

Letters from a friend

HAD GREAT TREASURE, LOST GREATEST TREASURE

Story No. 1

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

¹⁷ “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

¹⁸ “Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’”

²⁰ “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

²¹ Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

²⁷ Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

²⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(Mathew 16 v 16-28)

Story No. 2

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Jim Elliot wrote those now famous words. In 1956, at the age of 28, Jim Elliot took a flight over the Ecuador jungle to set up camp. Camped on a beach along the river, he and his fellow missionaries waited to make contact with the Acua Indians. After six days, two Indian women appeared across the river and five missionaries began to cross the river to meet them. Acua Indian warriors, spears in hand appeared before the missionaries had crossed. They were easy targets and they died at the hands of the warriors.

Within two years of their deaths, Jim Elliot’s wife and daughter and the sister of another missionary had moved into the village. Many Acua Indians have come to faith. Missionaries still live among them today, including the son of one of those killed in 1956.

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Story No. 3

Wisdom

⁷ A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of death better than the day of birth.

² It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of everyone;
the living should take this to heart. (Ecclesiastes 7 v 1-2)

Here the teacher tells us that all of us will die and if we are wise we will think about that. He says that the day of our death is better than the day of our birth!

He's rich, he's young, and he's powerful! He's got the best of everything; the best clothes, the best car (or maybe best camel), the best house. He's got answers – after all that's how he's got to where he is. If you've got questions, he's got answers! Solutions! Opinions! He's got power – and a future! He's the rich young ruler.

But for all his money, for all his achievements, for all the power he wields and the influence he exerts, there is something that's bothering him! He has a question that, embarrassingly, he can't answer. So he goes to Jesus to ask a question, and his question is simple: "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Sometimes it's true that by asking a question you reveal that you really don't know what you're talking about. That's exactly what this rich, young ruler did when he asked his question.

Friends, perhaps the truth is that sometimes, when we come to Jesus with a question, we do the same!

"What must I do?" he asks. Here's a man who is used to doing, because doing gets him where he wants to be and where he thinks he needs to be. His doing has served him well...after all he's the rich young ruler!

His question is, at the same time, deep, profound and quite wrong! "What must I do?" Well...what do you think? What do you think you must do...because surely there are things we must do...for life...eternal life?

Maybe I'm wrong, but don't we all, if we're honest, think there are things we must do to win God's favour? Come to church? Give money? Spend hours in quiet times? Pray lots? Be active in service? Read the Bible? Help others?

What do I need to do to get 'in'?

Jesus tells him he must keep the commandments! Does Jesus have any idea how hard that is...to keep the commandments? The rich, young ruler wants him to be specific: "which ones, which of the commandments are you talking about?"

Knowing full well he's asking the wrong question, Jesus indulges him anyway: "Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't give false testimony, honour your mother and father, love your neighbour as yourself." The rich

young ruler is confident he's done all that! "So...is there anything else I must do?"

Jesus response shows the rich young ruler has been asking the wrong question all along. "If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

The rich young ruler is devastated. The disciples are left asking... "If that's true, then who on earth can ever be saved?" Jesus says: "No-one, it's impossible!" Jesus says: "You're asking the wrong question: It's impossible when it's about what you do."

I'm wondering if Jim Elliot said it this way: "He is not fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." I'm wondering if another teacher in another time said it this way: the day of death is better than the day of birth."

And maybe you're wondering...what?

Jim Elliot it seems recognised the truth: that what matters most, what is most important is to trust ourselves to God. He recognised that the best way to live was to trust God for that which only God can give.

The teacher says that birth is all about potential, but that death is all about fulfilment.

Jesus says: There is one thing you cannot do, you cannot save yourself!

Jesus invitation to the rich young ruler is to let God do what is impossible for us to do. And if I'm in any way right, Story No1, and story No. 2, and Story No. 3 come together in this way:

To receive the greatest treasure we must lose our treasure.

We must give what we cannot keep to gain that which we cannot lose.

We must die to self and open ourselves to God

We must let the death of Jesus be what brings us life.

The truth is this: We simply cannot save ourselves. And that friends, is, in truth, really, really, good news. Because, quite simply, it means that there is nothing

I can do, or have to do, or need to do, to make God love me. God does not love because of what I do...and he never will!

He loves me because he loves me because he loves me...He loves you because he loves you because he loves you...

He loves you so much that he has done for you what you cannot do for yourself, and the moment you are willing to give up trusting in yourself and to fully trust in Him...he will meet with you.

Truth is friends he longs to meet with you now. It may be that we have some treasure that we are holding onto so tightly, we cannot receive His treasure that is better by far. The question is: are you ready to give up what you cannot keep to have God give you what you cannot lose? Will you, this morning, open your heart to him and let him do for you, what you cannot do for yourself? The rich young ruler went away very sad because he chose to go it alone and trust himself.

God is here...and waiting to see what you will do.

Dear...Ian, Sandra, Denise, Sue, Clare, Ian, Gill...

To you...all of you here today.

To those I love so much. To those of you who work so hard, so hard to get me to notice. To those who think it's never enough – what you do is never enough.

To those of you who are trying so hard to live well, to do the right things and worry so much about making mistakes.

To you I want to say this: I see you, I really see you. I see what you do, everything. Thank you! I see your heart.

What I want to tell you might surprise you, might even disappoint you! Because...you simply don't need to impress me. You don't need to prove anything to me. You don't need to convince me of how much you do or how hard you work. You really don't. In fact it would be better if you gave up trying. It would save you a lot of angst and heartache and worry and concern. It would

free you up to enjoy me and walking with me and being with me. It really would.

You see what I most want you to know is that I'm already impressed with you. I already love watching you and being with you and sharing what you enjoy. I love sharing the joy of you doing what I've created you to do and gifted you to do. I just love watching you. I love you. As you are.

I'm going to be honest with you though. There are times when you want to do things your way, work it out your way, have it your way. There are things about you that don't help you. And you know why? Because you won't let go. You won't trust me fully.

I get that. The world is a hard place to be with all sorts of things that are not right. There's a real battle going on and sometimes you get caught in the middle of it. And so it seems I'm not bothered, or not interested or not on your side. But that could not be further from the truth. I love you. And I love you because I love you because I love you...

I am the all- powerful, all loving God. I am at work in this fallen world to redeem it and to bring good out of it. And I am intimately aware and deeply concerned about your life, your future and the role that you could play in the world. If you are willing to trust me fully and trust that I am good, you will be able to face today and each day with a resilient confidence and unshakeable poise, not because things will work out how you want, but because I am with and you, and for you, and always, always working for good and for your good.

You matter to me. You matter to me more than you will ever know. You matter to me so much that I have done for you what you cannot do for yourself. I cannot love you more than I do right now in these moments. I will not be able to love you any more tomorrow that I do right now. And I didn't love you any more yesterday. Remember...it's not about what you do, or can do.

So...why won't you come? Why do you so want to hold onto your props, your securities, your achievements and your pride? Come to me. Open your heart to me. Let me love you. Let me help you. Let me nurture you. Let me be with you. I know it sounds odd, but dying to yourself and what you hold so tightly to is what opens the door to your heart. And if you open the door, I will meet you and come in. That is the way to fulfilment. That is the way to living well. That is the way to life, both now and forever.

I know that letting go is hard, so hard. But others have done it. And they have found the greatest treasure in trusting me.

Some don't. Some won't. And my heart breaks.

I'm here. I'm always here. I'm waiting. Remember I love you. Please come.

Your friend...Jesus.

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church, on Sunday 29th October 2017, by
Rev. Ian Phillips.