

The Dangers of Wealth

There are many people in this world who desire wealth. Countless people have fallen prey to get-rich-quick schemes which promise easy wealth with minimal work. There are some who have worked diligently for many years to acquire wealth, and there are others who play the lottery in hopes of being the lucky person who wins. It's commonly assumed that wealth is a wonderful thing, and having it makes life much better.

But that's *not* what the Bible teaches. Instead it says this:

Proverbs 23:4: "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom."

Does the Bible say that we should pursue wealth? Nope. That must not be our life goal. Instead God has given us a different perspective on wealth, and a different command that we must obey.

Before discussing that, I want to emphasize that it's not a sin to be wealthy. The reason Solomon was the wealthiest king of Israel is because God gave him great wealth:

1 Kings 3:13: "And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."

Abraham and David were both wealthy and God never rebuked them for it. The problem isn't with wealth itself. Instead it has to do with the effect wealth has on people. Agur prayed that God wouldn't give him wealth:

Proverbs 30:7-9: "Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove

far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

Agur was concerned that if he became wealthy he would deny the Lord. That's such a serious matter that it's worth going to great lengths to prevent. Jesus warned us that He would deny all those who denied Him:

Luke 12:8-9: “Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.”

Agur didn't want to take the chance that his wealth might tempt him to deny God, so he prayed that God would never put him in that place of temptation. All he wanted was enough to meet his daily needs.

Jesus taught that wealth can be dangerous. Some people never bear any fruit for God because their wealth is too much of a distraction:

Mark 4:19: “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

There are some people who are never saved at all because they value their wealth more than God:

Mark 10:21-23: “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. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!”

Why is it difficult for the wealthy to be saved? It's because they trust in their wealth instead of in God:

Mark 10:24-25: “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! 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.”

It can be very difficult for the rich to see their need for a Savior. A rich person may believe he already has everything he needs and wants, and may choose to deny God. He may also value his wealth far more than the things of God. This means wealth can lure us away from God – and that makes it dangerous. Our relationship with God is worth infinitely more than any amount of money. It's far better to be saved than to gain the whole world but lose our soul:

Matthew 16:26: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

I want to emphasize that it's not a sin to be wealthy. The Bible doesn't teach that wealthy people can't be saved. A great example is Zacchaeus. The Bible tells us that he was rich:

Luke 19:2: “And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.”

Even though he was rich, his salvation was genuine:

Luke 19:8-9: “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.”

It's not a sin to be wealthy, but wealth can make it more difficult for people to see their need for a Savior and to fully trust in God. It's dangerous to desire something that can tempt us to sin against God (or to reject Him altogether).

Instead of seeking wealth, God commanded us to seek Him:

Matthew 6:31-33: “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

What are we to seek? Not wealth, but the kingdom and righteousness of God. It's impossible to serve both the things of this world and the things of God. We will serve either one or the other:

Matthew 6:24: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

God wants us to spend our life serving Him, not seeking after wealth. The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That *must* be the central focus of our life! If God chooses to bless us with wealth (as He did with Solomon) then that's fine, provided we use it to serve Him instead of ourselves. However, our heart's desire must be to serve Him, not to amass silver and gold. If we're seeking after wealth then we've lost our way. God is far greater than any amount of wealth, and it's far better to seek Him with all our heart than to seek after anything else.

There's another aspect to wealth as well. The reason the book of Proverbs tells us not to seek wealth is because we can't keep it:

Proverbs 23:5: “Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”

Any wealth that you gain in this life is guaranteed to be lost. For example, there are some people who win the lottery and then declare bankruptcy a few years later. It's easy for foolish people to make foolish decisions and lose a great deal of money very quickly.

However, even if you're wise and careful and are able to keep your wealth for many years, one day you will die. When you die you'll have to leave behind all of your riches. They will be lost to you forever because you can't take them with you into the next life.

But there's another option. We can use our possession in

this world to gain treasure in Heaven:

Matthew 19:21: “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”

If we give to the poor then we'll have treasure in Heaven. The great thing about heavenly treasure is that it can't be lost or stolen:

Matthew 6:19-21: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Jesus commanded us to *not* lay up treasures on earth. That doesn't mean it's a sin to be wealthy or that all Christians must take a vow of poverty. What it means is that our focus must be on the life to come, not on this life. God wants our heart to be on Heaven, not on earth. It's foolish to lay up treasures in this world because we're guaranteed to lose *all* of them. However, the treasures we have in Heaven will never be lost. Instead of storing up silver and gold in a bank vault, it makes far more sense to give to the poor and gain everlasting treasures that can never be lost.

The world may seek after wealth, but they can't keep it. On top of that, the wealth of the wicked can't save their soul:

Proverbs 11:4: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.”

When people stand before God and are judged, their

wealth won't help them. In fact, if those riches was gathered through wickedness then it might actually *condemn* them instead:

James 5:1-4: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.”

In the day of judgment, ill-gotten wealth will testify against the person who has it. This means wealth can make judgment day *worse* if it was obtained through sin or oppression.

God commands Christians to be different from the world. He wants us to spend our life seeking after Him, not after material things that we're guaranteed to lose. When Jesus taught these things, the wicked Pharisees actually derided Him for it:

Luke 16:13-15: “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

We must make a choice. God commands us to serve and love Him with all of our heart (which is something the Pharisees refused to do, because they were in love with wealth and the things of this world). Those who are wise will seek to store up Heavenly treasure which can never be lost. Why spend your lifetime seeking something you cannot keep, when you instead could use it to gain things you cannot lose?