

You Want Me to What?

Luke 18:18-30

Crossroads Christian Church, 9/29/13

Psalms 91:1-6

off lectionary/Stewardship

Dramatic monolog

by Michael E. Dixon

Shalom, and may the Lord's blessing be with you. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you, as followers of the Way of Jesus the Messiah. I am David ben Matthan, and I am from Caesarea, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Those of you who have been in Caesarea before the revolt may recognize my family's name, for we were leading merchants in many areas—jewelry, spices, metal. And yes, it was our mansion that stood on the hill just above that beautiful city.

I am aware that our beloved physician, Luke, was here for some weeks and told you many, many stories about Jesus of Nazareth. He may have told you my story, too—what can I say? It's one of his favorites. And I had the opportunity to be one of Jesus' favorites—one of his disciples. But I walked away. But God always gives us second chances—and third and fourth—so here I am today.

My life was very blessed, very happy, as I grew to manhood. I ate the finest foods, drank the finest wines, and had the most beautiful furnishings in my suite of rooms. Yet I wondered. Is this all there is? My family loved me, and I was the youngest—the apple of their eye. Servants saw to my least needs, and the best teachers taught me whatever I needed to know. Yet I wondered. Is this all there is? So as I grew older, I worked harder, to prove myself, and to be a good son. I set up new trade routes, and increased our family's wealth. Yet I wondered. Is this all there is? In all this, I was a patron of the synagogue, and helped pay for their new building, and I learned much from the rabbi and the visiting rabbis, and I stayed true to the law of the people. I loved God, and felt blessed by God, yet I wondered. Is this all there is? Underneath my fine robes and rich jewelry, there was something missing, something that money couldn't buy.

Living in Galilee, of course I had heard of Jesus of Nazareth. He often stayed in Capernaum, just up the coast of Galilee from my home. He did wonderful things. He healed fevers of the body and sickness of the spirit. He helped the blind to see, and the lame to walk. He taught about a forgiving, loving God and he gave the poorest of people hope for God's future. Sometimes, I hung around the fringes of the crowd, and listened to what I could hear, and it was

true. Jesus could take the smallest, most ordinary thing, and in a few words, we could see God shining through. He helped others. Maybe he could help me, the man who seemingly had everything.

It took me several attempts to work up enough nerve to go up to Jesus. As a person of power and privilege, I could party with Jewish princes and Roman governors, so it seems silly that this poorly dressed carpenter's son could make me so nervous. Sometimes I even tried to disguise myself, so I wouldn't stand out so much in the crowd.

But finally I did it. I took a deep breath, and walked up to him, and paid him the respect due a great rabbi. "Good teacher," I said. He looked at me and smiled—I gulped. I had worried that he might see right through me, and condemn me for my comfortable, self-satisfied lifestyle. But he smiled like I was an old friend, and was glad to see me. His eyes were gentle and sad, but I could see love and humor in them, and I could see the depths of a great soul. I had so many questions to ask, but I went down to the basic one. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Like a good rabbi, he answered my question w/a question. "Why do you call me good," he asked, "no one is good but God alone." I had always thought that I was pretty good, and that Jesus was really good, but his humility caught me off guard. Then he challenged me. "You know the commandments: You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and mother."

"Teacher," I said—I knew better now than to say 'good teacher'—"I have kept all these commandments since my youth." Good! I had passed the first test! I smiled back. I grinned. Then Jesus looked at me intently, sadly, filled with love, and said, "You lack one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have your treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

My face fell. My heart fell. My shoulders slumped. Something within me wanted to say, 'Yes, Lord, I can do that!' but I knew that I wouldn't; that I couldn't. I had responsibilities to my family. I had responsibilities to any children that I might bring into the world in years ahead. My money was invested in so many ways. But what it came down to was this: Jesus had offered me a great pearl, the most precious jewel, but I could not pay the price he asked. I could not.

So I went back to my business, and worked hard, and made more money, and became a leader in the synagogue, but in the dark,

sad moments of my life, I kept coming back to that scene. Jesus had given me an invitation, had made me an offer, but I had walked away. Did he understand my predicament? Didn't he know that there were good reasons that I couldn't just throw my wealth aside like it was so much trash?

It had hurt even more when I heard that down in Jericho; Jesus had invited himself and his disciples to lunch with Zacchaeus, a tax collector for the Romans. Now my business dealings were all ethical and legal; Zacchaeus was an extortioner. Why couldn't Jesus have asked me to take him to lunch? Jesus told Zacchaeus that he was a child of Abraham, and said that he and his household were saved. Why did he give Zacchaeus a free gift of God's love, and yet he tried to charge me such a high price? It wasn't fair!

I brooded on this rejection for years. Why would Jesus treat me this way, when he seemed so loving, so kind? Why wasn't I worthy? So I hardly paid attention when I heard that Jesus had died on a cross down in Jerusalem. They thought that he was a threat to the state. It seemed to show that he wasn't the prophet from God that I had once thought. Then I heard stories that he was raised from the dead; that his followers were telling the good news that this Jesus, who was killed, now lived, and had gone to heaven to be with God. Deep down, I hoped that the stories were true, just because Jesus had seemed to be such a good person; a kind person; a person who had loved me, even after I had turned my back on him.

I prayed and prayed, trying to make sense of it all, and one night, on a caravan, I looked up into the dark night, at the brilliant stars, and the moon, and they seemed to sing of the glory of God. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established," and I became lost in awe. I thought how rich God was, and how poor I was by comparison. I didn't own the stars. I didn't own the palm trees and the oasis. I didn't own the sea. But God did, and it was all right.

I was so wrapped up in this sense of God's power and love, that I got up enough nerve to talk to God and Jesus in prayer. "Lord, Jesus, please forgive me for walking away when you invited me to join you. The price was too high for me then. Now I am ready. You can have it all. All the money in the world can't fill my empty life, but you can. I realize now that I didn't own my possessions, but my possessions owned me. Receive me, Lord. Receive me into your fold." And I felt this deep and wonderful peace grow over me. I

imagined that those eyes I had seen look into mine all those years before, those gentle, loving eyes, were looking at me again, and welcoming me home.

Giving up my wealth wasn't a condition, you see. It wasn't something that Jesus demanded of me as a test of loyalty. Rather, it was an offer of healing. When I laid aside that which had controlled my life, and let God into my heart, I was set free. Once I had walked away. But now I have returned home. Praise be to God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.