

Do you do the lottery? What if you won it...and then some wandering religious teacher said that you'd be much happier without it? Would you give it all away? OK – so that's 14 million to 1 question, and unlikely to happen. Try this one: what do you think of those bankers who got massive bonuses, even though they already earned far more than anything we could imagine? Do you think they should keep it all, or should they be relieved of it? That's a bit of a different question...their riches are about a system, not luck which is blind to who wins.

Try another one, perhaps closer to home. If you had worked and worked, studied and studied, got to a point of real achievement rewarded properly with an income and lots of the things that go with it – at the accepted going rate – what would you think if some homeless teacher, who sponged off everyone else because he earned no money himself, said that it all had to go? All that money which you'd sweated for, and was yours, and would guarantee your future. Would you be happy to see it go?

When our society places value on gain and growth, on the things we own and the things we want to own, on wealth creation and money making, when multi millionaire tennis players threaten to strike because they are not getting a fair share of the income of the Australian Open Tennis Tournament, when our charitable organisations have to be more hard nosed than big business and when charity is funded largely by people's desire to get more money themselves, who is going to listen to someone who doesn't obey those rules and says that it is the most successful people in the world – the ones who have got money - who will find it most difficult to get to know God?

But that is what Jesus says here. A needle is small. A camel is big. Can you get a camel through the hole? That's how easy it will be for someone consumed by their consumption, possessed by their possessions, to enter God's kingdom. And the shocking thing here is that Jesus was not only challenging an accepted world view – the rich are clearly doing something right – but the accepted religious world view of his day also – the rich are clearly blessed by God. They are rich because they are righteous.

Not so, says Christ. There is another way.

Imagine a person walking through town, laden with bags from the swankiest shops, looking like a beast of burden, with things round their neck and over their shoulder. You want to give them a present. A free gift. They look at you completely amazed. Where on earth are they going to put it – they can't fit one more thing in a bag, and there's not even a finger to hang it on. The gift goes unclaimed.

I think the man in the gospel reading is like that. He has everything – 'many possessions' says Mark. The other gospel writers comment on his youth, and that he was a ruler. He has everything a young man could want, outwardly. Unusually (these days at least), he is not keen to flaunt this, or misbehave with two opened bottles of champagne. Neither does he want to add Jesus to his list of celebrities met, to boast about later. He has a spiritual side.

His question is about what happens after all this, and actually about how this life can be fulfilling now. 'How can I be sure of eternal life?'

Jesus's answer is about lifestyle and good action, about morals, laws and religion in harmony, about being law abiding, moral and faithful to God. When it is clear that this is in order, Jesus goes to the heart. If you want to show you love God, and that you have room in your life to accept God's love for you, the things which are taking up your time and energy and love, the things you idolise, must be laid aside. And, it would seem, that's too big an ask.

Our happy shopper on the street would have needed to put their bags down to receive the gift, and having put them down there is no guarantee that they could ever be picked up again.

Jesus pulls no punches here. He didn't attack the rich man for being rich; the man did ask him the question first, after all. He's not like our banker, whom many people would like to rid of their wealth. He is a good man. But Jesus saw that if a person was to have room for God, everything needed to be rearranged. The whole room needed to be cleared out to allow the guest to come in. It wasn't a case of squeezing a small space to add the guest to the great list of everything else that was there. To put God first is to realise that none of the rest is important any more.

This isn't just about rich people. Not many of us would qualify for a rich list like the young man did. But we are as consumed by the need for cash, the desirability of things and the hope of riches as much as anyone else. Jesus says that where your heart is, there your treasure is. We all need cash, but how much does it consume us?

Lay that aside, says Christ. Seek God's kingdom first. Have a careful look at all the bags you are clinging onto so tightly. Can they be put down so you have room to accept love, forgiveness, purpose, new life? Put them down, and you'll be amazed at what is given to you. But that comes not because you are asking for it. It comes because you have gained eternal life...and that's the greatest gift.

Perhaps most people do the Lottery not because they are desperate to get millions of pounds – it's more a kind of dream. But our banking crisis was all about being consumed by greed, by growth, by getting more. And we all took part in that. I took out a saving plan with an Icelandic bank which promised 10% interest, just like loads of others did. People bought and sold houses at stupid prices and at stupid mortgage rates, because that was happening. This was all of us, being camel, not thread to go through needles.

So what drives you. What do you really want to gain? And are there any bags you have to put down? It's a challenge. But Jesus promises that all will be well, and we will be cared for now as well. So what are you waiting for?