

I don't know if you're like me, but it seems to me there are some Gospel passages that require that we pause and take a little time to figure out just what's happening or what Jesus is talking about . . . and how it relates to us.

But this isn't one of those passages.

This passage is very clear. It stunned Jesus' disciples then . . . and it stuns all who hear it today.

Jesus emphatically tells his disciples . . . "how hard it is to be rich in this life and enter the kingdom of God."

And as they're reeling from this undisguised truth, He goes on to take it even further . . . "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God !" . . . apparently not just for the rich . . . but everybody.

This is tough stuff . . . and in their astonishment they ask, "Who then can be saved?!"

Because of the very nature of human sin and error, we cannot save ourselves. God knows it . . . and we need to know it.

Jesus has their full attention . . . and hopefully ours . . . and He teaches something very important . . .

“For human beings it’s impossible, but not for God! For God, all things are possible.” . . .

. . . that’s because God makes this great “wrong” right . . . through His Son Jesus . . . and does so for our sakes.

God loves us . . . and from the beginning has allowed for and planned for our restoration . . . and has done all this through Jesus.

This being the case we can, then, enter the Kingdom of God but we must do it through the doorway that is Jesus Christ (It must be!)

This is how God has done the impossible.

When Jesus meets the rich young man and tells him to get rid of his wealth, he’s talking about letting go of his attachment to earthly things and ideas. Only when we let go of attachments to the world can we reach out and grasp heaven.

God doesn't hate . . . despise . . . or condemn the rich. Wealth in itself is not bad. It can be a gift from God.

There is a misquoted saying that money is the root of all evil.

Money is not the root of all evil . . . it is the love of money that is a root of evil . . . it is the our attachment to and our desire for money . . . and for anything other than God . . . that becomes the problem.

If we fall into an inordinate love for wealth, then not surprisingly we develop an ideology to justify our pursuit of riches . . . and such ideologies and justifications are rarely in keeping with God's ways and teachings.

And so then we begin making choices which lead us away from Christ.

The rich man faced this choice . . . wealth or Christ. And as far as we know he did not do very well with his decision. And keep in mind . . . he was a man who kept the law of Moses to the letter. According to the law of his time, he was a good man. He wanted to be in good standing with God . . . and how interesting that

he had found in the law a way to do that and keep his wealth and comfort to boot. In his way of thinking, he had reconciled his religious beliefs with his lifestyle. (The perfect compromise.)

Then he runs into Jesus . . . and his house of cards comes tumbling down.

As he looks into Jesus' eyes, the question of what he wants most . . . is very clear. And he goes away sad . . . because he doesn't like the answer that has gripped his heart.

"How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God."

And if it's not wealth, then perhaps it is the way we justify our lifestyle or our opinions . . . or perhaps it is comfort . . . or pleasure . . . or maybe power . . . or position in life . . . or anything that has become first in our lives. . . many things can replace Christ in our lives.

"Children . . . how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God."

The rich young man faced a choice.

We all face the same choice.

Do we choose differently than he? Do we fare any better? Are our hearts sad at the answer to the question?

According to the Italian press, in April of 1989 a mandatory seat belt law went into effect throughout all of Italy. Many people protested that this was an infringement on their rights and that the government shouldn't be telling them what to do. Dr. Claudio Ciaravolo decided to make some money on the issue by designing a T-shirt with a black diagonal stripe that made it look like the driver who wore it was actually buckled up when he or she wasn't. The shirts sold so well that stores couldn't keep them in stock.

In 1990, a year after the mandatory seatbelt law went into effect, one of Dr. Ciaravolo's best friends was involved in a terrible accident. He had been speeding and lost control of the car. The car struck a tree, and the driver was thrown from the car and instantly killed. He was not wearing a seatbelt. He was, however, wearing one of the famous T-shirts. It failed to protect him.

Obviously, just looking like we are wearing a seatbelt won't keep us safe. Only wearing the real thing can protect us from harm.

In the same way, just looking like a Christian doesn't really

make us one; there has to be more to our faith than that.

Jesus invites us into a real relationship with Him. He takes us seriously and wants us to take Him seriously too.

How can He protect us if we don't know Him?

How can He deliver us if we don't allow Him?

How can we enter heaven if we won't walk through the doorway that God the Father has so impossibly opened for us?!

It is not our possessions . . . or our ideas . . . our families . . . or our attachments or an unchallenging walk through this world . . . that will save us in the next!

It's Jesus who can do that!

So He must first in our lives . . . because life is eternal. And when Jesus is first, everything else finds its proper place.

We don't lose everything . . . we gain everything . . . everything of true value in this life and the next.

Listen again to what Jesus says to the rich man in the Gospel. . . because he says it to us as well.

It's not a demand . . . it's an invitation.

Let go of those passing things that fill your life . . .

. . . and come . . . follow me.