

My name is Ashar -- and for the linguist among you, I don't have to tell you it is a Hebrew word meaning -- *to be, or to become rich*.

My name is far from being a self-fulfilling prophecy. For from the day of my birth, it was known that I would grow up to be a rich young man.

For unlike in your day when someone with drive and a dream can climb the ladder of success and make something of themselves -- in my day there were only two sorts of people -- the haves, and the have nots. So there was only one way to be rich -- and that was to be born into a wealthy family. >> Otherwise there was very little hope of social improvement -- you always stayed what you were born to be. . .

So my father was rich, and his father before him was rich. I came from a long line of merchants -- importers, if you will -- for we were in the spice trade -- making money hand over fist.

Now you would think being born into riches and not having to pull myself up by my bootstraps -- would make me very aware of the fact that I was indeed -- gifted. For what had I done to earn any of my wealth?

And yet, being blessed and gifted were the furthest things from my mind. Somehow, I DID have the notion that I had earned my wealth -- and therefore my status. Somehow I had the notion I deserved to be who I was -- treated with honor, even feared by the lowly around me -- some of whom were lucky enough to be my servants. . .

As I look back on my life -- there were many missed opportunities to share what I had with the less fortunate. I especially turned from what could have been considered a chance of a lifetime -- when I encounter that guy on my way to Jerusalem one day.

Somehow I even had the notion that I was better than him -- a mere itinerate preacher, with a rag-tag group of people following after him.

I wanted to prove my superiority by hopefully humiliating him with some questions I'm sure he did not know the answers to. Little did I know -- I would be the one without the proper answers -- or at least the one without the drive and dream to properly respond to the answers. . .

"Good teacher," I said, "what do I need to do to inherit eternal life?"

"Keep the commandments," he said. "Oh, I have been very observant since I was a young boy." -- see how smug I was??

And then his wisdom showed: "sell what you have -- and follow me."

It was an invitation. . . but with those words, my comfortable little world crumbled. With those words -- he tried to alert me to the fact that I do nothing to inherit eternal life. . . God gives it to me -- God gives it to everyone. And God gives us this great gift NOT because we keep all the rules and regulations. . . But because we are in relationship --- "come follow me," he said. Be a disciple. Be a follower -- and let me lead you. Forget about earning your way into heaven -- receive the gift by receiving me. . . He was telling me, quite bluntly -- that all those rules, and all my riches -- weren't going to buy me a place in heaven. . .

Receive the gift. . . how do you possibly do that after a lifetime of holding tight to everything you thought you had earned and certainly deserved? How do you receive a gift after a lifetime of grasping for more, and caring nothing about who you had to step over -- or on ---in order to remain secure in your only little bubble?

I HAD TO WALK AWAY -- I could not accept the invitation to be a disciple, to be a follower, to be in relationship with him -- because I could not humble myself enough to turn control of my life and all that filled it -- over to someone else. . .

I HAD TO WALK AWAY -- because all my life I had seen myself as an owner -- and not a steward.

Someone who earned and took and grabbed and held onto ---- rather than someone who received, and shared, and gave away. . . .

My name is Ashar, a Hebrew word meaning to be – or to become rich. . . and I am here to tell you to not make the same mistakes I did. Don't walk away from him – as I did: accept the invitation. Accept the fact that you are a steward, and not an owner. Turn the control over to him. . .

How can you make that choice? A will tell you four things that might help. . .:

First: Pray. Center yourself on someone greater than yourself. And please notice I said *someone* greater not *something* greater. Because faith and religion is about a relationship --- not about rules and regulations. Enter into the relationship with the one I walked away from – they call him Jesus.

Second: Always be in the process of forming yourself more and more into the image of Jesus. Never get comfortable with where you are in life or who you are. Continue to grow and learn and to surrender. Learn to think like God – not as a mere human being.

Third: Place yourself in some form of service to those around you: especially those who are not as fortunate and blessed as you are. That's why Jesus told me: "go, sell what you have and give it to the poor." I was too wrapped up in my possessions. I allowed them to define who I was. I could not think of others because I was too busy thinking about myself. Service to others pulls us out of ourselves and into the values of the kingdom of God.

And Last: Practice hospitality – welcome and involve other people in your life. This Jesus teaches us that whenever we welcome one of the least, we welcome Christ.

To do this – you must let loose of the idea that you have earned your status and that you deserve to be treated with honor. . .

Don't miss your opportunity to be a disciple – like I missed mine.

Open your minds – open your hearts – open your lives --- and receive the gift of salvation. Allow Jesus to change you from the inside out – by letting him get a hold of your mind and heart. I guarantee you – you will never be the same.