

Jesus' Hard Sayings: Matthew 19 and Riches 02-09-20 PM

There seems to be a contradiction in the call of Christ. On the one hand, Jesus promised an easy yoke "*For My yoke is easy and My burden is light*" (Matthew 11:30). But He also said there would be hard sacrifices, perhaps no harder than this: "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple*" (Luke 14:26).

Is this a contradiction? Not exactly, but to many it seems that way. But Jesus would have us understand that if we choose Him, we choose Him alone, and anything that comes between us must be cast aside. Matthew 19 provides two great examples of this truth: first in Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage, and second in His teaching on wealth to the rich young ruler.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

It is interesting that no single passage call this man "the rich young ruler"; instead, it is the composite of the information we have from the three accounts of his interaction with Jesus. Consider first in his story that he is an obedient man. He has kept the commandments of God, and this seems to be a statement without controversy. But when Jesus tells him that he must part with all of his belongings, the young man leaves in tears.

Why was this so hard to hear? Jesus does not command us all to take a vow of poverty, as we see many examples of disciples who were wealth and used that wealth in the service of God. But Jesus is saying that we must separate our identity and life goals from money. In Matthew 6:19-24 Jesus made it clear that we cannot serve (pursue) God and wealth. James 5:1-6 challenges us to consider that we will be judged by our wealth. We might say that everything we have now belongs to Christ, and that we are not to rely on riches.

That seems a bit more reasonable, and yet the Apostles were upset by the teaching. Why? Maybe there is something more personal to this after all. Maybe the issue is that everyone wants to be rich. Even more strongly, most of us are deceived by riches, and cannot even see that most of us ARE rich.

Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:6-11 to want men away from the desire to be rich. That is a problem all have; we all think that more money will solve many of the problems we have. We may not call it a desire to be rich, but instead it is a desire to "have enough not to worry" or to "be able to help others". Yet helping others or worry are not issues tied to money, but to trust and love.

The danger of wealth is that it by nature is deceiving. In Mark 4:19 Jesus said that many disciples would be deceived by money and fall away. How many people see the spiritual problems created by wealth and declare "I would be different". How many have been lost to the pursuit of wealth telling themselves. "If I just make a little more it will be ok". Maybe the greatest deception of wealth is that we tell ourselves that it is other people that are rich. We need to consider that WE are the rich people in question. We need to see that 1 Timothy 6:17-19 was written to us, and we need to act accordingly.

Paul described himself as rich in a fashion. He had a great pedigree in the world of Judaism. Yet in Philippians 3:4-8 he said all of these things are counted as lost, as rubbish in contrast to Christ. He did not throw them away, but refused to esteem them any longer. The rich man's **sorrow** demonstrated his master; ask yourself, what would make you sad to lose?