

For about the last 4 months, I've had a really saw shoulder, and the doctor's had me on anti-inflammatories... Have you noticed that while I've been on anti-inflammatories, my sermons have been a whole lot less offensive??? Do you think anti-inflammatories work on our words??? If they do, maybe I need to take a double-dose today...

I reckon, if by the time we finish today's message, if you're not at least a little bit offended, and I'm not feeling somewhat hypocritical, then I've totally failed to adequately portray, the gravity of what Jesus said...

Jesus had some really tough things to say to all sorts of people, and today, he's got some really tough things to say to those who are rich.

But before we begin, I suspect that I may need to dispel a myth that some of us might believe...

Some of us might've breathed a sigh of relief when I said that Jesus had some tough things to say to those who are rich... "Phewwww, thank goodness He's not talking about me",,, "Oh, but it might make so-and-so squirm, because he **is** rich..."

So, let's dispel a myth: How can I tell, if I a person is rich???

Well conveniently, there's a very simple test that we can perform:

If you've got a watch on today, I want you to try and catch your reflection in it... Now if you can, that person you can see reflected in your watch, is rich...

For those who are technology savvy, you mightn't even have a watch, that doesn't matter... Can you get your reflection in your phone? Or better still, you might be able to use your camera to get an image of yourself... Now, have a look at that picture... The person who's image you're looking at, is rich...

*You might say to me, but Michael, I don't have any money at all – how could I be rich??? Well guess what??? The reason you don't have any money, is because you've already spent what you had,,, But you're not really **too** concerned, because you are **so rich**, that you know that more money will arrive in your bank account, before you've been without food for a week...*

You may have an enormous debt, and feel, “Well, I'm not rich – look at the size of my debt” ... But the thing is, the only reason you have that debt, is because you are so rich, the bank is certain that you can pay it back...

You see, a lot of us believe the myth that “I'm not rich”... But you know what, depending on what international scale we use, Australians have an **extremely** high standard of living... We usually rank somewhere in the top 5ⁱ countries (usually #3 or #4) of the world.... (I fear that we're sending our country broke by staying in the top 5), but by world standards, our standard of living is **exceptional**... The trouble is, as we **get** more and more, and as we attain a higher and higher standard of living, we expect more... And the ones we compare ourselves to, are the ones who **have** more and more.

And so, we compare ourselves to others who are richer than us, and so we continue to believe the myth, “I’m not rich”...

Why do you think so many people put their life at risk, to try and get to Australia to live??? It’s because in Australia, even an unemployed person, or a person on a disability pension, is richer than the vast majority of the world...

Robyn and I, are rich. We are so rich, we keep a room in our house – actually since November, it’s become 2 rooms – 2 whole bedrooms, that no one lives in, just in case some visitors stop by...

We are so rich, we spend as much money feeding our dog, as what many people in the world can afford to spend to feed their kids...

In fact, we are so rich, that some weeks, we don’t even work... Isn’t that incredible??? In February this year, for 2 whole weeks, we stopped work. And we are so rich, we continued to get paid, for not even working, while we went to the beach and did nothing...

We are so rich, that in our home, we have a machine,,, so that when the temperature gets up, and we start to get uncomfortably hot, we turn this machine on, and it lowers the temperature of our house down, so that we don’t even have to sweat any more... We are that rich...

So, let’s dispel the myth: By world standards; and certainly by historical standards, **we are the rich**... Our standard of

living, is far higher than the very richest person in Jesus' day...

So, we've dispelled the myth – that we're not rich, and now let's begin with prayer:

Heavenly Father,
our prayer for today, is that You would soften our hearts.

Lord, give to us Your wisdom,
that we would see things as You see them.
And Lord, as we study Your word today,
instil into us, the eternal values of Your Kingdom.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Righto, so Jesus has been travelling toward Jerusalem (He's got an appointment with the cross). He's started off in the far North of Israel; He's been to Capernaum; He's now travelled down to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. ...

But just as He's about to leave the town He's in (on the next leg of His journey), this man comes running up to Him. Now, in the Gospel of Luke, we're told that he's a **young** man. Matthew tells us that he's a **ruler**... Mark just tells us he's a man, and he comes running up to Jesus, and kneels before Him, "**Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**"

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

Alright, the Gospel of Mark, is all about revealing who Jesus is. Right at the beginning of Mark, we've been given the 'executive summary', Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God... And right throughout the Gospel of Mark, we keep getting these pearls dropped in, which form a string of pearls (if you like), that reveal who Jesus really is...

This man recognises that there is something extraordinary about Jesus – He recognises Jesus' inherent goodness, and for some reason, he also assumes that Jesus knows the way to eternal life... And with His answer, Jesus doesn't try to downplay His goodness – He crystallises what His goodness reveals about who He truly is...

You call me good – **No one is good except God alone.**

There's the pearl, right there: Jesus is good; Nobody's good except for God; Therefore Jesus is ,,,, "God"... So, next time the JW's knock on your door, and they try and surprise you by telling you that the word "trinity" isn't in the Bible, don't be surprised, because they're right – the word isn't in the Bible... But take them to Mark 10:18, and show them what this reveals about Jesus... The absolute **goodness** of Jesus, reveals the divinity of Jesus...

But then Jesus answers his question. The man had asked, **"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"**

Alright, "Eternal life" is the inheritance – what do I have to **do** to get it???

And Jesus said: **19 You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honour your father and mother.'** "

Alright, He didn't spend all day, quoting **all** of the commandments – He just quoted a few (Mostly from the 10 commandments), and the ones that He quoted, are the ones that can easily be seen demonstrated...

And Jesus' answer, probably brightened his bloke's day a bit (**momentarily**): "Teacher, I've kept all those commandments since I was a young fella..."

21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "**You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.**"

Now, I want to make sure that we don't try and vilify this man – He wasn't a villain. By most standards, it seems he was a very good man... He'd tried really hard to **keep** the commandments. From his **youth**, he had kept them...

And, did you notice, that

- Jesus didn't correct him;
- call him a hypocrite;
- say, "Well, you actually **didn't** keep this command, and you **didn't** keep that command..."

This man had tried his best, to keep the law – to do the right thing,, And Jesus **loved** that about Him...

There is a very disturbing teaching, that gets presented sometimes today... Some people tell us, that we have to repent of our goodness – that we have to repent of good deedsⁱⁱ...

Sometimes, they misquote Isaiah 64 and tell us that ‘good deeds’ are like ‘filthy rags’ – that they’re something we have to repent of ... What a load of rot... and I call it “rot”, in the true sense of the word... There is something truly rotten in the church, when we get told, we should turn away from doing good deeds...

Jesus saw the good deeds of this man, and He loved Him for it... Right throughout the Scriptures, God **never** condemns **anybody** for doing a righteous act... We are **never** told to repent of righteous deeds...

God **loves** it when we do the right thing... God **loves** it when we do good deeds... He even loves it, when people of the world do the right thing....

It’s not **good** deeds we need to repent of – it’s **sin** we need to repent of... It’s not ‘the good we **do**’, we need to repent of – it’s ‘the good we **fail** to do’, and the **bad** we do...

You see, Jesus loved this man, but He saw that He lacked something... Jesus could see beyond his external demonstrations of righteous, and He could see into His heart...

All of The Law can be boiled down into 2 simple statements (Mark 12):

1. "Love the Lord your God, with all your heart; and soul; and mind; and strength."; and
2. "Love your neighbour as yourself"...

And this man failed on both those counts...

^{V 21} And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

You see, he **didn't** love the Lord with all his heart— he loved his possessions more... He didn't love his neighbour as himself, because he kept great possessions for himself, rather than sharing with those who had need...

^{V 23} And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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."

Wowhh..

Over the last few weeks, I've introduced some of you to a new word, "Hyperbole"... Jesus uses a fair bit of hyperbole in this section of Mark. For those who weren't here, I'll give you the same definition I gave last time:

Hyperbole, is an over-the-top statement, that is given to make a point (it's not usually meant to be taken literally)... So for instance, we might say:

- That bag weighs a ton... Well yeah, it might be very heavy, but it doesn't weigh a "ton"...
- Yesterday was the worst day ever... Well, it might've been a very bad day, but it's unlikely that it's the worst...
- I cannot live without him... Yes you can... You might miss him, but you're not going to die because he goes away...

Alright, that's a few examples of hyperbole, **but** when **Jesus** uses hyperbole, it's generally a bit different... Yes it **is** an over-the-top statement, given to make a point (and no, it's **not** usually meant to be taken literally), **but** when Jesus uses hyperbole, it **is** actually true.

So:

Jesus said, **how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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."**

It's an over-the-top statement, isn't it... He's named the largest beast of burden, that they have in that part of the world (camel)... And He's named the smallest aperture (hole) – the

eye of a needle... and He said, it's **easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."**

It's an over-the-top statement, given to make a point – what's the point??? It's really difficult for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God... Well actually, no... It's **impossible**... It's impossible for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God...

Now, that's truly offensive... Speaking as a rich person, I find that offensive... And ever since Jesus said it, and right through the ages, people **have** been truly offended by this, and so they try to tone it down a bit...

When I was growing up as a kid, I remember a minister telling us once, that there was a gate in the wall of Jerusalem, which was known as the eye of the needle,, and it was just big enough, that if you unloaded all of the goods off of the camel, and you got him down on to his knees, he could just shuffle his way through the gate... That's what we were told. Has anyone ever heard that teaching???

If you've heard it, **forget** it... There is no archaeological evidence for this at all – that such a gate was named “the eye of a needle”... It's just an attempt to make something which is “impossible”, sound “difficult” ...

When the whole point of Jesus' illustration, is it **is** impossible. It **is** impossible, for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God... The disciples were amazed by this... You see, in their culture, there was a bit of prosperity theology going on there too –

Those who are rich, must be rich because they're blessed by God, right??? No. The first will be last, and the last will be first...

The point is, it's impossible...

Jesus said: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

Alright, He makes an over-the-top statement to make a point, but what He says, is actually true... It is actually true, that it's harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, that what it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle... But you know what? – God can put a camel through the eye of a needle. It is actually true, that it's impossible for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God, but you know what? – by a miracle of God, **even** a rich man can enter the Kingdom of God...

Now, this is where we rich folk have to be very careful... Jesus has told us it's impossible, except, with a miracle of God, it **is** possible...

....

So, how is that any different than for anybody else??? Isn't it only by the sheer grace of God, and the miracle of God, that **any** of us are saved??? ... Yeah, that's right... With man, it's actually impossible for **any** person to be saved – even a poor person... It's only by a miracle of God, that even a poor person is saved...

And so, the challenge for us rich folk, is for us **not** to discount the gravity of what Jesus is saying here... The line we need to

walk, at this point, is to understand, the **seriousness** of the situation... Jesus is using hyperbole for a reason – It’s to drive home, a very important point...

*It’s like He’s grabbing us by the shoulders and shaking us – I’m shocking you with this statement, because I want you to know, just how critical this is... I need you to grasp how dangerous, the lure of wealth is... What you do, with what you have, has eternal consequences... It’s about eternal rewards, and it’s about our very place **in** eternity...*

Jesus said to the man, “There’s one thing you lack”... But then He told him 3 things he needed to do:

1. Sell all you have
2. Give to the poor
3. Come, follow me...

He lacked 1 thing, but he had to do 3 things to fix it... So, did he lack 1 thing? Or 3 things? And what **was** the one thing he lacked???

Well, he certainly lacked “an eternal perspective”.

His worldly perspective, was causing him to try and serve 2 masters; His worldly perspective, caused him to value his wealth, more than he should... He had a lot of it, and he didn’t want to give it up... Jesus could see right into his heart, and He knew what he lacked... Sell it up; Give to the poor; and then you’ll have treasure of eternal value...

So, he lacked an eternal perspective... But the pattern Jesus gave him, was the pattern for becoming a disciple of Jesus...

Repent, and follow... All of his good works (as good as they were), and all of his keeping of the Law – none of it was enough to save Him... He needed a Saviour, the same as all of us... And he made the **first** step, when he came to Jesus... He got close...

And Jesus actually called him to follow Him as His disciple,, And as when Jesus called His other disciples, and as when He calls **us** as His disciples, we have to leave something... To become a disciple of Jesus requires repentance... Repentance is a change of mind, and a change of direction. It's demonstrated by a change of actions...

Jesus called the fishermen, and they left their nets and they left their boats; they left their homes; Jesus called Matthew, and he left his tax booth...

When Jesus calls, we have to leave behind whatever is preventing us from following Jesus with our whole hearts...

Now, the thing is, **that** was a word for that particular rich man. Does everybody have to sell up what they have and give to the poor, before they follow Jesus????

No.

The fishermen left their boats and their nets, but they didn't sell them up and give them to the poor. Peter didn't sell up his house and give the proceeds away. Nor did Mary and Martha...

So, why did that particular rich man get told that **he** had to sell up everything??? Well, I think it's pretty evident, by the way he responded to Jesus – Jesus knew His heart, and He knew that this man was trying to serve 2 masters, and his possessions were a greater master than what Jesus was... When the rich man had to choose between his possessions and Jesus, he chose his possessions...

You see, what it's boiling down to, is Love of money & love of stuff vs the love of God & love of others... And, this is a real litmus test, isn't it... If Jesus said to me, "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and then follow me with nothing in your pocket...." Would I do it??? Or would that be a deal-breaker for me???

Now, for a poor person, that's not a very big ask,, But for a rich person, that's an enormous ask... To be a disciple of Jesus, means Jesus has to come first...

Jesus has to come before:

- Your bank account
- Share portfolio
- Career
- Workplace
- Business
- Farm
- Sporting commitments
- Family
- anything

If to follow Jesus, meant you had to give up any of those things, would that be a deal-breaker for you???

You know what? – the more desperately, we try to convince ourselves that I’m not like the rich man – I don’t need to give up everything,, the more I desperately try to justify ‘my having wealth’, the more I’m exactly like the rich man.

If we truly have an eternal perspective, we hold wealth loosely...

Some people have the mantra, “blessed to be a blessing” ... That’s usually code for, “I know God’s made me wealthy, but I have a lot, so that I can give some of it away...”

But you know what??? Often, it’s those who have the least, who give the most... Very rarely, does a rich person give more than their excess... Very rarely, does a rich person give sacrificially...

Peter said, “Look Jesus, **we’ve** left everything to follow You...” And they had... They didn’t sell everything up and give it away, but to them, it wasn’t important either. What they had, wasn’t controlling them... They just left it, and followed Jesus...

And next week, we’ll talk more about the blessing that it is:

- to leave everything behind, to follow Jesus;
- live with an eternal perspective;
- the blessings in this life; and
- the blessings in the life to come...

But we’re also going to talk about the physical and personal cost of following Jesus...

But, what's the lesson for today?

Love God, and love others... Love them with everything you have...

The world tells us to set goals:

- Set financial goals
- Set succession goals (a big one for us out here, is "How can I get my kids onto a farm?")
- Set career goals
- Set superannuation and retirement goals

We've been having that drummed into us for our whole lives...

Jesus wasn't joking around, when He said, ²⁵ **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."**

That is a truly shocking statement... Are we seriously going to try and convince ourselves that we're the exception to the rule???

many who are first will be last, and the last first."

As tempting as it is, as a Bible teacher who is answerable to Jesus, I must not remove the offense of Jesus' words today...

The way of being a disciple of Jesus, is **very** different to the way of the world... We don't need to be rich by world standards... We certainly don't need to be wealthy by Australian standards... Let's be generous. As disciples of

Jesus, let's always be generous, and let's always be sacrificial in the way we give... Our love for Jesus, is evidenced by what we treasure most...

Questions?

ⁱ Human Development Index : No. 3.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index

World Economic Forum: No. 4. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/07/these-countries-have-the-highest-quality-of-life>

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 64:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.

⁵ You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷ There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

The point of this passage is that God meets with those who joyfully work righteousness, and remember God in their ways... The ones who God is displeased with, are those who through empty religion do a few righteous deeds, but don't call on God...