

# MONEY OR JESUS

*Money or Jesus: A Reflection on  
Matthew 19: 23-30 by Wilson Chan*

## MATTHEW 19: 23-30

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, 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."*

*When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"*

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

*Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"*

*Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife[a] or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."*

New International Version

# MONEY OR JESUS

In Chinese culture, there is a saying:

*How do you make a man brave or courageous?*

*Give him some money and watch his bravery and courage rise.*

There is truth to this saying because Money has power. Money gives security, fame and power. And this, of course, makes a man brave.

There is another saying in Chinese culture:

*Take away his money and let's see what he's made of.*

Money has power. In Western society, within families, the root cause of most fights is over money.

Money has a power that causes arguments and stress in families. Money can bring out the ugliness in people.

I'm sure that all of us have had a time when money brought out the ugliness in us. Or a time when you had an argument or fight with a loved one related to money.

Jesus said You cannot serve God or Mammon. Money is not neutral.

Money has power and influence.

Here in this passage after the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus is saying that someone who is rich or someone under the compulsion of money will find it hard to enter into the kingdom of God.

I want to say that there are wealthy people who are not under the compulsion of money who love Jesus. Biblical examples are Zacchaeus and Joanna and Lydia.

Growing up in the hood and being a youth pastor in Manurewa, I've seen people in poverty be under the compulsion of money who are running an ugly rat race, believing that if they had they had more money their lives will be better like the rockstars, movie stars and sports stars.

People under the compulsion of money and under the influence of money are tempted by what it offers - power, glamour, pleasure, popularity and security.

People under the influence of money will find it hard to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples asked "who can be saved?"

Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

By giving our allegiance to God instead of money, it is possible to enter into the Kingdom.

So, how do we give our allegiance to God instead of money?

There is a comparison that I really like: the Kiwi Dream and the Kingdom Dream.

We know what the Kiwi Dream is - we just need to see tv ads or billboards and they tell us the Kiwi Dream. It's the house, the car, the right crowd, the boat, the Bach, the perfect family.

And we know the Kingdom Dream from the scriptures.

My old boss, Mick Duncan, used to print out his bank statements to see his spending.

And I was always puzzled by this, so one day I asked him why.

The reason, he told me, was to make sure that his spending and his allegiance were to the Kingdom.

For him, this was as simple as asking if the coffee was Fair Trade. Was it a sustainable purchase? And who was the coffee with?

And it was also more complex things such as a mortgage. Will the banks invest the money in weapons? Or sustainable energy.

This was a regular reflection and check-in with his money.

He was aware of the power of his money and the unjust structures that keep the least at arms reach, away and under the boot of an oppressor. He chose to simply live and sometimes pay more for a product so that others can live simply, as Gandhi would say.

Mick asked if a banker or the average person would be able to tell the difference between him and a non-believer.

If someone else looked at my bank statements, would they be able to tell the difference between a non-Christian's bank account and mine?

Mick was sold out for the Kingdom Dream.

And he taught me about transforming the unneutral power of money into a tool for the Kingdom.

We are sold out for the Kingdom Dream? Or are we sold out for the Kiwi Dream?

One way to tell is through our bank statements. We create the world we want with our money.

Are we using money in a way that invests into the Kiwi Dream or the Kingdom Dream?

The way we give allegiance to our God instead of the influence of money is by voting with our dollar and investing in the Kingdom Dream.

This loosens the power of money.

And I hope when people see my bank account, they see that I'm trying my best as a follower of Jesus to invest in the Kingdom Dream.

And that I am putting my money where my mouth is.

Peter, the disciple of Jesus, said something interesting: "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" (Matthew 19:27)

Jesus answers quickly: "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things ... "

I don't really like the next bit because often prosperity preachers love to use and abuse this. But it finishes with: "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

This reminds us that the Kingdom Dream value system is different to the Kiwi Dream value system.

The economy system is different.

By economy, this means the managing or arrangement or housekeeping of money will be used differently.

In the Kiwi Dream, the economy speaks and values in the name of profit. Profit, power, prestige, glamour - this is what money buys is first in the Kiwi Dream.

Which is last in this Kingdom Dream.

The Kingdom Dream invites us to invest our money where all of humanity flourishes, even the least of these.

My wife, Esther, and I always worked for less than 60 paid hours combined. We are aware of the power of money tempting us to live in the Kiwi Dream.

We did this while living in the richest suburb in New Zealand: Epsom. It's possible to live off a 30 hour week. Living simply enables us to be more creative and allows us to have more time to do the things we love.

Money is not neutral. Money has power.

Will we take control of money or will money take control of us?

Will our money hold us or will we hold our money?

Bishop Justin Duckworth said something about the Kiwi and Kingdom Dreams that resonated with me.

*When I ask someone 'when will you start to follow Jesus with your whole life?' And they say 'when I finish my degree'.*

*When they finish their degree, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?' They say, 'I gotta get a job.'*

*When they get their job, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?' They say 'I'm in a new relationship and gotta save for a wedding'.*

*When they get married, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?' They say 'I need to save for a house'.*

*When they buy their house, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?' They say they are starting a family.*

*When they've started a family, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?'. They say 'when the kids leave home'.*

*When the kids have left home, I ask them 'when will you start following Jesus?'. They say 'when the mortgage is paid off and we've saved up for retirement'.*

Bishop Justin would say that this person has given their best years to the Kiwi Dream and not to the Kingdom Dream.

The power of money and the temptation of the Kiwi Dream got in the way of following Jesus. Just like the Rich Young Ruler.

So the challenge for us is: who will have our allegiance?

Money or Jesus?

Who will we give the best lives of our lives to?

The Kiwi Dream?

Or the Kingdom Dream?