

Theme: Discipleship – putting our heart and soul into our faith

This is the first of our lent talks on Discipleship and putting our heart and soul into our faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This means our faith must be our number one priority, which is what is meant by putting your heart and soul into your faith; it is a commitment to live for Christ. That means our faith must be our number one priority, that is what is meant by putting your heart and soul into your faith; it is a commitment to live for Christ.

I now want to explore what that meant for the ruler, who featured in our reading from Luke's gospel and who we are told in verse 23 was rich, and what putting our heart and soul into our faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ would mean for us. Firstly, the ruler would have been considered a religious man, he probably went to the synagogue regularly and he admits to obeying the commandments that Jesus listed, but in his heart he knew that there was something missing in his life, but as yet he couldn't, or didn't want to, put his finger on it. He had probably tried many things to fill the gap, buying all the latest things, going to parties, horse racing, gambling, all the usual things that a rich idle man might do in ancient Israel in order to fill the gap, but nothing had worked, and he was getting despondent.

Then one day he heard that an itinerant preacher was coming into the district, and despite the humiliation of airing his problems in front of, and with, the local community, many of whom could well be his own employees or tenants; he plucked up courage and went to meet Jesus.

Now just before our reading we are told that Jesus was talking to a crowd of people which included a number of children, and that Jesus was talking to them about the kingdom of God and how they could enter the kingdom of heaven, and it was then that the ruler saw his opportunity to ask Jesus what **he** should do to inherit eternal life. But instead of addressing Jesus as teacher or Rabbi, he addresses Jesus with false flattery by suggesting that Jesus was better than everyone else including himself, by prefixing the word 'good' to teacher, but Jesus was having none of it and he rebuked the ruler by saying, "No one is good but God alone." Jesus then said to the rich ruler you know the commandments, and he lists a few of them to make sure the ruler is keeping up with him.

The rich ruler was no longer the dominant person in the conversation, Jesus had taken the initiative, as indeed he usually did in situations where he was being challenged, and all the rich man could say was, "I have kept all these since my youth". However, as a rich ruler in the area he must be fully aware of the poverty and misery around him, but although he had the means to make a difference, was doing nothing to help the poor in his community and Jesus was fully aware of that.

So, Jesus's command to him was that if he wanted to find what it was that he was searching for, then he must first sell all that he owns and distribute the money to the poor, and then

he will have treasure in heaven, and Jesus then added, “then come follow me.” Why did Jesus tell the rich ruler to sell everything he had, give it to the poor and follow me? When Jesus selected his twelve apostles, some of whom were quite well off, Jesus didn’t tell his disciples to sell everything and follow me, he just said “follow me”. So why did he ask the rich ruler to sell everything and then follow me? It was because the rich ruler’s god was his riches, it was his riches he worshipped, and before Jesus could do anything for him he had to separate him from his earthly god, his wealth. Yes he was a religious man, but it was his wealth that he worshipped, his real god was his money, it was his money he put his trust in, not God.

Now had the rich ruler agreed to give all his money away, and had he given it away grudgingly then possibly all he would have done was to add himself to the poor of the community, but had he given it away cheerfully then he would already have started obeying the second part of Jesus’s command, “come follow me”. All depended on his and on our attitude when we give money away. St Paul wrote to the Galatians chapter 2 verse 16 these words, “Yet we know that a person is justified (Justified means being put right with God by the forgiveness of sins) not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” “And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.”

It was the second part of Jesus’s command, “come follow me”, which was a strong hint on how he was to give his money away and how he was to behave in the future if he wanted to inherit eternal life. Jesus said as recorded in Matthew chapter 6 verse 3 these words, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

However, it would appear that Jesus had asked the impossible of the rich man, a bit like a camel going through the eye of a needle verse 25 of our reading, because he walked away sad. Going back to verse 25, the story of the camel and the needle, Jesus said, “Indeed, 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 heaven.” That may well be true but entering the kingdom of heaven is exactly the same for both rich and poor alike.

Most of us here today do not rely on the food bank for a meal or have to have government subsidy in order to pay the bills, in which case we are numbered among the rich in our community, because there are people who are poor and who do need government subsidy and who do need to use food banks. So, the reality for us is that we are in the same situation as the rich ruler and that Jesus’s story is for us and the way we live out our lives and our attitude to wealth and the poor; so, this for us is no hypothetical story, Jesus is talking to all of us here today and to those of you listening to this at home.

So, our motives for supporting the charities which are there to support the poor wherever they may be, including the Crowthorne food bank is important. St Paul wrote in his second

letter to the Corinthians chapter 9 verse 6 and 7 these words, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”, and. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Going back to our reading, in verse 28 Peter said. “Look we have left our homes and followed you.” Why did he say that? Peter had a wife and possibly children, his family owned fishing boats on the lake and probably sold fish throughout Galilee and here was Jesus telling him that it was impossible for him, a rich man, to enter the kingdom of God despite all he had done. But Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”

Giving our heart and soul to Christ will have its consequences, but these will be vastly outweighed by the joy we will receive.

As we have seen, there are many lessons in this fairly short passage which applies to us. For example, true fulfilment is found in what we spend cheerfully on other people through love, be it our time our talents or our money. And we need to remember that what we do cheerfully for other people we do for God. (Matthew 25 starting at verse 31.)

Secondly, this story is as relevant today as it was when Jesus told the story because Jesus is speaking to all of us today, at this very moment.

Thirdly, we are justified through faith not through works, so all that we do must be to the glory of God.

Fourthly, God does not favour the righteous poor over the righteous rich, God favours the righteous person who puts his heart and soul into his faith in Christ and cheerfully puts his faith into action for the good of God’s people.

Finally, we are not to judge other people, we only have a snippet of the life of the rich ruler, and while he did not respond to Jesus there and then doesn’t mean that he didn’t go home and pray about it and was eventually saved through his faith in God and his compassion for other people.

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