

## 8. With the Rich and Famous (1Q 2014—Discipleship)

**Biblical material:** Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; John 3:1–15; Luke 19:1–10; Mark 4:18, 19; Matt. 19:16–26; 1 Timothy 6:10.

### Quotes

- The figure of the crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*
- Fame is fickle, and I know it. It has its compensations but it also has its drawbacks, and I've experienced them both. *Marilyn Monroe*
- If you come to fame not understanding who you are, it will define who you are. *Oprah Winfrey*
- Not everybody can be famous but everybody can be great, because greatness is determined by service. *Martin Luther King Jr.*
- Fame means millions of people have the wrong idea of who you are. *Erica Jong*
- Who is rich? He that is content. Who is that? Nobody. *Benjamin Franklin*
- To be able to give away riches is mandatory if you wish to possess them. This is the only way that you will be truly rich. *Muhammad Ali*

### Questions

Why are we so preoccupied with the rich and famous? What should our relationship be to money and fame? How does Jesus' example help? How can we show that we follow different principles without becoming dismissive? How can we best use our own resources to share the good news of God?

### Bible summary

Deut. 8:17, 18 reminds us not to take credit for our wealth and fame, but to honor God. Abram's wisdom in not being greedy is revealed in his offer to Lot in Gen. 13:5, 6. John 3:1–15 tells us the story of Nicodemus. Luke 19:1–10 records the experience of Zacchaeus. In the parable of the sower Jesus warns that "worries of this world, the temptation of wealth, and other distractions choke the growth of the word, and it becomes unproductive." Mark 4:18, 19 FBV. Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler is reported in Matt. 19:16–26. Paul tells Timothy, "the desire to be rich leads to many kinds of evil results." 1 Timothy 6:10 FBV.

### Comment

Nicodemus had a high position. He was well-known, even famous. He came to Jesus at night so as not to prejudice his reputation. In the conversation, Jesus while treating Nicodemus well told him the absolute truth! Rich and famous people think they should receive special treatment, and even Jesus' disciples were surprised at Jesus' comment that it was hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Riches and fame we considered rewards from God for good behavior, so such ideas were confusing to them. But Jesus pointed to fundamental principles, and that the most important thing was to be rich towards God.

With Zacchaeus Jesus was able to help someone deeply involved in chasing money and self-profit to see life's true values, and salvation beyond.

Jesus' values were often at odds with those of his contemporaries. Re-read the Beatitudes and you see Jesus turning the values of the world upside-down. Jesus speaks of those who are "blessed," and the list doesn't include the rich and famous by this world's values. In fact he targets the false integrity of those who claimed to be religious: "I tell you, unless your righteousness is more than that of the religious teachers and the Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20 FBV.

Why? Because theirs was an outside external value system, one that considered image and perception as supreme. They based their values on how others saw them, rather than who they truly were. So Jesus says: "Make sure not to do your good deeds in front of people, just so they can be seen. Otherwise you won't have any reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup>When you give to the poor, don't be like the hypocrites who blow their own trumpets to announce what they're doing in the synagogues and in the streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth: they already have their reward.... When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand up and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people can see them. I promise you, they have already got their reward." Matthew 6:1, 2, 5 FBV.

In fact Jesus reserved his strongest condemnation for these who claimed so much but had so poor values: "What a disaster is coming on you, religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white-washed tombs, looking good on the outside, but on the inside full of skeletons and all kinds of rotteness. You're just the same. On the outside you look like good people to others, but on the inside you're full of hypocrisy and wickedness." Matthew 23:27, 28 FBV.

To some, this may seem strong language! But Jesus was most concerned. Why? Because with such a false view of what was of true value, he could not help them. Which is why God says he hates pride and arrogance (Proverbs 8:13), because with such an attitude he can do nothing to save such people.

### **Ellen White Comments**

When night came on, Jesus, pale with the weariness of his long-continued labors, sought for retirement and repose in the Mount of Olives. Here Nicodemus found him and desired a conference. This man was rich and honored of the Jews. He was famous throughout Jerusalem for his wealth, his learning and benevolence, and especially for his liberal offerings to the temple to carry out its sacred services. He was also one of the prominent members of the national council. Yet when he came into the presence of Jesus, a strange agitation and timidity assailed him, which he essayed to conceal beneath an air of composure and dignity. {2SP 126.1}

He endeavored to appear as if it were an act of condescension on the part of a learned ruler, to seek, uninvited, an audience with a young stranger at that unseasonable hour of night. He began with a conciliating address, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." But instead of acknowledging this complimentary salutation, Jesus bent his calm and searching eye upon the speaker, as if reading his very soul; then, with a sweet and solemn voice, he spoke and revealed the true condition of Nicodemus. "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." {2SP 126-7}