

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

What About the Idols in Your Life?

Matthew 19:16-22

¹ What about the idols in your life? In ancient times people worshipped idols or images made to look like what they supposed God looked like. They were often statues made of wood, clay or metal.

The young man in our scripture today had idols of a different type. ²

In Matthew, chapter 19, verses 16 through 22 we read, Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”. “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” ^{1 3}

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be

¹ Matthew 19:16-19.

perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²

An idol in your life is what takes the place of the living God. Rather than worship God, some would worship an idol.

In our society, it’s whatever you have in your life that takes the place of God. It isn’t what you possess; it’s what possesses you that affects your spiritual relationships!

It’s also a question of attitude, not quantity. Greed affects poor people as well as the rich. This man’s idols are something we can relate to much more than carved images. ⁴

What kind of person was he? Was he like you? ⁵

² Matthew 19:20-22.

I. Who Was He?

Who was he? ⁶

In verse 16 ³ we discover that **he was very religious**. He had the right purpose. He wanted to do the right thing. He wanted eternal life. ⁷

Notice in verse 20 ⁴ **he was moral**. He wanted to do the right thing. He prided himself in obeying as least the legal demands of the laws the Lord had just quoted. Jesus never denied that this young man spoke the truth. ⁸

Verse 20 also points out that **he was young**. ⁹ He was filled with the enthusiasm of youth! Mark, chapter 10, verse 17 ⁵ has him running and kneeling. ¹⁰ But as we see in verses 18 through 20, ⁶ as with youth, he failed

³ vs. 16 - "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

⁴ vs. 20 - "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

⁵ Mark 10:17 - As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

⁶ Mark 10:18-20 - "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

to think things through. He had trouble with the implications of some of these commands. ¹¹

Verse 20 also shows that **he was sincere**. He knew he had a spiritual need. He wasn't happy or complacent with his spiritual life. He wanted to be more spiritual!

¹²

Verse 22 ⁷ tells us **he was rich**. To so many people this is the most desirable thing in life. But also, like so many, money and possessions just don't seem to satisfy life. ¹³

We also discover in Luke, chapter 18, verse 18 ⁸ that **he was a ruler**. Apparently, he knew and practiced the law enough to be recognized as a leader in the synagogue. So, in addition to being rich, he had popularity and prestige. ¹⁴

But the most important thing he had going for him we find in Mark. chapter 10, verse 21, **Jesus looked at him**

⁷ vs. 22 - When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

⁸ Luke 18:18 - A certain ruler asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said
Jesus loved him! At this point Lord Jesus was impressed with this bright, sincere, humble young man. The Lord wanted him as a disciple and told him what he needed to do to become one! ¹⁵

II. What Did He Want?

What did he want? ¹⁶ He wanted to do something to receive eternal life. He wanted the right thing but in the wrong way! He wanted eternal life but based on the Merit System. ¹⁷

What's the Merit System? Anyone who understands the military knows all about this system. It's a system of merits and demerits. If you behave and do enough good things, the system grants you merits; good points. You accumulate enough merits and you get benefits and, eventually, promotions.

But, there are also demerits. In the Army we called them “gigs”. They are the opposite of merits and bring you the opposite results. If you get in trouble or don't

behave in an acceptable manner, you get “gigs”. The results of accumulating enough of these are participation in “barracks parties”; you get the privilege of cleaning the dorm rooms. You might even wind up assisting the cooks with kitchen duty. Real fun!

Your life, hopefully, has a balance of having more merits than demerits. In the military, life becomes easier that way.

Most of the religions of the world are based on this Merit/Demerit System. If you do the right things God will be pleased and accept you. If you don't do it right you are not accepted. So you must learn what the right things are so you can comply. If you do it well enough you get in. If you don't, you don't! ¹⁸

What is God's way for you to receive eternal life? Fortunately for you, it's not the Merit System. ¹⁹

God's way is for you to receive eternal life as a free gift! Romans, chapter 6, verse 23, says, **For the wages**

of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. ²⁰ Again, in Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. ²¹

It's the cross that provides you eternal life, not your good behavior!

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Your desire to obey the Lord and live a righteous life comes as an expression of your gratitude for the cross! ²²

Your good life is a by product of heaven's promise, not an attempt to get there! Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 10, For we are God's workmanship, created in

Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ²³

As great as this young man appears to be, he was making a selfish request. Notice, during the whole conversation he was seeking something for himself! ²⁴

The Lord's answers were intended to steer his mind towards other people and away from himself. Look again at verses 18 and 19, **Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself." The Lord quoted the last six of the ten commandments. These are the ones dealing with relationships with other people. The Lord's command was to give money to the poor; to share your abundance with other people. God's way is always others oriented!** ²⁵ **If you think of others more than yourself, the blessing of God will start flowing!** ²⁶

III. What Did He Lack?

What did he lack? ²⁷ In verse 21 ⁹ **he lacked the desire to respond to the Lord's answer.** ²⁸ The word “go”, ¹⁰ in this verse in the original language, means to depart slowly or slink away; unnoticed. He was supposed to do this good thing without drawing attention to himself. ²⁹ The Lord was against giving to the poor for show. ¹¹ ³⁰

The requirement for being a disciple was to deny yourself. Matthew, chapter 16, verse 24, **if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** You are a hypocrite if you do things in the Lord's name just to draw attention for yourself! ³¹

Verse 21 continues with, **sell your possessions.** The thing that stands in the way of being complete in the

⁹ vs. 21 - Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

¹⁰ ὑπάγω.

¹¹ Matthew 6:1 - Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

sight of God is whatever you put in front of your loyalty to Him! The Lord is saying here, “Get rid of your idol!” - whatever it is you’re worshipping. Is it money, friends, family, car, boat, time (on Sundays), TV, computer or cell phone? ³²

Discipleship means **take up your cross!** ¹² ³³ The Lord said, **No one can serve two masters.** ¹³ Abraham may have been so close to his son, Isaac, that his love for him might have began creeping up on his loyalty to God. ³⁴ This may have been part of the reason God had to test Abraham. ¹⁴ ³⁵

Then, continuing in verse 21, the Lord gave him the invitation, **Come follow Me.** ³⁶ The idea here is “to be on the same road with”. He was implying, “Go where I go” and “imitate what I do”. ³⁷ The Lord wants His disciples to follow His example and to trust Him! ³⁸

¹² Matthew 16:24.

¹³ Matthew 6:24.

¹⁴ Genesis 22:1-13.

In verse 22, ¹⁵ **he lacked the faith to respond to the Lord's answer.** Having money represents security to most people. ³⁹

An example of this was the farmer in the story Jesus told in Luke, chapter 12. ¹⁶ The farmer had a bumper crop and decided he would build bigger barns to store his produce for a long time. He thought he could sit back now and retire. He had security in all the possession he now had. But the Lord had other plans for him. He said, **'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'** ¹⁷

In 1975 six armed robbers broke into the deposit boxes in a London bank. They stole over seven million dollars of contents. One lady had jewelry appraised at \$500,000. She said, "Everything I had was in there. My

¹⁵ vs. 22 - When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

¹⁶ Luke 12:13-21.

¹⁷ Luke 12:20.

whole life was in that box!”¹⁸ Was that jewelry her idol? Probably so!

So, what are the idols in your life? What’s more important to you than the Lord’s will? Don’t be like this young man and walk away!

<http://www.biblelifemessages.org>

¹⁸ “You and Your Possessions”, Our Daily Bread, September 26.