

Text: Mark 10:17-31

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Title: One Thing you Lack

Live Streaming

## Introduction

*“Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”*

Today’s gospel reading is one of those difficult passages to reflect on. It’s tempting to give in to the urge to soften this passage’s demands. To make it more palatable, more acceptable. That urge has been around a long time.

Literal reading of this story certainly, offers discomfort to many of us. How are we to understand this passage? Is everyone to *“sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven”* (so Mark 10:21)? What did Jesus mean when he said, *“It is 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)?

We know the saying, “Money makes the world go around.” Economies rely on the exchange of money for products and services. Economists define money, where it comes from, and what it's worth.

What is money?

- Money is a medium of exchange; it allows people to obtain what they need to live.
- Bartering was one way that people exchanged goods for other goods before money was created.
- Like gold and other precious metals, money has worth because for most people it represents something valuable.

**I have a crazy idea I want to run by you.** Imagine that a cultural anthropologist finds one of your credit card statements in 100 years. What would your spending suggest you value the most? Based on your spending, what assumptions might someone make about how you live your life?

Our credit card statements (really, any financial statement) reveal a lot about us and what we care about. They are unintentional personal manifestoes. In stark detail, these statements lay out how we spend our money and our time. As a result, we end up with a clear picture of what we value versus what we say we value. I like the old saying, “The check book and the calendar never lie.”

How we spend our lives, be it money or time, says something about us. It says something about our values.

**Let us pray...**

Do you know what's the one subject that preachers/pastors/ministers talk about that make most members uncomfortable? MONEY. Yes, MONEY.

Do you know in the New Testament, Jesus offers more wisdom and has more to say about money than any other subject besides the "Kingdom of God"? I remember when I first heard that Jesus said more about money than he did about love. To be honest, I was initially a little angry. There was no way that was true, I thought to myself.

Sure enough, after doing a bit of research on this subject as well, I discovered that indeed: Jesus talked more about money than he did Heaven and Hell combined. In fact, there are more than 2300 verses on money, wealth, and possessions. And Jesus spoke about money roughly 15% of his preaching and 11 out of 39 parables. Are you surprised?

I believe Jesus spoke about money, not because he was obsessed with money, or that he wanted us to have lots of it, but because he knew that money was a *heart issue* and that it is one of the most likely reasons for someone to not follow him or to give up on him. Money is important to the extent that how we think about it will impact how we behave with it.

Taking this one step further, how we think and behave with money reflects our spiritual condition.

When we hoard money; or are envious of other's money; or spend money we don't have (debt) then there is a good chance we have been seduced!

Jesus us present us with a clear choice: *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*

*You cannot serve both God and money."*

Let's take a closer look at our gospel passage for this morning. A rich young man meets Jesus on the road.

Running up to him and kneeling before him, the fellow asks, *"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* (Mark 10:17). In typical "Jesus' fashion," Jesus answers his question with another question,

*"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone"* (10:18).

Jesus proceeds to answer the man's question by reciting the second part of the Decalogue, otherwise known as the Ten Commandments. "You know the commandments," he says. The questioner, likely with a bit of pride responds, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth" (10:20).

There is no reason to doubt him; most of us, I suspect, tend to think of ourselves as law-abiding, as keeping to the straight path. But something is bothering him, and Jesus, being excellent reader of human nature, knows it.

The young rich man is probably "soul sick" or sick at heart. Soul sick is feeling like something has affected your spirit, like you have no sense of courage left, like you feel internally disordered, spent, hopeless.

Remember, Jesus loves this young rich man – By the way this is the only time Mark mentions Jesus's love for an individual. Jesus diagnoses the problem. He realizes what is missing in this man's life.

**"You lack one thing,"** he says. Jesus knows that the human heart has multiple needs, and that the gospel is not a one-size-fits-all model.

How did Jesus address this man's feeling of lack, to cure his soul-sickness"? Paradoxically Jesus first increases the lack by telling him, "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor" (10:21a).

The questioner felt that something was missing, and Jesus's first move is to make that missing sense tangible. I don't have to tell you that's one thing to feel a gap in one's heart and one's soul; it's something else to experience a gap in the pocketbook and bank account.

Jesus then tells him what he needs, and the need is not to focus on eternal life. Rather, first, he needs to refocus his attention from his treasures on earth— his estate, his investments, his mammon—by laying up treasures in heaven. Second, now that he has divested of his earthly goods, he is to become the type of disciple who follows Jesus on the road: "Then come, follow me," Jesus says (Mark 10:21).

Unfortunately, the story does not have a happy ending. Mark reports that the would-be disciple "went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (Mark 10:22). Did he go home and do what Jesus said? Did he look at all his stuff and say, "This isn't worth it and give it all away." We don't know. Mark didn't tell us.

And that's a good thing, because it forces us to step into that rich man's shoes and ask, "What should I do if I were him?"

*Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* NOW some of you expect the disciples might also be perplexed. You might be wondering, "Do I have to sell what I own and give the money to the poor?"

NOW let me get rid of your misery. According to Amy-Jill Levine *"Sell all you have" cannot be an address for everyone, and Jesus does not tell everyone to engage in this type of divesting. To do so would be both immoral and insufficiently attentive to people's needs.*"

NOW Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, *"Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."*

By the way there isn't a small gate in the walls of Jerusalem called 'The Eye of the Needle', which reputedly was so small that a camel could only get through after being unloaded and by crawling through on its knees. There's no such gate. However, the story does illustrate a point, Jesus simply meant that it is impossible. *But "With man this is impossible, but nothing is impossible for God."*

By the way I find the reactions of the disciples interesting. Rather than ask Jesus for an explanation, the disciples start asking each other, "Who can be saved?" They should, as disciples, have asked Jesus directly. Jesus wasn't kidding. Riches are the major block to the Kingdom. Let's be honest, Money— "mammon" in Aramaic—can become a god. But one can use money for the good. The people at whose homes Jesus eats and heals are not selling all they have; they do not have to and should not, because they are displaying hospitality. Jesus does not tell Martha to sell her home; to the contrary, he receives hospitality there, Martha practices ministry there, and in this house Jesus continues his teaching.

The people who welcome the disciples, sent out with no provisions of their own, are not selling all; they are instead welcoming those who have no monetary means of reciprocation.

I think Jesus looked at the person standing before him and saw a human with a potential future full of possibility and good work and growth and challenge and opportunity.

And Jesus loved him ... loved this rich young man from the top of his head to the bottom of his toes ... loved him so entirely that he had to tell him the truth ... for the truth would set him free.

Freedom from a life determined primarily by one's own earning power. Freedom from defining success for his own life based on the world's calculations.

Freedom from having society determine his innate value by the privilege his wealth affords ... rather than the quality of his relationships and the character of his words and deeds.

Freedom from the struggle of fighting tooth and nail to maintain his wealth when the crops fail and the rains stop, and the bottom of the economy falls out.

Freedom from seeing other people as a means to an end ... a means of padding further his own bottom line.

Freedom from the isolation caused by not knowing and loving and learning from those living without privilege, without wealth in a world that so profoundly builds a wall between the rich and the poor.

Freedom from fear, that devours the soul, by placing our security and future and purpose ... the weight of our own world ... squarely on our own shoulders ... a weight that we cannot and should not bare alone.

Perhaps Jesus means this: Go and *dismantle* the system that has made you *rich at the expense of others*.

Let go of the materialism that is despoiling your soul. Break the barriers that are crippling you to experiencing life in its fulness. Move out from your comfort zones and share what you have so others may live comfortably like you.

A theologian said that "*heaven's treasures are ours only when we take steps to do something about the way the goods of the earth are unequally distributed.*"

Maybe it is time to rethink our relationship with money. Maybe we need to reconsider how we spend our time and with whom we spend our time. Maybe we need to reevaluate how we determine the value of our own and other's lives.

The invitation to follow Jesus, to befriend Jesus, to dine with Jesus ... to walk in love as Christ loves us ... remains ever before us. We are not owners of our life but stewards and caretakers of God's life in the world, each other, and ourselves. We are free to possess without being possessed by our wealth.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN COULDN'T LET GO.

I imagine he grieves because he realizes that he doesn't *desire* eternal life as much as he thinks he does.

He's hungry, yes. But not hungry enough. He recognizes that he doesn't trust the promise of "treasure in heaven" enough to relinquish the treasures he has on earth. He doesn't really want to *follow* Jesus; he wants to admire the "good teacher" from a comfortable distance, and go on living as he has always lived.

ONE THING YOU LACK?

A hard question for you and me today. What is the "one thing" YOU lack, the one thing that might cause me to walk away if God points it out to you and says, "Let it go?"