

## **This Sunday's Sermon: Is This the Hardest Passage in the Bible?**

Sunday morning, I will continue to preach on discipleship in the Gospel of Mark. As we've seen over the last month, Mark's gospel presents the disciples of Jesus as unable or unwilling to embrace what Jesus teaches them about serving others and suffering for living contrary to society's values. The disciples' struggles are a warning to us who claim to be Christ followers. If we think we understand what it means to be a disciple of Christ, we had better watch out, because we may have it all wrong.

This Sunday, I will preach on what I consider to be one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. It is often called the Story of the Rich Young Ruler, although Mark makes no mention of him being a ruler and none of the three versions of the story in Matthew, Mark and Luke really say he is young. The rich man is righteous and follows the Law, but Jesus says to have eternal life the man must sell everything he owns, give it to the poor and follow Jesus. The man goes away sad and Mark reports Jesus "loved" him.

If you've been around church for any length of time, you probably have heard different interpretations of this story. I'm here to tell you most of what you have heard about this passage is WRONG. There is no easy way to interpret it that lets you and me off the hook when it comes to wealth. Lutheran Bible scholar Matt Skinner lays out some of the common ways this passage has been misinterpreted:

An ancient scribe added words to make 10:24 read "how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God" (see the King James Version), as if the problem highlighted by the rich man is not being rich but putting faith in the wealth a person has or craves.

A ninth-century interpreter made up the idea of a low gate into Jerusalem called "the eye of the needle," through which camels could pass only if

stooped and unladen. Presumably, then, Jesus criticizes only the proud rich, or only the rich who are not extremely determined to enter the kingdom. Unfortunately, no such gate ever existed.

Countless preachers have told us Jesus omnisciently perceived that wealth was this particular man's special "weak spot," and so he zeroed in on it only to expose the man's distinctive shortcoming.

Other preachers assert that Jesus only tests the man by issuing a demand meant to expose the futility of his supposedly self-striving piety. But such an interpretation makes a mockery of Jesus' love for the man (10:21) and the man's grief (10:22).

We readers of Mark's gospel are left to wonder if Jesus' instructions to this rich man might also apply to us? Does it apply to all of us, some of us or none of us? Join us for worship Sunday to find out my answers to these questions.

Grace and Peace, Rev. Chase Peeples