

60. Jesus Taught About the Danger of Riches

We saw in our last topic that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the attitude that God wants us to have as we come to Him in prayer. God will always hear the prayer of those who humble themselves and come to Him asking Him to show mercy. He will not hear those who think that they can earn their salvation by their own works. In this topic, we will see that Jesus also gave a warning about those who try to depend on their riches.

As Jesus was getting near the time of His death, there were many areas of ministry that Jesus wanted to make sure that His disciples understood. One of the things that Jesus wanted to teach them was the importance of little children. Luke 18:15-17 says, “Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw *it*, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to *Him* and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’” The word translated “infants” speaks of a newborn child or a baby. In Luke 1:41 and 1:44, the word is used to speak of John the Baptist before his birth. In Luke 2:12, the word is used to speak of Jesus at the time of His birth. It is used in a spiritual sense in 1 Peter 2:2 where we read, “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” In this verse, we see that the word speaks of new Christians.

Many of the Jews did not think that young children were important. As a result, the disciples rebuked the parents who brought these infants so that Jesus could touch them. Jesus used that opportunity to teach the disciples the importance of young children when He said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.” Then Jesus said that all people had to have the same kind of faith that a very young child has in order to enter the kingdom of God. A very young child cannot do any works. However, even infants give us an example of faith because they learn to trust a loving parent at a very early age. In the same way, it is that childlike faith that is pleasing to God. We will see that lacking in the next event in these verses.

Luke 18:18-23 says, “Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, *that is*, God. You know the commandments: “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not bear false witness,” “Honor your father and your mother.”’ And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’ So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.” We see a little more about this ruler in Mark 10:17 where we read, “Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?’” Since this man was very rich, he had probably received much of his wealth by inheritance and thought he could inherit eternal life.

Jesus began His answer by asking an important question, “Why do you call Me good?” The word translated “good” means *that which is good in its nature and beneficial in its effects*. Jesus wanted

to make it clear to this ruler that God is the only One that can be called good. The Ten Commandments divide into two sections. The first section talks about the relationship of man to God. The second section talks about the relationship of man to man. We see that Jesus only asked the ruler about the second section of the law. This ruler had so deceived himself that he thought that he had kept the part about his relationship to others perfectly from the time of his youth.

Jesus chose not to challenge the ruler regarding his relationship with other men. Instead, since Jesus knew that his riches were his god, Jesus told him to get rid of his god of riches, distribute that money to the poor and come and follow Jesus. Suddenly, the ruler had to make a choice. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 say, “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.” This ruler wanted earthly riches and gave no thought to spiritual riches.

Suddenly, that thought changed his whole way of thinking. We read that he became very sorrowful. The word translated “very sorrowful” means *to be filled with sorrow*. Jesus used this word when He asked the disciples to pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus left part of the disciples near the entry to the Garden. Then Mark 14:32-34 says, “Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.’” Here, we see that this sorrow of Jesus was so great that He compared it to death. Jesus was teaching this young man that he could not serve two masters. Either God would be his master or riches would be his master. This made the choice very difficult for the ruler because he was very rich.

We see that the ruler had to make his choice. Mark 8:36-37 says, “‘For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” The rich ruler made his choice. Mark 10:22 says, “But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” In his sorrow, the ruler chose to follow his riches; and, in making that choice, he also made the choice not to follow Jesus. He made a choice that had eternal consequences. (See also Luke 18:24-30)

Jesus then used this opportunity to explain the danger that faces the rich. Jesus said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” Many people today are deceived in the same way that this young ruler was deceived. In fact, many today teach that riches are a sign of God’s blessing. That was the same attitude that the Pharisees and religious leaders had in the time of Jesus. That is why Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “‘No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches).’” Many of those who teach that riches are a sign of God’s blessing have deceived themselves in our day just as the Pharisees deceived themselves in the time of Jesus. Such individuals have made riches their god.

Jesus went on to describe what He meant by His statement that it is hard for those who have riches

to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” Here, we see that Jesus made it very clear that it is completely impossible for anyone to be saved by their riches or their works. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Romans 3:19-20 add, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” No riches and no works can ever pay or earn the way of anyone into heaven.

Those who heard Jesus say this immediately asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus responded by saying that the things that are impossible with man are possible with God. That is why the verse in the previous paragraph says that we must be saved by God. Instead of being saved by the Law, we see that the Law brings a curse because it shows that all are guilty before God. That is why Galatians 3:13-14 tell us, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Here, we are reminded that salvation can only be received through faith.

Peter had been listening to all that Jesus said and now asked his question. Peter said, “See, we have left all and followed You.” Peter and the other disciples had done just exactly what Jesus told the rich ruler to do. Jesus said that all those who make that choice will receive both present and future blessing. Jesus said that those who have followed Jesus and made sacrifices on this earth will receive many times more in this present time. The blessings that Jesus gives on this earth are spiritual blessings rather than material blessings. For example, Jesus will give us spiritual children in addition to our physical children. Paul said, in Philemon 1:10, “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains.” Here, we see that Onesimus became one of the many spiritual children that the Lord gave to Paul.

Jesus also said that all those who follow Him will receive eternal life in the age to come. Romans 8:16-17 say, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” Here, we see that in addition to eternal life, we also become joint heirs with Jesus and will share the riches of God throughout all eternity. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that God gives us much greater blessing than any earthly riches could ever give either in this age or in the age to come. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand these eternal blessings that God has promised to us.