



# Naked Before God

**Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:17-31; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:1-4**

The young rich man came to Jesus with much to recommend him. It was to be expected that he depended on his position in society and on his wealth. The mask of the day to day promoted him well, but he sensed that something was still missing. He came before Jesus to ask him what he was lacking. Jesus encouraged him to leave everything to come naked before God in complete dependence and need. It is a difficult lesson to hear. In what way does it apply to our lives, as well?

He had everything going for him. He was young. He was rich. He was a leader among his people. He had position, possessions, and a good religious reputation among the people. His résumé was that of having followed God's instructions in faithfulness. The people attested to his righteousness before God and the Law of Moses. At least, that was his public presentation. Regardless, he lacked something. He could not identify what he was missing. That was the concern that brought him to Jesus.

He came to Jesus with his questions. Well, it was really no more than one question. "Master, what do I lack that I might inherit the life of the ages?" Somehow, his recommendations hid the real condition of his internal life. Beneath his fortune, status, and good reputation, he needed something to give him confidence in bringing him close to God. He needed a real hope that would give him peace with God and fill the void of his internal life.

We stood well before his public. He was known and recognized by his society. People sought to get near to him, for he had both riches and position. Given the popular concept of divine blessing, one would think he was in good standing with God, for it was understood that those who were in good standing with God enjoyed the blessings of health, power, and material riches. A great part of the society understood it this way. It was the mark of divine blessing, according to popular thought. On the basis of such merits, this young man already had everything he needed. Within himself, however, he needed something more. His greater problem was in not knowing how to identify what that something.

He came running to Jesus, perhaps because the rest of the people sought after Jesus. Perhaps at first he came merely out of curiosity. At the least, on hearing Jesus he saw knew lacked something. The void in his life cried out for an answer. Knowing that Jesus was about to leave on a trip, he ran to him before he lost his chance. He presented Jesus his doubt and question. "Master, what do I lack?"

Initially, Jesus seemed to answer him without granting him much attention. "You know the Law. Don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't lie, honor your father and mother." This answer was the basis of all that he had been doing to attain life with God. He knew there was more than that. It was not satisfying. He had tried that and well recognized that he needed something more. That was not the part of the answer he sought. It was the answer of his tradition and he needed the rest of the secret of life with God.

"Yes, Master, all this I have done. It is the lesser part. What am I still lacking? What part have I not done?" This was when Jesus looked at him with full attention. This was when the man had made himself truly ready to hear Jesus. He looked at him with attention and love. Only then did he answer the question the rich man came to ask, for it was only after recognizing that all he had trusted in was not enough that he might hear him.

He looked well at the man, he said with love, “Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor. Then your riches will be transferred to heaven. Then come and follow me.”

The rich man felt himself naked and empty at this answer. It was nothing he wanted to hear. Yes, it was the answer of what he lacked, but it was not a pleasing answer. He was too content with his life and the blessings he took for granted. He was too comfortable with his position, power, and material goods to let them go that he might follow Jesus. It would be too difficult to set aside his material wealth to depend nakedly on God. It was asking too much.

How could he rid himself of everything? What kind of life would that be? It went against that the people and his tradition said about God’s blessings. He became sad. He had come happy and full of hope before Jesus. Now he left sad and disconsolate, returning to the empty life from which he had made an attempt to escape. He was too trapped by his possessions to give his all to the poor. He yearned for the life of the ages, but not at that cost. He turned his back to return to follow his sad way.

Jesus was also saddened, but for a different reason. He was sad for the loss of this man who could have become much more in the hands of God, but who turned around as a prisoner to his riches. He was a moral and righteous man. He was a man esteemed by many. He was yet a man who was empty and a prisoner to his wealth. He was not the owner of his goods. He was a slave to them. Given the opportunity to leave his slavery, he preferred to remain a slave than accept the embarrassment of escaping naked and completely dependent upon God.

Becoming naked before God in complete dependence was difficult for the young, rich leader. It has always been so. From the beginning of creation there was no reason for embarrassment before God, but this before the advent of sin. Innocence knows no reason for shame, nor does it understand shame. Innocence knows, on the other hand, an open confidence from which it has no reason to flee. It is in this confidence that faith and the center of the gospel of Jesus Christ reside.

In the paradise garden—creation as planned by God—there was open communication with God. Here was complete dependence upon God. In such a plan for life, there would be no reason to hide from one another, or to mask ourselves. Open communication, however, depends, on an innocent confidence. It is when we depart from dependence on God that it becomes necessary to hide our intimate selves from others, masking the conflict we bear deep within our lives. Hidden from God, we do not depend upon Him, but on other things—riches, power, position, and influence over others.

The author of Hebrews says that in Christ we have fuller access to God, as well as a greater responsibility before God’s purposes. If God spoke through mediators in the past, now in Jesus Christ God has come personally to deal with us directly. The rich man had all that the prophets had taught, but he was still lacking the essential part—the portion that Jesus came to clarify. Instead of trusting more in God because of his traditions and faith heritage, he trusted God less. He remained too embarrassed to come into God’s presence naked, trusting only on the eternal provision of Christ Jesus.

Are we much different? Perhaps it is time to give our all to God, remaining naked, but trusting God and only God to supply our needs in great sufficiency. After all, this is how we were created to live. Are we ready to exchange our material dependencies for eternal ones?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*