

All I ask is the chance to prove that money can't make me happy (Spike Milligan)

Mark 10:17-31

¹⁷ As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother." ' ²⁰ He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' ²¹ 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.' ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.' ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved?' ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.'

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' ²⁹ Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.'

Introduction to the Theme

Quotes: "All I ask is the chance to prove that money can't make me happy. "(Spike Milligan)

Cartoon: We only lend money to people who don't need it...

Quote: Henry Youngman

"What's the use of happiness? It can't buy you money."

Quote: Author Unknown

"Riches can't buy happiness, but they can buy you the kind of misery you prefer."

Illustration: Regret

A person was walking in the desert when voice said to them, "Pick up some pebbles and put them into your pocket, and tomorrow you will be both sorry and glad." The person

obeyed, stooped down and picked up a handful of pebbles and put them in their pocket. The next morning, they reached into their pocket and found diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The person was both sorry and glad. Glad they had taken some – sorry they hadn't taken more.

Quote: Jerry Seinfeld

“Dogs have no money. Isn't that amazing? They're broke their entire lives. But they get through. You know why dogs have no money? ...No Pockets! “

We are looking at one of the hard sayings of Jesus – one of the traditional ways of making sense is that Eye of the Needle was gateway into Jerusalem

Camels needed to have their load removed before they could fit through. So too rich people need to unload their riches to fit through the gate of salvation. Great story and even a helpful illustration – unfortunately there was no Eye of the Needle gateway into Jerusalem. Another case of do you go with the truth or go the legend?

After my reflections I'm happy to field any ponderings or questions

Illustration: The Jeans Episode

Sally and I were heading for our first overseas trip in 1988 and on the way back to Australia we were planning to go to the Philippines to visit a Christian mission project that sought to help people who lived in Manila's rubbish dump.

Fair to say we felt a mixture of trepidation, all the while hoping to take home some inspiration in how we approached issues of justice and inequality in our own life. Also, maybe laced with a tinge of self-satisfaction that we were on the side of the angels!

Kambiz my friend, who had arrived in Australia as an asylum seeker having fled the Iranian revolution and then a struggling student, asked me if I had the chance whether I could buy him a pair of jeans when we were in the Philippines.

I indignantly replied, “What do you mean? I'm not going to exploit the poor for you!” Well upon our return we shared stories of our visit including being caught up in a coup attempt in the Philippines. Kambiz noted, “Nice jeans – where did you get them?” I replied matter of fact – the Philippines. At that point my Chez Guevara like self-righteous outburst before we left came to mind. Kambiz laughed, “So you were not happy to exploit the poor for me, but you were happy to buy jeans for yourself!” Hoisted on my own petard!

Nowadays no point going overseas for bargains - I am just addicted to supply side economics – it all comes to me by delivery!

Quote: Franklin Jones

“A bargain is something you can't use at a price you can't resist.”

The Story of the Rich Young Man

This passage draws in all the same dynamics. The call to prioritise others. The self-congratulations of doing the right thing

The truth is that we are probably far richer than this man could ever imagine!

I must confess that one of my priorities is to leave as much wealth for my children as would make my father proud – not sure Jesus as is thrilled for me!

Jesus message is clear - the challenge of inequality and privilege starts in your own life and should cost you a lot .

Imagine you were foolish enough to be there and you asked Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Eternal life involves than life after death – a quality of life for now & ongoing

What would Jesus Christ have say to you or me if he lived in our time?

What does Jesus Christ expect or have us do?

Above all the reality of Jesus encounter with this man is our own story of how hard it is to respond to issues of justice – why did God invent pockets?

To Give or To Keep

I would like to present five ways Christians have responded to Jesus challenge to give all our riches away to the poor.

This might re-trauma some of us – certainly we have had a go at all these at some point in our Christian life.

Alternative lifestyle

aim to present a Christian counterculture to contemporary living

provide Christian alternatives: communal living, food co-ops, etc.

Versions – renounce technology: dishwashers, microwaves, mobile phones, etc.

give what is left over beyond what one barely needs to the poor

such Christian activism tends to lead to performance-based faith

a theology that forms a legalism, guilt trips and elitist tendencies

Moderate Lifestyle

too much of anything is regarded as a bad thing

live a bit (cafes & restaurants) and give a bit (child sponsorship)

a cosy option that leaves us too easily consoled by our genuine concern
doing your best is enough

sometimes you need to do what is necessary

we all like the theology we can afford and justice that comes with it

Simple Lifestyle

everything is seen as robbing the poor and contributing to injustice

frugal and measured – kind of a vow of poverty that has a long Xn tradition

aim to transfer as much power and resources to those who are victims

tendency to offering hair shirts to everyone and taking life too seriously

in the face of the unachievable standard like Sermon on the Mount it is then just a question of trying harder

a kind of theology for the no "blinker set"

Symbolic Action Lifestyle

we're called to token gestures that remind us that Jesus died for our sins

so that we do not need to sell all we have and give to the poor

a commitment to small acts of kindness and occasional grand gesture

Jesus has done the heavy lifting so that we do not have to any ourselves

One person's token action is another person's sacramental theology

The Problem is too Big Lifestyle

we really can't do anything about it – the poor will be always with us

find reasons why anything we do is not going to help

focus on not thinking about other people's plight: ignorance is spiritual bliss

a commitment to not changing anything

God is someone who answers your prayers, cares about you and provides car parks

Tendency to argue against having any interest in anything but spiritual matters

Conclusion

So where does that all leave us? Time to sadly walk away as the young man?

As if we needed convincing Jesus tends to be an all or nothing kind of guy

There is a big lesson here – but what is it? Is there wiggle room?

Is this something we are all called to follow?

Is this something only the special are called to follow?

Is this something to trouble us like it did the disciples to keep us on our toes?

Is this something to motivate us to really follow Jesus?

Is this something that comes from Jesus starting the day without breakfast?

What's the answer – well all of the above and none of the above

Some think our role as Christians is to change the world

If so time to sell our wealth – embrace faith by works – utopianism be damned

Some think our role is to witness to the God of Jesus who changes the world

If so hold on to your wealth and the road that leads to the slippery slope of tokenism – faith without enough works – anyone want a pair of jeans?

Quote: George Carlin

“Most people work just hard enough not to get fired and get paid just enough money not to quit.”

The truth is we acknowledge Jesus just enough to think we are Christians and do enough not to feel unchristian

As a self-serving jeans buying kind of guy, keen to pass on my wealth to my children, while somehow still following Jesus, whom am I to offer insight?

Illustration: Baker's Religious Quotes #229

A single drop of water will not quench the thirst of everyone in the desert, but it does prove there is such a thing as water.

Our Christian witness as individuals or as a community will not affect or save everyone we have contact with.

But it does prove that God's love and justice seeks to overcome privilege and inequality is not only real, but in real possession of the Christian's heart.

Hard to hear this scripture without picking your own theological poison

I confess to being nervous when we strip too much of the magic or metaphysical from the Jesus story. There is a danger you leave yourself only a kind of semi-pelagian – works based faith – where trying harder is the primary measure of following Jesus.

As Jesus said, “What is impossible for us is possible for God” – the God of Jesus sets an exam we cannot pass and has Jesus sit it for us so we follow Jesus

For what it is worth, I hope we can rely on Jesus’ prayer in which we pray forgive our wealth sins as we forgive those whose wealth sin against us?

Any comments or questions?