

Riches

Billions and billions of people have lived on this rock. Not many of them were rich, or kings. But even the kings, throughout history, did not have what we have. A king, who wanted a bath would have to call the servants to fetch the water from the river or well, then heat it with fire, and only then, after like an hour, could the king take his bath. What do you do? You turn the handle and wait a few seconds. Throughout history the kings went on their campaigns for months and years in their bumpy carriages for hours and hours, day after day, month after month. What do we do? I was to Portland and back in less than a week. And people bring us snacks, and we watch a movie while we are at it. Not even kings could do that. Let alone the other 99.9 percent of the billions of people who were the ones pulling the carriage, or heating the water they never got to use.

You are rich. Now, don't get me wrong, I am well aware that not all of us have all we want, and sadly, even in our country, not all of us have all we need. But folks, we complain about our health bills, but only two hundred years ago – you would have been glad to pay all you had to not die from appendicitis or to save your kid from scarlet fever. We are rich. Yes, we have circumstances, yes there is poverty and homelessness, I get it. But let's not pretend that we don't have luxuries others haven't had.

Yes, we live in the lap of luxury, but you know what, depression and suicide are on the rise. So why, when we have more than billions of people ever could have dreamed of, why are we still so unhappy? We live in an age where we can communicate with anyone around the world at any time, but we are forgetting how to have a conversation. We have entertainment at our fingertips everywhere we go, but how much is it just distracting us from what really matters? We have knowledge at our fingertips, but we are so foolish and unable to listen to an opposing viewpoint

and think critically about it. We live like Kings and queens folks, we do. So, it should be obvious to us, riches and fame and power may be awesome, but they don't bring peace.

One man out of the billions, knew this. His name was Solomon, and he was "lucky" enough to be a king. A great king, with wealth, and riches and women and fame and wisdom. But even with all that, as we read in our Old Testament lesson, he, like much of our generation, was depressed. He was depressed because he realized as he got older, all his riches and power, would leave him. Nor could he use those things as much as he got older - you can't party forever, and you certainly can't take it with you when you go. He calls it a grievous evil, it makes him sick to think that one day he will be gone and the world will go on without him and some other king will take his stuff. So all his work, all his enjoyment, he calls it wind, here then gone, and no one will care.

Uplifting isn't it? Because it is the same for us. We love our stuff, even when it kills us and our relationships and, try all you might, it will eventually leave us. Riches, luxury, technology... more like wind. Here to distract us, powerless to save us.

Jesus in our lesson last week met a man who loved his stuff, a rich young man who left Jesus sad after Jesus told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor. But he didn't want to give his stuff away, he loved it. More than God's kingdom, it seemed. This man treasured his wind, his clothes, his homes, his dollars, his servants, his land, his subscriptions, his country club. And none of those are sinful in themselves and Jesus commands him to leave them not because they are sinful, but this young man's idea that he has done enough for heaven – that is sinful. So Jesus shows him he isn't strong enough, he isn't faithful enough, he needs a Savior. And so did all the rest of the people listening. So Jesus tells them, "how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And as we already talked about folks, that means us. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." And you see the disciples shock. "Who

then can be saved?” Because they knew what we know – that rich people can do basically anything. They get all the luxuries, they get the breaks in court, they get the best spots, they get the hot baths, they don’t have to worry about the bill, and they get their way in just about anything. And I know we all know the saying “money can’t buy happiness,” and we all know it’s true, but I don’t see too many people passing up their paychecks – because we kinda need some of it, and it does solve a few problems. The disciples knew this, which is why their jaws dropped, because if a rich person can’t get it done, what hope did they have? They hadn’t realized what Solomon had – that money, while it can get you a whole lot, and make things easier, and bring you some fun stuff, it can’t get you everything.

So Jesus tells them, “what is impossible for man, is possible for God.” And that is where we finally see, from this quirky exchange with a rich young man, the clear teaching. We can’t get to heaven. Rich or poor. Billions and billions of people have lived and only one of them, born in a manger, was good enough for heaven. Not a single other person, not even a king. Because no money in the world is worth enough to buy the goodness, the perfection that God requires. He wants no silver or gold, he made it all anyway. He wants no stocks or land, it is all his. He wants perfection and goodness so that his people will never be harassed by evil ever again.

But that’s impossible, isn’t it? Not with God. So God, the King of kings, who was rich and the maker and owner for all things - he became poor. A king could have gotten a room in Bethlehem, this King didn’t. And was born in a manger. A king wouldn’t have had to run from Herod, he would have fought him, but Jesus and his family ran. A king wouldn’t have to labor, but Jesus helps Joseph in the carpentry shop. A king wouldn’t let a group of thugs arrest him, he would have fought, but Jesus said, “Put your sword away.” A rich man could’ve called on the best lawyer around and bought or bribed his way out of his trial – Jesus said only a few words. A king

wouldn't say "my kingdom is not of this world." A King wouldn't die without a fight. But this one did.

And the world says, "not much of a king then." But that changed three days later. When he rose, proving that he was the King of life, the King of kings, the King of all. And the life he offers, over death, how many wars would we fight, how much money would we spend for that!? But he offers it free. It is the riches of his kingdom. That he shares with all it's citizens.

Which is you, you who stand and confess his name, you who have been born of water and Spirit into his kingdom – you receive his rights, his inheritance. And, trust me, he doesn't much care how much you make, where you come from, or what your struggles are. Only that you come to him, not like a rich king expecting and demanding anything, but like a child, like a beggar, looking for his goodness and, trust me, there is plenty of that to go around.

And our sin will even try to turn that into a competition. "Look at what I have given, look at what I have sacrificed!" The disciples respond this way. Almost as if they are bragging about what they did to follow Jesus – and you know what, Jesus commends them! And promises them a reward! Because he DOES notice when people sacrifice for him. He does notice when you stay late to do that thankless task. He does see the sleep you lose worrying about that loved one. He does see it, and he blesses you for it.

But he also guards against our attempt to turn this into a competition, he guards against us trying to make our sacrificing our martyrdom all about ourselves. Because martyrs don't bear witness to themselves, but to Christ. And so he says, "but even the last are first and first are last." You have given so much, disciples, they would give their lives. He does notice that. They will receive

the crown of life. Yet the one who has given less, who follows Jesus? Does he miss them too? Does he love them a little less? No. He gives them his impossible grace too.

And, lets be honest, we need his impossible grace, because we do love our money and distractions and we are spoiled – we need his impossible grace. Let's just be honest about that, and then rejoice because he gives it. And then, maybe we can find what Solomon needed, some contentment. The things you have won't save you, understand that, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy them – a hot shower, a ride in the countryside. And even when you aren't in the best days of your life: understand that you are rich! Not just because you get a hot shower, but because you belong to the King of Kings! He has died and rose for you. His riches are not like the wind. They last. Forever. And so does he, and so do you. Amen.