

*17As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.’” 20He said to him, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.*

*23Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It 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.” 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, “Then who can be saved?” 27Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”*

*28Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.” 29Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”*

What do you think happened to all the stuff? The lamps made of bronze that adorned his home and the bedspread with all the fine needlework – stitches so small and delicate – the carpet –hand-woven of brilliant colored wool the envy of all who saw it. What happened to the robe that cost more than a laborer would earn in a year, and to the plantings imported from distant lands? What do you think happened to the table utensils crafted of silver and the bowls and plates baked from the finest clay? What of the chairs and couches and pillows that made his home such a place of comfort? What of the house itself and the gardens and fields that surrounded it? What of the barns and the stables and the reflecting pools and the slave quarters? What do you think happened to all of this? Broken or stolen by an invading army? Thrown out on the garbage pile when it had become worn? Collapsed in a storm? Buried under the debris of centuries? What do you think happened to the things the man could not let go of? Whose are they now?

Jesus loved him – that is what Mark tells us - Jesus loved this man who came running up to Jesus and knelt before him.

“Big deal” you say, “Jesus loves everyone.”

But Mark, the writer of this gospel never tells us this about anyone else – Jesus loved him.

I think Mark tells us that because we think something else when we read this story – not that Jesus loved this man so much but that Jesus wanted to test him. After he had asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life and after Jesus asked him if he was keeping the commandments and after the man said “From my youth I have kept them all!” Then it is that Mark tells us Jesus looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

What a great way for Jesus to find out if his love for Jesus is for real! Does he love Jesus or his stuff more? We think Jesus was testing him because we think Jesus is testing us. Will they love me and follow me and die for me or will they fail? –that is what we think Jesus is thinking. So hearing about this man really makes us nervous – what if Jesus asks the same of you and me – to leave behind all our stuff and to follow him? Will we pass the test?

But Mark is telling us it is not a test. Jesus loves him. Jesus does not want him enslaved by the stuff – owned by the stuff – living for the stuff. Jesus had bigger dreams for this man.

And you and me? Does Jesus want us owned and enslaved and living for the stuff? How many needy neighbors might we walk by because to notice and help them might cost us some stuff? How many anxious nights might we lie away because there is some problem with the stuff? How many hours of work do we give for the stuff and how many hours with our loved ones do we lose as a result?

This man could have walked with Jesus to Jerusalem - he could have waved a palm branch and cried Hosanna as Jesus entered the city. He could have heard Jesus debate with the scribes and the Pharisees. He could have been with Jesus as Jesus took the bread, broke it and said, “This is my body.” - and the cup with the words, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” He could have been in the garden and stayed awake while other disciples slept and seen the arrest, the trial, the crucifixion. He could have gone to the tomb with the women and heard the announcement that Jesus is risen. He could have been in that room when Jesus appeared and heard Jesus speak a word of peace. These

are the things Jesus wanted for this man he loved – that he would stay close to Jesus. But he chose to stay close to his stuff instead.

And you? When Jesus looks on you in love what does he see holding you back? Fears about your future security? A heart that cannot forgive? A blindness to the ways you could know the joy of helping another?

When Jesus looks on you in love he says, “Let go of everything that is holding you back – let go and follow me. Enter into my life of love, of forgiveness, of giving. Follow me, share my work with me, I love you so much I want these things for you.”

But that man could not let go of the stuff.

Was he saved?

Who knows? Jesus said with God all things are possible.

Can you cling to your stuff and still have hope through Jesus? With God all things are possible. But Jesus who loves you more than he loved his own life wants more for you than just getting by. He wants you to be free to love and to give yourself in love. Will you follow him in this?