

THE PASSIONATE DISCIPLE - A PASSIONATE WARNING - FREEDOM & FAMILY

We have so far seen that as a Disciple of Christ 9 Passionate requirements, responses, etc...

Sacrifice (1), Compassion (2), Urgency(3), Giving (4), Approach (5), Affection (6), Command (7), Reward (8) & Shift in Thinking (9).

I thank and praise God for the many stories that are coming to hand now of the way you have been wrestling with the issues and simplifying lifestyle in response to these simple principles of Jesus from this one story but fleshed out through the rest of the teaching of Jesus about what it means to be Passionate Disciple. The story is in Mark 10:17-31

Here are a couple of other stories...

One couple decided to simplify and buy less by 'running down' the pantry instead of buying 'everything' they'd normally use from the supermarket.

A Couple have sacrificed a silver ingot...

One man has revisited his travel needs.

Someone has sold a car.

This is our last week of teaching from this particular story of the rich man and Jesus.

It's actually also our second last week in this series before I conclude this part on 22nd April with what I have called "The Passionate Disciple Experiment..." After Easter we are going to have a special Sunday with a difference to wrap things up...

Now, in this series we have been looking at the kind of sayings from Jesus that if we were to actually believe them have incredibly passionate implications for our lives.

Now, as we follow what Christ has said, our lives will increasingly look different in the culture and in the church that we are a part of.

I think this leads us to a question that we keep coming back to... "Do we believe what Jesus taught? Do I really believe the message of the whole Bible?"

If what this book says is true, then there are over four and a half billion people in the world today, who are headed to a Christless eternity, in addition there are 20,000+ children who will die today of either starvation or a preventable disease

and brothers and sisters in Christ who are doing it tough; all of whom need our help.

We do not have time to play games with our lives and with the church. We do not have time to play games with our resources and our possessions. We are asking God to help us be gripped by these realities.

We are a rich people. I know parts of our economy is struggling, but even if you make \$1,500.00 next year, you are more wealthy than 80% of people on this earth.

Father God, we pray that you would help us with what we now study. We pray that You would help us find Your Grace by your Spirit across this room in helping us in the next few moments we have. To sift through our thinking that is so culturally engrained and so counter-Biblically engrained. Help us to hear Your Words in a fresh way and give us grace not just to hear them but God we pray for grace to respond. God, we can do nothing this morning to change ourselves. We need you to change our hearts as we pray to you. Do it through Your Word and in a way that You get Great Glory, not just here but around the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

How does this practically play out?"

First truth today is...

10 A PASSIONATE WARNING

Here's the warning: We desperately need to realize the deadly nature of our possessions. We desperately need to realize the deadly nature of our possessions. How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. The reality is, most people in our culture and most of us in the church simply just don't believe Jesus on this one.

Mark 10:23(NIV) Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Jesus is saying it is hard to enter the kingdom of God from Perth, Western Australia. And we just don't buy it. We are accustomed to thinking like the church culture we have been raised in to see possessions and money and wealth as blessings.

We don't think of our blessing as barriers.

So what happened in the lives of early Christ followers?

Does the New Testament church have the same stance on possessions that Jesus is giving us here in Mark chapter 10?

1 Timothy 6:6–10 (NIV) But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grief's.

Now, notice and this is what often people notice and point out, "Well, it's not money that is the root of all kinds of evil. It's the love of money." And thankfully, we draw the conclusion that all of us are free from that, even though we have money.

Neither Jesus or Paul are saying that wealth or money is inherently evil.

Jesus is not saying nor is Paul saying that we need to give away wealth, money and possessions because they're bad. They're saying give away wealth, money and possessions because people are starving.

Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor. This is incredibly important.

1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV) Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Put these two passages together and the picture is, Paul is saying "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction." That's people who want to get rich. This is not even talking about people who have achieved that, who are rich. This is even just the desire to be rich leads you into a trap that leads to ruin and destruction.

Doesn't it now sound like Paul is warning about the deadly nature of possessions much like Jesus had done in Mark chapter 10? Absolutely.

So what is Paul saying?

Back up in verse 6 he says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." The people say "Well okay, well the important thing is that I'm content and I'm pretty content in the life that I live here in Perth. So, I'm good." But look at how Paul defines contentment. He said in verse 8 "If we have food and clothing we will be content with that." Really? We will be content with that?

Some of our translations says food and covering, basically, Paul is identifying basic necessities. He said food, shelter, clothing/covering and I have these and I'll be content with that.

Then he says right after that, "Now those who want more, those who want to be rich, want more and more and more and more, that leads down the path of destruction.

So the picture that Paul's setting up is, those who want to indulge in luxury after luxury after luxury beyond necessity, go down a trap that leads to ruin and destruction. And here's the ruin and destruction. This is why Paul is warning about this, and it goes to verse 17 when he starts talking to those who are rich. It's the danger we face. You've got this in your notes. Riches cause us to become self confident. Look at verse 17. "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant." Not to be arrogant.

The Scriptures are teaching that possessions produce pride.

When we make a new purchase, when we make this good investment, when we put in a big deposit, pride begins to swell in us and what happens is we begin to place our confidence in riches instead of putting our confidence in God. Now, most of us would say, "Well my confidence is not in riches. My confidence is in God." You know how you test that? Start telling folks to sell everything they have and give it away. And all of a sudden, the riches are starting to be taken off the table and insecurity in our hearts rises to the top. The deal is and how the riches causes us to be self confident? Is that riches blind us to the depth of our self confidence.

Riches blind us for the lack of confidence we have in God because we think we have confidence in God, but our confidence is in stuff and when it's stripped away, we realize that it's not just self confidence, but riches calls us to become self sufficient.

People this is why we often don't pray because we don't need God!!!

We know that we are prone, every single one of us in this room, we're prone to enjoy gifts and disregard the giver. We're all prone to this.

This is the danger Paul is warning against. Your riches cause you to become self sufficient and self confident, and self centred.

Paul is saying here that the remedy for the **danger of riches is giving**. Because the reality is, riches cause us to want more riches and more riches and have more and more and begin to hoard. And he says you want to fight that, the core of who you are? Then you give. You give generously. You become rich in good deeds.

Here's how to avoid the deadly danger of possessions. Give them away. Be rich in your giving.

Don't give your scraps anymore. That's what the rich man did in Luke.

You take the necessities that you live on, Godliness and contentment, great gain, food and covering and then you give.

So we come back to our choices.

1. LIVE A LIFE OF SELFISH LUXURY THAT FORSAKES THE POOR.

A life that is not content with food and covering, a life that wants more and more and more. A life that increases it's standard of living every opportunity it gets. Jesus says "No, don't live like that." And Paul says "No, don't live like that. Possessions are deadly that way. They're dangerous that way. One option is a life of selfish luxury that forsakes the poor.

2. LIVE A LIFE OF SELFLESS LOVE FOR THE SAKE OF THE LOST AND THE POOR.

It's at this point that we step back and many ask, some of the questions that come to our minds are, "Well what's wrong with luxuries? What's wrong with a nice house? What's wrong with a nice car? What's wrong with nice clothes? What's wrong with nice stuff? Is that inherently bad?"

Now think about this for a minute. This is huge. It comes back to what we were just talking about a second ago.

I believe that as long as we ask the question, "What's wrong with this?" we are reflecting exactly what's Scripture is warning us against. And that is a self centred mentality to our possessions.

Can you imagine taking a tour through your home or my home, and look for unnecessary furniture, unnecessary wall hangings, unnecessary clothes in the closet, unnecessary entertainment centres, unnecessary - And the list goes on and on and on and on. Are these things bad in and of themselves?

They're only bad if outside in your yard there's 500 children from Thailand or Africa whose bodies are malnourished and whose brains are deformed because they don't have a meal or they haven't heard about Christ.

You see, the only way we can ask the question "What's wrong with that?" is if we're ignoring the poor on our doorstep. You see the connection here? Which one are we going to live for? A life of selfish luxury that forsakes the lost and poor or a life of selfless love for the sake of the lost and poor? This is what Jesus and Paul are saying. Give.

IN YOUR NOTES, HERE'S MY PRACTICAL ENCOURAGEMENT.

1. As families identify the necessities and luxuries in your life. Then begin selling and giving away your luxuries for the sake of the lost and the poor.

I know that this is not an easy process to walk through. It's a painful process because you're beginning to realize how little in your life is necessity and how much is luxury. And it's painful because all of these rationalizations and justifications begin rising up in our hearts to explain away your luxuries.

What happens when we identify food and covering, basic needs, minimal wants, not even minimal wants that are germane to this culture and then beyond this, begin to ask the question, do I need the kind of car I drive? Do we need the kind of house we live in? Do I need all the clothes that I have? Do we need all the stuff in the house that we have? Do we need this, do we need that? Be careful because you'll start to ask, "Well what's wrong with that? Why can't I have that?"

These basic questions are just exposing the self centred plague in our hearts that need to be removed by Christ. And you'll begin to see that your life is full of excess and full of surplus that can be given away for the sake of the lost and the poor.

2. Set a simple cap on your lifestyle and then give away everything else. Set a simple cap on your lifestyle based on food and covering necessities. Decide this is what I or my family needs to live on.

Once you've got a cap, you're going right against the grain of a culture that says the more you make the more you have in your life. The reality is that the more we make, the higher our standard of living increases.

This is starting to sound a little more New Testament and you've got a cap and now you're freeing up anything that God grants above that cap to make the Glory of Christ known among the lost and the poor.

You say "Well is it wrong? John, are you saying it's wrong to have a lot of money, to make a lot of money, to make a good job?"

No. It's absolutely right. Like get the best job possible and make the most money possible because now, God is entrusting resources to you, not for your self indulgence, for the sake of the lost and the poor around the world. Now this begins to make sense.

What if, what if we did this? I know people think that it's crazy, don't even think about it. What if we decided across this Faith Family that if 50 or 75 or \$100,000.00 salary does not necessitate a 50 or 75 or \$100,000.00 or a million dollar lifestyle?

What if we decided that we're going to free up the resources that God has entrusted to us for the sake of the lost and the poor?

People say "Well that's passionate and different - you bet it is."

What if it's obedience? Think. The resources of heaven entrusted to us for the sake of the world.

You say "John, have you lost it? I mean, don't you think this is extreme. Aren't we going to get to place where we don't provide, that we don't take care of ourselves and our families?"

I don't think we're in danger of that. Not with what we have and what the culture we are fighting against.

I can't ever imagine Christ saying, "Tut, tut, You gave too much away. You should've spent more on yourself."

Don't worry about erring too far in that direction.

Let's just simply say in the words of Christ and Paul that there's a deadly danger in our possessions for us and for the sake of the poor and the lost!

Let's do what Jesus told the rich man to do in Mark 10 and what Paul is telling the rich to do in 1 Timothy 6.

That's the warning. It leads to...

11 A PASSIONATE FREEDOM

Jesus frees us from our bondage to ourselves and our stuff.

We're not going to spend too long here, but I want you to see this.

Mark 10:26–31 (NIV) The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

I want you to see Peter's response in Mark chapter 10 verse 28. "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Peter said to him "We have left everything to follow you."

I love this. See the picture here. See the contrast. Just a few verses before this, a man walks away from Jesus sad because he's holding onto everything he has. Now you've got an eager disciple, let's be honest, a little too eager at some points, stands up and says "We've left everything to follow you." And there's a contrast here.

There's a freedom here. There's a man walking away sad chained to his possessions and a man who is standing up excited about the fact that he has left everything to follow Jesus and it sounds a little bold, but Jesus doesn't rebuke him or anything. He actually affirms him in this.

There's a freedom here...

We've looked at some of these passionate commands in Scripture and as a result there's a tendency to also think, "Well when we're saved does Christ free us? Why are we talking about all these commands? We're free."

We're not free from commands. For the first time, once Christ saves us, **we're free to obey commands**. Now we have what's in our hearts that's necessary to put these truths into practice. And we don't have to try to work or earn or do this that we don't want to do, we do begrudgingly.

No, we do it because Christ is changing our hearts and it overflows into our obedience. And the beauty is, now we are free, absolutely free from ourselves and our possessions and our stuff and our living for comfort and security in this world because now we're free to live for Christ. And, we're free to go wherever He calls.

What happens when a people, because of spending, are not in chains to debt and large mortgages and large payments on this and that, what happens when we're not in chains to this or that we're holding onto? What happens when we are free to go wherever He calls? What a picture. And free to give whatever He asks. Imagine that. A cap on your lifestyle that frees up abundant resources and now your struggle is, where are we going to give these resources?

What's the best way to give these resources? Where do I give to the lost and poor?

Now, this is a good question to ask. A good question to wrestle with and a good problem to have. Before, when we were giving scraps, we could manage that pretty easy. Now we're giving surplus, now we're giving instead of having a nice house or a nice car or nice clothes or this or that.

Now we say, "Okay, how can I best spend that? How can we best spend that for the sake of the lost and for the sake of the poor?"

And all of a sudden – and don't miss this – what if? What if there really were billions of people on this planet who are headed to a Christless eternity and millions of them haven't even heard the name of Jesus? And what if there were unprecedented numbers of suffering people on this planet? And what if God decided to give His people on this side unprecedented wealth to make a difference among the lost and the poor?

What if that's exactly what He has done? What if that's exactly what He has done in this room? And what happens when the people in this room, you and I, are free to go wherever He calls and to give whatever He asks?

Ralph Winter truthfully said, "Obedience to the great commission has more consistently been poisoned by affluence than by anything else."

Let's get rid of the poison!

PRACTICAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Try to honestly answer this question. In your life or in your family are you giving less than your ability? Are you giving according to your ability? Or are you giving beyond your ability? Less than, according to, or beyond your ability.

To be honest, I would guess, and I certainly don't have anything empirical to back this up, but I would guess that 90% plus of us are giving less than our ability and I would include myself, as your senior minister, in that, yeah, far less. The luxuries and excess's that surround my life.

I would say maybe 2% of us are giving according to our ability, commensurate with how much we have.

And I would say probably less than 1% of us are giving beyond our ability, and those are probably the most unnoticed in this room.

It's the whole picture in **Luke 21** when all the wealthy are putting gifts into the temple treasury and a widow comes by with two copper coins and puts them in. And what does Jesus say? He says she gave more than all of them. Why? Because she gave out of her poverty and she had nothing left. She gave beyond her ability. We don't think like this. You use even the extreme example.

Say, a man makes \$10 million next year and he gives away \$9 million to the poor. Would we say that's extravagant giving? Of course we would, but the reality is, it's giving far less than that man's ability. Far less. He's only living on a million dollars!

Doesn't square with 1 Timothy 6 at all, does it?

What happens when people making 20, 30, 50, 75 \$100,000.00 or more in a Faith Family, begin to give beyond their ability? Probably not going to happen overnight, but what happens when we begin to move in that direction? We're spending our surplus and excess in our lives for the sake of the lost and the poor.

Let's stop asking how much you can spare and start asking how much is it going to take. What can we spare and what will it take?

The fear is that the overwhelming nature of the numbers I've thrown out can lead to inaction. Cause it can actually make us begin to think "what can I really do to impact that?"

In light of that, I want to encourage you. The line of thinking that says "I can't do everything, so I won't do anything" is straight from the devil.

What happens when individuals and families across this room begin to say "I can do. I can free up this over here to do for one. I can free up this over here to do for five. I can free up this over here to do for 10 and 20 and hundreds more and more and more."

What happens when a Faith Family stops asking "What can we spare while we indulge ourselves?" Instead, "What's it going to take to make the Gospel known among the least reached peoples on the earth?" "What's it going to take to bring water, food to unprecedented millions in the world?"

That begins to change a whole mindset and that really leads us to this last truth, and it deals with the church. It brings this altogether for us as a community of faith...

12 A PASSIONATE FAMILY

Mark 10:28–31 (NIV) Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"²⁹ "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Here's the deal. This is a picture that rounds off Mark 10.

Jesus unites His people together to enjoy and encourage one another as they abandon themselves to Him. Did you catch that?

Enjoy and encourage one and other as they abandon themselves to Him.

Now I love this bringing of our whole series to such a strong concluding statement here.

Jesus says, you abandon your house and your possessions and your family. That's what Christ calls you to do, which He's doing all across this world today.

We have talked with many people and some here in our church who have had to leave family to follow Christ. It's the reality. Many of you will lose your mother or father or brothers or sister. You'll lose your life, maybe. But here's the beauty. You do that? You get 100 times as much. It's a good deal.

If you give me \$1.00 and I give you \$100.00, that's a smart thing for you to do? Right?

That's what Jesus is saying here. And don't miss this picture – first, the church no longer is an abstract idea in our minds. He says "Some of you will lose family, but you're going to get a family you can't even imagine."

This is talking about the church. Let me show it to you real quick.

Look at this in verse 29, I want you to listen to the family members that are mentioned and see if there is a conspicuous absence the second time he mentions them around. Follow with me. No one's left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me will fail to receive 100 times as much – and listen to what He says – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields. What did He leave out? Did you catch it? He left out father.

The picture is when following Christ you may leave behind your earthly family, because you're following Christ and He says you will have brothers and sisters and

mother, but you will have one Father who protects you as His children and makes sure that you're provided for. This is the beauty. Our Heavenly Father stays with us!

The church is no longer an abstract idea. This is Acts 29!

When we – if we'd do this, if you were to do this. If you were going to take food and covering and then begin to give surplus away, then all of a sudden some unexpected need comes that you never saw coming in your life, the beauty of it is, now you've got a family that is around you to walk with you through that, to help you in that, a giving family at that. This is the picture. This is the church in reality.

But I also think it's one of the deterrents. When I think about these truths and putting them into practice, I think one of the reasons why we're hesitant to is because of our love of things. I think another reason why we're hesitant to is because of our fear of loneliness. Here's what I mean by that. I think it would be a lot easier to live out these truths in a simple, passionate life if we saw everybody else in the church doing that.

But when we look at these words and we look around us, and even look at our ministers and we see a life of self indulgence, then we think, "Well I guess this really doesn't matter. I guess this isn't really true."

We need each other to show what this looks like in practice. I need you to pray for me and I want you to know that I'm praying for you. We need each other. The church is not an abstract idea that we gather together every Sunday. This church is a motivator in our lives that spurs us on to Christ with the way we're living.

Listen to Scripture...

Proverbs 14:21 (NASB) He who despises his neighbor sins, But happy is he who is gracious to the poor.

Proverbs 22:9 (NIV) The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor.

Acts 20:35 (NIV) ...Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Isaiah 58:10–11 (NIV) ...if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

This is why Hudson Taylor, after giving his life for 50 years in China, spending his life, his family's lives and his possessions for the sake of the lost and the poor in China makes this statement. "I never made a sacrifice." He said "I never made a

sacrifice because it all made sense." See the treasure here. Church no longer an abstract idea. Sacrifice no longer an appropriate term and the world no longer seems like an adequate home. Not just in this present age, but in the age to come.

Brothers and sisters, this world is not our home. Let's stop living like it is. Picture this. You live in Indonesia. You come over to Australia for one year! You're living in a reasonable sized apartment here. And the rule is, during this one year, you can make as much money as you would like, but when you get on that plane at the end of the month to go back to Indonesia, you can take absolutely nothing on that plane with you. You can take no money and no possessions with you. Just all you've got on your back is what you will take back with you. Not even a suitcase! Now the only caveat to that is, as you make all the money you want, you can deposit that in your bank in Indonesia.

So you've got a year here in Oz, what are you going to do? Are you going to go out and buy expensive paintings and put them on the wall in your rented apartment? Are you going to go out and buy expensive furnishings to fix up that apartment as nice as it can be? Absolutely not. That would be the most foolish of things to do. Aren't you going to make as much money as you can and you're going to make sure that before you get on that plane, it's in the bank in Indonesia.

I remind you, ladies and gentlemen, we are here as a vapour, a mist. Our life is here one second and it is gone the next. And there is an eternity to come. What is 80 years here to be followed by 80 billion years? So why live for nice hotel rooms? Houses and cars and clothes and stuff that are full of luxuries, why? Why not leave all the luxuries behind because it makes sense because there's another world to come. This is the question: Do we believe this book? Because the Bible tells us about Christ dying on a cross so that we would not have to live for comforts here.

We know that we're living for another home. We know there are people here that God has left us here for their sake. The only reason we're here instead of with Him at this moment is for their sake. So, how can we indulge in more and more and more and more for ourselves? Not if we believe this book, cause this book says we're living for another world! Now we are at a point where we've got to ask as a church. Where are we going to stand? Are we going to stand with the starving or with the overfed? Are you going to stand with the rich man on his way to hell or the poor man, Lazarus, on his way to heaven?

How can we hoard our wealth and possessions when millions are hovering on the edge of starvation? I appeal to Christ in you. Are we going to have the courage to seek justice for the poor and the lost, even if that means disapproval from our affluent and religious neighbours?

PRACTICAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Which world are we going to live for? We must decide and my encouragement is to decide today to take our lives and our possessions and to give them to God and to ask Him to spend them radically and passionately for the sake of the lost and the poor around the world.

"Society counsels us to secure our financial future through hoarding and investing; Jesus calls us to invest in the poor and hungry. Society advises us to network with people who can advance our careers; Jesus calls us to network with the outcast, the homeless and the sick to advance their good. Where the veil is removed, we see clearly how Jesus' way leads to a better approval."¹

¹ David A. deSilva, "An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation." p. 589