

Several layers of tragic sin and unbelieving deception 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 sin 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 to take up his Cross to follow Jesus.

Mon/Tues: Read Matthew 19:21-24, Luke 12:15-21 and Proverbs 18:10-11 Strong Tower of the Godly

Note Jesus' warning about the danger of wealth, firstly, 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; neither is He asserting entrance through poverty 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*. 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 of wealth is in our hearts and not in our bank accounts. 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. On the other side of the coin, let us say that the danger of a covetous spirit also makes poor people sin when they place their hopes in one day gaining wealth and live discontentedly until they have it! Just stop by a gas station on payday and see covetousness at work as people line-up to snag that one lottery ticket to riches and happiness! The basic danger 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.

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 poverty of 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, through Jesus Christ our Lord:

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

[Chorus] Alleluia, What a Savior,
 Alleluia, What a Friend
 Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
 He is with us to the end.

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: Read Matthew 19:16-20

The Foreign Gospel

The root error of the rich man leads him to seek his security in the accumulation of possessions and religious good works. It is his distorted view of God's Fatherly care that undermines his trust God as his sole security. A living, warm, secure relationship with God as His Father – this is what the rich man lacks in Matthew 19:20. Perhaps this is why Jesus challenges him as to whether he truly appreciated the unique and unparalleled nature of God's goodness. Distrust of God's goodness is always the first step in a life which decides to transgress God's Law.

How then did this zealous and moral Israelite come to be so deceived? When did he turn from the path of trusting in God's redeeming grace to pursue a righteousness by his own self-effort? The source is deep down in our human nature. We are, 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 the unbeliever distrusts God and therefore misuses God's law, believing he must obey it to be righteous:

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 natural 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).*

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.)

The Gospel is foreign to the sinner's nature, a strange thing to him, a thing he has no familiarity of 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 from our lips and from our church's pulpits to be sent forth without your Holy Spirit. We are so lost in a tangle of powerless resolutions to do better on our own. Without your Spirit, no man can 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 holy communion with you and joy in your presence every day. Amen.

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 19:16-20; Exodus 20:1-11 and Ephesians 1:3-8

Rich within the Law

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. It is the reason why wealth is so *deceptive* in promising us independent security without God. It encourages our imagining an uncaring God and drives us to provide for ourselves in this world without trusting in God's care. But God's Law, to the eye of faith, speaks of God's generous provision for us and not of God's condemnation of us.

For example, 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 to pour out His riches into our lives through Jesus Christ!*

And why in the third commandment are we to take care to honor God's Name in our every endeavor, 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 command 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 work ourselves in God's graces – Christ has finished that work!*

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.