

A Successful “Failure”

(Mark 10:17-22)

(preached 6/28/15 Pine Grove BC)

Introduction

On the day that I turned 15, my dad drove me to the DMV in Newberry to take the written drivers test to get a driving permit.

Though I am not sure of the current law, in 1989, you could go back after 15 days and take the driving test to get a restricted license.

Well, those 15 days passed but I didn't go back to get my restricted license.

Another 15 days passed.

In fact, 15 months passed before I ever went back to take the driving test.

And why was that?

I was fearful that I would fail that test, and I could not stand the thought of possibly failing.

So I decided it would be better to not get a license than to take the test and face the possibility of being rejected.

The fear of failure can have a paralyzing effect on people.

And that is the reason that most Christians are hesitant to share their faith.

They fear rejection.

They are horrified at the thought that someone may make them look like a fool by asking them a question.

And they don't want to feel like a failure if that person walks away.

Therefore, most Christians do very little evangelism.

They are simply content to keep their mouths closed and save their pride.

Yet, this morning I want to encourage you to share the gospel by helping us think through what successful evangelism looks like.

We just finished up VBS this past Thursday and part of the follow up is to submit a report to the association and to Lifeway...

These reports are a way to measure VBS in 2015 across the state and nation.

And each of the reports includes a section that asks about decisions made, salvations, etc.

And for many, those categories are the standard of judging the success of Vacation Bible School.

If you have a higher number in one of these categories than the church down the road, you must have had a more successful Bible school.

Now, there is a problem here.

What value do we place upon a person's decision and profession of faith in the Christ?

It is possible that there is true salvation in that decision and profession of faith?

Sure it is possible.

In fact, a profession of faith is the starting point of salvation...

Confessing with your mouth and believing upon the Lord is part of being saved...

But is it possible that those decisions, professions are not salvation?

Well, sure.

Who hasn't seen someone make a profession at VBS or church and then never see them again?

We have all seen that?

So, the question becomes how do you know if those professions are real or not?

Is it possible that out of 10 kids who made a profession of faith at VBS, all 10 are now saved?

Sure, it is possible.

But is it also possible that out of those 10 kids, none are saved?

Sure that is possible as well...

So, the question remains, how do you know?

The Bible says that a true believer will obey the commands of Christ.

The Bible says that a true believer will show fruit.

And the truth is that evidence of obedience and fruit takes time.

When it comes to VBS, you can't measure it in 4 days.

And that is why I have a problem with surveys that ask how many decisions we had for Christ at VBS, and then using that to gauge our VBS success.

The truth is that no church has any way of determining what whether decisions made for Christ were genuine or not.

Only time will tell whether those decisions were just words or if they were the beginning of true salvation.

But this problem moves beyond VBS.

Because churches are often judged by their number of salvations each year...

And reports are written that say this church had this number of decisions in 2014 or this number of baptisms or this number of professions...

And people then point to this statistic or that statistic to measure a church's success...

Let me share this...

For those of you who were here for VBS...

Let's say that on Thursday night right after we sang those silly songs in that emotionally charged room, I asked all the kids to bow their heads....

And we dimmed the lights and played some music and I went into this long invitation to follow Jesus.

And after a few minutes, I asked kids to make a decision....

And I asked them to raise their hand if they wanted to be saved...

There would have hands up all over that building...

And we could have counted those hands, marked them down on that report and mailed it back in....

And the folks at the association and at Lifeway would have said that Pine Grove Baptist Church had a great VBS....

And we may have gotten a plaque and a pat on the back for all those decisions and we would have said that VBS was successful...

When the truth is that it is possible that none of those hands were nothing more than a manipulated response to an adult asking them to make a decision.

We don't need any more decisions in the church, we need disciples!

And we don't need Lifeway or an association telling us that VBS was a success based upon a number....

VBS was a success because the seeds of the gospel were sown into the children who attended.

I don't need a report to tell me that we pleased the Lord with what we did last week...

God in heaven is pleased when we spread the gospel to the world.

Success in your evangelism is not based upon how people respond to you...

Success in evangelism being faithful to share the gospel.

IF you tell a person how to be saved, and they refuse to do it....

You are not a failure....

You only fail when you don't share the gospel in the first place...

And why do I say that?

Because that is what we are going to see this morning in the gospel of Mark.

In Mark 10:17-22, Jesus is going to tell a man how to be saved,...

The people who measure success in getting a decision from a person would say that Jesus was a failure in this scene...

But don't you dare think for a minute that Jesus failed at anything....

And he certainly didn't fail here...

So, let me read this passage this morning....

¹⁷ As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments, ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”²⁰ And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.”²¹ Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”²² But at these words ^[g]he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

There are only 6 verses for us this morning, but we are going to have 5 outline points...

Because this scene is so full of information for us...

It is how to do evangelism the way that Jesus did evangelism...

So, there is a lot to learn this morning but not much time to learn it...

So, let's jump in at verse 17 with...

I. Getting “Good” All Wrong (17)

If you remember from a few weeks back, Jesus is in the southern part of Israel.

He is in an area east of the Jordan River known as Perea...

He has taught about marriage and divorce there.

And he has talked about having faith like a child there..

But in verse 17, he plans to set out on a journey from there...

Most likely, he is still in the house where he has blessed the little children...

But as he sets out on a walk, a man comes running up to him...

Now, we know from Matthew and Luke that this was a young man who was also a ruler...

The only option for a Jewish ruler would be the ruler of a synagogue...

And although it would be rare for a young man to lead a synagogue, this seems like the best explanation...

We also know from Matthew and Luke that he was wealthy.

So, what we have before us today is a rich young ruler coming to Jesus...

He had probably heard about Jesus.

And he must have heard that Jesus was now in his area...

So, he comes and falls down before Jesus..

And let me say up to this point, this rich young ruler is on the right track...

He is in the right place and he is the presence of the right person....

And then he asks the question...

“Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

And let me add, this is a good question.

He has come to Jesus and essentially asked Him, “what do I need to do to be saved?”

How can I get eternal life is a wonderful question.

This is evangelism on a silver platter.

Jesus is stopped by a man who wants to be saved.

This is a guaranteed win.

He is coming to Jesus and wants to know how to be saved...

I am sure that the disciples are in the background going crazy....

They are already adding this salvation to their VBS report....

This is a done deal.

Mark this salvation down in your Bible...

And though we have read how this turns out, let me ask you how would you answer that question?

Would you say, "pray this prayer with me.."

Would you say, "come to church with me on Sunday and go down the aisle at the end of the service.."

Would you say, "I don't know."

What would you say...

But before we answer this question but looking at how Jesus responds....

We need to see a very important word in this question, and that word is "Good."

Good teacher...

And though we may fault this young man for the words he chose...

He simply picked good because he believed that people could be good...

His whole life and rise to power in the synagogue was based on the error that “good men and women go to heaven.”

The whole Jewish religious system was based on that idea.

And some of you may believe that even today.

That goodness is what gets you to heaven.

And you can even see how strongly this young man believed it by what else he said in his question...

“what must I do?”

There is that idea again that salvation is based on some kind of good deeds or actions...

And so here we have a young man thinking that Jesus is going to give him the magical good thing to do in order to be saved...

Yet despite this wrong idea of salvation based upon goodness, this is still an excellent opportunity for salvation...

And this is an excellent candidate...

He's young and influential and popular among the Jews...

I'm sure the disciples are saying....

This is a great opportunity...

We want this guy on our side...

Don't mess this up Jesus...

And so we go from Getting "Good" All Wrong to

II. Showing Sin to the Sinner (18-19)

In verse 18-19 where we expect Jesus to give him a tract or ask him to repeat a prayer...

We find something very different...

First, Jesus attacks the man's use of the word "good."

You see Jews believed two things that are opposite in reality...

They believed that only God was good...

But hey also believed that man could be good by following the Law.

And here Jesus says, "Only God is good."

The clear truth of that is that you are finally in front of someone who is truly good.

For the first time in this man's life, he had finally found someone who was truly good...

Because Jesus is God.

Yet, this man never even understands that...

And then Jesus goes on to say in verse 19...

You know the commandments....

And then Jesus offers a list of some of the commandments...

The point is to awaken the young man to his own sin...

This is so important when we share the gospel with people...

They need to see their sin before you tell them of a Savior...

If you ask most people would you like to be saved?

Most will say absolutely,...

But if they don't do what they are saved from, what's the point?

If they never see themselves as a sinner and God as a Judge who will punish their sin...

They will never see their need to be saved.

Let's say a man jumps off a boat into the ocean...

He is playing in the water splashing around....

Then someone on the boat spots a shark headed his way...

And they tell him that a shark is headed his way...

He just laughs and continues to play until he catches the shark out of the corner of his eye...

Then he quickly heads to the boat....

The sinner needs to first see his sin before he sees a Savior.

When people have come to me and say, "I want to be saved."

I always try to answer this way, "Saved from what?"

We need to be clear about sin when we share the gospel.

If not, we will fill our churches with people who simply see Jesus as a nice addition to their already good lives.

You must see your sin in order to see your incredible need for a Savior.

And we must talk about sin when we talk to others about the gospel.

Yes, it is uncomfortable.

No, it's not popular, but if Jesus pointed people to their sin, His people must do the same.

Yet, this young man never got it...

Look at verse 20....

He is still....

III. Holding on to his “Goodness” (20)

²⁰***“I have kept these things from my youth up.”***

And I have no doubt in his mind, he thought he had kept all these things...

But if we know anything about the Bible, we know that all have sinned...

And we know that obedience to God goes beyond what we see on the outside...

Obedience to God is an inward issue, but not everyone understands that...

So many people walk around this world and watch the news and talk to their neighbors...

And the more evil that they see, the more convinced they become that they are a good person.

At one time, we have all had that list in our head of what keeps us better than the next person.

And folks then walk into churches and see people there who are worse than them, and they feel they are ok because they aren't as bad as the person in the pew beside them.

And they do what this young man did...

They tell God, "I am a good person."

Unfortunately, they are comparing themselves to the wrong standard.

Your goodness is not measured against other people, your goodness is measured against the holiness of God.

That's why a man can sit in his recliner and watch the news where a boy goes in a church and kills 9 people...

And he turns off the TV and thinks to himself, "I'm so glad I'm not that bad of a person."

And he can deceive himself into thinking that God is pleased with him.

Yet, he can sit in that same recliner with hate in his heart toward someone else and according to the words of Jesus...

He is just as guilty of murder as that boy in that church.

True obedience is an issue of the heart, yet few understand that or either choose to ignore that...

And they live lives that look good to the world but
are an insult to the holy God that they claim to
know and love.

The truth is that none of us are good people.

And the truth is that this rich young ruler may have
thought he had kept these commandment...

But the truth is that he like all of us had broken
them countless times over in his heart.

And so we move from "Holding on to his
Goodness," to...

IV. Calling for a Supreme Love of Christ (21)

Verse 21...

21 Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

Please don't miss the first few words of this verse...

“Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him...”

Before we talk about Jesus' response to this young man, please don't miss this important principle in sharing the gospel with someone else...

It must be driven by love...

Although this young ruler is wrong in his view of goodness and God and salvation, Jesus is angered by him...

Instead, he feels compassion and love for him.

Often times, I see Christians express so much dislike and negative comments about the unbelieving world.

And we should be angered by unrighteousness.

But the truth is that we can't expect unbelievers to behave like believers.

This young man was a product of the false religious system that he had been in since his youth.

It had given him a wrong sense of who God was and who he was.

And Jesus looks at him and feels love for him.

We must do the same when we share the gospel with people.

Even though they may insult us and reject us, love must drive our efforts to tell folks how to be saved..

So, Jesus shows love for him, but then Jesus says this....

One thing you lack, go and sell your possessions and follow me.

Now, this is an interesting response to the man's claim that he had kept all the commandments...

People have said that Jesus switched gears in presenting the gospel to this man...

Taking to him about his sin didn't work, so he talked about something else that he could do to be saved.

But there was no switching gears here...

What is the first of the 10 commandments....

You shall have no other gods before me.

The truth about the rich young ruler is that he thought he had kept all the commands but in fact, he had broken the foundation of all the commandments.

The basis of the ten commandments is a supreme love of God above everything....

Though this young man claimed to have loved his neighbor from his youth up

He had never loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength.

Many people have taken and twisted this passage to say that Jesus is teaching that wealth is what keeps people from being saved.

But that is not what is happening here.

You don't have to give all your money away to be saved, but you do have to give all your idols away.

You have to be willing to part with anything that you worship more than the Lord.

And Jesus takes this rich young ruler to the very first commandment with his words right here....

To go and sell and give away his possessions would be evidence that he truly loved God from the heart more than anything else in the world...

And if anything salvation is a total and complete love of Jesus Christ from the heart...

It is a love that causes us to rid ourselves of anything in this world that prevents us from loving Jesus completely...

And though this man thought he was good...

And though the people in his town may have thought him to be a good man....

The proof of his goodness is found in verse 22...

V. Leaving and Grieving (22)

²² But at these words ^[g]he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

Most people in the church today would see this as a total failure on the part of Jesus.

How did Jesus let this promising encounter slip through his fingers?

How could he just let this man walk away?

Why didn't he go after him begging him to listen and come back?

Often times, we feel that pressure as a church when people leave to never return.

What did we do wrong?

What did we say?

And though we must always be aware of loving on people and caring for them and sharing the gospel with them,...

We need to realize that some people aren't rejecting us...

They are rejecting the gospel.

This man heard the truth, yet he left sad because he was not willing to part with his possessions...

He loved money more than he loved the Lord.

Conclusion

Don't let that be true about you today.

Give up the thing that has the place of God in your life.

Jesus gave us these verse to show us how to share the gospel with the world...

Show them their sin, and show them the Savior...

And so I offer that same truth to you today...

So you see your self as a sinner before a holy God?

Stop comparing yourself to the thief down the road or the murderer on TV.

And start comparing yourself to a God who is perfectly holy.

A God who made you and will judge you.

Stop hiding behind the town drunk or known adulterer and look at your sin before a holy God.

Have you ever told a lie?

Have you ever taken God's name in vain?

Have you ever stolen?

That makes you a law breaker...

And even beyond that, do you love God above anything else in this world?

What other gods have you put before the one true God?

What other gods do you need to rid yourself of right now?

As a little boy, my dad loved Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom.

It was a show that came on Sunday afternoons that often talked about wildlife and nature...

And I remember one episode about monkeys that has always stuck with me...

In some areas of the world, natives will dig holes in the side of a hill and put nuts or fruit in the hole...

Monkeys will come along reach into the hole to grab the fruit...

But once they have made a fist to grab the treat, their hand is now too big to come out of the hole..

But instead of letting go of the fruit and pulling their hand out and gaining freedom...

They will grab tighter to what they are holding even though that means the natives are then able to come and capture them.

My question as we end today is this...

Do you love what you are holding onto so much that you are willing to hold on to it even if it means an eternal death for you?

Today is the day to let go of your hold on this world and turn to God in repentance and faith.

This rich young ruler came to Jesus with an open hand but he left with a closed fist...

Do not let that be true of you today.

Let us pray.