

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups March 22nd 2009

'Good New - for the rich!'

Matthew Chapter 19:16-25



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

I remember on a particular Saturday about fifteen years ago I went on a men's group day-out to a place in rural Surrey called the Granary. It was a basic retreat center that had been built from a run-down barn next door to a beautiful old farmhouse. The property, and the surrounding land, was owned by a family who had decided to dedicate some of their resources to Christian work. Over lunch, as I was walking around the land with one of the other men, he asked me rhetorically 'how is it possible to have such wealth and be a Christian at the same time?'

Had you been a Jew living in 1st century Palestine, then perhaps your family would have been considered to have been blessed by God. Much Jewish psychology looked to the wisdom of prophets and rulers of old, such as King Solomon. Take a look at the Proverbs 2, read it out amongst you. Keep in mind the rich young man and Zacchaeus. How would the accepted wisdom of the day have applied to them? Such wisdom influenced the underlying narrative of society and influence what people considered to be fairness and justice.

We have just heard what the Jewish point of view was, but what is the underlying narrative in the western capitalist society of today? Is the default assumption still that if the rich find it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God, then the poor will find it easy? Jesus appears to say so doesn't he? But look around you at our own society; perhaps you may feel that this assumption cannot be sustained. What does it mean to rich or poor in our credit driven world? For many apparently well off people, their mortgages mean that their overall financial net position is six figures into debt! According to a recent report in one of the broadsheets, the average personal debt in Britain is over £33,000. So who are the rich and the poor these days?

Take a look at Luke 8:14. Consider what this tells us about how the good news is received amongst the rich. The seeds of good news are scattered there, just as they are everywhere else, yet they usually fail to flourish. The good news is available to all, yet something stifles its germination. Think about what this might be; there is unlikely to be a simple answer.

Mark's gospel has an interesting version of the rich young man story (Mk 10:17-30), but with an extra twist which can help us understand Jesus' good intentions towards all people, regardless of their financial situation. Just the same as in Matthew, the young man comes to see Jesus to ask what he ought to do to get eternal life, Jesus tells him to keep the commandments, which again he apparently already does, but now comes the twist, in verse 21: **Jesus looking at him loved him**. He hasn't told him to give away anything yet. Jesus knew the man had come to seek him out because he realised that Jesus had something that he could get nowhere else, and for that much Jesus loved him anyway.



Witness: questions to discuss:

1. Take a look at the other passages about the rich young man \ ruler. They can be found at Mark 10:17-30; Lk 18:18-30. What interesting differences can you spot? Consider what we might learn from such differences.
2. Is rich a relative term? What does it actually mean to be rich today?
3. We all live in a society that influences our attitudes to money. Is it possible to step out of these attitudes and take a different direction?
4. Ask yourself, what good deeds must you do to have eternal life? Is it a fair question?
5. Do you think that the rich young man sold some or all of his possessions in the end?