

More About Jesus, Week 8: Jesus Was Not Materialistic

(Luke 9:57-58)

by Paul Hammons

One of the most obvious characteristics of Jesus that scripture shows us is that throughout his ministry, Jesus lived in what we would consider poverty. Or at least, a life that didn't involve material possessions. At one point when Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem, a man said to him:

"I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." - Luke 9:57-58 (ESV)

And while it appears that Jesus lived for a time in Capernaum (Mat. 4:13, 17:24, Mark 2:1, 9:33) using the town as his "home base," most of Jesus' teaching tenure was spent traveling. There's no indication that he had any significant possessions, other than the "collection bag" which Jesus and the apostles carried with them to assist those in need (John 12:1).

That life is reflected in the instructions he gave to his disciples when they went out to teach:

"Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart." - Lk 9:3-5

Jesus wanted his disciples to be free from concern about possessions, just as he was. And the book of Luke is filled with examples of Jesus rebuking those who focused on "storing up treasures on the earth."

In Luke 12, a man shouted to Jesus while he was teaching: "Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."

But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." - Lk 12:14-16

One of the most sobering warnings Jesus gave to his apostles is found in the parable of the Sower, where he predicts that many will hear the word of God, but *"the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful"* (Matt. 13:22).

What does that mean for us? Does Jesus call us to live in poverty, rejecting material possessions altogether? We only see one group of people whom Jesus called to that sort of life, and that was the disciples who chose to follow him, receiving his instructions and preparing themselves for work in the kingdom.

Paul told the rich people in Ephesus to *"do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future"* (1 Tim. 6:18). Certainly some of Jesus' most loyal disciples lived in homes and had wealth of some degree (Luke 8:1-3, 10:38).

But in the story of the rich ruler (Luke 18:18), when a young man asked "what must I do to inherit eternal life," Jesus' response was clear: *"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*

Jesus didn't ask everyone to do that! Some he simply told *"Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you"* (Mark 5:19). The man's reaction might explain why Jesus' requirements of this man were so much greater.

Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." - Lk 18:24-25.

For those of us living in a culture that is wealthy beyond any in human history, that ought to alarm us! Because we see around us the pressure to "have things" in our consumer-driven culture. When we allow ourselves to focus on material things – more possessions, better gadgets, more luxurious surroundings - we can't serve God like we should.

If Jesus asked us to leave it all, would we walk away sorrowful, as the rich ruler did? Or would we put everything on the altar of sacrifice to work in the kingdom of God?