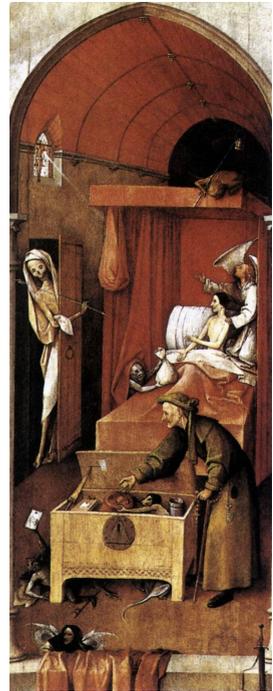


But many who are first will be last, and the last first. 10.17-31

One of the greatest challenges Jesus faces is getting his disciples to think in completely different categories: heavenly, eternal ones rather than earthly, transitory ones (e.g. 8.33). Whereas they recognise that his teaching is 'new' (1.27), they fail to grasp that it is *radically* new, i.e. different from its very roots upwards.

This rich young man shares this failing. He thinks firstly that he can earn eternal life, and secondly that he can do so by doing more good. Unlike the Pharisees his question of Jesus is not a test; he is absolutely sincere. So Jesus' answer is a knock-out blow to his self-righteousness. Yet, although Jesus loves him and is well aware that he has asked too much of him, he doesn't call him back or give him an easier route. On the contrary, he turns to the disciples and underscores the hopeless plight of the rich, and – by extension – of anyone who trusts in anyone or anything other than God. If a good rich man is not fit for the kingdom, who is, they ask? No one, replies Jesus. Nevertheless, "all things are possible with God."



Then comes an ironic twist. Just when the disciples are grappling with Jesus' teaching and saying it's impossible, they stumble upon the truth that they have in fact stumbled into the kingdom themselves, by God's grace. Although they didn't sell their possessions to earn salvation, they have left everything in answer to Jesus' call to follow him - and they are in. They have unwittingly (at least till now) been recipients of God's saving grace, advancing into the kingdom ahead of someone whom thy thought was a shoe-in. They have entered as naïve "children," the only time Jesus refers to them as such.

Warning: If your instinctive reaction is to spiritualise this teaching to avoid the possibility God may be asking you to sell all you have, think (and pray) again (and see Acts 4.32-5.11).

? What would be the hardest thing Jesus could ask you to surrender to him?



Lord Jesus, you have given your all for my sake, and called me to take up my cross daily and follow you. Give me such a vision of your kingdom that I may have the will to do so, in the power of your Spirit in whom I pray. Amen.