

True Wealth

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- [0 : 00] Just under four years ago, my oldest son, Samuel, announced to his mother and I that he had a girlfriend! and would like to bring her round to the house to meet us.
- He warned us, especially Aidan and me, to be on our best behaviour. And that afternoon, he introduced us to Lisa, with whom we all instantly fell in love.
- After a lovely dinner, when Samuel and Lisa had left, Kathma, my wife and I, gave each other high five. Because of all the girls in the world, Samuel had chosen the best.
- Now, and I mean that Lisa, now put yourself into the shoes of first century Jewish parents, whose daughter tells them that she wants to bring her boyfriend round to meet them.
- Later that evening, she introduces them to a rich young man. Over the course of the evening, they learn that he's also a leader of their people.
- [1 : 07] He's a religious man, and he diligently keeps all the laws of their people. When they leave, those Jewish parents do the same as Kathma and I did, give each other a high five.
- Unfortunately for that young Jewish daughter, the relationship between her and that rich young man didn't work out. A few months later, she tells her parents that she wants to bring her new boyfriend round to meet them.
- And later that evening, she introduces them to another young man. Over the course of the evening, they learn that he's poor. He doesn't have his own house or job.
- And is a follower of a controversial rabbi called Jesus. When that young couple leave, these Jewish parents look at each other with concern.
- Now, let's ask another question.
- [2 : 11] With all reverence, if you were God, which of the two would you rather have as your follower? A rich young religious influencer?
- Or a poor, jobless, homeless man whose only claim is that he's a follower of Jesus?
- Continuing on from our previous passage we looked at last week, the account of the rich young ruler in Luke 8, 18-30, explores the question of who is right with God.
- It digs into the issue of who God favors and who God justifies. We've already seen that he justifies sinful tax collectors who call out to him for mercy.
- We've already seen that he justifies people who receive rather than earn the kingdom of God, like little children. In our passage this morning, a contrast is set up between a rich young man and the disciples.
- Which of these two are favored by God? And we want to examine each. First of all, between verses 18 and 25, a man with everything and nothing.
- [3 : 27] And secondly, from verse 26 to 30, 12 men with nothing and everything. Suppose you're a parent here.
- Would you rather your daughter take home a rich young religious ruler or a poor, homeless, jobless disciple of Christ? So first of all then, from verse 18 through 25, a man with everything and nothing.

A man with everything and nothing. Our passage begins with a young ruler who we learn from verse 23 was extremely rich. Now in the Israel of that day, to be that wealthy was very rare.

Most people were extremely poor. Makes a change from the others who come to Jesus with their needs. Children, the blind, tax collectors.

Just goes to show that anyone and everyone, rich and poor, can come to Jesus as they are. King and commoner, rich and poor. King and commoner, rich and poor. King and commoner, rich and poor.

[4 : 28] And he begins by asking what seems a valid question. Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? But sometimes questions open up unintended cans of worms.

What must I do to inherit eternal life is the question every religious person asks. But they mistakenly think they must do something. What must I do?

Earning or inheriting eternal life is about us doing for God. That is the default position of the human heart. We must do something for God.

We must place Him in our debt by our morality, by our religious devotion, so He rewards us with eternal life. In the previous passage, in the context of little children, Jesus has talked of receiving the kingdom of God, not earning it.

The only people who inherit eternal life are those who have not earned it, but have received it. God has done something for them, not them for God.

[5 : 36] God, a better question than what must I do to inherit eternal life would have been, what has been done for me to inherit eternal life? Are there any here who still mistakenly think they must do something to become a Christian?

Well, you're mistaken. Everything has already been done in the cross of Christ. All you do is believe. All you do is sit in that chair, as Evan said.

But there's more here. Jewish rabbis were never addressed by the title, good teacher, because they attributed goodness only to God. Jesus responds by saying, why do you call me good?

No one is good except God alone. No one is good.

Jesus is God. Jesus is calling on this rich young man to reflect on what he has just said. He is calling upon him to reflect on who Jesus is.

[7 : 07] Who really is Jesus, who is addressed in a way only God can be? But there's even more than that. If Jesus really is God, then the rich young man should think again about what he's asking.

This rich young man is in the presence of the perfect holiness of God, the God who sees everything, everything in the heart of man. If only that man could understand how perfect God's purity really is, he would realize how far short he falls of that perfect purity.

And rather than asking how he may earn God's favor, he would do what the tax collector did. He would cry out for mercy. He wouldn't boast about how he had perfectly kept all the laws of Moses.

Rather, he would bemoan his own heart unfaithfulness and inner lack of purity. Jesus then draws out a response from this man, which if the man had been spiritually sensitive, he would have understood as being an invitation to repentance.

You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. You'll notice all these commandments refer to our responsibilities one to another, not to God.

[8 : 26] It was commonly thought by the Jewish rabbis that it's possible for someone to keep the whole law perfectly. It's not surprising then that the rich young man replied, all these I have kept from my youth.

What we're witnessing in this conversation is a man who has neither realized the perfect purity of God, the God in whose presence he stands, nor his own spiritual poverty and sinfulness.

The French reformer John Calvin opens up his great work, the Institutes of the Christian Religion, with the words, nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say true and sound wisdom, consists in two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

For all that he had everything this world could give him in terms of status and wealth, this rich young man was a fool because he neither knew God nor himself.

He didn't realize how far short he fell of God's perfect standard, therefore how foolish the question, what must I do to inherit or earn eternal life?

[9 : 42] If we truly understood how high the holiness of God compared to how low the sinfulness of our hearts, we'd realize nothing I can do is enough. There's no religious devotion, there's no moral performance which is sufficient to earn eternal life.

We have an expression, don't take a knife to a gunfight. We must be adequately prepared for every challenge we meet. Don't try to climb Mount Everest if all you have are a pair of shorts and a t-shirt.

You're unfit and obese and you neither have a map nor a guide. Once we begin to realize how high God's holiness is compared to our sinful lowness, we quickly conclude there is nothing I can do to earn eternal life.

It can only be received as a gift of God's grace. How little this rich young brother knew either God nor himself.

But then Jesus delivers his coup de grace. One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

[11 : 00] Jesus no longer reflects on the commandments relating to this rich young man's responsibilities to others. He challenges the man concerning his relationship to God.

The question is this. What comes first in this man's heart? The first commandment says, You shall have no other gods before me. Does this man have any other gods before the Lord God of Israel?

No. Jesus has identified his sin. His money is his God. His wealth comes first to him before his religion, before his relationships.

If God came first, he'd have been willing to sell all he had and give it to the poor. He'd be willing to leave everything behind and follow Jesus. Jesus, this man for all his religious devotion, is as much an idolater as those who worship foreign gods.

It's just that his idols are shaped like coins and made of gold and silver. This is a man with everything, but he's unwilling to give up even a single penny for God.

[12 : 10] He's not willing to put God first in his life.

He's not willing to stop relying upon his wealth and status. Jesus immediately responds, Those who are wealthy in whatever way are far less likely to see their need of God's mercy and therefore far less likely to repent and believe.

Those who have approached Jesus already, found mercy and have been justified before God, are only too aware of their needs. The sinful tax collector, helpless infants, and a blind man as we'll see in a couple of weeks' time.

This rich young man had everything the world had to offer. He had no felt need, as we might say, and therefore he did not cry out for God's mercy, so he did not receive it.

It is so difficult for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God, whether that's physical wealth in terms of their health, economic wealth, intellectual wealth, social wealth.

- [13 : 36] They don't see their need of anything else in life because they've already got everything this world has to offer. They've got everything, but when it comes to what really matters in life and death, they've got nothing.

They've settled for monopoly money when the true riches of God's blessing eludes them. Like children who play with cardboard boxes rather than the presents they contain, we make idols of this world's wealth, forfeiting God's greater riches of grace, mercy, and salvation.

They've got everything and nothing at the same time. They're wrong with God because they put their worldly wealth before Him. For that reason, they remain outside the kingdom of God, excluded from the fountain of all love and joy.

On a practical level, this is one of the things which makes evangelism so very difficult in our setting in the prosperous West.

We're wealthier than any generation which lived before us, so we don't see our need of God. But you see how Jesus approaches this problem. He points to the Ten Commandments and shows how the law reveals to us how far short we fall of God's perfect standards.

- [14 : 55] God gave us the law to point to our shortcomings and our need of God's mercy and grace. But the law also points to the perfection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the law.

So in our personal evangelism, we do well to remember to use the law in these two ways as Jesus does here. The law that points to the perfection of Jesus, the law which points to our need of God's mercy.

But on another level, this truth about wealth hindering our entrance into the kingdom of God also helps to explain why there are times God sends suffering.

into our lives as Christians. Why God sends suffering. Let's be honest with ourselves. There are times when things are going so well for us in life that we all but forget God.

We get wealthy in whatever sphere that wealth may be. At times like this, our loving God may take away certain aspects of that wealth in order that we may turn once again to Him for mercy, for help, for grace.

- [16 : 08] In some ways, we have to view our sufferings as God's call to return to Him. Are there any here this morning who have everything but nothing?

We might have youth on our side. The world's our oyster. We may have everything, but if we don't have Jesus Christ as our Savior, we have nothing at all. Because one thing is for sure, death will take everything we have away from us if all we have is this world's wealth.

Naked we came into this world, naked we shall leave it. But if we have Christ, death will take nothing from us. It will only bring us into the eternal joy of life with Him.

This rich young man had everything but nothing. For all his wealth, he was a fool. A man with everything.

A man with nothing. Well, secondly and more briefly, from verse 26 to 30. Twelve men with nothing and everything.

- [17 : 15] Twelve men with nothing and everything. At this stage, those who heard what Jesus said protested, then who can be saved? Verse 26. In the world of Jesus' day, wealth was considered a mark of God's favor, a mark of God's blessing.

If the rich young ruler, he who is favored by God, can't be saved, who can? Jesus replies, what is impossible with man is possible with God.

In other words, God thinks very differently from us. He doesn't judge by outward appearance. He judges by the state of our hearts before Him. We too must dare not judge by outward appearances.

A person may do all the right religious things and be an outstandingly moral person, but he may be wrong with God. Another may be a diamond wearing a good disguise, rough around the edges, not always living up to our standards of morality.

He may be right with God. We must leave judgment to Him. Peter, keenly listening in, on behalf of the other disciples, says, see, we have left our homes and followed you.

[18 : 25] Peter speaks truly. He and the other disciples they had left their own homes, their own families, and their own livelihoods. They'd left everything to follow Jesus. For the last three years, they had become homeless and poor, and all because they'd heard Jesus call and put Him first before everything else in their lives.

They could have been comfortable at home with their families and their livelihoods, but unlike the rich young ruler, they had put Jesus first. Well, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, all the disciples had put Jesus before all the worldly things which could have made them wealthy.

In this world's eyes, they had nothing, and they had become nothing. Like one of their later counterparts, the Apostle Paul, he said, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

No Jewish parents would have welcomed these men as potential husbands for their daughters, because as far as the world was concerned, they were abject failures.

But if the blessed rich cannot be saved, what about them who, for the sake of Christ, are dirt poor? If Christian salvation is so impossible, have the disciples made a mistake in following Jesus?

[19 : 53] Do you ever think that way? That having given up so much to follow Christ, it's just not worth it? You thought that becoming a Christian was a ticket to happiness, but over the years, you've endured much pain instead.

You've endured much, which you wish you hadn't, and life has sometimes been far from easy for you. You look at your non-Christian contemporaries and are tempted at times toward jealousy.

You too might say, along with the Apostle Peter, see, I have left my home and followed you. And it's okay to say these things. Jesus doesn't rebuke Peter for his outburst.

He will not rebuke you. If you have put Jesus first in your life, and as a result have lost many things which otherwise you wouldn't have, Jesus reminds you that you have gained far more in Him than you have lost for Him.

Let me say that again. If you're asking whether being a Christian is really worth it, Jesus is reminding you that what you have gained in Him is far more than what you have lost for Him.

[21 : 06] It's so important to take a long-term, wider view of things than this world allows. Take your doubts to Jesus, and in return He'll remind you of His promises. Tenderly and with great love and wisdom, Jesus responds to Peter's outburst.

Truly I say to you, there's no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not receive many more times in this, many times more in this time and in the age to come eternal life.

How careful we must be here to understand what Jesus is and is not saying. He is not saying that following Him is a path to financial gain, as some health and wealth teachers want to insist.

That is not true to experience and flies against everything Jesus has been saying in this passage about wealth and the kingdom of God. The last clause is easy to understand, the gain of eternal life.

Something money and wealth can't buy. We'll come back to that in our conclusion. The question remains, what does Jesus mean by saying that for the sake of the kingdom of God, Jesus' followers will receive many more times in this life?

[22 : 16] There are many options, but the one I favor is that as Christians, we become members of a new family. We become members of a church where loving bonds can go even deeper than flesh and blood.

we may lose our earthly home on account of our faith, but we gain a new home among the people of God. We may lose our family, but we belong to a new family in the Christian church.

But then Jesus talks about in the age to come eternal life. To compare eternal life to this life is comparing light with darkness, the full glare of the sun with the gloom of night.

Whatever wealth or status we have on this earth is as nothing compared to the wealth we shall have in the everlasting life, not the wealth of financial security, the wealth of eternal joy, belonging, and peace in the presence of God.

To forfeit the greater joy of eternal life for the uncertain wealth of this passing life is foolishness, but it's exactly what the rich young man did that day and it's exactly what so many in our society do every day.

[23 : 36] Would you forfeit a pound for a penny? Would you sacrifice your life for a mere breath of wind? What a foolish man this rich young man was to walk away from Jesus on account of his wealth.

What wise men these twelve disciples were to give up their wealth to follow Jesus. The Jesus who spoke these words descended from the glories of heaven and he gave up all his riches and his rights in order to become the servant of the slave of all.

Having been rejected and betrayed for thirty pieces of silver he died on the cross. God reached down to us through Jesus. Everyone here today who is willing to put their faith and trust in him, anyone who will put him first in their lives will receive many more times in this life and in the age to come eternal life and all because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor so that we through his poverty might become rich.

Jim Elliot of whom some of you may have heard was a young American missionary who was called by God to reach the Haurani Indians of Ecuador.

in 1956 the Haurani killed him. Jim Elliot became one of the most famous Christian martyrs of the 20th century.

[25 : 09] Few years later the Haurani en masse became Christians. But just before he died Jim Elliot wrote these immortal words in his diary words which if anyone here is to be a faithful Christian they need to bear close to their heart.

He wrote he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

These surely are the ultimate words of wisdom over which we all must reflect this morning. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Amen.