

Bible Study What Did Jesus Teach?

By Rev. John H. McArthur, S.T.D.

XVI. About Riches

Topic for week beginning September 11.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Select some of the following passages:

The folly of trusting in riches, Luke 12: 15-21.

The unjust steward making wise provision for the future, Luke 16: 1-8. Faithful stewardship: a passport to heaven, Luke 16: 9-13.

Lovers of money condemned, Luke 16: 14-15.

Parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16: 19-32.

The rich young ruler, Luke 18: 18-23. Hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, Luke 18: 24-27.

Rewards to those who leave all for Jesus, Luke 18: 28-30.

Faithful stewardship rewarded, Luke 19: 11-27.

Parable of the hired laborers, Matt. 20: 1-16.

We are responsible for the use of our talents, Matt. 25: 14-30.

Jesus said so much about the subject of riches that it will be impossible for us in this short study to do more than give a general outline of His teaching on the subject.

1. *The importance of the subject.* Jesus was Himself impressed and desired to impress the people with the necessity of holding correct views concerning riches. This may be inferred from the large place which Jesus gives in His teaching to the doctrine of riches. Especially did Jesus warn the people against the dangers arising from an incorrect view and an improper use of money. Says Prof. James Denney, D.D.: "Jesus spoke more about money than about any other single subject, and always in passionate words. What frightens men especially is the thought of being poor—this is the Englishman's hell, as Carlyle said; but what alarmed Jesus was the peril of the rich."

Taking the Gospel of Luke alone, notice how much of our Lord's teaching deals directly or indirectly with the subject of riches. In chapter six He sounds a warning note to the rich—*Woe unto you that are rich.* In chapter eight riches is one of the things singled out as being among the thorns that choke the good seed. In chapter twelve we have a warning against covetousness and a refutation of the false principle that a man's life consisteth in the abundance of the things that he possesseth. These lessons are enforced by the parable of the rich fool, followed by an exhortation to distribute our money to the needy and thus lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. In chapter fourteen a new light is shed upon the law of hospitality. "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy rich neighbors, . . . but . . . bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed." In chapter fifteen we read of the certain son wasting his substance with riotous living. In chapter sixteen much is said about the right use of money, while those who scoffed at such teaching are warned by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. In chapter eighteen we read of the rich young ruler whose riches prevented him from entering the kingdom. This leads Jesus to make some startling statements about the difficulties in the way of a rich man entering heaven. Hence the rich man, rather than being envied, should be

pitied. Nevertheless, those who make the necessary sacrifice, and leave all for Jesus, shall be suitably rewarded. In chapter nineteen we see Zaccheus, having been brought under the gracious influence of Christ, resolving to give the half of his goods to the poor, and to restore fourfold to any man from whom he had wrongfully taken aught. Then follows the parable of the pounds, showing what God expects from us as His stewards, and how faithful stewardship is rewarded. Thus does Jesus seek to impress us with the importance of understanding aright the true meaning of riches, together with their dangers. To quote Prof. George Jackson: "It is a remarkable fact, the true significance of which few Christians have yet realized, that, as John Ruskin says, the subject which we might have expected a Divine Teacher would have been content to leave to others is the very one He singles out on which to speak parables for all men's memory."

2. *The use of riches.* "The value of money," says Sir John Lubbock, "depends partly on knowing what to do with it, and partly on how it is acquired." Men may obtain money by inheritance, they may earn it, or they may obtain it by methods that are questionable, though not technically unjust. There is a limit to man's earning power. It has been said that no man can possibly earn a million. If this be true there must be something wrong with the principle of distribution of wealth whereby some men obtain their millions, while others obtain nothing more than a bare living. Yet there are men who by their inventive genius and skill have added millions to the world's wealth. Like Edison, the wizard of electricity, and like the plant wizard, it is the duty of the rich man to find a proper method of distributing his riches among his fellowmen. Carnegie is reported to have said that the man who dies rich dies disgraced. Hoarded wealth is of no value. It must be used, and used so that it will tend to the uplift of humanity. The rich man can only discharge his duty to God by using his money for the benefit of his fellowmen. Christ teaches us that wealth is a trust for which we must give an account unto our fellowmen, but in relation to God we are stewards.

We have no space here to discuss the many ways in which money may be used for the uplift of humanity. Jesus insisted on giving to the poor, but he also sanctioned that use of money which was spent in buying ointment to anoint His feet. The physical needs of the poor must be supplied. But man is more than a mere physical being; he is a spiritual being. And that use of money is right which tends "to feed the mind, to stir the imagination, to quicken the emotions, to make life less menial, less animal, less dull." Especially is that use of money to be commended which serves to bring the Gospel as a potent factor into the lives of men and women and children of the world over.

3. *The perils of wealth.* While Jesus said much about the use of money, He said much about its dangers. Jesus had a heart full of sympathy for the unfortunate, the outcast, the fallen. But for those who were simply poor he does not seem to express much sympathy. They did not need His sympathy simply because they were poor. Rather He says, "Blessed are the poor." Luke 8: 20. It was not the poor because of their poverty, but the rich because of their riches that He pitied. See how He sorrowed for the rich young ruler whose riches were his ruin. Well did Emerson say that the worst thing about money is that it so often costs so much. See how often Jesus sounded the

note of warning to the rich, declaring, "How hardy shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God."

4. *The intrinsic value of wealth.* Wealth has no power to make a man great. Jesus gave to the world a new idea of greatness. He who has great possessions and a noble ancestry is not necessarily great. But he alone is great who has a great purpose and a noble character. Jesus was the greatest of all men, but he was poor, born in a manger, sleeping in the mountains, buried in another's tomb. "He came poor." The life of Jesus is a rebuke to those who have set their heart on riches. How aptly does Prof. George Jackson say in a beautiful passage which we here quote: "This is the lesson of the life of the Best. . . . Is it not also the lesson of the lives of the good in all ages? The greatest name in the great world of Greece is Socrates; and Socrates was a poor man. The greatest name in the first century of the Christian era is Paul; and Paul was a workman and sometimes in want. It was Calvinism, Mark Pattison said, that in the sixteenth century saved Europe from its own strength. The only declared lay man in this; that money had no charm for him. John Wesley re-created modern England and led behind him 'two silver teaspoons and the Methodist minister Abbey.' It has been said, commemorates a glorious company of paupers. And even in America, the land of the millionaire and multi-millionaire, the names that are graven on the nation's heart, and which men delight to honor, are not its Vanderbilts, or its Jay Goulds, but Lincoln, and Grant, and Garfield, and Webster, and Clay."

Quotations. "Wealth is only a disadvantage in the hands of those who do not know how to use it."—Sir John Lubbock.

"Of great riches there is no real use except it be in the distribution; the rest is but conceit."—Bacon.

"Seek not proud riches, but such as thou mayest get; use soberly, distribute cheerfully and leave contentedly."—Bacon.

XVII. About Forgiveness

Topic for week beginning September 18.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Matt. 18: 15-35.

Jesus as an Original Teacher. The teaching of Jesus on many subjects was far in advance of that of his times. Some men are twenty years ahead of their time, but in the course of twenty years the world catches up with them. In advance of His times that, though nineteen centuries have passed since His day, the world has not yet caught up. To love your enemies, to pray for them, to forgive them freely, was a kind of teaching that was in advance of anything in his day, and men are unable to appreciate it even in this day. The ancient Greek or Roman did not think it manly to forgive his enemies. That man was considered fortunate who, on reviewing his life, was able to say that no one had done more good to his friends, and more evil to his enemies than he. The spirit of the ancient Greek and Roman is still with us, but how different from the spirit of Christ. The man who stands upon his false dignity says, "I will get even with mine enemy," but the Christlike man says, "I will love mine enemy." It is true that certain ancient philosophers placed the forgiveness of injuries among the number of virtues, but that forgiveness was not the outcome of love for one's enemy, but rather the outcome of a

"There are blind minds as well as blind eyes."