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**If only!** Job 23: 1-9; Amos 5: 5-6, 10-15; Mark 10: 17-31

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Job had a deep-rooted faith but one that was being severely tested by circumstances, under terrible attack from what life has thrown at him. At times stuck in deep despair & darkness, v. 17- *Darkness is all around me, thick, impenetrable darkness is everywhere but I am not silenced.* Then, finding a measure of assurance & confidence that the Lord held him. **If only** he could find God; **if only** he could speak to God then the darkness in which he found himself would start to clear. **If only** I knew where to find Him; **if only** I could go to His dwelling (v.5) **If only**, he would hear God speak clearly to him for Job knew that speaking to God is part of a 2-way conversation.

In our present circumstances, in the church & outside, many are now living with loss of loved ones, of previous certainties; with the loss of financial support going into winter; tired of waiting; living with a loss of hope for the future. Many people now rail against God & feel the same absence of any light at the end of the tunnel. **So a big question & challenge: What are we as Christ's local Church, as God's representatives doing to bring light to that darkness?**

**What are we as Christ's local Church, as God's representatives doing to bring light to that darkness?** That's a challenge to me every time I meet a bereaved family or speak & try to listen. But like Job, *I do know that my Redeemer lives.* (Job 19:25) & as the old chorus puts it: *I know whom I have believed & am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.* **How then as a church do we show that as we care both for each other & for our neighbours including those we may work alongside?**

**Amos also brings a challenge.**

He held up a mirror to his society then & to us now. **Do we see what God sees or are we blinded by our own smug self-righteousness & vanity?**

v. 6- is a command, an invitation or a plea: ***Come back to the Lord & live.***

Amos was aware of the failing of the people & that they are content to go along with the abuses that are happening all around them. Amos was giving a wake-up call that is still relevant for the church today. **Are we comfortable with the inequalities & injustices going on around us?** If we continue to ignore God, Amos says that there are consequences. *Otherwise, he will roar through Israel like a fire, devouring you completely.*

vv. 10 -14 give more detail about the wrongdoing rife in the society: highlighting dishonest judges & lying (10); unfair taxes & rent (11); oppression of the honest through bribery (12a); & using wealth to buy justice. In the light of the Pandora Papers & some government's priorities, that mirror is still relevant today in our country & across the world where too often wealth & privilege bend justice & the poor & most vulnerable take second place & wait to be heard. **May we seek good not evil that we may live & bring God's healing & hope to broken lives and the Lord's light & love to those in darkness at this time.**

**Contrast: the children** brought to Jesus by adults, chased by his disciples but then welcomed by Him with open arms, lifted up, blessed & commended. **& the rich man** – a ruler or ruling elder according to Luke (18:18) & a young man according to Matthew (19:22) who had run to Jesus & knelt before Him but after speaking with Jesus went away sad, & much to the surprise of Jesus's disciples who had assumed that His riches & respected position more than qualified him for God's kingdom.

**He had made a good start**, running, kneeling, eager, then "**Good teacher, what must I do to receive eternal life?**" **Fair question you may think but flawed:**

- a) Jesus was and is more than good teacher, the only human who was truly good & is God
- b) none of us can do anything to earn or deserve or buy eternal life. **It is gift and grace**

1. **Be childlike, not childish. Let go of your agenda & trust** - a child is totally dependent on the parent. Total trust is the centre of a child's existence so it must be for the disciple **that doesn't mean that we are to be childish** or simplistic
  - like rejecting learning or common sense or logic,
  - like not planning ahead or preparing
  - like neglecting natural & God-given abilities

## 2. **Commitment cannot be forced**

v. 21f *Jesus looked at the man with love* **But the man went away sad for he was very rich.** He made no further attempt to try to persuade him.

The conditions had been set; the young man must make up his mind.

## 3. **Christ's love is for all - rich & poor, powerful & weak**

**But** possessions can be a hindrance to total trust.

Some have said the "*rich man was possessed by his possessions*"

Perhaps, but clearly, at this stage, rich young man trusted in his possessions more than Jesus!

That man was challenged to give away his possessions because they mattered too much to him. *Jesus met a rich ruler who had come to Him one day.*

**He loved him & He said, "Will you let go of your safety rope?"**

The rich ruler's safety rope was called money.

*Will you give away all your possessions or sell them & give the money to the poor & come after me? Then you will have treasure in heaven. Then, come follow me!*

What gets in the way of our deeper commitment as individuals...as a church?

There are so many ways to keep God at arm's length

..... so that He can't get through to us and we can't grow.

And it's not only about possessions.

Resentment or jealousy or refusing to forgive may be just as much a barrier;

Fear of change can keep God at a distance,

...so can fear of the unknown, or fear of being hurt, or self-pity or self-satisfaction.

Jesus spoke to a woman caught in an adulterous affair. He said, *Go & sin no more* Jn 8:11

- **Will you let go of** that relationship that you know dishonours God/

**What are you to let go of? Anything that will keep you from God**

**Let go of** your attachment to money

**Let go** of your power, be a servant.

**Let go** of your addiction. Admit it. Get help.

**Let go** of that habit.

**Let go** of that grudge

**Let go of** your pride, your money, your reputation, your disobedience,  
your wanting to be in control

**Let go and let God!**

***In God we trust!*** Trust in the God we see in Jesus. He is faithful.