is nothing lacking. Surely that is common sense.

If you have everything, then you lack nothing. If you don't have everything, you lack something. And this man lacked something.

How can I say that? Well, he came to Christ looking for something. because he didn't have it. Because he had this burning question that he had to ask Christ.

What have I got to do to inherit eternal life? He didn't have eternal life. It was something that he believed that he needed to come into possession of in the future.

He didn't have it there and then. Now, this is the thing that Christians need to understand. That eternal life is not something that you come into possession of in the future.

[19 : 21] The person who has come to faith in Jesus Christ at that very moment comes into possession of eternal life. They are not waiting to come into possession of something.

They already have. We talked about it earlier just a few moments before we came in here. Someone was asking the question about the peace of the believer or the rest of the believer. And you may not have it in the fullness of what it entails because the fullness of it awaits the believer in the promise that is to be realized when the believer comes into the into the heaven that is prepared by Christ into the fullness of the interaction that occurs within that heaven into the fullness of being in the company of the completed saints of God who are in the presence of their saviour engaged in an act of worship which will never end.

They don't have that yet but they have a promise concerning it that it will be theirs. This man was looking for something and he didn't even have a foretaste of it.

There was something in him that made him uneasy. Now I know that there are some of the Lord's people and this is a question that burns within them.

[21 : 01] There are times when they feel themselves asking the question about whether they have eternal life or not.

Whether they are truly the Lord's or not. And they involve themselves in a violent introspection where they are searching in the wrong places for the confirmation that they are seeking to help them along and to make them believe that what they have is real and what they have is genuine and what they have is marking them out as the Lord's people.

What the Apostle John says to them is that he that has the Son has life. And it is the person without the Son that doesn't have life.

And the only way you can have the Son is by putting your trust in the Son. Jesus Christ as God's Son as he has revealed to you in the Gospel you put your trust in him and in putting your trust in him and having faith in him as the one who has finished God's work in this world there you have him in possession.

and there you have the certainty that what he has promised to all who are his will become yours in fullness. This man did not have that confidence.

[22 : 32] This man did not have that certainty which is what made him come to Christ with this question and which was what made Christ respond to him in the way that did not appeal to him.

you have all heard of the I think it is Augustinian description of a person without Christ.

The person without Christ is someone who has a God shaped void in his heart that he needs to fill and only God can shape that void.

I know that when our children were little we bought them this it wasn't a game as such it was a square shape of wood and it had different shapes inside the square you had a star you had a circle you had different shapes and you would tilt the wooden thing upside down and all they had to do was put the right shape in the right hole and it was something to help them with their coordination help them with their hand-eye coordination whatever.

for the believer for any person who comes to Christ they need to discover for themselves that this Christ is everything this Christ must be everything it can't be Christ plus something it can't be Christ less than something he is Christ alone he is God's savior he is the only one that can meet the needs of a sinner in need of a savior because God has not supplied any other and when you come face to face with that Christ he is more or less saying to you well what you are looking for can only be found in me and Jesus tested this man that's what we are told good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life why do you call me good no one is good except

[24 : 53] God alone he listed the commandments and the man said I've done all that and Jesus said to him still you lack something you lack one thing Jesus knew who he had and that's the thing you have to remember I hope you do business with the Lord Jesus Christ on your own behalf and you do business with the Lord Jesus Christ by reading the Bible interacting with it thinking through what this word says to you you do business with Christ on your knees in prayer by articulating as best you can what your thoughts are in the light of what God's word is teaching you and you do business with the Lord until the Lord shows you your need of him and only him and when you do that you realize you begin to realize

I hope that Christ is indeed the person that you must have at the heart of your life some Christians I've heard say I've heard them say this and I believe that what they've said is honest and earnest that if you took everything away from them as long as they had Christ they wouldn't they could manage and some people who have actually said that have had that saying tested they've probably lost their health or their wealth or their family and yet those who were genuinely earnest about what they say because they had Christ they were able to suffer the loss of all things and that's what Christ is wanting this man to discover he's probing in an area where he needs to discover what he is most depending upon and maybe

Christ will do that with you when you do business with him maybe he'll show you you're saying to me this is what you want but let me show you what's really going on under the surface let me show you where your heart is let me show you where your instincts take you Paul argues that the chain that we mentioned where where we are without God without Christ we are without hope in the world and I think personally that it's the hardest thing if not impossible to live in the world without hope I don't think it is possible I don't think it is possible we use that expression hopelessness but I believe even in this situation where hopelessness seems to be the dominant experience that there is something even a crumb of hope sustaining the passion a sense in which maybe something will come on come along something better something different something will take away this the hope is there it's looking to a future where things will change things will get better things will be different but the problem with that kind of ideology or thinking is this that if the hope is not genuine that is the hope of the gospel then it will be proved to be a false hope it will prove itself to be something that although it sustained you in trial and difficulty it is something that is not really from the

God John Bunyan in the famous book Pilgrim's Progress he names his characters in a very visible way the names themselves they create in our minds the thought of what kind of person this person is and there was this man in Pilgrim's Progress called Vain Hope Vain Hope and there was another character called Ignorance and in the Pilgrim's Progress Vain Hope ferries Ignorance across the river and he arrives at the celestial city but when Vain Hope gets to the celestial city what happens is that according to

Bunyan's story he is bound in chains and carried from the gates of the celestial city and cast into a lost eternity a hope is necessary but Vain Hope is wrong this man when Christ dealt with him he probed in the area where this man discovered that for all his religiosity and for all of his beliefs that all things were right between himself and God Christ exposed something to him and that is that there was more than God sitting on the throne of his heart but there is only one person who can sit on that throne and that is God anything anyone sitting on that throne but God shows that the relationship with God is wrong and that's really I think the whole nub of the matter here this is what [31 : 39] Jesus is dealing with he's dealing with the problem of misplaced trust this man's attention was not on Christ the man thought money was the answer the disciples thought money was the problem because they're looking at this and their conclusion is well does that mean that the rich can't get into heaven that's you know this this must be the conclusion that they can arrive at but the man has a problem and the problem is this that he wants to be where God should be and he's not willing to relinquish that that's why he goes away disheartened he's not willing to surrender this place that he has and I suppose in many senses some people think that the problem today is we have wealth wealth no you hear a lot of people talk about our day and generation and they'll tell you the problem with our generation is that we have too much material wealth unlike a former generation they lived in poverty as if poverty is the answer and that's not really the case that's not really the case the thing is that

God must have his place and it's quite easy for a person who's poor to put something else between themselves and God instead of God and if that happens they can be poor and lost just as surely as you can be rich and lost if God does not have his place the writer Bob Gass you find his name sometimes in a UCB daily readings he describes this man's problem as his ego he says he was self-sufficient which is a very real danger to receive salvation you must declare you are bankrupt spiritually your cupboard is bare your reputation worthless and your options gone spiritually bankrupt bankrupt it's not the same as materially bankrupt in other words you have no credit with God many of us believe that we do we do this and we go there and God is sure to consider us well this man knew the commandments this one believed he could do the commandments he was spiritually bankrupt

God knew Christ knew that he needed to be introduced to his bankruptcy and when that happened he didn't like what he saw what does God need to do in your own experience that's a question for you what does God need to do for you tonight if you are out of Christ where must he take you to discover that where you are you are nowhere as far as God is concerned what is it that you put your trust in what is it that you must depend upon what is it that is the light of your life if not God what and if not God then God will say to you what he said to this man and when you hear what he has to say you too may well go away disheartened and sorrowful because of your great possession whatever it is may God ask you or help you to ask these questions so that you will have answers that will take you to the place where you must come to ensure that your salvation is certain by only being found in Christ may you bless to us these thoughts let us pray