

# To The Rich

By Jonathan Banning

I'm continually amazed at the request Jesus makes of the rich man in Mark 10:21, "... go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me."

This seems so unreasonable to us. Is it really fair for Jesus to ask him to sell all that he has, to give up everything? If we have honest hearts this teaching from Jesus will cause some discomfort, because deep down we are forced to ask ourselves how we would respond to such a request. What if Jesus asked you to give it all up and give to the poor. The house, the hundreds of clothes, the membership at the country club, the truck, the boat, the college fund, the comfort and ease that every one of us enjoy, do you think you would be willing to let it all go? Make no mistake, Jesus is speaking to us too in Mark 10, and He wants us to understand three truths.

## 1) You Are Rich

Possessions fill our houses and our lives. What if Jesus told you to give it all up? Now, it is easy for us to put that thought out of our mind, because at the end of the day we tell ourselves that we aren't like the rich man. We ease the discomfort by telling ourselves, "Jesus wouldn't ask me to give anything up because I'm not rich." We look at our possessions and our salary, we glance at our tax bracket and convince ourselves that Jesus would never bother asking me what He asked the rich man because I'm not anywhere close to rich.

We fool ourselves. We are rich. Being an American means that we have hit the material jackpot by birth. The tendency is to read this story from the perspective of a disciple or a destitute bystander. The tendency is to read this story thinking about the people in the better neighborhood with the bigger houses. Rather, we should read it from the perspective of the rich man, because more than any other group of people on the planet we are the rich man. Jesus speaks to us, and this is what He says...

## 2) Riches Make Following Hard

The response Jesus receives disappoints Him. Verse 22 tells us that the rich man "went away grieving." To him, riches trump Jesus. Though Jesus doesn't stop teaching. "How

hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" He exclaims in verse 23. The disciples stand amazed at this statement. So amazed they were, that in verse 24 Jesus reiterates His message so they knew that they heard Him right. In verse 25 Jesus surprises them by pressing further, "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." This statement, Mark informs, left them "even more astonished." So astonished that they asked, "Then who can be saved?"

Riches make it harder to follow Jesus. A certain freedom comes to a person who has nothing to lose. A man with no wealth must sacrifice no wealth to come to Jesus, but a man of means must be willing to part with every last cent to serve Jesus. For "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). The rich have more to lose. That means you and I have more to lose than most everyone in the world. Many rich would never voluntarily part with every last cent, instead they set a threshold for their sacrifice. They will only give so much before they give up. I wonder what the rich man might have said if Jesus had proposed he give half, or a fourth. Riches make following harder. The more we have the more likely we will obtain something we are unwilling to part with in order to serve Jesus.

### **3) But Following Is Possible**

In response to the question, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus answered, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." Man cannot conjure anything more valuable than wealth, but God can provide us with something infinitely more valuable than everything we own. God provides eternal life. A rich man may not be willing to concede his wealth for something man can provide, but if he knew what God provides he would be willing to leave everything to follow Jesus.

The lesson for us is not to concede all possessions (although that would be admirable and praiseworthy), but to remember the value of eternal life. The lesson is to see all my luxurious, fancy, wonderful possessions as meager crumbs. Even family and friends amount to rubbish and chaff compared to the riches found in the kingdom of God.

How different this story would read if the rich man rightly understood the value of following Jesus!