

Introduction: There are several layers of tragic sin and unbelieving deception which contribute to the sad departure of the rich young ruler from Jesus. There is the danger of wealth, the danger of distrusting God's fatherly care, the danger of good works done for the wrong reasons, and the danger of refusing to sacrifice his riches to follow Jesus. In other words, we could sum up the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-24 in terms of the *commission* of these sins: first, a sinful reliance on his wealth instead of on God, because His view of God is distorted and distrustful. Second, he relies on his good works for salvation, which is the sin of his people Israel. Finally, he also sinned in the *omission* of self-sacrifice, refusing in verse 22 to "take up his Cross to follow Jesus." Let's look at these explanations of the rich young ruler's departure from Jesus in this and next week's notes.

Mon/Tues: Matthew 19:21-24; Luke 12:15-21 and Proverbs 18:10-11. Let's look at Jesus' warning about the danger of wealth first in terms of what Jesus is not saying. When Jesus says it is hard for the wealthy person to find entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven - as hard as "a camel going through the eye of a needle," He is not asserting that a lack of possessions is more holy than many; neither is He asserting poverty itself grants an entrance into God's Kingdom. It is only God's grace through the gift of faith which qualifies anyone for citizenship in the Kingdom - and possessions of *themselves* do not prove an obstacle to entrance. In terms of the parable in Luke 12, it is not the number of barns; the amount of grain or the vast wealth produced, which make the rich man a fool in that story.

What, then, is it that makes the rich man subject to God's condemnation? It is his self-assurance and security *apart from reliance on God* which makes him a fool. It is that he views his wealth as his source of stability in this world and does not seek gratefully to give the glory to God for what he gains. Once again we are brought face-to-face with the world-view of the wealthy unbeliever in Proverbs 18:11: "A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination."

The danger, then, of wealth, is in our hearts and not in our bank accounts. It is that we can be deceived into thinking that our satisfaction and meaning in life comes from what we have, or what we are able to pass onto our children. It is because we are sinners desiring independence from God that we tend to place our trust in wealth when we have it. That is what makes it dangerous. As Professor Dale Davis described this danger, "The ruler's problem was not that he possessed wealth; it was that his wealth possessed him!"

How much better to discover the riches of Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe." Here is how God truly "lifts us" out of the greedy spirit which grasps at the things of this world! He sets us on high, in the refuge of His mighty Name. Here is where we find security and safety: in the Name of God!

Meditate and Pray: Let us sing about the security of God's Name, as that Name is revealed to us as "Savior", through Jesus Christ our Lord:

Jesus! what a Friend for sinners!
 Jesus! Lover of my soul;
 Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
 He, my Savior, makes me whole.

*Refrain: Hallelujah! what a Savior!
 Hallelujah! what a Friend!
 Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
 He is with me to the end.*

Jesus! what a Strength in weakness!
 Let me hide myself in Him.
 Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
 He, my Strength, my victory wins.

Jesus! what a Help in sorrow!
 While the billows over me roll,
 Even when my heart is breaking,
 He, my Comfort, helps my soul.

Jesus! what a Guide and Keeper!
 While the tempest still is high,
 Storms about me, night overtakes me,
 He, my Pilot, hears my cry.

Jesus! I do now receive Him,
 More than all in Him I find.
 He hath granted me forgiveness,
 I am His, and He is mine.

Weds/Thurs: Matthew 19:16-20. The root error of the rich man, leading him to seek his security in the accumulation of possessions and religious good works, is his distorted view of God's Fatherly care, leading him to distrust God as his sole security. A living, warm, secure relationship with God as His Father – this is what the rich man lacks! Perhaps this is why Jesus challenges him as to whether or not he truly appreciated the unique and unparalleled nature of God's goodness in Matthew 19:17. Distrust of God's goodness is always the first step in a life of secret idols and of seeking gods of our own making as our security and hope.

How then did this zealous and moral Israelite come to be so deceived as to turn from the path of trusting in God's redeeming grace? Well, the answer is deep down in our human natures. We are by nature, as fallen sons and daughters of Adam, *so prone* to distrust God the Father. Consider for example, this quote from John Owen, which emphasizes how we tend to distrust God, and therefore misuse God's law, believing we must fashion our own righteousness instead of trusting God's:

The unbelieving sinner thinks he has many reasons to listen to the voice of the law as a means of righteousness, because:

- (1) The law is his oldest acquaintance. The law came into the world with him, growing up with him from his infancy. It was implanted in his heart by nature, - he can never shake it off or part with it. It is his friend, that cleaves to him as the flesh to the bone; so that even those who have not the law written can't help but show forth works of the law, (Romans 2:14-15), because, even without the actual law of Moses in their hands, they find that law inbred in them, and written on their hearts.*
- (2) The law speaks nothing to a sinner but what his conscience assures him to be true. When the law says, "This or that sin is worthy of death," conscience says, "It is even so", (Romans 1:32).*
- (3) The law reminds the sinner of the holy purity of God, and of His hatred of sin... Their inward thought is, that God is an avenger of sin; that it belongs to His rule of the world to take care that every sin be punished. This is His judgment, which all men know, (Romans 1:32).*

(Pastor Carl adds: But this is where the unbeliever really goes off the rails – Instead of fleeing from condemnation to find refuge in Jesus, the unbeliever *flees away from the Lord – like the rich young, ruler!* Why does this happen? Because the Gospel is unknown and foreign to those so used to living under the sentence of the law.)

John Owen goes on to describe it this way: *The Gospel is foreign to the sinner's nature, a strange thing to him, a thing he has no familiarity or acquaintance with. The Gospel has not grown up with him; nor is there anything in the natural man to side with the Gospel or to plead on its behalf. So ask yourselves: Will not a man rather believe the ones he has grown up with, like his conscience and the law, than to believe a foreigner like the Gospel? For you see, the Gospel comes with strange principles, and such as suit not reason or pride at all.*

As 1 Corinthians 1:18 puts it: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Meditate and Pray: Lord, do not, even for one day, allow the Gospel to depart from our lips and hearts. We are so lost in a tangle of powerless resolutions to do better on our own, that without your Spirit, we cannot receive the Gospel as good news. And for our lives as believers, help us always to see your Fatherly grace behind your law, and to cherish our relationship with you, as we learn to run in the way of your commands. Give us such holy communion with you, and joy in your presence every day. Amen.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Matthew 19:16-20; Exodus 20:1-11 and Ephesians 1:3-8. This distrust of God's Fatherly character, coupled with a fear of God's judgment, is at the root of all sin against God's Law and is the reason why wealth is so *deceptive* in promising us independent security without God. It encourages our accusations that God is uncaring and drives us to provide for ourselves in this world without trusting His care. But to the eye of faith, God's Law points to His generous provision for us, and not His condemnation of us. We see this in the following summary of God's Law as it applies to believers:

Why is it that we are to have no God but the Lord in the first commandment? *Because we don't need any other God since He is so committed to providing for our every need!*

And in the second commandment, why is it that we are literally to "make for ourselves" no image or idol to take the place of the one true invisible God? *Because we don't need to create an image that promises us wealth and blessing, since God has drawn near to our hearts in order to pour out His riches into our lives through His image, Jesus Christ!*

And why in the third commandment are we to take care to honor God's Name in our every thought, word and action? Because that name has become our refuge, as Proverbs 18:10 declares. God's name, as we will discover further tomorrow, is the place where God takes us under His wings, to protect and to nurture us! How could we profane such a peace-giving and protective Name?

Finally, why in the fourth commandment are we to rest by faith on the first day of the week? *Because God, through His Son our Savior and by His Spirit - has done the work of making us a new creation! Just as God the Father rested after 6 days of making **His creation** in Genesis, so the Lord Jesus Christ claims the first day of the week as **His seal of approval** on the new creation in our lives! We don't have to work God's graces into our hearts - Christ has laid the foundation for the growth of all such graces in us, by sending His Holy Spirit to work that new creation into the depths of our being!*

Meditate and Pray: How much was promised these Hebrew slaves, newly delivered from Pharaoh's deadly power - when God gave them His Ten Commandments! They were now free to possess God as their God; to be rich in terms of their worship, and to use His mighty Name, even as they rested in His completed work for their sakes! What spiritual luxury, after 400 years of bondage! So too, let us thank God for His rich generosity

towards us in Christ Jesus. Sing about God's rich provision for us, especially granted to us in the name and person of His Son, in hymn # 647:

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
and drives away his fear.

2 It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary rest.

3 Dear Name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treas'ry filled
with boundless stores of grace;

4 Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

6 Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

For Further Reflection on the life-long process of learning to trust God's fatherly care:

The Christian life, from one angle, is the long journey of letting our natural assumption about who God is, over many decades, fall away, being slowly replaced with God's own insistence on who He is. This is hard work. It takes a lot of sermons and a lot of suffering to believe that God's deepest heart is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger." The fall in Genesis 3 not only sent us into condemnation and exile. The fall also entrenched in our minds dark thoughts of God, thoughts that are only dug out over multiple exposures to the gospel over many years.

Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly; The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*