

The University Heights Messenger

September 19, 2010

“Blessed Are You That Are Poor”

By Paul Earnhart

There is perhaps no more interesting and defining encounter with Jesus than that had by an unnamed young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). He came with such genuineness of spirit to stir in the Lord a warm affection for him. Unlike so many, and in spite of his worldly achievements, he was deeply concerned about transcendent things. Striving for eternal life and wrestling with a gnawing sense that something vital to his mission was missing, he came to the Lord for reassurance and instruction. Perhaps he thought that Jesus would soothe his anxieties with praise for his exemplary piety, or at most give him some noble but not all-embracing task. Whatever the case, the wealthy young man was wholly unprepared for what happened next. His thoughts of doing some “good thing” (Matthew 19:16) to make himself truly “worthy” of eternal life were as misguided as his use of the word “good” was shallow. The Lord’s demand that he give all that he had to the poor and come and follow Him shook him to the core and made him aware perhaps for the first time not only that he did not love God supremely but that he was not prepared to do so. It was a crushing experience.

But, if the young ruler was shaken by the Lord’s answer to his request, the disciples were every bit as startled by Jesus’ observation to them afterward. “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:25). The disciples, prejudiced toward wealth as a sign of God’s favor, were stunned into wondering if anyone could be saved (10:26).

Did Jesus have a prejudice against the rich? No, He was simply speaking realistically. He does not say that it is impossible (10:27) but

that it is very difficult. It is difficult because rich people have a far greater temptation than the poor to trust in themselves and their riches to see them through, to live their very comfortable lives without a sense of the need of God. It will be harder to be humble, to take instruction rather than give it, to recognize one’s own profound spiritual inadequacies, to see wealth as a responsibility rather than a privilege.

Can rich men and women be saved? Abraham, Job, and David will all answer “yes.” But Paul, echoing Jesus, says not many; “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). Rich and powerful people can humble themselves and cease to trust in their riches, but it will be harder for them than for the poor who may indeed be tempted to covetousness but have nothing to lure them into a sense of self-sufficiency. It was always “the common people” who heard Jesus “gladly” (Mark 12:37). And there are reasons for this.

- 1) The poor know that they are in need of help, not only from God but from other people.
- 2) The poor by necessity rest their dependance on people rather than things.
- 3) The poor do not tend to have an exaggerated sense of their own importance.
- 4) The poor can distinguish between necessities and luxuries.
- 5) The poor can wait because they have been forced by circumstances to acquire a dogged patience.
- 6) The fears of the poor are more realistic, less exaggerated, because they already know they can survive great suffering and want.
- 7) When the poor have the gospel preached to them it sounds like good news and not a threat or scolding.
- 8) The poor are accustomed to submit to authority.

Through no choice of their own the poor find themselves in a posture that suits the grace of God. They are not by necessity more virtuous than the rich but they are less likely to pretend to be virtuous. In their state of need, dependence, and dissatisfaction with life they are more disposed to welcome God's gracious gift.

You can with considerable accuracy substitute "rich" for "poor" in the preceding eight statements and then reverse them. We might also try asking which way they most accurately describe ourselves.

Luke's record of the beatitudes makes them even more pungent than Matthew's: "Blessed are you that are poor: for yours is the kingdom of heaven...But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation" (6:20, 24). Of course, as Matthew's account makes clear, Jesus is speaking of an attitude more than an economic condition. But He has also made it plain that economic condition can have a powerful influence on our attitude, and that the rich have a much harder time getting to heaven than the poor.

Our problem is that as citizens of the wealthiest nation in human history we think Jesus is talking to somebody else!

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

Janet Brundige is recovering from shoulder surgery. While the surgery went well her recovery will be a long and involved process. Let's remember to ask if there is anything we can do to help, besides our continued prayers.

John Bennett, an acquaintance of Jim Edwards, has been in UK's ICU after a serious car accident.

Let's continue to remember the **Warfel** family after the tragic death of **Darlene** in a motorcycle accident.

Our members: **Glenn Davis, Glenn Kimberlin**

Others: **Robert and Sarah Brundige, Gail Hunter, Kay Montgomery, Jean Gartland, Ruel Baker, Wes Kidd, Vera Howerton, Gail Stein, Glenn Goldy, Shannon Gilbert, Chuck McDavitt, the Shamas family.**

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Our meeting begins today! Remember that tomorrow through Friday is specifically designed for non Christians. Who will you invite?

BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Sunday: Job 5-6, Ps 45, Luke 9
Monday: Job 7-8, Ps 46, Luke 10
Tuesday: Job 9-10, Ps 47, Luke 11
Wednesday: Job 11-12, Ps 48, Luke 12
Thursday: Job 13-14, Ps 49, Luke 13
Friday: Job 15-16, Ps 50, Luke 14
Saturday: Job 17-19, Ps 51, Luke 15

SERMON TOPICS:

Sunday AM. "Be Thou Faithful"
(Revelation 2:1-11)

Sunday PM. "Bear The Yoke In His Youth"
(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)