

Jesus and Wealth

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[0 : 00] Okay, well I wonder if you've been following the Wagatha Christie trial in the news recently. Anyone following it? No? Or not that you'd like to admit anyway in public?

Well, it's when footballer's wife Rebecca Vardy took the other footballer's wife, Colleen Rooney, to court and tried to sue her for libel.

And I think the case is still ongoing or the result has yet to be revealed. And it's over the alleged leaking of information from a private Instagram account. And so Hilary Rose for the Times writing, she summed up the case like this.

She said, the case isn't about betrayal as the lawyers have argued. It's about a world of wealth, privilege and boredom, fueled by jealousy and paranoia and seen through the poisonous filter of social media.

Or more brutally, she said that this was a trial in which two women spent millions of pounds and hours of their lives slugging it out over something that doesn't matter.

[1 : 04] So there you go, court case about something that doesn't matter. Now it is amazing what you can do if you have money, isn't it? Money can do a lot of good, but at the same time, money can also cloud your sense of what is really important in life.

And the more money you have, perhaps the more prone that you can be to do silly things with your money. And this is certainly one journalist's opinion of the Wagatha Christie case.

But it's also what we see here in the story of the rich man in Mark chapter 10. He had great wealth, but his wealth distracted him, clouded his vision, his senses to what was really important in life, to what really matters.

It wasn't his wealth as he began to see. And so today what we're going to see is what Jesus has got to say about wealth, about how this man who had great wealth actually misses out on the even greater wealth that is on offer.

And so here Jesus gives us not just sound financial advice. It's always good to get sound financial advice. But what he gives us is the most important, not just financial advice, but the most important advice, instruction that we could ever hear.

[2 : 23] And so what we see here is we learn about having great wealth, also that there is even greater wealth on offer, and actually we see how to get really rich.

That's what's going on in this passage. And so this is the advice we need to listen to, because if we don't invest our lives wisely, then we'll be left bankrupt forever.

That's what's happening here. So let's look at two simple points, great wealth, and then secondly, greater wealth. So first of all, great wealth, verse 17 to 22.

Jesus encounters a man with a question. This question's there, verse 17. As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? So here's a man who had everything that this world values. He appears in three of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

[3 : 21] And so what they do, they basically fill out his CV for us. So Mark tells us he was rich. Verse 22 says he had great wealth. Matthew tells us he was young.

And Luke tells us that he was a ruler. That's why he's often called the rich, young ruler. And he is impressive in every single way. I guess if we were to imagine him in today's terms, then he would be the kind of guy who had loads of money spread out in a number of different bank accounts. He'd have significant investments in stocks and shares. He'd have a very good property portfolio, maybe a big house, maybe a big house, family home in Mulgai, maybe a trendy flat in the merchant city, maybe a holiday home in Mauritius.

He would be the young entrepreneur of the year, director of his own companies, offices in London, New York, Beijing. He'd wear bespoke designer suits. He would wear crafted quality leather shoes on his feet and a Rolex watch on his wrist.

And I guess he'd be driving an Aston Martin DBS because that is a great car. But it would only be one of the cars that he has in his extensive garage. And he would have membership of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club in St. Andrews.

[4 : 40] That's the kind of man that we're talking about here. And so when Mark describes him as a man who had great wealth or possessions, we can safely assume that he had made it in life.

But we shouldn't get the wrong impression of him because despite the fact that he had made it, he certainly didn't think that he was it. Because he was humble enough to run up to Jesus, to fall on his knees and to address Jesus as good teacher.

And so the man who had everything was still conscious that he lacked something. He was astute enough to realize that there is more to life than money.

He'd come upon a discovery that still so many people have yet to make. And that's why his question for Jesus was, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And I think we can assume that he was sincere in his question. Because despite his wealth, he just knew something was missing in his life.

[5 : 46] But notice the contrast between him and the little children that Jesus was speaking about just before, earlier in Mark chapter 10, verse 13 to 16. Because there Jesus had said, truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

And so Jesus is making it clear that there is nothing that any of us can do to inherit the kingdom of God. We have got to receive it like a little child, a weak and helpless child who needs help.

That's us when it comes to the kingdom of God. But this man's asking, and look at his words, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Presumably, he had spent so much of his life achieving, working hard through his efforts, making himself the person he was.

And now he's thinking he'll get eternal life through his own efforts too. It's as if he's saying, Jesus, listen, just tell me what I need to do.

[6 : 57] Tell me the steps and I'll do it. I want eternal life. You just tell me what the deal is and I will go follow it through and I'll have it. But what does Jesus do?

Well, Jesus responds by picking up on being called good teacher. In verse 18, Why do you call me good? Jesus answered, No one is good except God alone.

Now Jesus isn't denying his own goodness here. He's emphasizing that nobody is good except God, which must have challenged this man's perception of his own goodness.

Because being good and living a good life doesn't earn you eternal life, does it? And that seems to be why Jesus asks him about the commandments.

Verse 19, You know the commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud, honor your father and your mother.

[7 : 58] Jesus forces him to reflect on how good he thinks he really is. And he actually reckons he's done pretty well. Verse 20, Teacher, he declared, All these I have kept since I was a boy.

That is his estimation of himself. He is confident in his own abilities. And yet Jesus, interestingly, doesn't pick up on what he's just claimed.

Instead, we read, Jesus looked at him and loved him. Now the word looked at here doesn't just mean to look at something, to glance at it and then turn away.

It means to look intently, to examine, to stare at. That's what Jesus does to this man. So it's as if this man's life is like an open book before Jesus.

And that's what all of our lives are like before Jesus. So Jesus sees him when he looks at him as he really is. And Jesus is under no illusions whatsoever about this man's confident commandment keeping.

[9 : 07] Because Jesus looks past the surface, past the outward observance of all of these commandments, and Jesus looks right deep down into this man's heart.

And when he does so, we're told that Jesus loved him. And what's interesting is, that is never said about anyone else in the Gospel of Mark.

But it's because Jesus loves him so much that Jesus has to expose the real love of this man's life. He must have thought it was God, but Jesus has to expose his true and first love.

Look at verse 21. One thing you lack, he said, go sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

Jesus is asking him to give away what is most important in this man's life, and that is his wealth. It's his possessions. Now, Jesus doesn't ask that of anyone else either, to give up everything.

[10:15] So giving away all your wealth isn't how you get to heaven. So don't panic. Giving away all your wealth isn't how you get to heaven. So having wealth isn't a bad thing, but wait.

It is a dangerous thing if our wealth becomes what we love more than anything else. And that's why Jesus tells this particular man that he has got to give it all up to inherit eternal life.

Because his wealth had taken the place in his life that rightfully belongs to God. It is what mattered most to him.

And so despite what he had, his wealth was what he really loved and what he really put his trust in, no matter how much he said he obeyed the commandments, we discover his real trust, his real security in life wasn't in God, it was in his possessions.

It is in what all he had. Because when you think about the commandments, this man was quite confident he had kept the second half of the commandments, you know, the commandments about relationships with other people.

[11:30] He thought he was doing well on those. But do you remember the first commandment? What is it? You shall have no other gods before me. And so his reaction to Jesus proves that his wealth did actually come before God in his life.

The God he'd have to give up if he was going to have the even greater wealth of treasure in heaven. You could say that money was his God.

But he couldn't give it up. He couldn't give it up for a greater wealth or treasure because it was far more important to him than God himself.

And that is why this is such a tragic tale. Because what Jesus does is he lovingly exposes the heart that hides beneath the religious facade and he challenges this man on what his heart was really attached to.

And his heart was really attached to his wealth. And so the man who seemed to have everything in the eyes of this world at the end of the story actually ends up with nothing.

[12:43] And what is interesting is that Jesus just lets him walk away. Did you see that? Jesus didn't run after him. Jesus didn't pull him back and negotiate a different deal that suited both parties.

No. It had to be all or nothing. But that was too much for this man. So he walked away sad. That word sad is probably better translated grieved or sorrowful.

So he began to grieve when Jesus asked him to give up all his wealth. Because he knew that is just something he couldn't do. Even with Jesus standing before him.

Even with this promise that he will have eternal life and treasures in heaven. He just can't bear to part with his great wealth. Because it was his God.

It mattered more than God in his life. And so just as Jesus got personal with this man here, it's a one-to-one encounter, Jesus also gets personal with us.

[13:51] So what does Jesus see when he lovingly looks at you? Not just your life, the things you do on the outside, but what does he see when his gaze penetrates through the facade and he looks deep down into our hearts?

What is it that we treasure in our hearts? What is it that we possibly couldn't possibly imagine living without? Because whatever it is, that thing has become our God.

And it might be wealth, but it could also be happiness, it could be success, it could be position, job, it could be power, comfort, love, security, relationships, our relationship, all of these things, whatever they are, the things that we can't imagine life without are probably the real gods that we worship.

But whatever these things are, Jesus calls us, just like he called this man, to surrender it and to give it up for him.

Because he demands our full allegiance. That is what he's asking of us, the same as he asks of this man. So that's the first point, great wealth.

[15:14] The second point is greater wealth. Because the focus shifts now from the man, the camera lens, as it were, pans away from the man, he walks off into the distance, into the sunset, the

dust disappears, he's away.

And so, now Jesus applies the lesson about wealth with his disciples. So, look down in verse 23. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples were amazed at his words, but Jesus said again, children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God. 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 God.

Now, that phrase, camel, going through the eye of a needle. There's debate amongst scholars about the source of this saying. So, some wonder whether Jesus was talking about a city gate that was so small that camels had to go down on their knees and sort of be pushed through the gate, be unloaded of all their load, kneel down and squeeze through.

And it's a kind of cute image, camel bending down, going through a gate. But it sort of takes away from the force of the point Jesus is making here. And there's no evidence for any kind of camel gate.

[16:40] But the point is, the camel was the largest animal in Palestine and the eye of a needle was the smallest hole possible. And so, it's obviously impossible for the camel to fit through the eye of the needle.

And that is Jesus' point. It is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Not because wealth disqualifies people who have it, but because wealthy people are tempted to love their wealth more than God and to trust their wealth for security more than trusting in God.

As we've just seen, the testimony of this rich man and his refusal to give away all he had and follow Jesus. And so, this rich man's wealth had such a powerful grip over him that he couldn't let go of it even for eternal life.

And that's why being rich with great wealth can actually prevent you and me from receiving an even greater wealth.

And it's the disciples who were confused and trying to figure all this out. And so, verse 26, the disciples were even more amazed and said to each other, who then can be saved?

[18:00] Jesus looked at them and said, with man, this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God. Now, I guess the disciples are surprised that the rich man who himself was a prime candidate for a place in the kingdom of God, the rich young ruler, morally obedient to the commandments, great person to have as part of God's kingdom.

And yet, the disciples watch on and they see this man, yet this man lose out and walk away sad. Because it's impossible for him to be saved, for anyone to be saved, by keeping the commandments.

And in this man's case, and in anyone's case, wealth can be a hindrance more than it can be a help. And so, Jesus is making it clear here that our salvation, eternal life, treasure in heaven, place in the kingdom of God, all of that is impossible by human effort.

It's impossible because nobody's good works can ever be good enough for God. We can never do enough to earn our salvation by ourselves.

But what Jesus is saying is our salvation is only possible because of what God does for us. And that's why we can't do a single thing to inherit the kingdom of God.

[19:31] We've got to receive the kingdom of God like a weak and helpless child. And the disciples were beginning to realize just how radical this was. The penny was beginning to drop for them because they were beginning to see that giving everything up for Jesus doesn't mean that you lose out.

Verse 28, then Peter spoke up, we have left everything to follow you. And they had left everything to follow Jesus, which means they will be rewarded.

Verse 29 says, truly I tell you, Jesus replied, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields, along with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and the last first. What's Jesus saying here? I think he's giving a maths lesson.

But it's not about subtraction where you're left with less by following Jesus. Yes, you've got to let go of everything that you cling to for security if you are going to follow Jesus.

[20 : 54] Well, that doesn't mean we lose our security, does it? We get even better security in Jesus himself, which means that we can view all that we have in this life as gifts to be enjoyed rather than God's to trust in.

And so the maths lesson that Jesus teaches isn't about subtraction, it is about multiplication and addition. Because we're rewarded a hundred times as much in this world, that's the multiplication, and then there's still eternal life to come.

That's the addition. So what does that look like? Well, because eternal life when you die is one thing and we can grasp that, but what does it mean to be rewarded in the here and now?

Because that is what Jesus is promising, isn't it? Reward in this life too. And so whatever we give up for Jesus and the gospel, Jesus is saying whether it's home or family or property or possessions, you will be given back a hundred times as much.

I think he's saying we enter into the family of God and in that family we receive so much more. And in that family we then discover that Jesus does meet our needs and Jesus then helps us see what really matters in life.

[22 : 22] And it isn't wealth or possessions. It's not the wealth of this world. What really matters is the greater wealth that comes from following Jesus.

And yet there's more to it because Jesus makes it clear as well as the reward we will also face persecution. That's part of the deal for being a disciple of Jesus.

And yet it is all worth it because of everything that we're going to inherit. And so those who follow Jesus might seem like losers according to the values of this world and yet Jesus is saying the very opposite is the case.

Many who are first will be last and the last first. He's assuring his disciples and us that those who are first in this world like the rich young ruler will be last when it comes to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

Whereas those who are last, those who follow Jesus, those who face persecution in this life will be first, will be rewarded, will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

[23 : 32] It is a complete reversal of how this world works, isn't it? Because it's only those who are ready to give up everything for Jesus who can receive everything.

and this is the pattern that Jesus had been teaching his disciples because all of this, this story and last week and the week before, all of this comes in the context of Jesus predicting his own death and resurrection.

And so Jesus is the model for what he is calling his followers to. So following Jesus is to go the way of the cross but then what happens after the cross?

what comes next? It's the resurrection, isn't it? So Jesus is telling us how to get really rich with wealth that we can never lose.

So let's be clear. Jesus Christ does make huge demands of us. He calls us to follow him. He calls us to surrender our life and everything we have if we are to be his disciples.

[24 : 40] What he also does as he looks at us and loves us, he exposes our hearts and he reveals to us what matters most to us. And so he forces us to make a choice.

So we can do what Jesus asks and we can give up the false gods, the idols that we cling to in this life or we can continue to keep a tight grip on them and lose out, not just in this life but in the life to come.

You've probably heard of Andrew Carnegie. In his day he was one of the wealthiest men in the world because of his steel company in the United States. And when he was just 33 he was already so rich and successful that he wrote a note to himself as he looked into his own heart and he could see what was in there and this is what his note said.

It said man must have an idol. The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money.

Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefore should I be careful to choose the life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery.

[26 : 09] I will resign business at 35 but during the ensuing two years I wish to spend the afternoons in securing instruction and in reading systematically. Well Carnegie promised to retire at 35.

He wrote that when he was 33. He didn't retire at 35 like he planned. He was actually 66 when he sold his steel company and he sold it in 1901.

31 years later than he had said. But his note is interesting because he knew his own heart didn't he? He knew that wealth was a dangerous idol for him.

He knew it could be his master and indeed in many ways it was and he didn't know what to do about it. It had a tight grip on him and he couldn't release himself from it.

But here we see that Jesus does tell us what to do and he makes it explicitly clear. And so what we decide to do ourselves really has massive implications.

[27 : 12] Not just for our life now but for our eternity. Because walking away from Jesus Christ will ultimately lead to great sadness.

And that's why we must be willing to let go of the temporary wealth of this world and follow Jesus knowing that this gives us greater and lasting wealth.

So how could we possibly do this? Well it's only as we realize what Jesus Christ has given up for us. Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything he hasn't already done himself.

Because unlike the rich man Jesus gave away everything. Paul puts it like this in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

So you see we're not just reading about one rich young ruler here. We're actually reading about two. Jesus is the true rich young ruler who gave up the ultimate wealth.

[28 : 26] Why? For you and for me. Jesus gave up his wealth by surrendering his life on the cross so that we can inherit eternal life.

And so it's as we grasp what Jesus Christ has done for us that we then will be able to give up our wealth. Jesus' sacrifice should change our attitude towards money, relationships, possessions.

In fact everything. Because when we see what Jesus has done for us, it should move us to give more. Being generous with our money of course, but also in every other area of life.

We will want to give what we can rather than grab hold tightly of what we've got. Because as our affection for Jesus Christ grows stronger and our grip on the riches of this world grows weaker, and so as we close, can you see how the rich young man here warns us against making a disastrous investment with our lives?

Because if we miss out on the eternal life Jesus offers, then we must face eternal death in hell. don't make a serious miscalculation with your life by walking away from Jesus Christ.

[29 : 58] I guess most of us will have checked our bank balance this week to see how much money is in there. So what? Fair enough. But how are you investing your life?

Where are you putting your trust? trust? You see, we can have everything this world values, but if we don't have Jesus Christ, ultimately, we have nothing.

We Solid reefered in hell where we do everything. Remember your belief rightgers? We love you about coisas thativia says and affect all the whole world