

“Wealth Beyond Measure” – Pr. Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 21 – October 17, 2021

- I. **Mark 10:21** – ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”
- II. **I read an article in The Atlantic on life in America...**
 - a. It basically pointed out the irony of our lives getting more comfortable over time, but our happiness going down.
 - b. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that, when you adjust for inflation, the average household income was at its highest point ever in 2019.
 - i. Every segment of society (at least on paper) is making more money – but an interesting difference is how these different segments spend their money...for example, lower income earners eat out 22% more than 15 years ago.
 - ii. Government services increased significantly – from education, training, employment, and social services – they increased by 30% over 20 years.
 - iii. New homes in America that were built in 2016 were 1,000 square feet larger than in 1973... and living space per person, on average, has nearly doubled.
 - iv. The number of Americans who use the internet increased from 52% to 90% percent in the last 20 years, and people using social media went from 5% to 72% in the last 15 years.
 - c. But here’s the kicker... even though our quality of life has increased on nearly every level – and in every income segment – happiness is decreasing on average.
 - i. Since 1988, the General Social Survey shows a long-term, gradual decline in happiness.¹
 - d. So, I realize there are plenty of people who would like to debate statistics like that, but we cannot deny that we’ve seen huge progress in medicine, technology, and overall quality of life.
 - i. Yet, we can also see a great sense of despair, hopelessness, addiction, and depression... and many people just giving up
 - e. The underlying principle I want us to consider today is that God’s creation cannot satisfy the deeper emotional and spiritual needs in people.
 - i. In the first article of the Apostle’s Creed, we say, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth”
 1. What we are saying is that God the Father gives us all good things in creation – taking care of our needs with food, water, shelter, money, family and friends.
 2. However, some people equate happiness with God’s creation – and this will always lead to loss.

- ii. What I mean is that creation is broken by sin just like we are, and it breaks down, loses value, gets stolen, or changes in a split second.
- iii. If we think the good things God gives us in creation will make us happy, we will experience loss.

III. **The rich man helps us today.**

- a. I was very interested to hear Pastor Phil Brandt present on the topic of early Church history at our pastor conference a couple of weeks ago...
 - i. One of the big points he made is that this section of Scripture, where the rich man fails to give up his wealth, became the reason many wealthy people gave everything to the Church and lived like monks.
 - 1. You see, they were hearing that rich people don't go to heaven (or it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, vs. 25) so they decided wealth had to go...
 - ii. However, the intention of this passage is not necessarily telling us to give up everything like it seems to say – But again, Jesus is telling us where to place our trust.
- b. The rich man approaches Jesus, and he's probably genuine in wanting to know how he receives eternal life...
 - i. Now, I want to emphasize that he says, "what do I do?" (vs 17) – so he's looking for a way he can do something to be saved...
- c. Jesus opens the exchange by pointing out the commandments of God... which the man has kept his whole life
 - i. Now, everyone in that time would have looked at a guy who is wealthy like that AND kept the commandments as being especially blessed by God and would be saved for sure.
- d. And this is where it gets good... everyone is probably on the edge of their seats wondering what Jesus will say – and this was a tense moment...
- e. So Jesus looked at him and loved him...
 - i. Jesus can tell that something is missing – and He zooms in on the exact nature of the problem – this man might outwardly show his dedication to God, but inwardly he lacks trust in God alone.
 - ii. So Jesus invites the man – you might say it's a loving invitation – to give up all he has and follow Him.
- f. The response? Gloomy and depressed, he decides to walk away with God's good gifts of creation – without God's good gift of salvation.

IV. **What is our response to the invitation?**

- a. I don't think that God wants every person to give up their home and family, along with all their possessions and money so that they can be a Christian.
- b. And yet, what does it mean to be a Christian? What does following Jesus look like?
- c. For one thing, being a Christian isn't just going through the motions –

- i. We don't just go to church, pray, give of our finances, do the right thing and then get this reward of eternal life one day –
 - 1. In fact there are probably many people who do all of those things but have no faith in God
 - d. Being a Christian is a simple faith in Jesus Christ – like the little children we heard about a couple of weeks ago.
 - e. Following Jesus is trusting Him over and above the wealth, or the doctors, or the career, or the family, or the relationships... or anything else God gives us to bless our lives.
 - f. You don't have to become a monk... or a nun... or a deaconess... or a pastor to follow Jesus – you don't even have to give up your possessions – but you do have to trust in Him more than any of those things.
 - g. That is so simple, yet so difficult – because we can see and feel and hear these things around us that give us comfort, but they do not give us happiness... or eternal life.
- V. **Eternal life comes in only one way...**
 - a. It comes through Jesus, the Way and the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6)
 - b. As the rich man sought to do the right things to receive eternal life, Jesus offers it by what He did on the cross.
 - c. It sure doesn't seem fair, does it?
 - i. Jesus goes through all the torture and beating... only to be rejected and abandoned... and finally executed on a cross... all so that He could pay for our sins
 - 1. He died for the sins of looking to the world to meet our needs and finding ways to push God out.
 - 2. Jesus spilled His blood to cover the sins of trusting in ourselves and our possessions more than seeking His will.
 - ii. His sacrifice was our benefit... so that we don't have to DO anything to inherit eternal life – because it was completed on the cross and by the empty tomb.
 - d. You know why Jesus did that for you? Love.
 - e. Just like He loved the rich man... He loves you more than anything... and He wants for you to place your trust in Him.
 - i. He isn't looking for you to give up all you have... unless it gets in the way of looking to Him for all your needs and life.
 - f. You see, following Jesus is not about preserving, fighting and possessing... it's actually about surrender.
 - g. Surrender your will, your life, and all you have to Him – and He will do the heavy lifting.
 - h. In fact, surrendering our will and lives to Jesus gives us wealth beyond measure – not money and possessions – but the crown of life (Rev 2:10)
 - i. Jesus looks at you and loves you...

- j. He knows that creation cannot bring true joy, but following Him – trusting Him – is the key to a life well-lived... and a life that never ends. Amen.

¹ *Arthur C. Brooks, "Are We Trading Our Happiness for Modern Comforts?" The Atlantic (10-22-20)*