

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON 17

“What Shall I Do That I May Inherit Eternal Life?”

by Ted L. Gibbons

Reading: Mark 10:17-30; 12:41-44; Luke 12:13-21; 14; 16

INTRODUCTION: The scriptures speak clearly to us about the dangers of wealth. So many of the apostasies chronicled in the pages of the standard works are related to a longing for filthy lucre. Paul was probably right when he said that the "love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:10) The danger of this love of loot is a theme often repeated in the pages of the New Testament. In this lesson we will review some of those divine warnings and moral tragedies recorded to serve as admonition to the faithful of all ages that we should focus our energy on the things that matter most: Jesus said, "let the solemnities of eternity rest upon your minds." (D&C 43:34)

I. TRUSTING IN RICHES CAN KEEP A MAN OUT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

(Mark 10:17-30; 12:41-44)

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.

19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.

20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions (Mark 10:17-30).

The basic message of this story is that wealth can even turn really good people away from following the Savior. Notice what we learn about this rich young man from the text and context:

1. He believed Christ is good (10:17)
2. He wanted to inherit eternal life (10:17)
3. He kept the ten commandments from his youth onward (10:20)
4. He only lacked one thing to become perfect (10:21; Matthew 19:21)
5. He went away sorrowing when he recognized that he loved money more than Christ

This is frightening -- or it should be. The problem this young man seems to have is the one identified by Jacob in his great sermon on riches. This wealthy youth has his riches and now he wants to obtain a "hope in Christ," but Jacob, knowing the danger of this sequence of events, said, "But before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good . . ." (Jacob 2:18,19) Jesus' invitation to this potential disciple with his "great possessions" was to use his riches to do good, but he could not give them up. His heart was "set so much upon the things of this world . . ." (D&C 121:35)

The Savior, having watched the departure of this man, whom he loved (Mark 10:21), used the event as a teaching moment for his disciples:

23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into 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 into the kingdom of God.

26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:23-30).

Notice the lessons that the Savior teaches about riches in these verses:

1. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (10:23)
2. "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (10:24, emphasis added)
3. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (10:25)
4. "And Jesus, looking upon them, said, With men that trust in riches, it is impossible; but not impossible with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake, for with such all these things are possible." (JST Mark 10:26, emphasis added)
5. "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. (10:29,30)

In sobering contrast to the response of the youthful, would-be disciple, we read this story:

41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.

42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.

43 And he called [unto him] his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto

you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:

44 For all [they] did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, [even] all her living (Mark 12:41-44).

This story is a mirror in which the Savior invites us to see ourselves. Having reviewed the story of one who clung to his wealth more tightly than to the salvation of Christ, we now read of a woman refused to cling to anything but his salvation. He was invited to sell all, and could not. She "cast in all that she had" without invitation of any kind.

Here we must find ourselves. Are there things which we are not willing to lay on the altar? Do we have possessions to which we cling more tightly than to our covenants? If we hope to dwell one day with those who have offered everything, rather than with those who would not, we must also we willing to do so—to "cast in all that [we have], even all [our] living." (12:44)

And note also that this story tells us that the amount of our contribution is of no significance whatsoever. What matters is the attitude with which we give, and the percentage of all that we have that we are willing to give.

II. SEEK HEAVENLY, RATHER THAN EARTHLY, TREASURE

13 ¶ And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, [and] be merry.

20 But God said unto him, [Thou] fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So [is] he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God
(Luke 12:13-21)

The follower ("one of the company") who appealed to the Savior for assistance in solving a family disagreement was afflicted with the same malady as the youthful rich man—he was pre-occupied with "stuff" and his petition caused the Lord to warn those with him "to take heed and beware of covetousness." (12:15) His next statement is as powerful a teaching as is found anywhere in the scriptures: "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (12:15)

This is precisely the point Jacob wanted to make when he taught, "because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they." (Jacob 2:13) How dangerous is it to believe that because we have more "stuff" . . . a nicer house, a nicer car, a bigger boat, and more toys, that we are better? Jacob begs those who feel this way, "let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls!" (Jacob 2:16)

There is sieve between here and heaven to filter out undesirable elements. Nothing will pass through but the spirt and the qualities that have become part of it. Everything else must be left behind. The rich fool with his big barns had a great desire to hang on to what he had. Never mind the poor of whom Jacob spoke. Never mind the naked. He wanted his stuff because it was evidence that he was better than his neighbors. And there is some of this attitude in almost all of us. So ask yourself "What would you hang on to today if you knew you were going to die tomorrow? We are sometimes like paupers picking up pennies on the way to the gold mine where we have been invited to become joint heirs with the owners. A true story from Jericho illustrates the folly of this passion for acquisition:

I think of Hisham, the mightiest palace an Arab ever built, just outside of Jericho . . . the prince took twenty-seven years to build it, and it was going to be the finest palace in the world. It was the finest palace; it was magnificent . . . The night he was to enter it for the housewarming, there came a great earthquake. He had a heart attack and died, and the palace was completely destroyed. They were going to have this big housewarming, and everybody was to come. After twenty-

seven years, poof, that's what happened. (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2, Lecture 41, pp. 5,6)

Moses warned the Israelites about the danger of wealth. He said to them as they prepared to occupy the promised land:

10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.

11 Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

12 Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

13 And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage . . . (Deut. 8:10-14).

Brigham Young said it this way:

The worst fear I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and his people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of this Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution and be true. But my greatest fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth; and yet they have to be tried with riches, for they will become the richest people on this earth. (In Preston Nibley, Brigham Young: The Man and His Work [1936], p. 128)

III. FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST MUST BE WILLING TO FORSAKE ALL TO BE TRUE DISCIPLES

Since the Father has offered us all the he has (D&C 84:38; Luke 15:31), we must offer him all that we have. Nothing is to be withheld. If we desire the thing of greatest value, we must be willing to surrender all things of lesser value. Thus Jesus taught:

15 And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said to

him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

25 ¶ And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

27 And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all

that behold it begin to mock him,

30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:15-33).

I am amazed at the skill with which the Savior teaches these things. The parable of the great supper is a wonderful lesson about priorities and wealth. We have all been invited to come and feast at the side of the Lord at a table of limitless sustenance and goodness. But in the parable those invited first began to make excuses—they were prevented from coming because of property, possessions, or relatives. This must be an allusion to the Jews, but we can all recognize ourselves somewhere in this story.

We must ask ourselves as we read this parable what excuses we use to rationalize our occasional or constant unwillingness to partake of the fulness of the Gospel blessings. What excuses do we use for not reading the scriptures or doing our home or visiting teaching or going to the temple. Are they more meaningful excuses than the land and the oxen and the new wife? As the Savior said in the conclusion of this parable, "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple " (Luke 14:33). Immediately we are reminded of the widow in Mark 12 who cast in all her living.

IV. SEEK SPIRITUAL WEALTH WITH ENTHUSIASM AND ENERGY

1 AND he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may

receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors [unto him], and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true [riches]?

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? (Luke 16:1-12).

This parable is certainly one of the most difficult from the Savior's teachings. It causes one to be grateful for the inspiration and insight of the living prophets. We should not suppose that this parable encourages or excuses actions that are at variance with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

James E. Talmage explained the meaning of this matter in the following way:

In pointing the moral of the parable Jesus said: "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Our Lord's purpose was to show the contrast between the care, thoughtfulness, and devotion of men engaged in the money-making affairs of earth, and the half-hearted ways of many who are professedly striving after spiritual riches. Worldly-minded men do not neglect provision for their future years, and often are sinfully eager to amass plenty; while the "children of light," or those who believe spiritual wealth to be above all

earthly possessions, are less energetic, prudent, or wise. (*Jesus the Christ*, Ch.27, p.463 - p.464)

I have a son who owns dozens (perhaps hundreds) of video games. He plays with remarkable skill and continuous delight. Suppose I asked him on one occasion a question like this: "Son, how does Zelda overcome the evil prince and destroy the Sultan of Suffering?" He would know the answer. He has paid the price in time and effort to know. But if I then asked, "How did Mormon maintain his righteousness in the world of sin and iniquity in which he was raised?" I think he would look at me like I was deranged. I have invited him to put as much effort into the scriptures as he does into Nintendo. I hope one day he will.

If we gave as much effort to preparing for the joys of eternity as we give to preparing for the joys of mortality, we might well be translated where we stand. But we often spend great energy on things less durable than water on a summer sidewalk.

Elder Dean L. Larsen suggested 10 things we can do to avoid the destructive power of wealth.

Wealth is a relative thing. Conditions vary dramatically from place to place in the world today. That which some consider to be the necessities of life, to others would be abundance, and even extravagance. In any set of circumstances, the challenges related to an improvement in material prosperity remain the same. The message that echoes to us from the pages of history and from the counsels of the Lord and his prophets is clear:

- Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven.
- Seek not for riches to consume them on your own lusts.
- Thou shalt not covet.
- Clothe the naked.
- Feed the hungry.
- Relieve the sick and the afflicted.
- Pay tithes and offerings.
- In all things acknowledge the Lord.
- Be grateful.
- Be humble.

(Dean L. Larsen, “Beware Lest Thou Forget the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 12).

CONCLUSION:

Perhaps this quote from Elder Melvin L. Ballard will serve as a useful summary to our discussion of wealth. It is interesting to note that this quote was given during the great depression.

We are in the age of self-indulgence. It is not peculiar to this Church. It is in the world. The spirit of it is rampant everywhere. It beats upon our shores from all points. It enters into the midst of the people. It is a deadly siege in an attempt to destroy that which persecution, mob violence, privation and hardship failed to destroy,--- the integrity of this people I recognize however, with my brethren, that the sorest trials that have ever come to the Church in any age of the world are the trials of peace and prosperity. But we are to do a new thing, a thing that has never before been done—We are to take the Church of Christ not only through the age of persecution and mob violence, but through the age of peace and prosperity. For we must learn to endure faithfully even in peace and prosperity.

I am not praying for the return of persecution and poverty; I am praying for peace and prosperity; but above all things for strength and power to endure this test. For it is not the design and the intention of the Lord to have this people always in suffering and bondage and distress. They shall come to peace and prosperity, but it is the sorest trial that will come to them. (Elder Melvin J. Ballard, CR, April 1929, p. 66)

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