

JESUS WASN'T KIDDING ... when he said "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"... and when he said we "cannot serve both God and Mammon (Money), because one will surely become the Master (top priority) over the other." Jesus warned about the dangers of riches, and the apostle Paul also warned about money, specifically about the "**love** of money." Jesus also wasn't kidding when he said "Blessed are The Poor," (sermon on the plain, Luke chapter 6) ... and when he quotes Isaiah and describes his mission as "bringing good news to the poor," and when he says those who are welcomed into the kingdom of God (sheep and goats story) are those who respond to the needs of "the least of these."

I want to be clear that Jesus did not condemn wealth, but warned of the *spiritual* dangers of wealth, one of which is that money can become a god (a god of greed), perhaps an addiction to amassing more savings one's entire life, accompanied by a feeling of never having enough, never being satisfied. Jesus warns one rich man to stop making more storehouses for his goods, as his life could end at any moment. Jesus also says in Luke chapter 6, "Woe to you who are rich, for you *have received* your consolation." The implication is that a wealthy lifestyle can become an overriding goal, so that "you have all the comfort you are ever going to get." Implied is that there are spiritual comforts and rewards you may never experience because your heart is set on amassing earthly goods (Jesus also said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be"). Amassing and guarding riches can take priority over spiritual values, such as compassion for "the least," for those in great need.

Do we sense any relevance of Jesus' way and words? I have heard it said often that a budget is a moral document. Whether a personal budget, a city budget, a national budget, it is a moral

statement because it shows our priorities and our values. There is a reason why the biblical Jewish Law instructed setting aside a percentage of one's harvest (income) to help those on the margins of society.

Certainly we are hearing a lot these days about cutting the national budget, getting rid of waste. Yet sadly, what is often called waste is care for the poor, those who truly need assistance. And how is it that billionaires living far from streets of poverty, far from the faces of the poor are the ones who get to decide what social programs are worthy or wasteful? We hear that US-aid is on the chopping block. We are talking about healthcare, life or death in war-torn countries! Why are not weapons of death and destruction on the chopping block? We hear that Medicaid may be on the chopping block. Those who are poor, who cannot afford the best foods and gym memberships often need even more health care!

The "world" says you will be happy with riches and comforts of material things. Jesus challenges such worldly values and asks us to be rich in *spiritual* things, such as the skill of peacemaking, the power of love, compassion and generosity towards the weak and the oppressed. Will we be a "good Samaritan" to any neighbor in need? Will we make Jesus' values our top priority, and truly follow the command to love one's neighbor as oneself? This will make the world a better place.