

I've given today's message the title: **A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

And the reason I'm making a point of the title, is to try and keep myself on track. It would be so easy (with this reading), for us to head off in any one of a number of different tangents. And if we did that, we might miss the main point.

And there will be times today, where we do start heading off on a tangent, but then I'll pull us up, and bring us back to that title:

**A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

Righto, so, let's set the scene. Last week, we had the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, who went to the Temple to pray. And the Pharisee: well, his prayer was pretty-much, "God, thank You that I'm such a good bloke." While the Tax Collector beat his breast, and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

And it was the Tax Collector, who went home justified before God, and not the Pharisee. Why? Because the Pharisee trusted in his own righteousness. He thought he was pretty-good-alright, and that he didn't need forgiveness for anything in particular... While the Tax Collector, knew that he was totally dependent on God.

So, that was the parable, last week. And that was pretty challenging, wasn't it? No self-righteousness; humble ourselves...

And now, a man who Luke describes as "a ruler" – most probably some kind of Civic Official, says to Jesus: "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

He's obviously missed the whole point of Jesus' parable... Inheriting eternal life, isn't about what we do – it's about what **God** does. We've just learned that the only way to be saved, is to forget about our own self-righteousness, and to humble ourselves before God and before men, and to totally depend on God. "Humility"... Humility before God. An end of self, and a desperate clinging to God.

And he says: "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

**Doh!!!** He doesn't get it.

Anyway, Jesus never misses a teaching opportunity, and here's a tangent we could go out on:

Jesus said to him, "**Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.**"

And I reckon there's 2 things that Jesus is doing here. Firstly, He is inviting the ruler (and you and I), to consider the goodness of Jesus... And if Jesus truly is good, then that reveals the **God**-ness of Jesus (because only God is good)...

Only God, is truly “good”. Oh, you and I, we might be able to do a few good things, but we also do evil, don’t we? There is a difference between “doing” good and “**being**” good.

And so, the second thing Jesus is doing, is causing us to reflect on our own lack of goodness... Only God is truly good, and so, when we examine ourselves, I find that I am not up to par – I am not good....

And so, even with that little response from Jesus, He’s already shot-down-in-flames, the whole assumption of the ruler – that if only he knew what was missing, he could do enough good, to inherit eternal life...

We cannot do enough good, because sin continues to lurk in our nature, and sin prevents us from being “good” as God is good.

Anyway, let’s not go any further down that tangent. Let’s come back to the title:

**A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

The question was: what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus' answer:

<sup>20</sup> You know the commandments:

- 'Do not commit adultery,
- Do not murder,
- Do not steal,
- Do not bear false witness,

- Honour your father and mother.' "

It wasn't a comprehensive list – it was just a selection of a few commandments. But, did you notice, that they are all commandments about how we relate to other people. Jesus didn't even get into the commandments on "how we relate to God". So, maybe this should have been a bit of a hint to the Ruler: "that how we treat other people, is really important – it has eternal ramifications"...

Anyway, the ruler: he probably thought that he hit the bonanza: "I've kept all of these ones, ever since I was a young fella". The Greek word actually means "from his early teen years". And that makes sense. I understand that in the Jewish culture, it was at the age of 12, where a boy became a man. From the time you reach 12 years of age, you know the difference between right and wrong. And so, from the time he was responsible for his own behaviour, he had kept those commandments.

But we soon realise, that keeping **some** of the commandments of God doesn't make us good. A pure heart, is what makes us good. A Godliness within, is our only source of "goodness".

In the Rich Ruler, there was something missing. A sacrificial commitment to God.

Jesus said:

**"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."**

What did he lack? "Treasure in Heaven". Why did he lack "treasure in heaven"? Because he valued his treasure on Earth way too much (and he had a lot of it). The thing that was missing for him, was "a sacrificial commitment to God" – to leave everything, to follow Jesus.

*When I got married, I knew that I was batting well above my average. Why would a girl as lovely as Robyn, ever marry a bloke like me... Some of you still wonder that.*

*And when I made my marriage vows, part of that, was a vow, to forsake all others... And that wasn't a difficult thing to do, because no one else would have me – certainly no one like Robyn...*

*I'm getting all mushy now...*

But when someone becomes a Christian, it's not only a matter of "receiving" (receiving Christ). It's also a matter of "forsaking".

- We forsake all other Gods.
- We forsake our own will, and say "God, Your will be done"; and
- we may even find God calling us, to forsake, that which is most precious to us...

When Jesus said to the Ruler,

- “Sell everything you have”
- “Give it to the poor”;
- “Come, follow me.”

He became really sad. Why? Because he was very rich. But not only because he was very rich. It becomes evident that the man’s wealth was more precious to him, than his commitment to God.

Owwh. His wealth was more precious to him, than his commitment to God.

And when Jesus saw how sad he had become, He said, “It’s really hard, **for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!** He said: <sup>25</sup> ... **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”**

Does that trouble you? I’ve heard people try to explain this away. *“There may have been a very small gate in Jerusalem, and because it was small, it might have been known as “the eye of the needle”. And, if you unload the camel, and get it down on its knees, you can just get the camel to wiggle through the gate...”*

Where do people come up with this sort of stuff... It is a shameless attempt to blunten the shock of the words of Jesus. In fact, the disciples were so shocked, they pondered, “How can **anyone** be saved?”

You see, it was a common (and logical) assumption, that “wealth was the sign of the blessing of God”. (lie of the prosperity gospel tells people that today). And so, if a person

had wealth, well, that must mean that they're blessed by God...

But, now Jesus is saying "It's really difficult for a wealthy person to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, **it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.**"

And so (in their minds), if even those who are blessed by God cannot enter the Kingdom of God, who can????

"Who then, **can** be saved????"

Jesus said: "**What is impossible with man is possible with God.**"

And we all go "Phew! Thank Goodness for that." With God, it is possible for the rich to be saved. Phew. Because by world standards, we are rich.

But do you see what we've just done? As soon as we take that attitude, we've missed the whole point. If it is impossible, but by a miracle of God, it is possible, for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, why is it, that every rich person, believes that they are the miraculous exception????

"Oh, it's because I don't love my wealth like the Rich Ruler did."

"Well, good. You won't have any trouble then, giving it to the poor."

Let's come back to the Title:

## **A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

Let's get a few things straight.

**1.**

Firstly, let us **not** just 'write-off' every hard teaching of Jesus, that makes us feel uncomfortable – every teaching that presents us with a massive challenge to a change of perspective/lifestyle.

Let's acknowledge, that Jesus is telling us something very important here. What's He teaching us? Storing up treasure in this world, means no treasure in heaven.

**James 5:**<sup>1</sup> Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

Letting go of what I have, and sharing what I have with those who are desperately poor, that is the way of Jesus. That is the way of a Disciple of Jesus. And that, is how treasure is stored up in heaven.



## **We are never worse off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

- Having stuff;
- Having a good bank account;
- Accumulating land;
- Accumulating wealth;
- Accumulating a nest-egg, or a good retirement fund;
- Creating a source of inter-generational wealth for us to keep in the family and to pass on to our children...

That might be good, solid worldly wisdom... But how is it any kind of benefit from the perspective of eternity?

The Rich Ruler, had much, much more than he needed. If he were to sacrifice what he had, he would not be worse off.

## **2.**

So, secondly, let's talk about having an eternal perspective.

Becoming a Disciple of Jesus, makes little sense, if we hold a current, earthly perspective. If all I value; or if all I can comprehend, is based on a current, earthly existence, why would anyone become a Christian?

Jesus was very up-front. The cost of being His Disciple, is high.

- It's not the popular road. It's the narrow road. Few will travel it.

- It's not the safe road. People will hate you because of your commitment to Jesus;
- It's not the road to wealth. Jesus gives us wealth to be generous to those who are destitute. It's not for our own luxuries. He gives us what we need.;
- It's not the road to longevity. Countless hundreds of thousands – probably millions of people have died, for the sake of Jesus; and
- It's not the easy road. As Disciples of Jesus, we don't sit back in relaxation. We labour for Him and for His Gospel...

Why? Why would anyone ever become a Disciple of Jesus?

Well, I reckon it was the Apostle Peter who summed it up. In John 6, Jesus gave a hard teaching, and many people who **had** been following Him, turned away. And Jesus said to His Disciples, “**Do you want to go away too?**”

John 6:68-69 (ESV)

<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, <sup>69</sup> and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

That's the reason right there. We believe in Jesus, and we follow Jesus, because we have an eternal perspective. This life is not the end. Think about this for a moment: “*On God's*

*time-line, what's the 70/80/90 years we get to live? They don't even rate as a dot on the timeline of eternity..."*

Jesus is the Holy One of God. He has the words of eternal life... And so, with this eternal perspective, everything changes.

And let me tell you: What we do with our money/investments/assets/things we have, are a pretty good litmus test of whether our perspective is truly eternal.

### 3.

Thirdly, let's talk about salvation.

Last week, we nailed it down that **nothing** I can do, can earn me salvation. (Are we agreed on that?) No good work, could ever pay-off, all of my sin (It couldn't even be a down-payment). And so, let's be very clear here. Jesus is **not** talking about this Rich Ruler buying his salvation, by selling up, and giving everything he has, to the poor.

The only way to be saved, is to realise that I am totally unable to save myself, and to cry out to God, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner"...

But this rich ruler, he hasn't got that yet.

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

## 4.

So, that brings us to “repentance”.

Last week, we heard the Tax Collector beating his breast, crying out “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” That was his repentant heart calling out to God for mercy.

Where is the repentant heart of the Rich Ruler? What is he repenting of? What **evidence** is there, of his repentance?

In a 2 or 3 weeks time, we’re going to hear the story of Zacchaeus. We know that *Zacchaeus was a very little man, and a very little man was he...*

Yes, he was short. But he was also **very** wealthy. And when Zacchaeus came to faith, he said “I am going to give half of my goods to the poor. **And** if I’ve defrauded anyone, I’ll pay him back 4 times what I’ve taken”... **That**, is repentance. It is not merely a matter of words. It is an action.

How do I know that repentance is an action, and how do I know that what Zacchaeus did, was “a repentant act”? Well, that’s simple, because “repentance for the forgiveness of sins”, is a theme that is preached right throughout the Gospel of Luke.

- John the Baptist preached it;
- Jesus preached it;
- The Disciples preached it

– Repentance, for the forgiveness of sins.

And right at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist is preaching this message of repentance for the

forgiveness of sins, And he tells the people, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance”. And they come and ask him, “What does that look like?” They said, “What then, shall we do?”

And John the Baptist said, “Don’t do anything... – that would be trying to **earn** your way to salvation...” Did John the Baptist say that? **Absolutely not!!!**. What then, did he say?

Luke 3:11 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> ... he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

To repent, is to completely change our allegiance. Becoming a Christian (and I’ve said this so many times) – Becoming a Christian is not just adding a bit of Jesus to your life. Becoming a Christian, is such a radical transformation, Jesus described it as “being born again”.

It is:

- A complete change;
- A complete new life;
- We no longer live for this world.  
We live for the next.
- We used to love ourselves, and so we would keep what we had for ourselves.  
Now we love others like Jesus loves them, and so our hearts break for those who are destitute.

*How could I possibly justify having a spare coat in my cupboard, when my neighbour is freezing at night because they can't afford heating, and they don't have a coat?*

*How can I possibly justify having a full pantry and a full freezer, and offer nothing, when my neighbour has no bread for his children to eat???*

How can the rich ruler, be filthy-rich, and love his wealth more than loving others. And how can he love his wealth, more than he loves Jesus?...

Repentance, is to turn from what once was normal (and to the world, might continue to be “normal”), and to embrace a whole new way of living by faith.

## 5.

Fifthly, let's talk about faith. And let's talk about the difference between a “living faith” and a “dead faith”.

We know that we are saved by “faith”. But what is faith? Well, it's “believe” – it's what we believe. It's “trust” – it's what we trust in. But “Faith” isn't “faith”, unless it is a lived faith.

In my daily bible readings this week, I've been in The book of James. And the book of James, is something that really messes with some people's theology.

*Martin Luther referred to it as “an epistle of straw”. He saw it as a “lower-level” book in the New Testament – other books were much more important. Why? I suspect it’s because it messed with his theology.*

The book of James reflects a crucial aspect of the preaching of the apostles: the *repentant lifestyle that is worthy of the gospel*. This matches Jesus’s teaching in the Gospels<sup>i</sup>.

James said:

James 1:9-11 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, <sup>10</sup> and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Alright, what James is doing, is he’s painting a picture of how wealth is **always**, only temporary. That’s why the poor man rejoices, because “Hey, wealth is fleeting/temporary”. And the rich man, fades away in the midst of his pursuits... And that for me, captures pretty well, one of the dangers of wealth.

The wealthy get caught up in the pursuit of the wrong thing.

- More wealth perhaps;
- More lands;
- More houses;
- The pleasures that wealth can afford;
- The place of honour, that the wealthy seem to hold in society...

So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

But you know what: There is a godly pursuit for those who have wealth.

Let me take you to **James 2:14-17 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

A living faith (a faith that is alive/genuine/real/true), does good, from the goodness of God, within. If I claim to have faith, but the Goodness of God is not shining through in what I do, my faith is dead.

Jesus told the Rich Ruler, what repentance looked like for him. To sell up everything he had, and to distribute it to the poor, and then to follow Jesus. But, that made him sad. He couldn't do it. For him, that was giving up way too much...



Why do you think Jesus said that it's so hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God? And why did He use that shocking image of impossibility – <sup>25</sup> ... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Sometimes (and this may not be true for you) – Sometimes, the wealthy, are the most meagre of givers. Sometimes we structure our affairs, so we never have significant funds available for God (whether it be supporting ministry and mission, or whether it be giving to the poor). We keep buying assets by borrowing more money. And we put ourselves in a situation where *"I don't have any money to give. I've got a big debt I have to pay off"*... And before the debt is paid off, another asset is bought, and more debt is taken on... And using that logic, it is possible to accumulate (and pay off) millions of dollars in assets, and never have significant available funds to be generous.

Maybe that's why Jesus had to say to the Rich Ruler "**Sell**". He didn't say, "Give to God what you have available". Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

And maybe if any of us are asset rich, but we cannot afford to be generous, maybe God's word for us is "Sell"...

Let's come back to the heading:

## **A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

Here is the good news: Jesus said: **What is impossible with man is possible with God."**

The wealthy can be saved. Hallelujah!!

Peter understood that to follow Jesus, always involves sacrifice. <sup>28</sup> ... Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you."

<sup>29</sup> And [Jesus] said to them, **"Truly, I say to 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, <sup>30</sup> who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."**

Now, I don't think he's talking "abandonment" of our families, or our family responsibilities... But particularly in their culture, to receive Jesus, might mean rejection by their family.

And sometimes for the sake of the Kingdom of God, we leave our homes to follow Jesus.

But Jesus is teaching us **We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

If your own family reject you for following Jesus, that's ok. Look around you. In this life, we are your family. *I am reminded of this every time we go away and we visit another church, and we meet other Christians who we've never known before, but they're family – they're brothers and sisters in Christ. And people we don't even know, invite us into **their** homes. And we are welcome.*

But even so, how can that ever compare to the age to come (eternal life).

**A living faith – We are never worse-off, when we sacrifice, for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

Not worse off in this life.

What's better? Having wealth? Or having a loving, intimate relationship with the Lord who loves you? And having the family of God, who love you.

And in the age to come.

What's better? Temporary earthly things? Or eternal life in glory...

With an eternal perspective, and with a living faith, our attitude and our prayer is this.

Let's pray:

“Lord Jesus, we sacrifice everything,  
to follow you, and  
for the sake of the Kingdom of God.”

Knowing that in You,  
We are blessed

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Foord, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-epistle-of-straw-reflections-on-luther-and-the-epistle-of-james/>