

Reflection for Sunday 10th October 2021

Bible reading:

Mark 10.17-31

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No-one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “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 a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Reflection

How rich are you?

I wonder if you consider yourself ‘well off’ or ‘comfortable’ or just about coping.

Maybe you think of yourself as poor or in poverty. I wonder what it would take for you to feel rich. What if you had £10,000 a week? Most of us would consider that very rich indeed, but not in comparison to some of the world’s richest people like Warren Buffet or Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg.

What about £1,000 per week. Most of us would consider that pretty well off. How about £250 pw or even £140. Maybe you’d think of £140 a week as not that much, yet it’s still

more than 80% of the world's population. £255 pw would put you in the top 10% of the world's wealthiest people.

Perhaps you are richer than you think?

Have you ever thought about what the rich man was expecting when he came to Jesus? I suspect there was already some nagging feeling that not everything was good in his relationship to God. Maybe he was hoping that Jesus would put his mind at rest and tell him that he'd done all the right things and his place in God's kingdom was assured.

I can imagine Jesus being sad for him as he walks away and then he makes that famous statement about it being easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus wasn't talking about a sewing needle. The eye of the needle was a door within a door; rather like this one.



The city gates in Jerusalem would have had big doors that could be opened to allow camels, horses, carts etc. through, but when they were closed there was a smaller door within the door for just one person at a time to go through. Some factories (and some churches) in the UK have doors like that. The church at Astley has one.

It is not completely impossible for a camel to get through the small door but it would be difficult. All the baggage would have to be removed and the camel would have to stoop very low to get through.

Lots of us have baggage that holds us back from our relationship with God. Maybe it is material things that we are very attached to. Perhaps a new conservatory, or a nice car or a Nintendo Switch (other game consoles are available). Whilst we are thinking about those things, we are not thinking about the 90% of people who have less than we do, and the millions who live on less than £1 a day.

God never forgets them and when we do it makes a barrier between us and him. Like the baggage that stops the camel getting through the door.

It isn't just money either. We can be rich in other ways. Some of us are rich in terms of the family and friends that we have around us. People who will be there for us and support us when we need them.

We can be rich in terms of our health and independence.

We can be rich in the gifts and skills we have.

In all of those areas as well, there are people who are poor. People who are lonely and isolated: people whose health leaves them dependent on others and often in pain: people who need help to do the things we take for granted.

To truly be aligned with God's kingdom we need to think about all of the ways in which we are rich and especially where we are blessed whilst others are in need. Whether it's money or time or relationships, talents or something else we can't carry that excess baggage through the eye of the needle. We need to share it generously with others.

There's an old story about a monkey who spotted the last cookie in a jar. He was determined to have that cookie. He pushed his whole hand onto the neck of the jar and grabbed the cookie. But with his hand in a tight fist he couldn't pull it back through the neck of the jar. He wouldn't let go of the cookie but unless he did, he couldn't get his hand out of the jar. He pulled with all his strength but to no avail. Far from getting the cookie he had one useless hand because he wouldn't let go of it.

So the question for each one of us today is 'what do we need to let go of: what are the things that make us rich and we need to share them with those who are poor. It might be money, but it might be something else. It might be time or friendship. It might be some practical DIY for someone who needs help or a phone call or visit to someone who is lonely.

Whatever it is, I will share with you some wise words that were said to me well over forty years ago and which have always proved true. 'You can try as hard as you like but you cannot out give God'. Whenever we share the riches that we have with those who have less, God always finds a way to give us more in return. Mark doesn't tell us if the rich man in our story discovered that. I hope he did.

Amen.