

15. Learning to Avoid the Dangers of Riches

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our children how to do the will of the Lord in their lives. We saw that those who do not seek the will of God often base their plans only on their goals to gain the material things of this world. In fact, there are many Christians, today, who are more concerned about gaining riches and other material things than they are about doing the will of the Lord for their lives. In our topic today, we will see what happens when any person, Christian or non-Christian, chooses to base his or her goals on gaining riches and material things. This is important so that we can help our children learn to be content with what the Lord gives them and avoid the dangers of the love of money. We want them to realize they are stewards of any money the Lord gives them.

In 1 Timothy 6:6-10, we see why God warns us about the dangers of riches. Those verses say, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Here, we see that God warns that those who desire to be rich fall into temptation. They create a snare or a trap for themselves. They become controlled by many foolish and hurtful lusts that destroy them.

The dangers that are the result of the love of money caused James to write, in James 5:1-3, “Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you*! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” Here, we see that James warned those who had a love of money of the miseries that would come upon them. We see that those who depend on riches can expect hardship and trouble to come into their lives. For those who are not Christians, this would refer to eternal judgment.

However, there are also Christians who do have a lot of money. For them, it is important to realize that they are to be good stewards of the money the Lord has given to them to use for His glory. Christ warned of the danger of riches when He said, in Matthew 6:19-21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Later, we see this illustrated in Mark 10:17-31, where we see that a rich young ruler left Christ when Christ asked him to choose to follow Christ instead of his riches.

In contrast, we see that when Zacchaeus chose to follow Christ, in Luke 19:1-10, it changed his attitude toward his riches. He immediately wanted to start using his riches to bring glory to Christ. In Luke 19:8, we read, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore

fourfold.” Christ changed the heart of Zacchaeus. As a result, he had an immediate concern for the poor. He also had an immediate concern to become honest in his business dealings. As a result, Zacchaeus became a good steward of the money he had. The rich young ruler, and Zacchaeus, demonstrate two very different attitudes toward riches. James wrote to warn those who made riches their master to cause them to examine their own heart attitudes.

James gives us several reasons why the rich would be miserable even while they were still alive on the earth. Some of their possessions would decay and rot. Their expensive clothing would be eaten by moths. Their gold and silver would become corroded. Here, we see that the riches of this earth are very temporary. Many times, earthly riches and possessions do not even last as long as the person who has them lives. God said that the corrosion and rust their precious metals developed would be a witness against them. God said that the things they got with their riches would consume their bodies. This speaks of the fact that many times the pleasures that go along with riches are actually destructive to the physical body.

In Luke 12:16-21, Christ spoke a parable about a rich fool. In this parable, the man had gathered great riches so that he could enjoy various pleasures for the rest of his life. Christ said, in Luke 12:20-21, “But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Here, we see that the rich man planned to enjoy many years of retirement. He had provided himself with plenty so that he could have whatever he wanted. Many people, including many Christians, are doing the same thing today. God said the man was a fool because he would die that night, and someone else would use all that he had gathered.

We also see how many of those who are rich have become rich. James 5:4 says, “Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” Here, we see that many people have become rich by taking advantage of their workers. Today, many who do such things just think of themselves as smart businessmen. God says they have gotten rich by fraud. He says that He has heard the cries of those whom the rich have taken advantage. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” When we give an account before the Lord, we want to do so with joy because we have been faithful to the Lord in all areas of our lives including our money. We want that same joy for our children.

James tells us what the rich do with their money when they are not putting the Lord first in their lives. James 5:5 says, “You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.” First, we see that the rich have lived on the earth in pleasure. The Scripture tells us how to make wise choices. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.” Moses recognized that there was pleasure in sin. He also recognized that those pleasures would soon pass away. As a result, he chose to suffer affliction rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.

Second, we see that the rich have lived on the earth in luxury. Solomon was very rich and enjoyed everything his eyes desired. However, the book of Ecclesiastes shows us that those things did not bring joy to the life of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 12:8, Solomon said, “‘Vanity of vanities,’” says the Preacher, ‘All *is* vanity.’” The word “vanity” means *emptiness*. Solomon came to the realization that all the luxuries riches could provide only filled his life with emptiness. As a result, Solomon concluded the book with a very important statement. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 says, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” Solomon finally realized that only obedience to the Lord brought peace and joy to his life. Luxury could not satisfy.

Third, James said that the rich had fattened their hearts. The phrase “fattened their hearts” meant the rich lived only to please themselves. They looked for every possible way to live to please themselves and fulfill their own desires. James made an interesting comparison. People often feed cattle the best grain when they are preparing them to be slaughtered. James said that the rich were actually preparing themselves for the day they would die and stand at the final judgment.

Fourth, James told how the rich treated the just. James 5:6 says, “You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.” In James 4, we see that those who do not live their lives to please the Lord find that their lives are filled with conflict. Here, we see that the rich are one of the primary sources of this conflict. The word that is translated “condemned” means to *pronounce a person guilty*. Here, we see that the rich will often take other people to court and try to get them pronounced guilty so that the rich can continue to get more for themselves. That is why 1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” The love of money will produce every form of evil.

Finally, we see that the rich will destroy others to get what they want. In James 2:6, we read, “But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?” The rich choose to dishonor the poor. They choose to oppress the poor and take them to court. Here, we see that riches continue to become more destructive. That is why 1 Timothy 6:10 says that riches cause some to stray from the faith.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn the danger of riches so they can choose the things that are eternal instead of the things that are temporary. Then, they will be able to experience the blessing and joy of the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children the importance of placing the Lord first in their lives.