

# Kington Baptist Church

## MESSAGE BOARD – 92

On the day when parliament chose the shame of long-term cuts to the Overseas Aid Budget, I wonder why Jesus repeated his command to sell what we have to give to the poor. Those were his words to the 'rich ruler' (Luke 18.22) and the same words when he gave the 'little flock' the promise of the Heavenly Father's care. (Luke 12.32) Why did he give such an extraordinary and extravagant command? Was he jealous? Having nothing himself, not even a place 'to lay his head', was he jealous of those with plenty? Was he economically illiterate? Did he not realise we have responsibilities? Did he really mean what he said? It is the opinion of many that he didn't really mean this command; they find his words too demanding, too challenging. Clearly the rich ruler believed Jesus meant what he said; for he went away, unwilling to obey the Lord's command. And the 'little flock' would do well to take the Lord's command seriously, that is if the 'little flock' also wants to take seriously his words of promise. It certainly seems his word of command to 'sell' was meant as seriously as his command to 'give' – a command none doubt that Jesus meant!

We would do well to notice that the promises of God's care, provision and protection, his care for the 'little flock', depend on our obedience to the Lord's words spoken in the same breath: *'seek first the Kingdom of God'*.

The Lord's words of command – to sell so as to give – are a test of how attached or detached we are to 'the things of the world'. These words test how we organise our priorities: who comes first: self? others? the Lord? These words test the ultimate choice facing each of us – the one choice that, in the end, everything comes down to: God or money? (Matthew 6.24; Luke 16.13) Jesus said, *'You cannot serve God and mammon', 'God and money':* God will not tolerate being put on a shelf beneath your Bank book: *'You can't serve both God and the Bank'*. (The Message)

But why not? Isn't wealth a sign of God's blessing? Isn't it promised that those who honour God, God will honour? And isn't that honour wealth and possessions? If that is so – and there are many who think it is so – then Jesus must have been a man who lived far outside the will of his Father: for he had nothing, so 'nothing' he had *'nowhere to lay his head'*.

It's very simple in the end: either we trust God and his promises or we trust wealth and financial security. The words of Jesus about parting with our wealth to be able to provide for the poor, (Luke 12.32-33) follow a parable about a man who chose differently (Luke 12.13-21). This man relied on his possessions. The man had so much he needed bigger barns, more bank accounts; his motto was: *'Eat, drink and have a good time'*. While God's assessment of the man was that he was *'a fool'*!

Our blessed Lord shows here the utter impossibility of loving the world and loving God at the same time; or, in other words, that a man of the world cannot be a truly Christian character. He who gives his heart to the world robs God of it, and, in snatching at the shadow of earthly good, loses substantial and eternal blessedness. How dangerous is it to set our hearts on riches, seeing it is so easy to make them our God! (Adam Clarke)

This command is as serious as the obligation our Lord places on those who would follow him: *'None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions'* (Luke 14.33); *'Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple'* (Luke 14.27); *'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple'*. (Luke 14.26)

These last and shocking words follow on from a parable Jesus told about a feast and the invited guests. The problem was that all who were invited had other commitments and declined the invitation. The point is crystal clear: when we face the ultimate choice – the call to follow Jesus – we must not allow anything or anyone to get in the way. No matter how dear they are to us; no matter how attached we are to them; no matter how proud we are of them; no matter how heavily we rely on them; no matter if we can't imagine how we'd manage without them. *Jesus first. The Kingdom of God first.*

But what does this mean? Surely, we tell ourselves, no one comes before Jesus; there is nothing we have that we value more than him; we always put him first. We put him first – except when we hang on to what he tells us to part with; except when we choose to be somewhere else and with someone else rather than with the two or three who still meet in his name; except when Jesus fingers our wallets or credit cards; except when we choose to pass by the needy and ignore the Lord's commission.

As Jesus looked, he saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, *'Of a truth I tell you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their plenty, but she out of her poverty gave all she had to live on.'* (Luke 21.1-4)

Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax office; he said to him, *'Follow me.'* He got up and left everything, to follow him. (Luke 5.27-28)