

We continue this week in our study of the rich young ruler. This young man is at first so eager to fall at the feet of the Lord Jesus, but then turns his back on the Son of God. Such rejection must have been painful – not only for this rich man, who went away grieved – but especially for our Lord Himself, who is described as beholding him with a loving look. Oh, Lord, we look for your salvation in times of such painful rejection! Help us!

Monday: Read Matthew 19:17-20 and Luke 12:16-21

Accurate Accounting

We focus first this week on the error of the rich man in accumulating good works in order to build up his own *sense of righteousness* - instead of giving the glory to God for all that he possessed. It is especially interesting to note that the rich ruler of Matthew 19 actually looks at his law-obedience as a matter of possessing good deeds which then he can count up on the balance sheet of his life as meritorious. In the KJV for example, look at how he describes his good works as “things” in Matthew 19:20: “All these **things** have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”

Such a possessive spirit when it comes to personal righteousness echoes the words of the rich fool in Luke 12:18, where he says to himself: “This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all **my fruits and my goods.**” God condemns this thinking in Luke 12:20: “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those **things** be, which thou hast provided?” Both men were self-satisfied because of their great possessions!

Meditate and Pray: What a danger it is to believe that our “riches” (whether material or moral) count before God in terms of lasting spiritual blessing and eternal life. Yes, we are to work diligently with our hands to provide clothes, housing, food and wealth for our lives. Yes, we are also to work diligently to accomplish the good works which “God has ordained for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). But let us always give back to God all that He gives us and sprinkle all our possessions and moral accomplishments with the “gold-dust” of having been done in Jesus’ name, lest we hoard them to ourselves as if we in our own strength have earned our spiritual or financial standing!

Sing about doing all for God’s glory and for Jesus’ sake, using this hymn, originally from a poem by George Herbert:

*Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything
to do it as for thee.*

*All may of thee partake;
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, "for thy sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.*

Tues/Weds: Read Matthew 19:20 and Romans 8:31-35**In God We Trust**

Clearly this wealthy and religiously accomplished young man had a gnawing sense of doubt as to his real standing with God. Had his morality and his wealth truly satisfied him, he would not have persisted with the question, "What still do I lack?" There is no lasting satisfaction or peace when we depend on our own bank accounts or morality for our security. Only a living relationship with God the Father and investment in the wealth of His Kingdom graces, poured out upon us through Jesus Christ, will give us true security and standing in this life and the next. Then, secure in how rich we are in terms of the Father's adopting grace and in Christ's righteousness imputed to us by faith – we will not be driven by the desire to hoard to ourselves possessions and positions of power in this world.

It all comes down to whether we believe in the truth of Ephesians 1:3-8, and in the picture given there of the Father's rich love for us. Let us rejoice in God's generous grace and resolve not to fall prey to the fundamental distrust of God's care which ruined the rich young ruler's life.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

Meditate and Pray: Every blessing bestowed upon us begins with the phrase "the love of God the Father." Trust for the Father is the first step in living a contented [instead of a covetous] life. May we have grace to speak well of God the Father every day of our lives, blessing Him for His sufficiency and goodness, and trusting Him for our every need.

Thurs/Fri: Read Matthew 19:21-22 & Mark 10:21-22**Sell all that you Possess**

Here is another area of great danger for the rich young ruler: He refused to "take up the cross" of self-sacrifice and would not get rid of his idolatrous devotion to his riches. His rejection of Jesus is easy to see. In contrast, we are to follow Jesus on the path of discipleship and Cross bearing, no matter how much it costs in terms of the world's scorn and hatred. To take up our cross means to renounce all our own failed efforts to reign over our own souls and to recognize that the Lord Jesus alone is worthy and able to rule our lives as the "God of our salvation." Here is how the Puritan John Owen defined such self-renunciation: It is a renouncing of all expectation of salvation from anyone else other than God (Jer. iii. 22, 23): "Behold, we come unto you; for you are the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is our salvation."

Why is this so hard for us? One great reason why we are so slow to surrender all, in order to have that which God is so willing to give us... *is because we are still casting our eyes towards the hills and mountains, looking*

this way and that way for something that may give us relief. We stubbornly hope to build the kind of life we so want to have!

Let us end our reflection on the cross with John Owen's warning from the rich young ruler's life: *When there has not been a solemn renunciation of all other helps except God, it is no wonder we do so halt as we do between God and the world, when we come to straits and distresses.*

Meditate and Pray: What a hard walk home that rich man must have had on the way home from turning his back on Jesus. We may be sure that the path became rockier and his efforts to be good in the eyes of men and God more impossible! Most frightening of all, because he was so sinfully proud of his own righteousness and miserly about his own wealth, we cannot have any assurance as to whether he ever found salvation. Yes, Jesus, "looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21) in the same way that God's loving goodness is "over all His works" (Psalm 145:9). But make no mistake: though Jesus could love *whatever was in this rich man's life from God's own goodness*, He could never justify this hypocrite until he learned to weep over his own covetousness in real repentance. Sadly, at least at this point we do not see such tears from this rich man.

Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 16:25-27 and 19:23-26

A Solid Savings Plan

The disciples see this outwardly impressive, rich and moral man go away - unwilling to part with his sinful desire for wealth. They naturally conclude - "Who then can be saved?" If a man so full of the good blessings of God in this life can yet turn away from a saving relationship with God's Son, who, indeed, can be saved?

But we are not to fear as long as we believe in Christ's imputed righteousness as our saving hope. We can rest assured that no sinful attachment will in the end be able to destroy our union with Christ. We will learn to yield to Christ, and we will be sanctified by His Spirit in preparation for the great Day of Judgment. Consider: Jesus would never command our steps down the path of self-denial without taking our hand in the process, so that when we "lose our life with Christ" (Matthew 16:25) we actually gain eternal life in union with Him.

Meditate and Pray: Father in Heaven, thank you for giving us your Son and through His ministry giving also the gift of the Holy Spirit, by whom you teach us the way to lasting eternal life. Thank you that, by your Spirit, you are able to give us one heart and one way, uniting us in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Lord Jesus, we rejoice to recognize that your Father poured upon you the Holy Spirit of wisdom and inspiration without limit. Because of this great donation, you, as the Head of our humanity, were able to live a sinless life of faith: a life which you now substitute in place of our guilt-ridden lives so that we can have the new life of the Spirit. Please be at work to sanctify and comfort your church on earth by that same Spirit, whom with you and the Father we love and adore. Amen.