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 untoyou, 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 tohim, 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, allthat 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 asks 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 mayreceive 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 allearthly 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)