

Mark 10:17-31
SMAS 9.00am & 10.00am
(14-10-2012)

Mark's gospel being the shortest is written at a fairly racy speed which helps convey a feeling of urgency, importance and excitement to what's going on. But the fact that the man runs up to Jesus on a public highway, and especially at a period in Jesus' ministry when it was disgraceful if not downright dangerous to be associated with Him, shows more than just Mark's style of writing. This rich man was probably fairly prominent in society yet no sneaking up in the dark like Nicodemus had.

How often might anyone run up to another person on a main road and ask how they obtain eternal life? My experience as a youth leader means that I have been asked the question rather a lot but usually in private or a small discussion group.

Can you imagine the sight? A rich young aristocrat running down the street, breathlessly flinging himself at the feet of a man who moments earlier was playing with a bunch of children.

"Good teacher", he says "what must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus in effect says "Forget the flattery. Don't call me good, that's a word you should only honour God with."
Well! That poured cold water on the situation!

The young man begins to listen to what Jesus is saying. "Have you been loving your neighbour as you should?" Yes, since he was a boy in fact. Obviously he knows something is missing from his life, why else would he come to Jesus? Then Jesus, out of love for him, puts His finger on the problem. "Your riches - that's where your problem lies. Get rid of it all and give it to those who need it."

It's the last thing he wants to hear and the last thing he's prepared to do. Sadly he leaves empty handed and empty hearted.

Why did this young man's wealth prevent him from coming to God? He was keeping the second greatest commandment, but Jesus could see he was falling short of the first. His riches stopped him surrendering totally to God. Jesus tells him to give them away, without them he would learn to rely on God, not on himself, for all that he needed.

It isn't just because it's money. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were never confronted about their money? It is actually about what is important to us. What big issue might we have in our life that we don't want to give to God? Time (computer games, facebook etc)? Power? Authority?

Whatever might either come before God or get in the way of our relying on God? We must surrender these things to God in both prayer and action today.

Compared to many in the world we're very wealthy people – although we may not consider ourselves to be. And if we don't think we're rich it's fairly easy to be dismissive of this passage. But the disciples were, rightly, shocked by what Jesus said.

To understand why the disciples were shocked when Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven we have to understand a few more things.

Various explanations have been offered about the camel passing through the eye of a needle. Most popular is that there was a small doorway called "the needle's eye." in the wall of Jerusalem. A person could get through it, but it was not big enough for a camel. Only the wealthy could afford a camel to carry their possessions. Some reports say a camel could just get through on its knees and unladen. In any event the implication was that one could only enter the city through this gate without carrying worldly goods. It is rather a suspect story and it's doubtful that Jesus meant it that way.

Jesus was referring to the fact that in those days people believed if you were rich you were blessed by God. Since you were blessed by God that meant you were righteous and if you were righteous you'd go to heaven. Jesus wanted His disciples to know the truth about God and the

way to go to heaven. He needed them to know that what they believed about the rich was not God's truth.

The disciples are gob-smacked! If rich people can't get into the kingdom of heaven then who on earth can?! Who can be saved?!

"No one" says Jesus "if their salvation depends on their own goodness or efforts. So no one has a head start, rich or poor. It's just not something that people can do for themselves. But for God? Ah well for God, nothing is impossible".

But for the rich themselves it is so hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God because they can have a false sense of security in wealth which creates the temptation to trust in material resources and personal power. What God wants is whole-hearted reliance on Him.

In a culture where wealth was regarded as a sign of God's blessing, a religious teacher, worth his salt, would be expected to be at least moderately wealthy. Jesus and His disciples would therefore have been conspicuously different. Here we see Peter reminding Jesus of this fact, and that the disciples had taken up the very challenge the rich young man had walked away from. They had given up not only possessions, but also relationships to follow Jesus. "So, what's in it for us?" Implies Peter with characteristic bluntness!

"Don't worry" Jesus assures them. "God will honour the sacrifices you've made for the Gospel. He is no one's debtor". Jesus promises "hundreds" more possessions and relationships to replace those sacrificed. This super-abundance of possessions and family probably refers to all that becomes available to us in and through the Christian family – those extra brothers and sisters, those homes we're welcomed into, all the possessions we're invited to share etc.

As a reality check, against all this talk of blessing, Jesus reminds his disciples there will be hardships and suffering for those who follow Him. It's a costly business, but 'He did not call us to win the rewards of time but to earn the blessings of eternity. God has not only this world in which to repay' us. The world may treat followers of Christ like the lowest of the low, but in the topsy turvy world of heaven we will be exalted to the highest place. But it would be very wrong to be in the Christian faith solely for what we hope to get out of it.

Jesus gave His life that we might have eternal life.

What are we prepared to sacrifice for Him?

A couple of weeks ago in homegroup we looked at the commandment about not stealing. We thought about the fact that in a world where everything we have comes from God, if we have much and others have nothing we are, in a way, stealing.

We live in a world that encourages us to buy more, not give away. Jesus challenged a rich man seeking to gain eternal life to give away his possessions.

What does each one of us stand to gain?

The answer is surely what are willing to give?

I'm thinking mostly here about what are we willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus but there is the added dimension that Jesus tells us to give to those who don't have what we have.

We make a living by what we get.

We make a life by what we give.

Sir Winston Churchill