

Jason Upchurch - The Good News is Better than all the Money in the World

The title of my sermon this morning is The Good News is Better than all the Money in the World. I think that really gets to the heart of our passage and what we see in this rich young man.

I think we can all agree that money is a funny thing and it does funny things to people. In many ways it amplifies who we are already.

I always think it's funny when people are surprised that someone who wins the lottery - millions of dollars - is broke within a couple of months. People will wonder how that's possible. How is that possible? Because you gave unthinkable amounts of cash to someone who is so bad at money and math they play lottery. That's how. It's like giving the controls of a 747 to a 6 year old.

As Christians we are both warned about the dangers of money as well as encouraged with the blessings of money. And both are very important. We see dangers in places like:

1 Tim 6:9-10: Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into destruction. The love of money - not money, but the love of it - is the root of all kinds of evils.

The love of money is dangerous. Always wanting more and more without any contentment or thankfulness for what we have. Is it okay to want more, to provide better for you and your family? Absolutely. But the desire for riches - opulence - is dangerous.

We are told all throughout **2 Pet. 2** that false teachers and prophets are often motivated by greed. They have their hearts trained in greed, they exploit people because of greed is what Peter says.

All throughout Proverbs we see that the desire to become rich through sinful means is condemned. Lying, stealing, unjust scales, are all condemned. So the love of money - greed - can be a trap, but not always. We can wrongly get the idea that somehow having money is bad.

But we know the Bible also teaches that wealth is often a profound blessing. And it's important for us to remember that as well because it's the side of the equation we don't often hear.

Prov 13:22: A good man gives an inheritance to his children's children.

What kind of man? A good man. A just and righteous man pursuing holiness and godliness stores up wealth for his family to bless them.

And Solomon isn't saying don't give your kids anything but give it all to the grandkids. No, the principle here is that the good man thinks generations down the line. There's some for your kids and grandkids and you want to equip your kids how to train their kids and grandkids.

It's funny, in our culture nepotism - favoring your own family for jobs and wealth - is looked at as a bad thing. Nepotism in the Bible is assumed. Of course you're going to hire your kids and bless them. Unless their steeped in sin or completely irresponsible why wouldn't you favor them?

Prov. 18:11 A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin.

It turns out wealth can insulate us from a lot of difficulty.

In **Eph 4:28** we find out that the gospel transforms our view on money. God saves thieves. Did you know that? People who steal from other people. And listen to how he transforms them.

"Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

This is what transformation does when someone comes to faith in Jesus. It doesn't just save us from hell, it transforms us into entirely new creatures who have new desires and goals.

A regenerate thief is no longer a thief. They no longer steal and take, now they are working hard and giving sharing. That's gospel transformation. See, God actually cares about our attitude toward money and our actions with money. And what's clear in this passage is that it doesn't matter how religious or pious someone seems on the outside, a sinful love of money can send someone to hell just as easily as any other sin.

Big Picture: The good news - the Gospel - is better than all the money in the world.

And what Jesus does in these few short verses is expose a faker, a poser. Someone who looks very righteous and religious yet in his heart he loves money.

See, it's hard to tell sometimes if someone is a good steward of the money God has given him or if they're just greedy. Jesus, of course, is the master of getting to the heart.

1) Greedy People often appear very reverent. Read 17

So at the outset this appears to be the golden opportunity for evangelism. I think it's safe to say we all struggle to some extent to go out and tell people the gospel message. That's uncomfortable and awkward and hard work. What we want are those serendipitous moments where people parachute in out of nowhere and ask us good questions about Jesus and seem really interested in our response.

That's what appears to be happening here. It's almost too good to be true.

Jesus is about to leave, and this guy comes literally running to Jesus. He runs up in a hurry. "Don't leave without telling me how to have eternal life! I gotta know!"

And he kneels down before Jesus in reverence. It's the same word used of the soldiers who, after beating Jesus, wrapped him in a robe, twisted a crown of thorns onto his head and knelt down mocking him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" This man is bowing down before Jesus as though Jesus is a king.

In ancient times you would kneel before people of prominence: rulers and high religious officials. He does before Jesus. In fact, what makes this really amazing is that in Luke's gospel he is called a ruler - we often know this story as the rich, young ruler. So he's rich, he's part of the ruling class in Israel and in a sign of devotion - or what appears to be devotion - he bows down to Jesus.

And then what comes out of his mouth is also quite great. He's respectful, kind, "Good teacher!" Not just teacher, not just rabbi. Good teacher. "How do I get saved?"

Now, we all know the outcome of the story. We've read this probably many times. But if we were watching this as a movie on TV it would probably cut to a commercial break right here. And we'd be thinking: wow, this is great. What a sincere guy.

And guess what? He probably is sincere. As sincere as he can be as an unbeliever.

But we know the end of the story. We know what happens. He'll go away from Jesus because he has great possessions. So what do we do with this first bit? We realize that greedy people often look very reverent. They look very sincere and holy on the outside.

Now, just to be fair: This doesn't mean that everyone who might ever come up to us and ask sincere questions about following Jesus has a greed problem. I hope we all know that. But this guy does and there's no obvious tell tale signs until Jesus zeroes in on his greed.

I don't know what you think about greedy people, what they look like or say. Maybe they're always complaining about prices. I once had a friend and it became hard to even go anywhere with him because all he ever did was complain about prices. Gas prices, grocery prices, car prices - numbers were always on his mind.

And listen, I get it, things are really hard. I just filled up my van in Idaho and I saved \$15 in taxes - inflation is crazy. But this was nonstop complaining about money, or prices or wages or whatever.

Maybe greedy people like Scrooge in A Christmas Carol counting every penny and mean to everyone. Maybe they seem like big heartless developers, real estate tycoons or people living paycheck to paycheck always trying to keep up with the Joneses. Those are all ways greed can manifest.

But sometimes it manifests itself as reverent and godly. And holy and sincere. There's no one face of greed.

2) Greedy people are often obedient in other areas. Read 18-20

Now, let's tackle this first phrase here. Jesus's answer here is a little bit puzzling to us. The man calls him good teacher, and Jesus seems to rebuke him for that because only God is good.

Which kind of seems like he's saying, "No, I'm not good, don't call me that because I'm not God." Is that what he's doing? No.

Well, remember whenever we come across a confusing passage we need to ask ourselves if there are other passages that are more clear. So are there clear passages that affirm that Jesus is God? Of course.

Rom. 9:5: Jesus is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

1 John 5:20: We know that the Son of God has come and given us understanding so that we may know him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is true God and eternal life.

And of course **John 5:18** says the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he was making God to be his own Father making himself equal with God.

So Jesus isn't denying that he's God here.

Here's what he's doing. Jesus knows the questions he's about to ask the man. These moral questions about the Law. And he knows what the man's response will be. Jesus knows this guy has a self-righteousness problem. The rich young man actually thinks he deserves heaven. And so Jesus wants to set the stage for him.

This is basically the Ray Comfort/Law-based approach to evangelism. To help him understand the sinfulness of his heart.

One of the biggest problems people have with the gospel is that they don't think they actually need it. They think they're good on their own.

So Jesus sets the stage - no one is good.

Rom 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

1 Kings 8:46: For there is no one who does not sin.

This is what Jesus is saying. He's not talking about his own divinity, he's showing this guy his sinfulness.

So he basically says: "There is no one good but God. So how's your life? Have you murdered, committed adultery, stolen, lied, honored your parents?"

And just like clockwork he's like, "Check! Check! Check! I'm in. Jesus you're good, and I'm good, and we're all good so I'm getting to heaven!"

That's what's happening. His problem is that he doesn't actually believe he has a sin problem. He's kept all the commandments, even from his youth. He thinks he's good to go.

Now, to be fair, he might have kept a lot of commandments. He might have been very outwardly obedient. Jesus doesn't respond to him, "You liar, you know you wanted to murder someone last Tuesday. You liar, you know you stole that guys food at the Bar Mitzvah."

Jesus doesn't contradict him, which he often does with other people. He looks at him and he loves him because he probably did keep the Law fairly well.

Now, two things about this I think are worth noting. First, Jesus isn't just looking for outward conformity to the Law. Sure the guy had probably never actually murdered or actually committed adultery. But what about his heart? And I think the heart is important here because it's often hard for us to diagnose the heart.

Just think about greed for a minute. How do you diagnose greed? Greed's a hard thing to diagnose because it's in the heart. Someone could have a really nice car and not be a greedy person. And his neighbor could look at that car and go "Man, I want it and I can't believe he has it" and be greedy. Same car - same object - two very different hearts.

So outward conformity is not the same as obedience.

Second, we are often plagued by sins we're not even aware of. This guy probably didn't come to Jesus knowing he had a greed problem. I think he actually thought he was fine. He's a very moral man and he's approaching a moral teacher, in a humble and teachable posture.

In ancient times people who had wealth were considered blessed by God - why else would God give you all the money?

So greedy people are often very obedient in other areas of their lives. And really this is true with a lot of sin. People who have a severe struggle in one area often are obedient in a lot of other areas. Unless they are truthful with you it's often hard to tell what's really happening in their life.

3) Greed can keep you from heaven. Read 20-22

So greed can keep you from heaven. Really we could say any sin here could keep you from heaven. But here the issue is greed.

Several important things to note here.

First, Jesus loved this guy. This wasn't a sparring partner or a war of words with one of the Pharisees. This was a guy blinded to his own sin. He didn't even know how plagued he was by the greed. And Jesus loved him.

Jesus loves unbelievers.

Rom 5: God demonstrates his own love toward us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

1 John 4:10 We didn't love God, but God loved us and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus loves unbelievers. Not in the same way as he loves believers, there's a difference just like there's a difference between how you love your family and how you love other people. But he loves them truly.

And we should too. It's easy to be sour toward sinners. It's easy to dislike them for their sin or their foolishness or their rejection. But we are called to love them even when they are blinded to their own sin.

Second, sometimes we find out what our sins are when our idols are taken away. Or when our idols are threatened. We all have functional idols, things we worship and bow down to and protect - maybe more than we even understand.

With kids it's usually easy to spot: toys or friends or freedom. How do we know their idols? It's whatever causes them to scream and throw a tantrum when you take it away.

With adults it's harder. We have self control and dignity. But those idols are there.

Idols of money, like this guy. How do you react when your savings account takes a serious hit? How do you feel when you don't think you'll have enough to go somewhere or do something?

That's often how God tests our hearts: when what we really want is taken away.

Now, here's an interesting little point that Mark makes. **Read 21**

Jesus says "Go, sell all that you have, give to the poor and you'll have what?" Treasure in heaven.

When you die, you can't take any treasure with you. All your bank accounts are worthless to you. But God actually says there's a way to transfer your money into a bank account in heaven.

It's to give it generously to those in need. That's what Jesus says here. Generosity with your money here actually translates into treasure in heaven.

1 Tim. 6:18-19: To the rich...They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Matt 6:4: Give to the needy in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

There's actually a way to transfer our wealth here into heaven. It's to be generous to those in need.

Here's the functional problem with this guy: He doesn't actually believe the treasure in heaven is better than the treasure on earth.

Jesus says give all your money to the poor and you'll be rich forever and ever. **Read 21**

He's sad about that. He doesn't want that. That's not a good promise to him. He wants his treasure here and now, he doesn't want to wait for it.

See, Jesus even promises that if we follow him, we get greater things even in this life. **Read 29-31**

When we follow Jesus, even if we give up some things, we get a whole lot more.

It's kind of crazy to think that most people in life don't have many friends. And if they do they don't share a lot of the same values. I know quite a few unbelievers and I'm one of their few friends. They just don't know anyone. Or if they do they don't get along with them or like them.

But think about just our little church. How many brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers do we have in here? And for the most part we agree on 95% of theology and morals and worldview. That's what the gospel does. When someone comes to Jesus, they don't ever lose anything. There is only gain to be had.

Now, just to be clear: Jesus isn't commanding all people to sell all they have and give it to the poor. Many people think this is a universal command for all Christians at all times. It's not.

Here, Jesus is simply testing this man. He's sifting him, really. He knows that the Kingdom is not valuable to this guy. His greed is stopping him. **Read 22**

Think about that. He's standing in front of God in the flesh and he wants his stuff more than he wants God.

Ray Comfort often uses the analogy that people are drowning in their sin and they have a belt made of solid gold on. And rather than take the belt off and live, they drown to think they can be rich.

Is greed keeping you from the Kingdom? Are your decisions always based on how it will affect you financially in the here and now rather than in the life to come?

Jesus isn't trying to take away anyone's treasure. He's trying to give them eternal treasure, eternal rewards, an eternal family, and eternal blessings that far outweigh anything we have here.

Pray