

# Menifee United Church of Christ

Established in 1962 by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit

## SERMON FOR

October 11, 2015

*“Jesus Does Not Revere The Rich”*



Reverend Bill Freeman: Senior Minister  
Eckart Seeber: Music Minister  
Marie Paulus-Nyquist: Children's Minister  
Richard Goward: Lay Reader

## ***Menifee United Church of Christ***

*Sunday Service and Sunday School 10 AM*

*26701 McCall Boulevard,  
Menifee, California 92586  
(951) 679-1149*

*Email: [uccmenifee@gmail.com](mailto:uccmenifee@gmail.com)*

*Website: [menifeeucc.org](http://menifeeucc.org)*

***Live Life Fully Alive!***

### **Hebrews 4:12-16**

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

### **Mark 10:17-31**

*As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother."' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 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.' They were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.' Peter began to say to him, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the*

*sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’*

## ***Jesus Does Not Revere The Rich***

You can't take it with you. That's what they say. You can't take it with you. “It” being your money, your possessions, your anything. There are jokes about that. There are real life stories about that. There are biblical stories about that. And the bottom line is: You can't take it with you.

A rich man was near death. He prayed that he could take some of his wealth with him when he died. Then an angel appeared before the rich man and said that God will allow him to take one suitcase of his riches with him. The rich man was overjoyed, grabbed his largest suitcase, and filled it with gold bars. Soon after that, the rich man died, showed up at the Pearly Gates, and was welcomed by St. Peter. St. Peter saw the suitcase and said, "You can't bring that in here!" But the rich man explained that God gave him permission. St. Peter said, “Okay, but I'll have to check the contents of the suitcase first.” So St. Peter opened the suitcase, looked inside, and said, “Great! You brought us some pavement!”

My first job out of college was as the News Director of a Christian radio station. I would often hear the deejays play songs about walking in heaven on streets of gold. At the time I thought: Was that to say to our audience, which I think was pretty poor: Hey, you may be poor now, but one day you'll be in heaven, walking on streets of gold? But then I realized: The point of those songs was that gold will be so worthless in heaven that the streets will be paved with it.

Lazarus laid outside the gates of a rich man's house, hoping for some scraps from the rich man's table. But, while the rich man ate very well, he never shared any food with Lazarus, the poor man. Then they both died. The rich man ended up in Hades, tormented in the flames of Hell, and Lazarus ended up in Heaven, comforted by Abraham. The rich man begged Lazarus for help. But Abraham said there's a chasm between Heaven and Hell, so

Lazarus couldn't help the rich man even if he wanted to.

Wealthy people are in for a rude awakening when they get to the next life, according to the Bible. Their wealth won't amount to a hill of beans in Heaven, if that's where they go.

So, St. Peter does not revere the rich, Abraham does not revere the rich. I don't believe God or the Holy Spirit reveres the rich. And Jesus definitely does not revere the rich.

A rich man asked Jesus how to attain eternal life. Jesus said to the rich man, "Sell all that you have, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow me." The rich man went away dejected because he was very rich and he didn't want to give up his riches. Jesus said to his disciples, "It's hard for a rich person to get into heaven." Jesus' disciples are like, "Say what, Jesus?" Then Jesus said to them, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into heaven." The disciples later said, "Wait a minute, Jesus, we've left everything to follow you." So Jesus said, "Everyone who's left houses and families and fields for me and the good news will have eternal life."

Some preachers and televangelists have a different message from the one Jesus proclaims. Some preachers and televangelists say: God wants you to be rich. Some preachers and televangelists live in mansions worth millions of dollars and fly around in private jets worth tens of millions of dollars. Some preachers and televangelists should have as their theme song an old Calloway tune. "I Wanna Be Rich." Calloway sings, "I want money, lots and lots of money. I want the pie in the sky. I want money, lots and lots of money. So don't be asking me why. I wanna be rich."

Did Jesus despise the rich or did he know that their riches could corrupt them? Did Jesus believe that money was wrong or that the love of money was wrong? Did Jesus want to keep the rich from feeling superior to the poor?

Maybe what Jesus is saying is: You can't follow him half-heartedly, or half-spiritually, as the case may be. Maybe what Jesus is saying is: You have to follow him with your entire essence, with your whole being, with all your heart, soul,

strength, and mind. Maybe what Jesus is saying is: You have to follow him and love him, not your money, not your house, and not your iPad.

Jesus had compassion for the poor. And he certainly had more compassion for the poor than he had for the rich. Do we?

“Blessed are you who are poor,” Jesus says, “for yours is the kingdom of God.” Then he goes on to say, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” Ouch. Statements like that are part of the reason why the rich, the powerful, and the biblical literalists - the religious right of his day - wanted to get rid of Jesus. Since Pope Francis sounds an awful lot like Jesus when it comes to the rich, that’s part of the reason why the rich, the powerful, and the biblical literalists - the religious right of our day - want to get rid of Pope Francis.

One of my parishioners at one of my previous churches was a member of the Michigan legislature. Each legislator gets to invite a clergy person to pray at the start of a legislative session. So she invited me to say a prayer before the legislature. I almost didn’t do it, because I believe in the separation of church and state. But then I figured I could pray a very ecumenical, interfaith, and inclusive prayer. So I began, “Spirit of love, known by many names: God and Goddess, Yahweh and Allah, Dios and Divine, Nature and Nothing.” A little later I gave thanks for the various people in Michigan, including “people of color and those of us who wish we were.” (The Detroit lawmakers loved that.) Then toward the end of the prayer I said, “And may we have at least as much respect for the Have Nots as we do for the Have Lots.”

But America does not have much respect for the Have Nots at all. That’s why state legislatures pass laws to drug-test welfare recipients, but not to drug-test corporate welfare recipients. And that’s why state legislatures pass laws to prohibit welfare recipients from buying lobster with their food stamps. Does that happen a lot? (“Yes, my good man. I would like two pounds of lobster. And throw in some caviar. Oh, and by the way, do you have any Grey Poupon? Here are my food stamps to pay for it all.”) Or is this just to make taxpayers feel good? “Yes, thank you, legislators, for humiliating poor people!”

Jesus does want you to be rich. But Jesus does not want you to be monetarily rich. God, no. Jesus wants you to be spiritually rich. Jesus wants you to be rich in spiritual things, like: Faith. Hope. Love. Joy. Justice. And: Peace.

While Jesus does not revere the rich, he does seem to respect the poor.

“The poor you will always have with you,” Jesus said. But that was not an admonition. “I am Jesus and I am saying to you: Make sure you always have the poor with you or I’ll be upset.” No. Jesus knew we’d always have needy people, because Jesus knew we’d always have greedy people. People who take more than their fair share. People who pay less than their fair share of taxes. People who pay workers, especially women, less than what they’re worth, and less than what men make for doing the same job.

Poor people can’t be poor, I’ve heard some claim, because many of them have refrigerators and stoves! (Gasp! Oh my God!) And many of them have television sets and cell phones! (Gasp! Oh my God!) And many of them have air conditioners and cars! (Gasp! Oh my God!) So, I guess unless poor people live in a cardboard box, they’re not really poor, according to some. How much of what poor people have, though, was bought before the poor people became poor?

Do you think poor people aren’t really poor because they have a refrigerator and a stove? This is a United Church of Christ church, so you can answer that question the way you believe is best. And I’m a United Church of Christ minister, so I can answer that question the way I believe is best, too. I believe poor people, for the most part, are doing the best they can. I believe poor people can’t raise a family of any size on a minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. And I believe poor people are still poor even if they own a refrigerator and a stove.

Maybe the poor are poor because they’re following Jesus. Maybe someone is poor because he quit his job because his job would’ve made him compromise his Christian principles. Maybe someone is poor because she would rather spend time with her children, teaching her children the ways of Jesus, rather than

work two jobs and leave her children in daycare all day. Maybe someone is poor because he turned down a high-paying executive position, and instead took a low-paying job where he helps people the way he believes Jesus would want him to.

What does it mean to sell - or give up - all that you have? Does anybody even do that today? Yes. Some people do.

Doctors Without Borders, I think of them, working in war-torn Afghanistan, who were recently mistakenly killed in a U.S. bombing raid. Doctors Without Borders - and others there that day - gave up all that they have.

Malala Yousafzai, I think of her, shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan, who won the Nobel Peace Prize, after fighting for her life, so she could fight for female education in a world that doesn't always value educated females. Malala Yousafzai almost gave up all that she had, and she continues to give.

Chris Mintz, I think of him, the former military man, who charged at the gunman who killed 9 people and wounded several others at a community college in Oregon, and was shot 7 times, but thankfully he survived. Chris Mintz was willing to give up all that he had to save others.

Are we willing to give up all that we have? Am I willing to give up all that I have? Are you willing to give up all that you have? If so, what would that look like? How should we follow the Lord? I wish I could tell you how to do it. But that's something each of us has to come up with for ourselves...with God's help.

Let us pray...

God of Love,  
Help us to love you and not money.  
Help us to love Jesus and not money.  
Help us to love the Holy Spirit and not money.  
And help us to love people and not money.  
Now and forevermore.  
By the power of the Holy Spirit.  
And in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.

## THE GOLDEN RULE

*What is hateful to you  
do not do to others.*

Judaism

*Do to others what you would  
have them do to you.*

Christianity

*None of you believes until he wishes for his  
brother what he wishes for himself.*

Islam

*Do not do to others  
what would cause pain if done to you.*

Hinduism

*Hurt not others in ways that you yourself  
would find hurtful.*

Buddism

*Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain,  
and your neighbor's loss as your loss.*

Taoism

*Do not do to others  
what you do not want them to do to you.*

Confucianism

*Treat other people  
as you'd want to be treated in their situation.*

Humanism