

Wealth is something that can hinder us or help us. What is our attitude towards wealth? For many of us it is a sign of security – that our future is secure. However, wealth can enslave us and all our waking moments may revolve around about how to make more money and how to save it for the future. The theme for our meditation this morning is, ‘The spiritual danger of trusting in wealth.’ In the Gospel reading Mark records for us an incident about a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus with a question. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ The passage begins with a question about eternal and also ends with eternal life. The key point that is to be noted in the man’s question is his assumption that he has to do something in order to attain eternal life. This is a very common assumption as many people in our world today also believe that they have to feed the poor, or give alms, or pay their tithes, or go on a pilgrimage, or go to church regularly in order to inherit eternal life. Their *karam* becomes important to demand that one be included in the inheritance of eternal life.

How does Jesus respond to the question that the young ruler asked? Jesus asks him is, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone’. Jesus was not denying his own goodness but was making the man understand that his only hope of eternal life was reliance on God. He then carries on by saying: You know the commandments, and cites five out of the Ten Commandments in a peculiar order: You shall not murder – 6, You shall not commit adultery – 7, You shall not steal – 8, You shall not bear false testimony - 9, You shall not defraud - a reference to Deut 24:14-15, Honour your Father and Mother – 5. The difficulty for the young man was not in understanding this but doing it. If anyone honestly tries to keep these commandments they will realize their bankruptcy and will be prepared to receive the Kingdom of God as a little child.

The rich young ruler tells Jesus that he has kept all these commandments since the time he was a boy and therefore has a clear conscience. He probably was not aware of the far reaching consequences of how Jesus interpreted some of these commandments in the Sermon on the Mount Matt 5:21-28. So by the letter of the law he had kept everything and therefore was an attractive recruit for the kingdom of God. Jesus looked at the man and loved him. He recognized the man’s earnestness and then challenges him to radical discipleship. He tells him that he lacked one thing and asked him to sell everything that he had and give them to the poor and then follow him. The demand was to forsake his property and his family and follow him. He is asked to place loyalty to the person of Jesus than to any material possessions that he has. The young ruler is made to see his need. Jesus’ words show him his self-deception, the summons to repentance and the gracious offer of himself as the way to eternal life about which he had enquired. Jesus is asking for a renunciation of possessions and a change of life style and to follow

him along with his itinerant disciples who were sharing their resources.

Mark records that at this 'the man's face fell.' He went away sad because he had great wealth. Origen a church father quotes the Gospel of Hebrews and says, 'He began to scratch his head and it displeased him.' The man also comes to the painful awareness that he cannot earn his way into God's kingdom. People of wealth find it very difficult to be obligated to anybody – even to God. But entry into God's kingdom cannot be earned either by our good deeds or by our money. Eternal life is a free gift of God that is to be received with thanksgiving like a little child.

When the rich man was not willing to follow Jesus because of his wealth and family ties, Jesus says, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God'. He says that it is 'easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for someone rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven.' A camel going through the eye of the needle is a picture of impossibility. So what is Jesus saying through this picture? Jesus is saying that the rich cannot gain eternal life by their wealth or by their own effort. Riches cannot buy eternal life. It is only by the grace of God and by faith like a little child that we receive eternal life. The disciples are flummoxed with each other and they say, 'Who then can be saved?' Only God can give us eternal life. Salvation is impossible with human beings and possible only with God. God can work the miracle of conversion even in the hearts of the rich. May we not trust in riches but turn to Jesus in faith and receive this eternal life which is freely offered to all who believe.

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