

More difficult teachings!! We've heard it a thousand times! Weren't we listening? So why does this passage always come as such a surprise? And why is Jesus always dissing rich people? It is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. What? That's from the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17 –

You remember the story of the young ruler – who asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life? Jesus reviews the requirements with him – don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't lie, honor your father & mother....to which the young man replies, "Sure, sure - -I do all that; always have! Ever since I was kid!" So then Jesus totally knocked the wind out of his sails – "One more thing then, sell everything you own and give the money away to the poor." The young man was blown away....I get the feeling he just couldn't do it. I get it. He had a lot of stuff. Whether he turned his life around or just gave up, we don't find out.... And I wonder if that's what happens to people today when they get into the nuts and bolts of following Jesus, they walk away... because they feel like they just can't do it.

These stories make us scratch our heads – especially in our little valley – in our country – the richest country in the world... Home of capitalism... what are WE to make of this?

Or this from Luke: "None of you can be my disciple if he does not renounce all his possessions." All my possessions? Seriously? All of it...? No wonder the young ruler was sad. He listened – and he heard. That would make me sad too!

So here you are at home, minding your own business, watching the game or something ...And some guy comes to your door claiming to be your late Uncle John. Now, Uncle John had always been the black sheep of the family – never able to hold a job, didn't ever fit in – he was never the same after Viet Nam -- they say he suffered Post Traumatic Stress .... You kind of wondered what happened to him and then you heard that he had died.

How can you be Uncle John – I heard he died! "True" he says. And so has your rich uncle Bob who is now spending eternity far from the presence of God because he only lived for himself and never did anything to help anybody else – and he certainly never did anything to help me when I was living down the street from his house in the shelter. Bob has asked me to come and warn you that you should do better than he did with all the money and cool stuff that you have...

Sounds like Jacob Marley's visit to Ebenezer Scrooge doesn't it? Scrooge doesn't believe what's right in front of him... "Just an undigested bit of beef – a blot of mustard..."

But what would you do? Would you listen? Would you believe him? Or would you stall him in the foyer just long enough to call 911 to get the white coats to come and take him away?

I don't think any of us would take him seriously nowadays, and that is just what Jesus says at the end of this passage: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." ...Even if someone rises from the dead...

So what's so wrong about being rich? Nothing! Renunciation doesn't necessarily mean to give it all away or sell it all. That's the lie – don't fall for it!

Check this out: Jesus never criticized possessions. One writer put it this way – "there's no scriptural evidence that Jesus looked on possessions with a fanatically critical eye." Jesus never said it was bad to be rich; He said it was hard. What Jesus did do was frequently go out for dinner with the wealthy, he hung out at Pharisees' houses, celebrated at tax-collector's banquets, and well-to-do women supported his whole ministry! These women and other supporters of Jesus ministry renounced all they had, but they didn't sell it all and give the money to the poor! If they had Jesus wouldn't have had any ministry at all! They used it wisely – meaning that they used it for the work of the kingdom.

Jesus was actually accused of being a drunk and a glutton. Listen Matthew 11:19 & Luke 7:34 – "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" Where Jesus compares himself to the more ascetic John the Baptist who ate bugs and wild honey!

There's nothing wrong with being rich. And before you go denying your wealth - -we are all rich here. If we have a pair of shoes and a roof over our heads...if it takes you more than 10 seconds to decide what to wear? – We are rich by world standards.

So just being rich is ok. It's not about that. Although, we do hear Jesus teaching that possessions are an obstacle to spiritual growth. We can see that 'being poor' seem to open people up to what God can do – IS doing – in their lives. Rich people for some reason don't get that. They don't have that response.

This passage is not about wealth or poverty – it's not about dying or who goes to hell or to heaven. This passage is about humility and service and listing to God. The sin here is complacency – apathy and self-centeredness..

The rich man who spent his whole life stepping over poor Lazarus, is still trying to take control and run things. He has no humility - even after his death he still treats Lazarus like a servant: send Lazarus to warn my brothers, he says.

The theme of how we should be using what we are given runs throughout scripture.

"From whom much is given...?" (...much is expected)

"With great power comes...?" (...great responsibility) – ok, so that one's not actually from the bible – thank you Stan Lee and Spiderman – for stealing that quote from Voltaire, French writer/philosopher. -- Who knew?

The new testament reading today in **1 Timothy** relates to this as well... **1 Tim 6: 10** is famous: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." They've wandered away....

Love of money is the root of all evil. Not money, but love of money. Because you can't serve two masters – you can't serve both money and God.

We've heard it a thousand times and yet – and yet, we... don't... listen. Even if someone comes back from the dead - like an old wives tale or that thing my dad always said – or Jesus himself – we just don't listen. We have to do something 'good with our possessions.

**1 Tim 6: 17-19** has this for us: "As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life." I think that the spiritually independent and non-Christians out there who think badly of us might change their opinions if they could see us using our gifts this way.

It isn't long after this passage about the poor Lazarus that we meet a different Lazarus – the famous Lazarus from the Gospel of John. He does return from the dead! And did it change anyone's mind about – well – anything? Did it convince anyone that Jesus was who he claimed to be? Maybe a few, but they were already on Jesus' side. Those who were opposed to Jesus weren't convinced at all! – in fact, they were more determined than ever to get rid of him! Father Abraham was right! "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." They just won't listen!

I have often had the conversation with youth about the difference between 'wants' and 'needs.' Teens and children – and the rest of us if we're honest -- seem to get confused about what we want vs what we really need. "Oh, I need the new Assassin's Creed video game." – I need new shoes – I need a new car – I need a Snicker's bar!

I'm so glad I've grown out of that! When I say I need a new sneakers, I need new sneakers! Purple ones! Mine are...dirty! Never mind about the 15 pairs of sneakers I already have...

So the teenagers don't listen – grownups, like me, we don't listen. If we did, we would hear this: Do something with your stuff that benefits someone else. It's not rocket science. The gifts

we have been given – our wealth, our stuff, our skills, our talents – these have been given to us as the means do the work of the Kingdom.

The rich man's stuff could have been a source of earthly pleasure not only for himself, but for others around him. If only he had heard that "where your treasure lies, there your heart will be also." Maybe he did hear it, but didn't listen...

I heard a joke while ago that really isn't very funny....What can we do about the problems of ignorance and apathy in the world today? I don't know and I don't care.

Past the seeker as he prayed came the crippled and the beggar and the beaten. And seeing them...he cried, "Great God, how is it that a loving creator can see such tragedy and sadness, and yet do nothing about them?"

All was quiet, and from out of the silence God answered, "I did do something. I made you."