

Enjoy the Riches of God's Kingdom

✦ **Empty wealth (vv.18-23)**

✦ **Entry wonder (vv.24-27)**

In the name of CHRIST THE KING, dear royal subjects and heirs of everlasting life:

How many here today are sure Jesus' words to this rich young ruler have nothing to do with you? Teen agers? Still at home or supported in school by your parents? Would you say with most Americans, "I'm not rich!" Maybe we pastors contribute to the misunderstanding by saying things like, "Jesus was speaking to a man who worshiped his wealth." No wealth, no such worship – why worry? ***"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*** If we could not pick up a bar of gold with our bare hands, how could we pick up God's gold? To truly **Enjoy the Riches of God's Kingdom** we first need to clean our hearts of...

✦ **Empty wealth (vv.18-23)**

A local businessman was feeling down last week – worse than just the economy. A customer had told him his personal wealth was around \$104,000,000. In 2008, the man complained he lost everything. A few months later he drove up in a new Mercedes. "Why did you say you lost everything?" my friend had to ask. His reply? "When I say, 'Everything,' it means I'm down to only about \$2,000,000."

The rich young man who ran up to Jesus could not relate either. Mark's Gospel reports he fell on his knees: ***"Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*** "Rich people" can have everything, yet own nothing. Once my wealthy boss came out with tears in his eyes: "In just a few seconds I lost \$5,000 in the Stock Market!" It was like me losing \$5, but it ruined his day. This rich young man had not lost a thing, yet his impoverished soul thought he could earn an inheritance of eternal life.

Does Jesus' answer seem strange? The man calls Jesus, ***"Good teacher,"*** but Jesus wants him to understand He is so much more. To be truly "good" means Jesus is God Himself. To appreciate that we first have to see how good we are not.

Which is why Jesus does something illegal for a hunter. Shining a high powered spotlight into the forest is not legal for hunting deer, but it's Jesus' way to help us see our dark poverty of soul. It makes us feel about as good as a patient whose doctor just diagnosed cancer. But this sickness, if caught in time, has a 100% cure rate with Christ. So Jesus says, ***"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"***

The rich young man obviously missed Catechism. Otherwise, he would have known better than to claim, ***"All these I have kept since I was a boy."*** He says he literally *guarded* God's commands since youth. Yet his soul feels empty. See why Jesus gave this prescription? ***"You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*** ***When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was a man of great wealth.***

Sound harsh? Maybe so if your faith is only a baby blanket wrapped around your heart to keep out the cold, cruel world. Christian self-denial has never been in style. We may be willing to pick up our cross and follow Jesus if it's a plastic cross with no slivers, and the path always leads downhill. But what happens when God tells us to give up the ***"one thing"*** we cherish most? Health, wealth or family in a tragic accident? What is the ***"one thing"*** you feel you could not live without? Does it come between you and God? Then it is your god. Whatever has our heart, that is our idol, our false god.

Our friend and brother, Mark Santelman, who has been helping us with prison ministry in Lino Lakes tells me the students at our Lutheran Day School near Winthrop, Minnesota, are all sure their classmates Trevor and Dillon Sommers are in heaven. “The adults may be grieving more than the children.” Internet comments about the tragic car accident bear that out. Some blame texting or lack of seatbelts. Others say, “They’ve suffered enough.” Some say the boys are in heaven, but where is mention of Jesus’ our Savior’s Name on these boys in their Baptism? Jesus says in the verses right before our text: **“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”** (Luke 18:16f NIV) According to the Lord’s own promise those boys are in heaven. And all the fun they had on earth has burst out in unbridled joy in the presence of CHRIST THE KING.

Sometimes we need to **Empty wealth** to see how **Empty wealth** really is. To walk away from Jesus can only make our souls **“very sad,”** very lost, very dead in that place where all the money in the world cannot buy a drop of water to cool your tongue. Unless we heed Jesus’ call to bank in heaven, earth’s wealth can only drag us down to hell. Self denial for the soul is like kicking off the cement blocks on Mafioso feet. But no one can do it alone.

✠ **Entry wonder (vv.24-27)**

This is why I thank my God for two Calls in recent years to say with a contrite heart, “Lord, I’ll leave it all if you want me to.” Thank God when your portfolio can no longer be your god. Thank God when hardship takes you down to where Job could soar in victorious faith: **“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** (Job 19:25–27 NIV) Freed from idols, our hearts are rich beyond earth’s best. We **Enjoy the Riches of God’s Kingdom** on our knees. None of us can really choose our losses, illnesses, job changes any more than we can choose our own medicine. But our gracious God turns our losses into blessings and our hearts to praise. God loves us too much to let us walk away sad. His love hunts us down and hauls us in to **Entry wonder**. Jesus loved this rich young man too much not to tell him the truth.

Even kids understand **“how hard it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”** Jesus says, **“What is impossible with men is possible with God.”** Stick with Jesus long enough, and childlike faith finds relief. You find **Entry wonder** into **“the kingdom of God.”** Here God gives us His gold of love, joy and peace. Here we don’t do surgery on our souls. One of my daughters says a professor claimed you could operate on your own brain because your brain has no nerves. As far as I know, none of his students tried it. One man set up mirrors to take out his own pancreas, but you cannot see sin in your soul.

God our Savior, the Great Physician is willing and able. A poverty stricken leper knelt and said, **“Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean,”** **Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.”** (Matthew 8:2f NIV) Before Jesus we are beggars all. But when He cleans our hearts with His full and free forgiveness, not a guilty spot remains of inbred greed and materialism. We put the **Riches of God’s Kingdom** in the bank with men like that little tax collector in the sycamore fig tree. Zacchaeus found a way to thank God for freeing him from **Empty wealth** to enjoy **Entry wonder** into **God’s Kingdom**. **“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”** **Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”** (Luke 19:8–10)

He saved you and me. And by Word and sacrament, God gives us faith to receive this great salvation. Faith needs no command from God how much or how often to give. We’re glad for His counsel, glad for His good examples, glad to see how generously our God loves to bless us – most of all with the forgiveness of our sins, new life and salvation. Having Christ, you really do have everything. As the hymn writers put it, “Take the world, but give me Jesus.” “How Great Thou Art!” Amen.

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