

The Rich are Going to Hell

“Why would he say that?” The gentrified couple couldn’t believe what they were hearing.

“It’s just to get our attention,” whispered the woman to her husband. “It must be about being thankful for what you have.”

The husband adjusted his glasses. “I don’t see the point. We don’t have to put up with this” and they left brusquely. The preacher continued without hesitating.

The audience was adorned with khaki slacks, polo shirts and topsiders. The tax lawyer in the third row queried his second (trophy) wife. “We take time out on a Sunday to come here and this is what we hear.”

The preppy blonde with the degree in art history agreed. “This is in very poor taste. We could have gone to the beach.” Their attention was drawn back to the speaker.

“Look at your cars, your homes, your vacation homes and your country clubs. Do you think they make you a better person? Do you think you have some special blessing from above? No, you’re the same as the homeless man in the street, the poor woman who takes the bus to clean your house, the laid off teacher struggling to feed her children.”

Old money and nouveau riche sat side by side this morning. There was a tailored man in a seersucker jacket, crisp Brooks Brothers oxford and pastel blue tie who looked like he just landed from Martha’s Vineyard. Next to him was a woman in pinstripe blue and power tie, obviously a Wall Street broker. She leaned over to her friend and spoke. “I thought this was going to be about the goodness of money, how it’s a sign of being blessed.”

“Look at your life. What do you think about? What do you do each day? How much time do you give to self-examination, peeling back the layers and finding out what your core really is? Who among you can say ‘I have earned everything I have?’”

People started to file out, first one by one, then in small groups. The congregation of about 100 quickly dwindled to just a couple dozen willing to listen.

“But not everyone wants to hear” he said gesturing to the people exiting the tent. “They don’t want to give up their comfortable life or face the fact that their life has been wasted in the pursuit of money. Who here is willing to peel away the layers of shame in public, to examine their life in full view of God and this audience?”

A man in his thirties timidly raised his hand. “Thank you, son. Don’t be afraid. Come up here and tell us your story.”

The man took the microphone. “My name is Alex. I made a lot of money with an Internet scam that preyed on the elderly. I’m ashamed of what I have done.”

The preacher nodded as he placed his hand on the man’s shoulder. “We have all sinned son. Repentance starts with confession. What do you want to do now?”

Alex cleared his throat and continued. “I could send a gift anonymously to all those I cheated.”

The man of the cloth looked up. “Anonymously? Will that clear your conscience Alex?”

Alex responded, “What else can I do?”

The preacher replied, “Get down on your knees and pray, in front of your brothers and sisters, so that you may be cleansed.”

The man knelt down as the preacher held the microphone for him. “Now admit what you have done son.”

Alex spoke into the mike. “I have stolen money and ruined the lives of decent honest people. I have done this without guilt or remorse.”

The preacher reassured Alex. “This is the start of a new life. Through your confession, you can begin again. Go and sin no more.”

Suddenly, two men hustled the speaker off his pulpit, dragging him away from the congregation. This surprising incident shocked the listeners, many of who whispered to their companions with explanations of what just happened. Everyone finally left the tent toward the row of BMWs and other luxury cars. On their way out, the trophy wife asked her husband. “Why do you think this guy was speaking at a car dealership anyway?”