

Rich Young Ruler Pt.3 Beware of Money

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 14

Mark 10:17-27 Pt.2 (Mt.19:16-30, Lk.18:18-30) 3/3/2020

Introduction: Greed

You can't overstate how dire the warnings about money are in Scripture—especially Jesus' warnings. He always connected it to your eternal destiny. It's a really, really big deal. When Zacchaeus voluntarily offers to give up half of his possessions and to restore fourfold whatever he may have gained by fraud, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:8–9). You can tell someone has caught a glimpse of the treasure in the field—treasure in heaven—when they have a fundamental change in how they view the value of earthly treasure.

Greed is a huge theme in Scripture. The tenth commandment forbids it, and the NT teaches that it's the same as the first commandment.

It is a devastating, deadly evil. Jesus gave these chilling warnings about it repeatedly. And yet, in 25 years of pastoring, I can't think of a single time someone came in and asked for counseling because they were greedy. People come in all the time: "I committed this sin, I did this, I did that. Help me learn self control. Help me overcome anger." But no one comes in and says, "I'm a walking violation of the 10th commandment. Help me overcome greed."

We Are Rich

The passage isn't over when the man walks away because Jesus wants to debrief his disciples and warn them, and us, about ending up like that guy. He wants us to understand that the rich guy wasn't some rare outlier. He represents the vast majority of people, and the threat that destroyed him could destroy us.

Make no mistake—when Jesus talks about the rich in this passage, that's us. Every person in this room, by the standards of those people in that time, by the standards of most people who have ever lived, by the standards of most people in the world today, we are fabulously wealthy. We live in luxury beyond what most people in the world could even imagine. The access we have to food, and shelter and clothes is unprecedented in human history. The #1 health problem for "poor" people in the United States is obesity. I doubt that's ever happened in human history. So all that to say, when Jesus says, "rich," that's us. And it's a real threat to our faith because our wealth increases our pride and self-sufficiency—not only in reference to material things but in spiritual things as well.

Wealth Increases Pride

At first glance it seems like there are two separate issues in this passage. First, he lacks baby faith because he's trying to use the law to make himself a good person. Then he lacks baby faith because he's more in love with his money than he is with God. Those are two separate issues, but they're connected. The same pride is behind both problems. This man was the opposite of a baby. He had earthly greatness. Because he had so much money, that money pushed him into a mentality of earthly greatness. And that's why his heart wouldn't let him let go of the money and follow Jesus. And it's also why he used the law for self-justification, because humble repentance and placing yourself under God's law is incompatible with human greatness. The more money you have, the less you feel dependent on God, the more self-sufficient you feel, and the less baby-like you become.

Money is a Negative, not Neutral

Everyone knows money is a tool, and like any tool, it can be used for good or for evil. But that's not to say money is neutral. In this passage we see that money and possessions are not only not an advantage for entering the kingdom, but they are an obstacle. They make you far less likely to enter.

1 Timothy 6:8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

If you didn't know what the first part of that passage said, and all you did was read the result—there is some threat out there, and the result is that you will fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. You'll wander from the faith and pierce yourself with many griefs. Would you take that seriously? Would you say, "Wow! What is that threat that causes all that? I need to steer clear of that at all costs!"? People are panicked about the Coronavirus. But this threat is far more contagious, far more widespread, and far more deadly than any virus.

If it's getting a grip on your soul, get rid of it as fast as you can. The moment you start loving it is the moment you start destroying your relationship with God. It's like an adulterous relationship—cut it off. Remember Jesus said if your hand or foot or eye causes you to turn away, cut it off—gouge it out? Do your literal eyes and feet and hands actually cause your heart to turn away? But your money might if your heart gets wrapped around it. And once your heart wraps around something, giving it up feels a whole lot like gouging out your own eye. It really does feel like you're losing a part of your very self when you give up a cherished idol. If your money is going to start taking up some of the room in your heart that belongs to Christ, dump it.

Makes You Despise Christ

And the way the virus works is by attacking your faith. It sucks your trust away from God to itself. Your money is always shouting to you, "Trust in me!" Even before you get it—even while you're dirt poor that money is shouting that. "Do whatever it takes to obtain me, and I'll be your savior."

This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6:24.

Matthew 6:24 "No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

This man's walking away is a vivid illustration of that truth. We always think we can love God *and* our cherished idol. Jesus says, "Sell everything, give to the poor, follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven." And we want to say, "How about I keep all my money and property, and also follow you and receive treasure in heaven?" We always think we can have our cake and eat it too. But what we fail to realize is that money is like a leech that sucks the faith right out of you. William Barclay said money is an acid test of a man. For a hundred men who can stand adversity only one can stand prosperity.

Should You Sell Everything?

But there is a solution. There is a test you can take to see if you have this virus, and there is a vaccine that can protect you from it. The test is the one Jesus gave the rich young ruler, namely, generosity. You can tell how attached your heart is to money by how much it hurts to share it. Now, do we all need to sell everything and give it away? No. Jesus didn't require that of his other followers. Jesus enjoyed going to Mary and Martha's house. He didn't make them sell it. In fact, have you ever wondered how Jesus and the Apostles had money to live on? If the rich young ruler would have done what Jesus said and gave everything away and joined Jesus and the 12, how would he have been taken care of?

Luke 8:1 Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women ... 3 These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

If everyone gave everything away, there wouldn't have been anything left to support Jesus and the 12. So it's true—Jesus did not require this of all his followers. But on the other hand, would we assume this one man was the only person in all of human history needed to get rid of his earthly possessions? I doubt that. So what should you and I do? What Jesus did with this man was a test, and I think generous giving is a great test for us as well. Give generously, and see if it brings you joy or pain. Then you know. There is a Bible college that has the saying, "Get as much education as you can keep sanctified." Great advice. A lot of guys in seminary end up getting way more education than their humility can handle, and they get puffed up. We could say the same about money. Keep as much money as you can keep sanctified. That's hard. Every dollar you get is another weight of responsibility on you as a steward. A steward's job is to put the master's resources. That's his full-time job. Every time the master dumps more resources on him, that just increases his workload. You might wish you had more income, but maybe you already have as much as you want to give an account for. If you want more money to pour into the work of the gospel, great. God will probably give it to you. But if you get more money and fail to invest it in the kingdom of God, you're worse off than before you got that money.

Wealth Makes You Forget God

So, generosity is the test for this virus, what about the vaccine? How can you protect yourself? How is it that, with all the inherent danger in wealth, some Christians are wealthy and still maintain baby faith and humility? For example, those women who were wealthy enough to support Jesus and the Apostles with their donations. How did they manage to be rich and not destroy their faith? I'm not going to do a full-blown study of that question, because it's outside the purview of this passage, but I can't resist mentioning one thing. One vaccine to protect you from this deadly virus is gratitude.

Now, we're moving outside of the rich young ruler passage now. This isn't in that text, but it's such an important principle, I wanted to mention it. One way money tends to destroy our faith is by causing us to forget God. Money tends to make us forget God because we don't feel as helpless and dependent when we have a lot of income and a big bank account. And so Scripture prescribes the medicine of gratitude.

Deuteronomy 8:10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. [that's gratitude] 11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

He's saying, "I'm going to bless you. You're going to have food and big houses and wealth, and the natural course will be for you to forget me. So make sure whenever you sit back after a great meal satisfied and full, praise the LORD your God." Gratitude won't let you become proud because you're not grateful for what you've earned. You're grateful for gifts that you didn't earn. So gratitude will guard us from pride. Any time you enjoy your wealth in any way—your house, your bed, your car, your clothes, your phone—respond with gratitude and praise.