

Intro:

I keep notes in my computer about possible themes for Christmas. Those of you who have been with us for a while know that I like to celebrate Christmas at least for the entire month of December. I have been creating special preaching series on Christmas for many years.

Of course, after a while, you cover all the obvious themes... we have done angels in our "Los Angeles" Christmas, Handel's Messiah excerpts, A Genealogy Christmas theme I called "Roots", the Barren Woman theme, and several others.

Last year we did Christ and the Nations, taking a kind of missionary theme as we had Duncan's inlaws with us as our missionaries at that time.

This year I am taking a theme from something Duncan's father-in-law suggested as a theme he had done one year. They have a Christmas decoration, a Moravian star. This decoration has attached to it a series of Bible passages, all of them, I think, appropriate themes for Christmas.

I want to introduce you to our themes in this message, but we won't develop them in great detail.

But I also want to introduce you to an interesting and important part of Church History, the history of the Moravian Church and their missionary endeavours.

Like all churches, the Moravian Church is not perfect. Indeed, today it is extremely liberal. We don't commend them or even recognize the current Moravian Church as being faithful to the Lord in any way.

However, in the history of the Pre-Reformation, the Post-Reformation, and the history of missions, the Moravians played an immensely important role and it will profit you to be acquainted with them.

For our text this afternoon, I want you to turn to Luke 18

Read Lk 18.18-30

The one man perhaps most responsible for the Moravian Mission was a German nobleman, Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf.

He has been described as 'the rich young ruler who said, Yes!' I want to assure you that his testimony is a remarkable one, and the blessings Jesus promised in our text accrued to him as surely as any other disciple.

They can be your blessings as well.

Proposition: The blessing of discipleship is the blessing of many multiples of brothers, sisters, children and in the age to come, eternal life!

I. The paradoxical nature of spiritual investment (give up all) (18-27)

- A. The persistent problem of looking to religion for eternal life (the rich young ruler's problem) (18-21)
- B. The probing call to invest all (22-23)
 - 1. Jesus isn't teaching salvation by works (we know from the whole counsel of Scripture)
 - 2. Jesus is touching the 'one thing' this man clung to more than God: his riches
 - 3. Jesus is echoing the universal theme of the Bible
 - a. Noah: build an ark
 - b. Abram: leave your home
 - c. Disciples: leave your nets and follow me

Proverbs 23:26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

Romans 12:1 ¶ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

Your thing may not be riches. It may be sports, music, friends, success, power, what have you.

Is there anything in your life that you won't give up if Jesus asked you to?

- C. The impossibility and the possibility (24-27)
 - 1. The sinful human heart clings to its idols and makes salvation well nigh impossible (24-26)
 - 2. The power of God makes salvation [and spiritual investment] possible (27)

II. The multiplication factor of spiritual investment (receive many times as much) (28-30)

A. A testimony of spiritual investment (28)

1. Consider: what had Peter given up compared to the rich young ruler?
 - a. Ruler's wealth far exceeded Peter's
 - b. Peter was only a fisherman

So what had Peter given up?

2. Answer: Everything – the rich young ruler would not give up anything

B. The promise of a multiplication factor (29-30)

1. Mark's Gospel has the fuller statement:

Mark 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, ³⁰ But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. ³¹ But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

2. The return of the present time: an hundred fold in terms of human relationships (with persecutions)
3. The return of heaven: eternal life [ageless life]
 - a. This is exactly what the rich young ruler was asking after
 - b. It is the reward of saving faith (Jn 3.15-16)

The multiplication factor is the reason for all Christian self-denial, not only of that which is worldly and sinful, but also of that which is unnecessary and unprofitable.

Romans 8:18 ¶ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory

III. An historical example of spiritual investment and its eternal returns

A. The Moravian mission in brief

1. The Moravians and Zinzendorf

- a. In the Pre-Reformation days, a priest named John Hus burned for preaching the gospel (1415)
- b. Followers of Hus persecuted by Church and civil officials for many years (1415-1722)
- c. Count Zinzendorf, a wealthy nobleman in the Holy Roman Empire (b. 1700, d. 1760)
 - 1) Raised by godly mother and grandmother
 - 2) Raised to be a nobleman
 - 3) Opened his estate to persecuted Moravians in 1722
 - 4) Moravians built a village called *Herrnhut*, meaning ‘the Lord’s watch’ or ‘on the watch for the Lord’
 - 5) Zinzendorf became closely involved with the growing Moravian group, acting almost as their pastor
- d. The community developed a zealous and devoted spiritual life
 - 1) The community was grouped into various ‘choirs’ – small group divisions to promote spiritual life
 - 2) Community members devoted themselves to vigorous spiritual life: monthly Prayer Days, regular worship, daily times of prayer and Bible reading
 - 3) Each young person learned a trade, applied himself to contributing to the prosperity of the community
 - 4) The rigorous spirituality and work ethic laid the groundwork for ‘self-supporting’ missions
 - a) Missionaries given funds for passage
 - b) Missionaries expected to ‘make own way’ on the field

2. The first Moravian mission
 - a. Zinzendorf met a freed black slave from St Thomas (Virgin Islands) (1731)
 - b. The ex-slave pled for someone to go and tell his people the Gospel
 - c. Two young Moravians volunteered, willing to be sold into slavery if need be to reach the slaves of St Thomas
 - d. Leonard Dober made his way to St Thomas, with much hardship won a handful of slaves to the Lord (including the ex-slave's brother and sister)
3. The record of Moravian missions
 - a. 1733 – 3 brethren to Greenland
 - b. 1734 – Lapland and Georgia (USA, where some met John Wesley on way over) and reinforcements to St Thomas
 - c. 1735 – Surinam
 - d. 1736 – Africa's Guinea Coast
 - e. 1737 – South Africa
 - f. 1738 – to Jews in Amsterdam
 - g. 1739 – Algeria
 - h. 1740 – North American Indians, Ceylon, Romania, Constantinople

More than 70 missionaries out of a community of 600 people in one decade...

By the time Zinzendorf died in 1760, the Moravians had sent out over 228 missionaries, besides starting Moravian settlements in various places.

The day before he died, Zinzendorf said to one of his closest partners, David Nitschmann:

“Did you suppose in the beginning that the Savior would do as much as we now really see, in the various Moravian settlements, amongst the children of God of other denominations and amongst the heathen? I only entreated of him a few of the firstfruits of the latter, but there are now thousands of them. Nitschmann, what a formidable caravan from our church already stands around the Lamb!”¹

¹ “The Rich Young Ruler Who said Yes” *Christian History Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 35.

Conclusion:

Mark 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, ³⁰ But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. ³¹ But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last first.

What kind of investment are you making with your life? Whether rich or poor?

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I want to mention before we close what we will be using for our theme for the Christmas season. It is associated with the Moravians and their message.

### B. The Moravian star: a device, a meditation, a blessing

1. An educational device [derived from the regular work of a Moravian brother]
2. Became a symbol of Christmas in the Moravian community
3. A blessing to all who consider the light of the star at Christmas or anytime (themes associated with the stars)
  - a. Let There be Light (Gen 1.3)
  - b. A star shall come forth from Jacob (Num 24.17)
  - c. We saw His Star in the East (Mt 2.2)
  - d. I Am the Bright and Morning Star (Rev 22.16)