

After such a long Scripture reading, I was tempted to use those three most popular words at most any business meeting, including our Session meetings: “Motion to adjourn.” George? And it really was a longer reading than I had really thought about ‘til I was re-reading over it a few times this week. But to do this experience with the “Rich Young Ruler” justice, it really all needed to ‘hang together.’ Especially since it basically begins and ends on that ‘eternally’ important subject of **“eternal life.”**

But here’s the good news. (NO, we are NOT going to ‘move to adjourn.’) This passage... and therefore, this message... I believe hinges on just two verses. The first one is there right at the beginning, where that faithful young seeker comes to Jesus and says, **“Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”** (Mark 10:17) And in His answering this question, Jesus makes a statement that is troubling to both the young man and the disciples. **“How hard it will be for those who have wealth** (NIV- **‘are rich’**) **to enter the kingdom of God!”** (Mark 10:23)

With regards to the first one, that question of **“What must I do to inherit eternal life,”** I would have to believe that most every ONE of us, at one point in our life or another... and perhaps MANY times... has asked that question. Either to God or to ourselves. Or BOTH. **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”**, of course, you don’t believe that there is life after death on this earth. And if so, well, like Mr. Sam the Financial Man used (?) to say, “Maybe we should talk.” Actually, NO ‘maybe’ about it.

But I’ll give you my short answer to that doubt. Would you really want to bet your life on there NOT being a life after this one? Would you really want to ‘roll the dice’ on eternal life and come up ‘snake eyes?’ (Quite literally! You know, that ‘serpent’ deceiver who has been at work since the beginning of human history... to convince mankind to ‘live in the moment,’ NOT for the future).

But if you have already come to grips with that fundamental issue that life does NOT end in that little rectangular box or urn, then the next concern is where one SPENDS that next ‘life.’ Is there a ‘door number one’ and ‘door number two?’ You know, like on that old game show that we were actually discussing at our Thursday morning Men’s Study Group... “Let’s Make a Deal.”

And I am afraid that if one does believe that door #1 is 'heaven'... whatever that is... and door #2 is 'hell'... whatever that is... that getting into the better alternative is, in some way, a 'let's make a deal' proposition. Now, the reason I say that... that there is some degree of uncertainty, of 'bargaining,' if you will... is that I have heard more than one person, when discussing if they believe their final destination as being heaven, they say, 'Well, I sure hope so.' As though there is a scale of 'good and bad' that they have done in their life and they 'hope' that the Divine Judge and 'Scale keeper' will 'tip the scales' in their favor.

Which is not too far from where that young 'padawan' of the Christian faith was coming. He had done well at loading up the **scale of good** in his life by living by the commandments of not committing murder or adultery, not stealing or lying, and being a good boy by honoring his mom and dad. BUT when it came to how he handled the material possessions in his life... of how much he gave to the real WORK of a faithful life, caring for the poor and downtrodden... well THAT was a different story. There came that **scale of bad**, crashing down on him. Causing his **"face to fall,"** (NIV) **"shocked... grieving"** over the manner in which his hoarding of wealth would keep him from inheriting eternal life. I'm sure that the disciples shook their head, either in judgment or in sympathy, as they watched him hang his head in shame and cower off into the crowd.

But then an interesting thing happened. The Scriptures say that ***"THEN Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth ('are rich') to enter the kingdom of God."*** (Mark 10:23) Was this a rhetorical statement, one intended to simply reinforce what happened with 'the other guy?' OR, was he speaking directly AT the disciples? From what we read next, sounds like the latter. ***"The disciples were perplexed at these words."*** (NIV- ***"amazed."***)

And then, when He goes on to use a seemingly ridiculously absurd statement... ***"it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."*** (Mark 10:25)... It says that the disciples ***"were even more amazed."*** In the NIV, they were ***"greatly astounded."*** This talk of Jesus that great wealth was a barrier to attaining God's kingdom sure seemed to be disturbing to them.

[As somewhat of an aside, how many of you have heard that this 'eye of the needle' was not a literal one, but a smaller door in one of the larger gates of Jerusalem? DID YOU KNOW... that there is absolutely NO evidence of there ever having been such a smaller gateway? Which even further supports the 'impossibility' of Jesus' statement.]

So, I think that there are two things for us to gain as 'take-aways' from Jesus' strong words about wealth. That one, we must be mindful of how we spend our wealth. That there is great truth to the corollary in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus says, **"Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."** (Matt. 6:21) That no matter what we may think about our own individual finances, as meager as they may seem to us, like that 'young ruler,' we too are RICH. That compared to the World population's median income of \$2000, we are rich. And even in our own prosperous nation, over 11 million children... 1 in 7... live at or below the poverty level. Friends, you and I are RICH.

You may have heard that expression that if you really want to see a good indicator of a person's FAITH, take a look at their CHECKBOOK. (I'm showing my 'A-G-E'... or one's 'online banking acct.) I want you to know, as I read over some of the startling statistics about our nation's wealth compared to others... indeed, to some of our fellow Americans... it gave me 'cause for pause.' It really made me think about how much of what Barrie and I spend is focused on OURSELVES. There is indeed much truth to Jesus' challenging words from the Sermon on the Mount: **"Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."** How does YOUR checkbook reflect your faith? 'What's in YOUR wallet?' Capital One... or Jesus Christ?

Does this mean that all of us 'rich, privileged' men and women are doomed to hell? Absolutely not. Should it cause us to think about how we are USING our resources. YES. But when those disciples asked that 'follow-up question,' **"Then who can be saved,"** it is quite likely that they were actually asking from a place of wisdom that knew the answer. 'Who can be saved' by their wealth, or even how well they may use their wealth.' NO ONE. **"For mortals... US... it is impossible, but not for God; for God ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE."** (Mark 10:27)

Jesus goes on to say that through that God by whom 'all things are possible,' those who make sacrifices of family and home **"for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel/Good News... WILL receive a hundredfold NOW, in this age."** **"with persecutions."** As we try to follow the lead

of Jesus' disciples, like them, we will receive both prosperity and persecution... blessings and curses. **'Now.'** **'In this age.'** **"AND in the age to come, eternal life."**

Which brings us full circle back to the question of that young 'inquirer': **"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life."** And do you recall what the first response of Jesus was? Seemingly having nothing to do with the answer He gave about following God's commandments. **"Why do you call me 'good?' No one is good but God alone."** (Mark 10:17) Was Jesus NOT 'good?' Of course He was. And because 'he and the Father are one,' God alone being good includes Him. But no 'mere mortal' can be entirely good, like God. We all share that seed of original sin that keeps us from completely 'doing good.'

Jesus knew that when that young man with 'good intentions'... (remember that 'road' is 'paved with?') Around here I think that there are a few that FEEL like the 'highway to hell!') ... when he said **"What must I DO to inherit eternal life"...**

It was clear to our Lord that he was attempting to EARN his way to heaven. AKA "Works righteousness." Jesus knew that this man's issues were not just about 'letting go' of his 'stuff'... it was 'letting go' of the notion that he could 'inherit' the Kingdom by his diligent efforts to live a good life.

As one commentary put it, *"The rich can reject God in favor of things in their life that they love MORE."* As Jesus said, **"No one can serve two masters."** We who are, whether we admit it or not, are 'rich,' we too must be careful of not 'rejecting God in favor of things in our life that we love more.' What did Jesus say was the greatest commandment? NOT those ones that the rich young man fulfilled. **"Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, mind, and strength."** AND **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** Particularly those neighbors who have much less than you do.

As we think about how dejected that guy was, may we remember that it really wasn't about him needing to 'let go' of his **wealth**... but rather, about the importance to 'let go' of the **idea** that we can in some way earn a 'merit-based promotion' to heaven. To use a phrase from our common culture, often relative to employment... but in this case, to a MUCH more important 'occupation'... *"It's not what you know (or DO)... but who you know."* J-E-S-U-S. **"We are saved by God's GRACE** (God's Riches At Christ's Expense) **through FAITH; not by works, lest any mere**

mortal may boast.” It’s not WHAT you know... but WHO you know. So... let go... and let God. To HIM be all glory and honor, dominion and power, this day, and forevermore. And ALL God’s children said, ‘AMEN!’