

Owned by our “stuff”

At first sight the young man comes across as an exceptionally good person, deferential to Jesus and somehow searching for the way of eternal life. He had kept God’s commands since his youth, and Jesus looked on him with love. An ideal person, you would think, to receive the gospel. And yet Jesus wanted to show him something about himself of which he was totally unaware. He was owned by his own wealth, and it had a stronger grip on him than he had on it. Jesus invited him to become free of it, but the cost seemed too just too high. “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.”

There is nothing wrong with money as such, or even with being wealthy. Some of the world’s greatest people who did most for the welfare of humanity, have been wealthy people. But at a deeper level the fact is that I own nothing, absolutely. My hold on things is provisional, temporary. A sudden stroke, a brain hemorrhage, or a heart attack, and I am separated forever from all my worldly belongings. “There is no pocket in the shroud.” Apparently, there was a narrow entrance at the side of the temple called the “needle.” It is wide enough for a camel to pass through, but only if the load was removed from the camel’s back. With the panniers of goods, the camel normally carried on either side, it would be impossible to pass through the Needle gate. How hard it is for people who are weighed down with money and ambitions to enter the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom belongs to children. It belongs to the poor in spirit; not so much economically poor but detached from riches in their inmost spirit. For a worthy cause, they can part with their wealth.

Then there are some who give up everything to follow Jesus. He doesn’t call everybody to do this. He didn’t ask Lazarus or his sisters to leave home and follow him. But being a follower of Jesus does mean having to leave something. It involves a change of priorities, a new way of valuing things, an interest in the riches that are stored in heaven, “where moth cannot consume, nor rust corrode.” Those who leave everything to follow Jesus are among the most blessed of people, dedicated souls like Padre Pio, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, aid workers in places torn by war and disease, and many other unsung heroes. Such people are blessed with the riches of God’s grace and bring much blessing to the lives of others.