

October 10, 2021

Texts: Psalm 90:12-17; Mark 10:17-31

Title: "What Must I Do?"

Kids think that money just grows on trees, don't they? But how can you blame them? When they're hungry, someone feeds them. Clean clothes magically show up in their dresser drawers. Toilet paper and soap appear in the bathroom. And so it's pretty normal for kids to assume that Mom and Dad or Grandma or some loving adult can also buy them whatever they want. Why can't we order pizza every night? Why can't we have a new car like the neighbors? That certainly was my mind set as a child.

The late author and humorist Erma Bombeck's young son once asked her the question, "Are we rich?" And that forced her to consider what her definition of "rich" is. See if you agree with her. She wrote: "You're rich when you can have eight people to dinner and don't have to wash forks between the main course and dessert. "You're rich when you can throw away a pair of sox just because one of them has a hole in it." "You're rich when your dog is wet and it smells good." Maybe some of you can relate to those. If so, I guess you're rich.

Today's story of the rich young ruler may not be one of our favorite passages for the simple reason that we don't think of ourselves as rich. But what if Jesus appeared to you right now and told you to sell everything you have, give the money to the poor, and then follow him? One Bible passage says that the rich young ruler's "face fell" and he went away grieving over Jesus' words. So what was this rich young ruler missing? And what did he give up when he walked away

from Jesus? That's the truly scary question that I'd like us to consider today.

Compared to most of the world's people we are rich although it's still a hard thing for us to accept as we don't see ourselves that way. Jesus' warning to beware of the danger of materialism is for all of us. He says in this passage that a rich person will have a hard time getting into heaven. On another occasion he talked about a rich man who built barns to hold his surplus crops and then after he got it all set up, he died. Jesus called him a fool who had not prepared for the world to come. Jesus warned time and time again about reliance on money.

He didn't say that it's impossible for a rich man to get into heaven but truly we do need to be reminded from time to time of the dangers of wealth.

In the first place, wealth is dangerous when we learn to overvalue things and undervalue people. It's important that we develop a sense of perspective about life. It is so easy for our accumulating of things to blot out the importance of the people around us.

Marjorie Holmes, Christian author, wrote some years ago that one of her best friends died "in the midst of her possessions." What did she mean by that comment? Well this friend and her husband had worked so hard to decorate their home with the finest furnishings and china and Oriental rugs. Now her friend was suddenly gone, and the many possessions remained as a sad reminder. She writes, "But let me learn something from this loss; that possessions are meant to enhance life, not to become the main focus of it." I think that I have money and possessions in their proper place until I read this story of the rich young ruler.

And then I wonder if Jesus were to make the same demand of me at this very moment . . . “sell everything you have, give the money to the poor, and follow me”...would I make excuses? Would I walk away from Jesus and from his abundant and eternal life?

Sometimes we are forced to make choices. One would be the choice about the time we spend earning a living and the time we spend with our families. Wealth is dangerous when you begin overvaluing money and undervaluing people.

It’s also dangerous when we see our possessions as an end rather than as a means. When the accumulation of great wealth is our main reason for living then we’re in trouble, in fact it’s dangerous.

Writer Ernest Hemingway had one very wise practice. On the first day of each New Year, he gave away some of his most prized possessions. When asked about this, he said, “If I can give these things away, then I own them. But if I can't give them away because they have somehow become so important to me, then they own me.” It’s not necessary for wealth to keep one out of the Kingdom of God, but wealth can be a snare that can stop our spiritual progress if it becomes an end rather than a means.

And finally this: **Wealth can be dangerous if we print on our money “In God we trust” but in our hearts, it’s really the money that we trust.** Author David Foster Wallace said this, “There’s no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Think about that for a moment. He went on to say that whatever we worship will eventually consume

us. If we worship appearances or money or status, we will spend all our energy on these things. Whatever we worship eventually comes to control us. And most of us aren't even conscious of what we really worship. Until, like the rich young ruler, we are asked to give it up.

At some point in our lives, we all have to choose who or what we will place our trust in. We all have to choose what we will value, what will take first place in our lives. Jesus didn't try to make this choice any easier. In fact, in every generation, following Jesus means giving up the things that our culture values. It means giving up our own security and comfort and control. But Jesus also ends this passage with the promise that whatever we give up for him will be returned to us a hundredfold, through the riches of *knowing him and sharing eternal life with him*. "What must I do?" said that young man. That's our question too if we're courageous enough to ask it. The answer? Follow Jesus and make living for him our undisputed number one priority. Amen.