

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

April 2023

MATERIAL RICHES VERSUS SPIRITUAL RICHES

In His “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7), Jesus addressed a variety of topics. Multitudes delight in studying this sermon, but when it comes to Jesus’ teachings on money, we often get a bit uncomfortable. Many a penitent Christian has confessed adultery, addiction, or theft, but how often has a Christian brokenheartedly confessed, “I am greedy”?

A humorous story is told of a long-ago preacher’s sermon from Isaiah 40:31, telling the congregation how they needed to progress from walking, to running, and then to flying! The preacher thundered, “If this congregation is to run, it will take commitment!” The congregation eagerly replied, “Let it run, preacher, let it run!” He then cried out, “And, it will take work!” to which the congregation excitedly answered, “Let it run, preacher, let it run!” Finally, the preacher shouted, “And if we are to mount up with eagles’ wings and fly, it will take financial sacrifice!” and the congregation responded . . . “Let it walk, preacher, let it walk!” Though the story is likely a mere anecdote, it sadly illustrates many Christians’ attitudes toward earthly riches versus spiritual riches.

Historically, humans tend toward two extremes: “poverty theology,” thinking earthly treasure is itself somehow bad or sinful; and “prosperity theology,” thinking earthly wealth is a reward for righteousness. Jesus, however, teaches “proper theology” toward earthly treasure—to realize all material wealth is God’s, and humans are merely temporary stewards. In Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus speaks about treasure and our relation to it. The text’s key concept is “**singular**.”

Jesus speaks of singular treasure. Verses 19-21 clearly imply all are laying up treasure somewhere—on earth or in heaven. Interestingly, “treasure” is the Greek word *thesauros*, which is never translated “money.” This is about more than just money. While not everyone has a lot of *money*, everyone does have *treasure*. And, truly, laying up treasure on earth is a foolish investment! Earthly treasure corrupts, is stolen, or is eventually lost in the inevitable end of all mankind—death. Heavenly treasure, however, is susceptible to none of these foes! People inevitably gravitate toward what they treasure. If one’s heart is set on heaven, that is where his treasure will be.

Jesus speaks of singular vision. Jesus contrasts a “good” eye with a “bad” one (6:22,23). The human body’s actions typically are directed according to the light received by the eye(s). If one’s eyes are faulty, he will stumble, as if in the dark. The idea of a “good eye” is a clean, pure heart that is set on heaven (and, thus, laying up treasure in heaven). When it comes to earthly riches versus spiritual riches, let us all walk in the light of God’s word (Psalm 119:105).

Jesus speaks of a singular master. Verse 24 is clear: “*No one can serve two masters.*” If one is a Christian, he belongs to Jesus and is His bondservant (Romans 6:16-18). One cannot be the Lord’s servant and a servant to earthly riches at the same time. It has been rightly said, “Money is a wonderful servant, but a lousy master.” Christians, when it comes to material riches (and life), remember, “*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Dear reader, where is your treasure? More specifically, where is your heart? “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:21). Do you have singular vision, fixed on “*a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Corinthians 5:1)? Is Jesus your singular Master? Remember Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?*”

Take this four-part test regularly to help assess your attitude toward material riches versus spiritual riches. (1) **The Durability Test** – How long will my “treasure” last? Is my “treasure” temporal or eternal? (2) **The Heart Test** – Where am I investing my time and money? Where is my heart, *really* – in heaven or on earth? (3) **The Mind Test** – Where do I focus my efforts and goals? Am I committed to material things or spiritual things? Do I live life based on God’s priorities or my own? (4) **The Master Test** – Is Jesus my Master, or is it something else? Do I serve Jesus or another? And remember. . . **He** knows (Hebrews 4:13)!

“*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:1,2).

-- Chad Dollahite

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING ASA

Asa was the third king of Judah, and he ruled for forty-one years. We can read in 1 Kings 15 and 2 Chronicles 14-16 about his time on the throne. Because he was king for so long, Asa was a contemporary with the first seven kings of the Northern Kingdom, which means while he was king in Judah, seven different kings sat on the throne in Israel.

Here is Jehovah's overall appraisal of Asa's life: "*And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God*" (2 Chronicles 14:2). The Bible also says, "*Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did his father David*" (1 Kings 15:11). Asa is one of only four kings in Judah about whom it is written that they walked in the ways of David (the other three were Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah).

Asa was a reformer, as he worked to remove idolatry in Judah and bring the people back to the Lord (1 Kings 15:12-15; 2 Chronicles 14:2-5; 15:8). In that regard, "*He commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers, and to observe the law and the commandment*" (2 Chronicles 14:4). He obviously understood what was best for the well-being of God's people, and when the Lord blessed them with rest and peace, he was wise enough to remind the people that the Lord was responsible for such a blessing, not the king himself (2 Chronicles 14:6,7).

A study of King Asa is fascinating. Here are some specific lessons which we can learn from his life:

(1) We already noted that Asa charged the people to comply with God's law. As God's children, it is not enough for us personally to seek to do the Lord's will. Like Asa did, we must try to influence those around us to seek God and do His will, too (2 Chronicles 14:4).

(2) Asa understood that the Lord was Judah's only hope and that His power and character are unchanged, regardless of how many humans stand with him or oppose Him. When Asa and Judah faced what appeared to be an unconquerable army of the Ethiopians — a force of one million soldiers, Asa cried out to Jehovah, saying, "*Lord, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God . . .*" (2 Chronicles 14:11). That is a great attitude to imitate!

(3) The plain principles of 2 Chronicles 15:2 are ongoing and meaningful for all people. God's message to Asa was, "*The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.*" Those who seek the Lord on His terms find Him. How encouraging! It is clear, too, that God being with an

individual, or a group of people, is conditional on them walking with Him. If a child of God chooses to forsake Him, His response will be to forsake them. He does not stop loving them, but He will not be in fellowship with darkness. It is a spiritual disaster when one departs from the living God (Hebrews 3:12)

(4) Hearing God's word can strengthen us and motivate us to make the right choices. Notice this specific example: "*And when Asa heard these words and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and removed the abominable idols from all the land . . . and he restored the altar of the LORD . . .*" (2 Chronicles 15:8). If we will humble ourselves and receive what the Lord says, that can build us up and cause us to be prepared to receive our heavenly inheritance (Acts 20:32).

(5) Asa showed admirable boldness in taking action against the queen mother who sinned. As the king carried out reforms throughout the land, "*Also he removed Maachah, the mother of Asa the king, from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah, and Asa cut down her obscene image, then crushed and burned it by the Brook Kidron*" (2 Chronicles 15:16). Asa realized that what the word of God says applies to all people, regardless of their relationship with us or others. When our friends or family members make choices which violate God's word, we need to be consistent: we must not support them in their wrongdoing or act as if what they have done is acceptable in God's sight.

(6) In the face of military invasion from the king of Israel, Asa's faith faltered. He showed that by running to the king of Syria to provide protection from Israel (2 Chronicles 16:1-9). Wait a minute. Is this not the same Asa who earlier had turned to the Lord for help when Judah faced military invasion? Yes, it is. Sadly, his faith wavered. Hanani, a prophet of God, described to Asa what the king had done when he turned to humans to rescue him: "*. . . you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the LORD your God . . . In this you have done foolishly*" (16:7,9). As we face trials in life, we need to learn to put our *complete* trust in Jehovah instead of other humans and what they have to offer (Psalm 20:7-9).

(7) The Lord wants our hearts to be loyal to Him. Hear what God's prophet told Asa: "*For the eyes of the LORD run to and from throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him*" (2 Chronicles 16:9). Our amazing Creator is worthy of our praise and total allegiance. May our loyalty to Him be unwavering!

-- Roger D. Campbell

Jesus — the Lion

In Revelation chapter four, over and over we read about the throne in heaven and the One who sits on it. In the next chapter, the picture is expanded to show the One on the throne holding a scroll in His right hand. John, who was allowed to see into the throne room of heaven, wept because “*no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll*” (Revelation 5:4).

The response John received was, “*Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals*” (5:5). In fact, it was a Lamb who came forth and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne (5:6). Thus, in this instance, the Lion and the Lamb refer to the same scroll-taker.

According to Revelation 5:5, the Lion was of/from the tribe of Judah. The Israelites knew that the Messiah must come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9,10), and a lion was that tribe’s emblem. The Bible affirms that “*our Lord arose from Judah*” (Hebrews 7:14), meaning that Jesus came from that tribe.

In addition, the Lion is called “*the Root of David*” (Revelation 5:5). Per Old Testament prophecy, not only must the Christ be from the tribe of Judah, He also must come from the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1,10) and be the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:12-14). Jesus was. He was a Root of Jesse (Romans 15:12) and “*of the seed of David*” (2 Timothy 2:8).

All of that information helps us to identify Jesus the Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. But why a lion? Why use *that* animal as a symbol of God’s Son? In Proverbs 30:30, we read about one majestic part of God’s amazing universe: “*A lion, which is mighty among beasts and does not turn away from any.*”

People often refer to a lion as “the king of the beasts,” noting their amazing strength. Or, we may speak of someone having “the heart of a lion” or “the strength of a lion.” The strength of the Lord Jesus is unmatched! He displayed spiritual strength when He overcame the devil in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). He showed strength when He chose to do the Father’s will at all times (John 8:29), regardless of the outcome.

The Christ showed strength when He cleansed the temple on more than one occasion (John 2:13-17). His strength was manifested when He defended God’s truth against all who opposed or distorted it in any fashion (Mark 7:1-13).

Those who sought to strike fear into the heart of Jesus failed miserably. He displayed the strength and courage of a lion. Jesus, the Lamb led to the slaughter, was also the relentless Lion. Let us praise Him!

-- Roger D. Campbell

Lessons from 1 John 2:12-17

The first half of this section deals with overcoming (2:12-14). Here is the great news for those who strive to overcome the wicked one, that is, Satan:

- Christians are forgiven people (2:12). Allow that marvelous truth to lift your spirits today!
- Christians know God, who is from the beginning (2:13,14; 2:3-6).
- Christians are able to overcome the wicked one (2:13). Recall the armor of God (Ephesians 6).
- Christians can be strong spiritually (2:14). Note the connections: (1) be strong, (2) have the word of God abide in you, and (3) overcome the devil (2:14). We are strong and able to overcome the tempter only when God’s word abides in us! When it does, we are more than conquerors via the One who loves us! (Romans 8:37).
- We are not told the name of one single saint to whom John wrote this epistle. It is undeniable, though, that those unnamed folks were strong servants of the Lord (2:12-14). Reminder: you do not have to be famous in order to be faithful!

The second portion of the passage deals with not loving the world (2:15-17). The clear command is, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world*” (2:15). If one is a world-lover, the love of the Father is not in him. The Bible says so (2:15). We must not love that which the Lord deems to be evil, we must not love earthly activities and pleasures more than we love God, and we must not be so attached to life on earth that we are not ready to let go of it for eternity.

The world that Jesus’ disciples must not imitate or love is the world dominated by sinful desires and sinful actions. “*For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world*” (2:16). The tempter successfully used that three-fold approach (lust of flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life) with Eve, and he continues to employ the same today. Beware! Satan wants us to think that fleshly, worldly, sensual appeals are innocent. Soul-destroying, yes . . . Innocent, no.

John’s concluding statement in this passage reads, “*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever*” (2:17). Something is temporary, and something is never-ending. The world and its lust bring “*the passing pleasures of sin*” (Hebrews 11:25), but if you and I want to have an enjoyable eternity, we will commit ourselves to do the Father’s will. In this context, doing His will includes refusing to love the world.

Eternity motivates us to be strong and overcome!

-- Roger D. Campbell

THE CHALLENGE TO MAINTAIN A STABLE, UNWAVERING FAITH

It is very clear as you go through the entire Bible that it can be challenging to maintain faithfulness to God and His commands. Abraham was a man of faith who obeyed God when he moved from his homeland (Genesis 12:1-9) and offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-19). And yet, on two different occasions, Abraham lied when he said his wife, Sarah, was his sister (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18).

David is referred to as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), and yet David stumbled into sin in his life (2 Samuel 11:1-27). The apostle Peter, who said he would die for Jesus (Matthew 26:35), did not remain true to his strong convictions when he later denied Jesus three times (Luke 22:54-62). And, of course, the entire Old Testament book of Judges is a cycle where God's people, the children of Israel: would turn away from God, then God would punish them, then they would cry out to God for help, and after He delivered them, they would return to faithfulness. All of this, only to begin the cycle again.

As Christians who have the benefit of hindsight, we often get frustrated when we read these accounts. We shake our head and wonder how anyone could turn their back on God. However, as we have already pointed out, consistency is hard. Let us notice the challenge we face and then some advice from God's word to help us.

The challenge that we face to maintain our faith is two-fold. First, we face a most difficult enemy. Peter describes him as ". . . walking about . . . a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He never rests from his labors to draw people away from God. This is a challenge for us as human beings. We tend to want to relax at times. When we feel as if we have done enough or accomplished a level of faithfulness, we want to take a break. But that is exactly when the devil will attack and cause us to stumble. The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44), and he uses many lies to get us to lose faith in God. It is a challenge to maintain an unwavering faith because he will never stop trying to draw us away from God.

The second challenge that we face is ourselves. When Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He said, "*Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" (Matthew 26:41). The apostle Paul would express it in the book of Romans as, "... *For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do*" (Romans 7:15). Both Jesus and Paul are articulating that sometimes, even though we try as hard as we can, we still fall short of doing what we

should. We know what God has told us to do and we want to be obedient. However, we get in our own way, and we transgress the law of God.

The challenge we face is to resist the devil (James 4:17) and to bring ourselves into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). Thanks be to God, though, that He has not left us without help in knowing how to handle these challenges.

Let us first go back to Peter's statement regarding our great adversary and notice that Peter also instructs us to "*Be sober, be vigilant . . .*" (1 Peter 5:10). We might also say to be self-controlled and watchful. Do not try to convince yourself to just ignore ". . . *all the fiery darts of the wicked one*" (Ephesians 6:16), but be on guard.

This leads us to a second action we can take: put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20). Each part of the armor is for our benefit as we fight off the devil. We put it on so we can ". . . *be strong in the Lord . . .*" and "*be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*" (6:10, 11).

We can also lean upon each other when we feel as if we are weak or wavering. In Galatians 6:1-5, Paul would encourage those Christians to help each other in their sin and temptations. And to other Christians he writes, "*Comfort one another and edify one another. . .*" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). What a blessing to have people to lean on in the challenges of this life!

Ultimately, if we want to maintain a stable faith, we must stay in a strong relationship with God. "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*" (James 4:8). A strong relationship is built upon communication. God has spoken to us through His word, and if we want to maintain our faith, we must read His word. And if we want to speak to God, we must be constant in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Praise be to God that His promises are sure. And He promises us that we can receive the ultimate reward if we will face the challenges of this life and remain firm in our faith. Paul's encouragement is to "*not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart*" (Galatians 6:9). The challenge is stiff, but the task is not impossible. Turn to God, His word, and His church, and you can maintain a faith that is stable and unwavering.

-- Joel Danley

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