

The Love of Money

Mark 10:17-31

We have probably all heard the statement that “Money is the root of all evil.” And hopefully we have also heard what the Apostle Paul actually said in **I Timothy 6:10**, “For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil.” Money itself is not evil. Nor is poverty good – unless it helps a person come to know God and better serve Him.

The Bible tells us that Job was exceedingly wealthy and very Godly. Those two realities are not mutually exclusive. Abraham, the father of faith, was also a man of great wealth. But because Job and Abraham were Godly, they **loved** people and **used** things. Those who love money, **use** people because they **love** things. That is what the Bible condemns.

This morning we are going to meet a young man who possessed much wealth, but unfortunately, he

allowed his wealth to possess him. That predicament, which he brought upon himself, resulted in great sorrow. Let's read Mark 10:17,

“As Jesus started on his way [to Jerusalem – to lay down His earthly life so we could gain eternal life], a man [Matthew tells us he was young] ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’”

Wow! What an opening for Jesus to share the gospel. But to the amazement of many, Jesus does not tell this young man, “In order to inherit eternal life you must repent of your sins and believe in Me.” Actually Jesus will do this, but not immediately – because at this point the young man did not think he needed to repent of his sins, nor did He believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Because Jesus understood this, He takes a two-pronged approach to the young man's question. Let's look at it together beginning in verse 18, “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good [in

the ultimate sense] – except God alone.”

Jesus is not denying His deity in this verse. We know this is true because earlier in Mark 2, Jesus forgave a man of his sins, and only God can do that. Also in Mark 1:11 and Mark 9:7 – God the Father audibly declared in the presence of witnesses – that Jesus is the Son of God. What Jesus does in verse 18 is to help this young man focus on the greatness of God, that He is holy, holy, holy – and then in verse 19, Jesus bids him to carefully consider God’s holy standards of right and wrong – as laid out in God’s Moral Law.

This was important for Jesus to do because at that time in history the Jewish people as a whole were a sorry lot. Why do I say that? Because Jesus called even the religious leaders of Israel – spiritual vipers and whitewashed tombs. Jesus was also constantly casting out demons from these people. And so when this young man compared himself to those around him – he came

out looking good. But still he sensed that something was wrong between God and him. And he had the honesty and humility to admit that to Jesus. And so Jesus next directs him to God's standards of right and wrong in verse 19,

“You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder [the sixth commandment], do not commit adultery [the seventh], do not steal [the eighth], do not give false testimony [the ninth], do not defraud [which Jesus links to the tenth commandment of not coveting], honor your father and mother’” [which goes back to the fifth commandment].

Why didn't Jesus start at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, where God says – “You shall have no other gods before me nor make any idols?” Jesus chose to start with the second half of God's Moral Law because it explains how we are to show love to people. Why is that so important? According to **I John 4:20**, “. . . anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” If

we do not love people, we cannot love God. And we cannot genuinely love people if we are lying about them or stealing from them.

God's Moral Law describes what love looks like – how it behaves – what it does and doesn't do. I have heard Christians say that under the New Covenant, we don't need to worry about God's Law, we just need to love people. That is a very strange thing to suggest because under the New Covenant – God's Moral Law is written on our hearts [Jeremiah 31:33]. That means it is to be treasured and embraced by all followers of Christ. Jesus said if you love Me you will keep my commands. Romans 13:10 says that love fulfills the law – it doesn't set it aside. One of the strong reasons for treasuring God's Law is because when people honor it, the world becomes a better place. **Here is a sobering truth. If we remove love from its foundation upon God's Moral Law, then love can become an idol that we shape into**

whatever form we wish it to be [Exodus, The Rational Bible, by Dennis Prager, page 233].

Is Jesus suggesting in verse 19, that we can earn eternal life by keeping God's commandments? No. Even if that young man faithfully loved and served people for a hundred years, how does that merit eternal life? Eternal life is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. One of the purposes of God's Moral Law is to reveal our sin and show us our need for a Savior.

Did you notice that instead of saying do not covet, Jesus tells this young man do not defraud. This word appears only four other times in the New Testament, where it is translated, cheat, deprive, or rob. I couldn't help but think that this rich, young ruler, probably had many people on his pay role. Did he pay them fairly?

And why does Jesus end the second half of the Ten Commandments by going back to the fifth commandment, to honor your father and your mother?

I wonder if it wasn't connected to the fact that in Jesus' day rabbis had figured out a way to allow adult children to dishonor their parents by not helping them financially during their old age [Mark 7:11].

We see something very surprising in verse 20. If we ask honest people today if they have ever lied or stolen, they invariably say yes. But this young man sincerely believed that he had fully obeyed all of God's commandments, "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Saul of Tarsus, at one time in his life, believed the same thing [Philippians 3:6]. Only someone with a superficial, misguided understanding of God's law would think that, which is why Jesus needed to show this young man that he had an idol, a false god in his life. Let's look at verse 21,

"Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. [Jesus now gives four commands, 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'"]

A paraphrase of what Jesus just said is, “Repent and believe in me.” If this young man had truly believed that Jesus was good, in the ultimate sense of that word, then he would have sold everything he had, given it to the poor and followed Jesus. But verse 22 shows that he didn’t believe that, “At this [the commands Jesus had just given to him] the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” Or more accurately – great wealth had him.

Someone has said, “For every hundred men who can stand under adversity, only one can stand prosperity.” Why? Because prosperity often gives people the illusion that they do not need God. In **Deuteronomy 31:20**, God foretold what would happen to most Israelites when they entered into the promised land,

“When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me

and breaking my covenant.”

I think many Americans illustrate this truth as well. Just in case you aren't aware of this, the average person in the United States is more privileged than kings who lived during the middle ages. We can speak to people on our cell phones who live thousands of miles away. We can walk into a grocery store and buy food from other countries. We have eyeglasses that restore our vision. And we have access to libraries and computers that have more information than kings of old ever dreamed possible. Do all Americans give thanks to God for these blessings? No, because wealth can cause us to believe that we do not need God. Jesus expresses this reality with capital letters in verses 23-27,

“Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’ [which in this context is another way of saying eternal life or salvation] ²⁴ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ 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.’²⁶ The disciples were even more amazed [because the Jewish people considered wealth as a blessing from God – and it is if we do not allow it to make us feel independent from God], and said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.’”

Let me be quick to say that anytime anyone – **rich or poor** – is born again through repentance and faith in Christ, a supernatural work of God has occurred. I have met poor people who are lovers of money – every bit as much as rich people who love money. And in my own experience I have thought more about money when it appeared I didn’t have enough – than when I do.

Does Jesus want us to be poor and humble? I think Jesus wants us to be humble and to always know that we are totally dependant upon Him – even if we have a millions dollars in the bank. I think if Christians see life accurately, we will understand that we are wealthy in

the ways that count the most. Let's continue to hear what Jesus says in Mark 10:28-30,

“Peter said to him, ‘We have left everything to follow you!’ [actually Peter still owned a house and a boat, but he wasn't using them very often while he followed Jesus]²⁹ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus replied, ‘no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel³⁰ will fail to receive a **hundred times as much in this present age** (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.’”

The martyred missionary, Jim Elliot, famously said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.” None of us can hold onto to the material things of this world. But if we are willing to let them go in order to serve God, we will gain much more than we lose. In regards to gaining family, Jesus said in Mark 3:35, “Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.” The Apostle Paul speaks of the believers at Thessalonica as his children and regarded

himself as a father to them. In Romans 16, Paul refers to the mother of Rufus as his mother too. Christians today have brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world. We are rich in family.

But Jesus also promised that His followers who give up homes and fields [which represent wealth], in order to serve Him, will receive a hundred times more wealth in this present age. How are we to understand that promise? I believe we must recognize that a great form of wealth – is to have the ability to make others wealthy. Listen to the Apostle Paul’s testimony in regards to this truth. It is recorded for us in **II Corinthians 6:8-10**,

“. . . [We are] genuine, yet regarded as impostors;
⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Here are six universally agreed upon statements:

(1) Life is better than death.

- (2) Health is better than sickness.
- (3) Liberty is better than slavery.
- (4) Education is better than ignorance.
- (5) Justice is better than injustice.
- (6) Prosperity is better than poverty.

In his book, *From Jerusalem to Timbuktu*, which is a world tour of the spread of Christianity, Brian Stiller testifies that when Christian translators give people who have never had a written language – a written language and a Bible – it lifts the entire culture of that people. Christianity started at Jerusalem, but its major hub initially formed in Europe. It then came to the Americas. Today the major hub of Christianity is on the continent of Africa. And this has happened within the last century. Let me share with you some of the results of the growth of Christianity all over the world. Life expectancy worldwide in 1820 was 26 years. In 2011 it was 66 years. Global poverty has declined more in the

last 50 years than it did in the previous 500 years. The worldwide literacy rate in 1911 was 25%. In 2011 it was over 80%. These are all side effects of the spread of God's kingdom. This should not surprise us. When our Lord Jesus was on earth, His primary goal was to teach people truth about God and His Word – and to become our perfect sacrifice for sin. But Jesus also healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons. These were all blessings that resulted from the Kingdom of God breaking into the world.

Let's finish with verse 31, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." This is true both in this life and in the next. We have already noted in II Corinthians 6, that Paul testified that he and his fellow workers for the gospel were regarded as being insignificant and poor, but were actually those who made many people wealthy. I am always amazed at how little we hear of Christianity in our news media, unless it

is something bad done by those who profess Christ. And that certainly does happen. But in spite of our fumbles and failures, Christianity continues to change the world. More Muslims have come to faith in Christ in last 20 years than in the previous 1000 years. And it is not the superstars of Christianity that God is using to accomplish that. It is the unknowns and unheralded.

When I think about people in the Bible who don't get much coverage, and yet may be some of the greatly honored on Judgment Day, I recall the women mentioned in **Luke 8:1-3**,

“After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him,² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;³ Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

Those women gave of their time and finances to

support the work of Christ – when He did not have a place to lay His head. Mark Strauss, in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark, asks the question, “What is the purpose of wealth?” I like his answer, “Wealth is God’s resources entrusted to us to accomplish his purposes. These purposes include caring for the poor and reaching out to those in need.”

The rich young ruler had a chance to use his wealth to help the poor. But he chose to keep his wealth and walk away from Jesus. What he did not know is that in a matter of 30 years he would lose all his wealth when the Jews revolted against the Roman Empire and became public enemy number 1. This resulted in the armies of Rome pillaging the land of Israel, killing hundreds of thousands of Jews and destroying Jerusalem. The survivors were carried off to the salt mines. But the Jewish believers who remained faithful to Christ, in spite of their great persecution, escaped this

great slaughter by fleeing to Pella and other places of refuge. Who knows, after this rich man lost all of his possessions, which had a strangle hold on him, he may have gained the freedom to follow Christ.

Everyone in this sanctuary is wealthy in comparison to much of the world. How are we using our wealth?

Let's pray.