

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**October 11, 2015**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

**Rev. John F. Koerner**

**Mark 10:17-31**

*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.*” (Mark 10:25 N.R.S.V.)

## How Much Is Enough?

I am a child of God. I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I believe he has the power to change my life and your life.

Comedienne Joan Rivers once said, “People say that money isn’t the key to happiness, but I always figured if you have enough money you can have a key made.”

She said, “If you have enough money . . .” So what is enough? Many of us say that we don’t really want to be rich. We just want enough money to meet our bills. Surveys have shown that when pushed, most of us think that if we had about ½ again as much as we are currently making - we would have enough. Sadly, those who make ½ again as much as we do, still think that they could be satisfied with ½ again as much more. In other words, we never feel like we have enough.

I read that the late J. Paul Getty, who was at the time, the richest man alive, once complained to a newspaper reporter that inflation was hurting him. He said, a billion dollars just isn’t what it used to be. That’s right billion with a “B.” That was back in the time when millionaires, that’s with a “M” were rare. Getty had more than a billion dollars and he was worried that it wasn’t enough, poor guy.

Look again with me at our passage from Mark 10. This a very difficult passage for most of us. We would rather not look at it too closely. It challenges much we hold dear.

If I were to ask for a show of hands, and I’m not going to. But if I were to ask for a show of hands as to how many identified with the rich young ruler in this story, I doubt many hands would go up. First of all, this guy was rich. We don’t consider ourselves rich. Most of us are just barely getting by.

It is interesting that we are not told how much money this rich young man had. We are only told that he had many possessions. That strikes close to home for me. Of course there are lots of people who have more possessions than I have. But I have to admit, I do have many possessions.

So here is this rich young man who has kept all the commandments given by Moses. But he still feels empty. He is a man of many possessions, but he still feels empty. So he comes to Jesus and says, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus looks at this young man and he loves him. Jesus loves his courageous, honest seeking. So much does Jesus love this young man that he tells him, not what he wants to hear, but rather what he needs to hear.

“One more thing is needful, go sell all your possessions, give the money to the poor, and come follow me.” So now how many of us are identifying with this rich young man? Yeah, right, me neither!

I am reminded of the story about the traveling evangelist who ended up preaching at this little church way back in the hills. After the service he noticed the ushers getting down a box from the back, then to his horror he realized that they were passing out rattlesnakes. One of the ushers came up and offered him a snake. The evangelist backed away.

“Come, now brother, if God told you to pick up the serpent, would you refuse?”

The evangelist kept backing away. “I didn’t say that. But God has not told me to pick up the serpent, and I’m not going to!”

When it comes to picking up rattlesnakes, I am right there with the evangelist. Yet, if I’m honest with myself, I must admit that I feel that way about a lot of things. I know that God does not ask all of his followers to give up all material possessions and follow him. Surely the point is that we are to be ready to do that if God were to ask us. And I’m really hoping that God doesn’t decide to ask that of me.

Having said that, I realize that this is a growing edge for me spiritually. And I trust that God will keep working on me day by day, one step at a time. God is not finished with me. God is not finished with you. Praise God!

The insight that jumps out at me today from this passage is found in verse 22. “When he (the rich young man) heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.”

We are used to stories in which someone tries to find happiness through riches. These stories usually end with, “And he was still empty and miserable in spite of his riches.” This story has a different ending. It says that the rich young man went away still empty and distressed **because** he had many possessions. How about that?

Jesus goes on to say that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. That was a shocking statement in those days, because the Jews believed that wealth was a sign of God’s favor. Come to think of it, this passage is still pretty shocking to us today.

I have heard preachers try to soften this shocking statement by explaining that the walls around

Jerusalem had big gates that were opened in the daytime, so that travelers and wagons could roll easily through. At nightfall these main gates or doors were closed. Off to the side of the main doors was a small door that a person could easily walk through but which was too short for a loaded camel to get through. This small door was called the eye of the needle. Clever drovers could sometimes get their camels to crawl through that small door on their knees, but it was very difficult to do so.

You may have heard that explanation. Here is the thing, Jesus did not say that it was extremely difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said that humanly speaking, it is impossible. Then Jesus adds, but with God all things are possible. That is incredibly good news!

God asks us to put him first in our lives. That is never easy. In fact it is impossible without God's help. We are endlessly clever at fooling ourselves about what we really worship. What we say is one thing but a look at our checkbooks and calendars usually offers a very different picture of what we put first.

Yet some of us have come to the realization that we want the more that God has to offer us. Some of us have realized that there will never be enough money, enough work, enough sex, enough narcotics to ease the pain of an empty and unfilled heart. God wants much more for us.

Sir William Beach Thomas said, "To achieve happiness by a succession of pleasures is like trying to keep up a light all night by striking successive matches." A full heart comes from purpose not possessions. Wouldn't you agree that the happiest people you know are those who have given themselves fully to the Lord?

Peter says, what about us, Lord? We have left everything to follow you. And Jesus says, "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age . . . and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

We believe Lord, help our unbelief.

Amen