

Stories from the Road #11

Stories Jesus tells as he is on his way to die outside Jerusalem^a

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

¹⁹ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”^b

²¹ “All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!^c ²⁵ Indeed, 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.”

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”^d

²⁷ Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”
(Luke 18:18-25)^e

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from the passage?

Q. Which character in these stories do you most identify with?

Q. What question would you like to ask Jesus?

^a Luke interviews eyewitnesses and writes his biography of Jesus to a particular person. “I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (Luke 1:4). In other words, he wants to add confirmation to what Theophilus already believes about Jesus.

^b These are the 7th, 6th, 8th, 9th and 5th commandments of the 10 Commandments given by God through Moses around 1300BC .

^c The kingdom of God is another name for heaven.

^d Those listening are surprised. This is because in Jesus’ day, the wealthy were understood to be especially blessed by God and therefore entitled to heaven.

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This excerpt is from a series of interactions with people Jesus has on the road as he heads towards Jerusalem to die. Luke the author includes these interactions to show what it will mean to follow Jesus - and not just in a physical sense.

Here Jesus elaborates who will find it especially challenging to follow him – and why.

The interaction begins with a question someone poses to Jesus: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replies by drawing attention to the seventh, sixth, eighth, ninth and fifth of the Ten Commandments. The ones he omits are:

“You shall have no other gods before me.” (first)

“You shall not make for yourself an image to bow down and worship” (second)

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God” (third)

“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (fourth)

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, land or animals” (tenth). To “covet” means to “to yearn to possess something, especially something that belongs to another”. In other words, to covet is to be greedy.

The commandments Jesus omits are the ones to do with God and greed. By omitting these commandments, Jesus highlights what will prevent the man from having eternal life. Greed leaves him incapable of selling his possessions and providing for the poor. It indicates that cares more for his money than for God.

Jesus goes on to say that wealth can be a deal-breaker when it comes to the kingdom of God – like it is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The love of what money can buy (comfort, pleasure, security, significance, independence etc) trumps everything else. Wealth doesn't always have to be the deal-breaker because nothing is impossible for God.

To love God over money can leave someone in a position of vulnerability, with a fear of missing out:

²⁸ Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!”

²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God ³⁰ will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” [Luke 18:28-30]

Jesus response is that God is generous to those who put him first: both in this life and in the life to come.

Q. What surprises, shocks or startles you from what you have just read?

Q. In what way has this story confirmed or challenged your understanding of Jesus?

Q. What do you want to take away and ponder further?