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SELL EVERYTHING YOU OWN



What's one thing you'd have trouble living without?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

*Choose Jesus or worldly wealth,
because you can't live for both.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

One of my favorite TV shows has an episode where the main character's uncle dies. The uncle wanted to be buried with all his favorite things: baseball cards, old trophies, the helmet he wore in battle—well, you get the idea. He has so much stuff in his casket they spend most of the 22-minute episode trying to figure out how to close the casket without breaking anything.

I enjoy this episode because it is just so silly. We know these things won't be with us when we die, nor will they matter; yet, some people in the world have been buried—or plan to be buried—with their possessions. No, it's true, we "can't take it with us," but it can still be easy to get wrapped up in all our stuff. The things we own are not what bring us closer to God, but in some cases, like with the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, those possessions can tear us away from Him.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 19:16-20

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” ¹⁷ And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁰ The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”

We know three things about the man who came to Jesus: He was young (v. 20). He was rich (v. 22). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He may have been a leader in the synagogue. Many religious leaders questioned Jesus with the intent of trapping Him somehow, but we have no hint of that with this young man. He even called Jesus “Teacher,” and he seemed willing to learn from Him.

What he wanted to learn could be seen as a universal question, one even you may have asked at some time: “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” This young man was trying to secure his way into heaven through the practice of good deeds. It is clear from his answer in verse 20 that, in spite of his actions, he sensed in his spirit something different was needed. I picture him standing next to Jesus and the disciples, writing instrument in hand, waiting for Jesus’ profound answer.

Jesus challenged his way of thinking with a question, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.” This is our first sign that what matters is not the good *we* do but the One who *is* good. The problem comes when we think we can be good in order to gain a right standing with God. We donate to charities. We volunteer our time to great organizations. Overall, we are kind and good people. But we’re sadly mistaken if we do these things in our own version of the “Get into Heaven To-Do” list.

What do you appreciate about this young man who approached Jesus?

QUESTION #2

Jesus gave the young man the checklist he was looking for. Jesus used these six commandments because they would have been familiar to this Jewish man. Most of these six commandments come directly from the Ten Commandments and involve other people. When it came to behavior, the man had done well. But he knew this was not enough. He was still missing something.

The young man may have outwardly obeyed these commandments but his obedience seems to have been out of obligation. Simply obeying the commandments was not enough. God doesn't just want our outward acts. Are our acts good? *Maybe. Probably.* But our acts don't always reveal our hearts. "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). Our hearts determine our motives and actions, and God wants our hearts to obey His call.

Matthew 19:21-22

²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Want to be perfect? OK. Here is what you do: Sell your possessions. Give to the poor because your treasures are in heaven. Follow Jesus. Easy, right?

If Jesus asked you to sell everything you owned in order to follow Him, could you do it? The house. The car. The TV. Your great-grandmother's box of correspondence with your great-grandfather. The crib that's been passed down from generation to generation.

Jesus was asking the young man to make an enormous sacrifice. He wasn't just to sell his possessions; he was to give away the money from the sale! *All of it.* Gone. But let's not get stuck on the possessions.

What's your initial reaction to Jesus' answer in verse 21?

QUESTION #3

Giving up our possessions is not the point of this story. The Gospels record no other time Jesus called anybody to do that. In following Jesus, Zaccheus gave away half of all he owned and paid others four times what he owed them (Luke 19:1-10). In His parable of the minas (or talents), Jesus called us to use what we have wisely for His kingdom (vv. 11-27). So why did Jesus make such a radical demand of this young man? Jesus knew the man loved his worldly possessions more than he loved Jesus.

To follow Jesus is to place Him far above everything in our lives. If those things get in the way of our full devotion and commitment, get rid of them.

I have a few friends who left lucrative and powerful jobs to follow God's call to vocational ministry. Their trust was not in their own abilities or in the jobs they were doing. Their trust was in Jesus. They trusted Him enough to know He would provide for their families.

The rich young ruler would've known that too, had he not walked away. He couldn't do it. His heart was too wrapped around his possessions to give them all up. To him, what he owned was so important that it kept him from truly knowing the Lord.

Initially, the man ran to Jesus, fell on his knees, and was ready to do anything to secure his place in heaven (Mark 10:17). Well, almost anything. The young man wanted eternal life, but not at that cost. Ultimately, it was his possessions that owned him. And with that, he missed out on something far greater.



How does Jesus' instruction to this young man apply to us all?

QUESTION #4

Matthew 19:23-26

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Jesus made a profound statement to His disciples as the rich young man walked away—and He uttered it twice: It’s hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. When the disciples heard this, they were confused. People commonly believed wealth was a sign of God’s blessing. If a person was rich, he was thought to be the perfect candidate for heaven. On top of that, this ruler was a great guy by anyone’s standard. He obeyed the Law and was respected by people.

So why is it so hard for the rich to enter heaven? So long as their wealth takes priority, they lack the relationship with God that He desires. They depend on what they have instead of depending on God. That’s true for us too. When we find our identity in Jesus and not in the things of this world, we experience:

- ▶ **Freedom.** When we trust and follow Jesus, the chains of bondage break, allowing us to live in freedom. We no longer have to live in anger, bitterness, self-doubt, and rage.
- ▶ **Peace.** The peace we seek and desire comes from Jesus—and only Jesus.
- ▶ **Joy.** “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

The rich young ruler missed all this. We cannot be “all in” for Jesus while obsessing over the things we own. It’s impossible to have the mind of Christ when our thoughts are consumed with our financial portfolio. Our relationship with God should be the center of everything upon which we set our hearts.

In what ways can wealth and possessions get in the way of following Jesus?

QUESTION #5

INVENTORY TIME

Take an inventory of your possessions and priorities by answering the questions below. Then write a prayer to God honestly bearing your soul to Him regarding your possessions.

If you were asked to sell everything you own, what would be the five most difficult things for you to give up? Why?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Prayer:

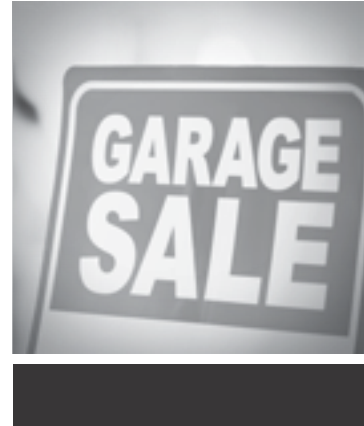
"He is no fool who gives what he cannot
keep to gain that which he cannot lose!"

—JIM ELLIOT

LIVE IT OUT

Having wealth isn't wrong unless it gets in the way of our relationship with Christ. Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Trust.** If you've been trying to be good and moral in order to gain a good standing with God, acknowledge the futility of it. Trust Christ and be obedient to His Word as a response to His grace in your life. See the inside cover of this book for help.
- ▶ **Audit.** Walk through your home and look at the things you own. Review each line of your financial statement. What do these possessions and purchases say about what's important to you? Consider ways you can use these things for God.
- ▶ **Sell.** Sell what you don't need or give it away. If you have possessions that consume your time in an unhealthy way or tempt you to focus on anything but Christ, sell it. Don't let anything come between you and following Christ.



God may not call all of us to give everything away, but He does desire that He be at the center of our lives. Let's make sure that's the case in our lives!

My thoughts