Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Poverty of Riches/ The Riches of Poverty
Scripture: Matthew 19:23-29
Code: 2344

The Poverty of Riches/The Riches of Poverty
Let's look together at Matthew chapter 19. It's our great privilege this morning to open the Word of God. And what a sacred trust it is. It's my constant prayer in my heart before the Lord that I would be able in some way to rightly represent to you the meaning and significance of God's Word. It is a holy trust and demands our great heart attention as we look together at what the Spirit of God would teach us.

We're looking at verses 23 to 29 of Matthew chapter 19. It is a section of teaching from our Lord that follows the incident with the rich young ruler. You'll remember that the rich young ruler had come to the Lord and he said, "What do I need to do to obtain eternal life?" That's a fair question. He came with the right attitude, he came running, it says in Mark. He came kneeling. He came to the right person. He asked the right question. His heart was eager and anxious and unembarrassed.

And the Lord effectively said to him, you're not ready to be saved until two things occur. Number one, you recognize your sin. Instead of giving him the gospel, instead of giving him grace, Jesus gave him law. And He listed the commandments and the young man had the audacity and the self-deception to say all these things have I kept. What lack I yet? Incredible. That man couldn't be saved because he wouldn't recognize his sin.

And the second thing the Lord did was tell him to sell everything he had, give it to the poor, come and follow Him. And he wouldn't do that either. That is the second demand that is an element of salvation and that is He demanded that the man submit himself to His Lordship. Jesus was saying you must acknowledge your sin and you must acknowledge that I have the right to give directions in your life. He wouldn't do either. He went away sorrowing.

Sorrowing why? Well, Mark says he even went away with his face gloomy, glum, drawn, dropped. He really wanted eternal life. But the terms of our Lord were an impassable barrier to him. And out of that experience, the Lord teaches about true riches and true poverty. The things that are really valuable and the things that are not. And so, I'd like to entitle this passage, "The poverty of riches and the riches of poverty."

There's a verse in Proverbs which sums up the lesson of our text. It's chapter 13, verse 7 and it says this, "There is he that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing. And there is he that maketh himself poor

yet hath great riches." Paradoxical.

Now, we're all aware that the Bible has a lot to say about riches and a lot to say about poverty. And maybe nothing is any more direct or clear or significant than this particular section taught by our Lord. The young man was a tragedy. He fits into the category of Luke 14:33 where Jesus said, "Whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he has cannot be My disciple." And what he held on to was self-righteousness and possessions. He could not come to the point of repentance for his sin and he could not come to the point where he would affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ and submit himself to that no matter what it costs.

Oh, he wanted eternal life. Sure he did. He really wanted it. But he wanted his self-righteousness more. He wanted eternal life but he wanted his riches more. And so he had to forfeit salvation. You see, it isn't that he didn't understand salvation. It isn't that he didn't understand that he needed it. It's just this, the price was too high. It would have cost him the admission that he was a sinner and it would have cost him the subjection of everything he owned to Jesus Christ...too high. He wouldn't pay the price. And the lesson we learned last time when we studied that account is that if someone wants anything more than Jesus Christ, they forfeit Christ.

Jesus could have succumbed to his terms. Making disciples on their own terms is quite easy...quite easy. They're easily won and they're easily lost. He could have gained that man on his own terms and would have perhaps created a temporarily enthusiastic follower who would have turned out to be a second Judas.

Now out of that incident with that rich young man comes some profound teaching about true riches. Let's look, first of all, at the poverty of riches in verses 23 to 26...the poverty of riches. "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you that a rich man shall with difficulty enter into the Kingdom of heaven." Now let me just say at the outset. We've seen the term "Kingdom of heaven" again and again. It is synonymous with the term "Kingdom of God." That's clear from verse 24 where He makes reference to the same thing and calls it the "Kingdom of God." They're used interchangeably. They simply mean the sphere of God's gracious rule. They are synonyms with eternal life. They are synonyms with everlasting life. Synonyms with salvation.

The young man said, "What do I have to do," verse 16, "to attain...to inherit or attain eternal life?" And here Jesus calls that eternal life entering into the Kingdom of heaven. So it's just a term referring to salvation. Now that is its non- technical usage. We could get into development of that but we've done it in the past. Suffice it to say, this statement by our Lord is clearly, "I say unto you that a rich man shall with difficulty enter salvation." It's very difficult for rich people to be saved. That's what He said...very difficult.

You see, the young man was not willing to forsake all and follow. And Jesus had said this many times. Matthew 10:38, He said, "If you're not willing to lose your life, you'll never find it." "If you're not willing to take up your cross and follow Me, and deny yourself," Luke 16...Matthew 16, "you're not going to be My disciple." I mean, over and over He said that. And even to this rich young man, in the Mark account, chapter 10, verse 21, He says to him, "You must sell all you have, take up your cross and follow Me." Take up your cross meaning be willing to die. You've got to abandon everything, even your own life if I require it. I may not but you've got to be willing to do that.

In other words, you come bare and naked through the narrow gate. And the man was not willing to admit his sinfulness and he was not willing to say no to all that he possessed. The price was too high.

So, Jesus draws this conclusion. "Truly," verily means truly, it is a point of emphasis, "I say to you that a rich man shall with difficulty, duskolos," that word is only used three times in the New Testament and it's each time used in this account, in the account in Matthew, in the account in Mark and the account in Luke. It says that our Lord used this word. Now we then have to take its meaning out of these accounts. So it is difficult for a rich man to enter salvation.

How difficult is it? We've got to get a definition from that word and since it's not used anywhere else, it's hard to use other Scriptures to define the degree of difficulty. So we ask just how difficult is it? And the answer comes in the next verse. Here's how difficult it is, "And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." How difficult is it for a rich man to get saved? It's the same difficulty...no, it's a greater difficulty than to stuff a camel through the eye of a needle.

Now you say, "What in the world is the Lord trying to say here?" Well, just take it at face value. How difficult is it to stick a camel through the eye of a needle? It's so difficult it's impossible. You can't put a camel through the eye of a needle. You say, "Well what in the world did this phrase...why does He use this phrase, where did it come from?" Well, you see, it was a colloquialism. In fact, we found in the Talmud a saying that was used in Persia, "It is harder...It is easier, rather, to put an elephant through the eye of a needle." It was just a colloquial phrase used to express something that was impossible. And, of course, since there were no elephants in Palestine and the camel was the largest animal, the Lord simply uses the colloquialism only He substitutes a camel for an elephant. It was just the way of saying something is impossible.

So, the point of the teaching is: how difficult is it for rich people to get saved? It's impossible. You know what this is saying? It is impossible for rich people to be saved. That's right. Jesus said that. It's impossible.

You say, "Now wait a minute. It's impossible?" That's what it says...impossible, just as impossible as sticking a camel through the eye of a needle. Well, you have to understand that. And, boy, you'd be amazed what people want to do and want to get out of this issue. They want to make it difficult but not impossible. So they say, you see, you see...when it talks about the needle it's referring to a gate. And there was in the wall of Jerusalem a needle gate, it's a little gate, a little small gate. And it was so small that when you wanted to put your camel through there, you had to take the load off the camel's back, you had to take the saddle off the camel's back and you had to get the camel down on all fours and sort of shove them through this needle gate.

You see, the problem with that view is it doesn't say needle gate, it says needle. And we also know that it was a colloquialism that was extant at the time our Lord used it. And we also know there's no needle gate. There wasn't any needle gate. And we also know that Jews aren't stupid. They're not going to jam camels through needle gates when 50 feet down the road is a huge gate. And we also know that if the gate's too small, they're going to make it bigger. There is no needle gate, folks. Where in the world that came from I'll never know.

Somebody else says, no, it's a scribal error. The word is kamelosfor camel and the word is kamilos, a difference of one vowel. And some scribe goofed it up. Kamilosmeans a cable or a rope and it referred to the rope that they anchored a ship with. That doesn't help. You can't stick one of those through a needle either. Plus you can't assume that every scribe all the way along made a mistake. Start doing that with the Bible and you're in a lot of trouble, change letters here and there according to your own whim. No.

And some have suggested that if you could just line up the molecules in a camel, you could shoot him through the eye of a needle. And one guy even suggested that if you reduced a camel to liquid, you could eyedrop him through the eye of a needle.

It is not difficult to enter the Kingdom, it is impossible...it's impossible. Now listen to Mark 10:23 and 24, just listen to what it says. "And Jesus looking around said to His disciples, How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God." But not only that, the next verse, "And the disciples were amazed at His words, but Jesus answered again and said to them, Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God." And He goes from the rich people to everybody. It is hard to get saved. How hard is it? It's impossible.

And so, the message of our Lord is on the impossibility of salvation. It is impossible to be saved. It is exactly what our Lord had in mind, of course, in Matthew chapter 7 when He said, "Narrow is the gate and narrow is the way and few there be that...what?...that find it." And it's exactly what He had in mind in Matthew chapter 11 verse 12 when He says, "The violent are trying to seize and take by force the Kingdom." In other words, they're struggling and fighting to get their way in. It is exactly what is meant when it says that everyone presses his way into it.

Listen, the rich young ruler wanted to get into the Kingdom. And he came running and kneeling and in a sense pressing his way and violently wanting to get in but it was impossible. It was impossible. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard and few there be that find it." You see, it's impossible.

What do you mean it's impossible? It's impossible to be saved when you come for salvation on your own human terms. You understand that? That's what He's saying. It's impossible. It isn't difficult in the sense of just hard, it's impossible. And He really goes to the extreme here.

And so, Jesus is saying that I demand the impossible. And what that does, in effect, is say that nobody can get saved on their own terms, right? In one fell swoop, He eliminates all work-righteousness systems. He eliminates all man-made salvation. Not only for rich people, but even beyond the rich people, as Mark 10:24, "Little children," He says, "how hard it is to be saved." And we say, "Oh, it's easy. All you have to do is just sign on the dotted line...just believe...put your hand up, or whatever." No, this man came, he was ready to do all that. The Lord put up impassable barriers to him. And when he was insisting on coming on his own terms, it became impossible. He had no power to do it himself. It's what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 13:23 when he asked whether the leopard could change his spots or the Ethiopian could change his skin. And he said, "No more can they do that than you who are accustomed to doing evil can do good." You see, man can't be saved by himself. No amount of works, no amount of religion, no amount of activity, no amount of desire, no amount of willfulness. It's impossible...it's impossible.

And that impossibility of salvation is sort of crystalized in the case of rich people for three reasons. The way that impossibility sort of works itself out in the rich people, let me suggest these to you. First of all, rich people have a false security. That's their particular problem. That's why they can't save themselves. They're obviously unable to do it. And what the barrier to them is the false sense of security. See, rich people don't need God because they've got all their resources. They can buy anything they need. No sense in depending on God.

You know, the city of Laodicea in Asia Minor was the wealthiest of all the cities in Asia Minor. In 60 A.D. it had an earthquake and the city was literally flattened. And the Roman government commissioned some emissaries to go to Laodicea and say the government will give you money to rebuild your city. They said, "We don't want any money from the government, we'll rebuild it ourselves." And the pride of Laodicea was that they raised their entire city out of the ashes without taking a dime from the Roman government. And that attitude spilled over to the church which was the dead...the dead Laodicean church and you remember when the Lord wrote them a letter, He said that you Laodiceans say I am rich, I have prospered and I need nothing and you don't know you're blind and naked and wretched and poor, right?

You see, rich people, people who have all the resources in and of themselves tend to feel smugly complacent. Look at 1 Timothy chapter 6, verse 17, and you'll get a sort of an epistle view of the same thing that Matthew 19 is teaching, same principle. Paul writing to Timothy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells him how to discharge his ministry and 1 Timothy is literally filled with all different aspects of it. He gets around to the rich people here in chapter 6 and in verse 17, he says, "Charge them that are rich in this age, the earthly rich," the people who are banking on their money, the people whose hope is in possessions, "Charge them that they be not high minded," that is snooty, proud, superior, "nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." You see, it is the particular problem of rich people to trust in their uncertain riches because they don't need God. They can buy anything they need. The rich are satisfied to trust in their riches.

And then the Apostle Paul says to Timothy, tell them they ought to do good, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to share. You say, "Why do you tell a rich man that?" Because if he's not willing to do that, then the rest of the gospel doesn't matter, right? Because if he's not willing to submit everything to the Lordship of Christ, they don't need to tell him the rest of it. If a guy comes to you and he's very, very rich, you don't say to him, "Oh, listen, wouldn't you like to ask Jesus in your heart and just accept Him and then we'll worry about all that other stuff later?" That isn't the way the Bible approaches it. If a rich man comes to you and the best question you can ask him is if the Lord Jesus wants every dime you have, will you give it to Him? Oh..oh..oh, and if he won't, that's end of discussion, right?

So, you tell the rich people, he says, do good, rich in good works, ready to distribute, throw it out, give it to people, and willing to share it. And if they'll do that, they'll lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against a time to come that they may lay hold on, it's not eternal life, aionios, it's ontos, real life. Because life does not consist in the abundance of the things a man possesses, Luke 12:15. But these people think real life is in money. You tell them if they'll give it away and distribute it, they'll lay hold on a foundation against a time to come and they'll get a hold of real life.

So that's very much like the story of the rich young ruler. It isn't that you get saved by giving away your money, it's just that you demonstrate if you have a lot of it that you're concerned more with the Lordship of Christ than you are with holding on to your own resources. And when you come to Christ, you come on His terms and the terms are abandonment to Him, forsaking all and following Him. It doesn't mean that He'll take it all away from you. I mean, He may give you back like He did Abraham, way more than you can handle. Or like Job, give you back far more than He ever took from you. But the only issue is not whether He will or won't, it's whether you're willing to let Him do what He will...submitting to His Lordship.

So, you see, it's so difficult for rich people to be saved because they trust in their riches. Secondly, they're bound to this world. Rich people are bound to this world. Go back to verse 6 of 1 Timothy 6, and there it says, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." I mean, have you ever met a contented

person, I mean, a really totally contented person? Most people in our materialistic society aren't content cause they want something else that they don't have. We brought nothing into the world and it's certain we can carry nothing out. No pockets in a corpse, right? Nobody going anywhere with anything.

So, he says in verse 8, "Having food and clothing, be content." Food and clothing, be content...a very convicting verse. And if you're not satisfied with that and all you want to do is be rich, you're just going to fall into temptation, a snare, foolish hurtful lust which drown men in destruction and perdition for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, causes people to err from the faith and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

You see what happens to rich people is they get all tied down to this world. And everything revolves around this world. How much they've got in the bank, how many possessions they've got, how many cars they've got and so forth and so forth. And Jesus said in very clear terms in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there will your...what?...heart be also." And if all a man cares about is here in this world, he has no thought for the heavenly realm. And you see what happens? The gospel comes to that man and all of a sudden he sees all of his money and possessions. The Lord says I'll take it all, please, I'd like to have it all subjected to My Lordship. And he says, "Wait a minute."

And that's exactly what happened, you'll remember, in Mark chapter 4 when the Word was thrown out like seed on soil and it was sewn among the thorns and it says, "The cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things entered in and choked the Word and it became unfruitful." You see, there's some people they hear it, "Oh, isn't that wonderful?" They respond to it but it isn't very long until they are deceived by the substantial riches that they have, until they are bound up in the caring for the things of this world and the lust of possessions and they abandon the gospel. So you have to deal with that first otherwise you're going to get a sham converts.

It's very difficult for rich people to be saved...it's impossible. In fact, it's impossible because in their humanness, they are bound to this world and they live and die for the possessions of this world and they trust in those as their security.

I mean, the big fool that we read about in the Bible is the guy in Luke 12, isn't he? You remember him? "He spoke a parable to them, A ground of a certain rich man," verse 16, "brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do because I have no place to bestow my crops?" Oh really? You can't find a poor man with no food? You can't find all these folks over here who have nothing? You have no where to put your crops, huh? Stash it away, right? "And he said, This will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater and there will I bestow all my crops and my goods." I know what I'll do, I'll give it to me. I'll give it to myself. He couldn't eat it in ten lifetimes. "And I will say to my soul," he had to talk to his soul because he had nobody else to talk to, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Boy, don't think of ever using it for somebody's need,

just stash it. "Take thine ease."

You know what rich people want? Easy life, eat, drink, be merry, retire at 28. "God said, You fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then who shall those things be which thou hast provided, so is he that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Listen, don't stockpile stuff for some unknown future. You are a steward of whatever God's given you. Use it for the advance of His Kingdom, the glory of His name, lay up eternal treasure right now. I really can't get in to too much future stuff when I see needs immediate. But rich people are bound to the world and their only hope is in their money and so they must stash and store. And they've got to do that to accumulate it so they can live a life of ease. And they've got to have enough to support their ease.

So, the rich trust in their riches and are bound to this world. Thirdly, they're selfish. I talked to a guy this week who works for a multi, multi millionaire. He said probably worth about 300 million or more. He said there's three things about him, he said I worked for other ones and he said they all have three things in common. One, they are very, very rich and capable of getting richer. Two, they are very eccentric. And three, they are all extremely selfish...self-centered. The rich are selfish. They're consumptive. They indulge themselves. "Soul, take thine easy, drink and be merry."

You remember the Luke 16, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Probably not a parable but a real story. And the rich man fared sumptuously every day and Lazarus is laying in the gutter with the dogs licking his sore, just begging for some crumbs. What kind of a rich guy is that? I mean, it's got a guy laying out there, the dogs licking his sores and he's leaving him the gutter and won't even give him a few crumbs to eat. What kind of a person is that? That's not a Christlike person, is it? What kind of a person does that? And then that guy winds up in hell and the rich...the beggar winds up in Abraham's bosom being comforted.

The world is full of people who indulge themselves. See, it's impossible for rich people to be saved. They can't get over the hump of their own humanness and they're evil of their own nature which cannot be reversed, manifest itself in the love of money and the love of possessions.

Now, believe me, when Jesus said this, this was a shocking teaching, not only to the rich young ruler but to the disciples. You know what the rich young ruler had been taught? He was...he was involved in rabbinical Judaism, no question because he was probably the ruler of a synagogue. And the rabbis taught this, never give away more than one fifth of what you possess. To do so is unlawful and sinful, they said. It's sinful to give away more than one fifth.

Now they had to make a law about that so they could be holy and still be selfish. You understand that. And so they made that law. And so he had been instructed all along, you just keep piling it up

and piling it up and you call it the blessing of God and you only give away one little part of it and that's how you buy your way into the Kingdom. They actually believed that the richer you were, therefore, the more...the larger your little fifth was and the larger the fifth that you gave away, the more you purchased unto yourself salvation.

For example, did you know that it says in Jewish writings things like this? It is good to do alms rather than treasure up gold for alms deliver from death and they purge away every sin. Did you know that it says this? Alms will atone for sin. The Talmud says, Alms giving is more excellent than all offerings and is equal to the whole law and will deliver from the condemnation of hell and make one perfectly righteous. And alms means giving.

So, the more money you had, the more you could give. The more you gave, the more you purchased for yourself salvation. And the more salvation you were able to purchase, the higher your status went up in the Kingdom. And so they believed the richer you were, the more readily you were able to enter the Kingdom.

Jesus comes along and says the richer you are the harder it is. That is a shocking statement, friends. That is a shocking statement. Because they assumed that rich people got in rather easily.

You want to see how the disciples reacted? Look at verse 25, "When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed." Well, what does that mean? They were dumbfounded. To put it in the vernacular, they were blown away. I mean, they went right out of their sandals. What are You saying? They were dumbfounded. What are You saying the rich people can't enter the Kingdom? This was contrary to everything they'd been taught, everything they knew in their tradition. I mean, rich people could buy all the sacrificial lambs in sight. I mean, they could atone for everything. And they could give their money and drop it in those 13 trumpet-shaped receptacles that lined the court of the women in the temple and they could pay their alms and do their thing and they were just jolted.

But Jesus says the very opposite, it's impossible. No wonder James said, "You rich men, you better weep and howl for what's coming on you," James 5. They were amazed and they asked this question, "Who then can be saved?" I mean, if rich people can't be saved, who can be saved? Who can be saved, poor people? Poor people can't give away alms so they can't buy forgiveness. Poor people can't even buy sacrifices that are very significant. I mean, if rich people can't be saved, who can be saved?

How hard is it for rich people to be saved? Impossible. It's impossible for everybody else, too. And so, Jesus says, verse 26, "Jesus beheld them, looked them in the eye, gazed at them, fixed His eyes on them, and said to them, "With men it's impossible." What's impossible? What's impossible? Salvation.

Really, we could entitle the sermon "The impossibility of salvation." It's impossible to be saved on human terms. Can't do it. You can't right the ship. You can't overcome your own sinful nature. Rich people can't get over the dependency on riches, the love of the things of this world and the consumptive selfishness that characterizes that particular kind of life. They can't of their own accord. They can't. With men, salvation is impossible.

And as I said earlier, that with one fell swoop wipes out all works-righteousness systems. Men can't save themselves. All the religion in the world won't do it. It is impossible. Not difficult, impossible.

But, aren't you glad it doesn't end there? I mean, I'm very glad for that last line, aren't you? "But with God...what?...all things are possible." Even rich people can get saved. They're tough, humanly speaking, tougher than others. But with God all things are possible. Oh, that's wonderful. Good news.

Why does it have to be God? Because only God can change the heart, right? Only God can do that. You want to hear something very practically applied to this text? That rich young ruler came to Christ to be saved and he was asking for something that was impossible. And when he went away unsaved, it just confirmed the impossibility of it. You see the point? That's what our Lord is saying. That is the demonstration of the impossibility of being saved on your own terms short of repenting for your sin and affirming that you subject everything in your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

And I say, beloved, that is not a doctrine of salvation that's being taught today, but needs to be. But with God, all things are possible. Even God can overcome that and only God. Can overcome the love of money, the selfishness, the earth-bound mentality. Only God can change the heart and He can change any heart.

You see, in John 1:12, at the very beginning of John's gospel, He said, "That as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on His name." And it was not by the will of man, but by God, He says in John 1:13. God has to do it. God has to do it.

Look at 2 Timothy 2 for a moment and just a supportive note. A good reminder, 2 Timothy 2:24, the servant of the Lord doesn't fight. The servant of the Lord doesn't fight. In other words, when we present the truth of Jesus Christ, we don't get into war about it, we're gentle to all men, we're able to teach effectively, we're patient, we're meek, verse 25, and we instruct those that oppose--that's where it stops. Watch this, folks. We don't fight. We don't intimidate. We don't badger people. We don't try to dramatically drag them into some place of repentance or whatever. We teach them gently, patiently, meekly and then we recognize that only God can give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And so he says, do all of that if God perhaps will give them repentance.

And we don't know if He will or not. But it's something only God can give, right? "No man comes unto Me except the Father...what?...draw him."

So, evangelism..is it gentle, patient, meek, in these terms anyway, teaching to those it oppose. At the same time, it recognizes that that's all it can do. It can't manipulate legitimately. It can't set its own terms. It can only beseech God that He would grant repentance.

Some people have accused me of preaching a works salvation because I feel so strongly about repentance. And to those people I would answer with this verse, and have answered, the point of this verse is that repentance is an element of salvation which also only God can do. So there's no works. I'm not trying to say that repentance is a pre-salvation human work, that affirming the Lordship of Christ is a pre-salvation human work, all I'm saying is that where real salvation occurs, God brings about repentance and God brings about submission and forsaking all and following Christ. But that is no less the work of God than the redemptive transaction itself. And that verse says it. God must give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil. God has to give that to them or they cannot be saved.

Let's go back to Matthew 19 and wrap up our study in the last few verses, and it will go by very fast. Watch this. So, we see the poverty of riches. Be rich in this world is to trust in riches, to be earthbound, to be selfish and to be impossible to be saved...except God should intervene on His terms and by His power.

And now let's go to the riches of poverty. The corner is turned in verse 27. "Then answered Peter," Peter speaking on behalf of the Twelve, "and said unto Him, Behold!" exclamation, "we have forsaken all and followed Thee." Now stop there for a minute.

You know what he's saying? Hey, we came on Your terms. Isn't that good? It's very clear, isn't it? We came on your terms. The rich young ruler did not, and that's the contrast that they see. I mean, he went away sorrowing. He wouldn't forsake all and follow. Boy, they got the message. I mean, we dropped our nets, we left our tax tables, we said goodbye to our employment, and goodbye to our families, goodbye to all these...I mean, we left everything and followed You. We have taken up our cross and we have denied ourselves.

I think that's Peter's definition of salvation. Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee. See, he hadn't seen the cross and the resurrection yet. And so, on this side of the cross he is seeing salvation as the Lord presented it and it's still valid, it is a forsaking of sin and a following Christ. It is submitting to His control, direction and Lordship.

And so he sees himself and the disciples, obviously, he didn't know at that time that Judas was not legitimately a follower. Judas never did abandon the love of money. In fact, when he knew he wasn't

going to get the money he thought by being involved in this new political entity called the Kingdom which he was hoping for, he tried to get as much money as he could by selling the Savior to those who would take His life. And he was going to grab his money and run. The guilt was overwhelming and he killed himself. But at this point, Peter's not aware of that and he just says on behalf of all of them, "We've forsaken all and followed Thee." It looked like that even in Judas' case on the outside. He was willing to do what Moses of old had done, to bear the reproach of Christ and consider it greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

And so they had followed. And he says this, "What shall we have, therefore?" The rich guy kept all his riches and he loses eternally. We've abandoned everything in life, what do we gain? It isn't a bad question to ask. Some people have really gotten on Peter's case, it's a very natural question. I mean, they followed Christ anticipating the Kingdom. They followed Christ with hope in their hearts that He would sort of right the nation that He would throw off the Roman yoke, that He would bring in the glorious splendor that the prophets had talked about. I mean, I think his heart was pretty right on in that area and sort of summing up all the anxiety of the disciples he says, "What's in it for us? What are we going to receive?" And I don't think that he's totally frustrated. I think he's partially frustrated. I think he's excited about what he anticipates and he wants to hear from the mouth of the Lord Himself what it is that God has prepared for them that love Him. What are we going to have, therefore? Because we've come on your terms. What are the benefits of salvation to us? We gave it all up. What are we going...what are we going to get?

Look what He says. It could take us months just to go through this. "And Jesus said to them, Truly I say unto you, that ye who have followed Me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye shall also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Boy, what a statement. I mean, that's pretty exciting stuff, isn't it? He says, and look at it again, He says, "You that have followed Me, forsaken all and followed Me, in the regeneration..." What is the regeneration? The...the palingenesis, it is a statement referring to the millennial Kingdom, the rebirth.

Now that term is only used one other time in the New Testament, it's Titus 3:5 where it talks about personal new birth, our new birth. We have been born again. Here He's saying there is going to be a rebirth. It's not a personal one, it's the rebirth of the earth. It's the restoration of the earth. It's paradise regained, in a sense. It's the millennial kingdom that He's speaking of. So in that rebirth of the earth, and it's a perfect parallel, by the way, we go along in our sin, we are reborn, we have a new birth, a palingenesisindividually, we're born again in Christ. And it's still not our future eternal experience. In other words, we are born again right now but we haven't yet entered the final state. And so it's used in the same way here. The earth will be reborn in its millennial...its millennial definition, its millennial terms and still be awaiting the new heaven and the new earth which is the eternal state. So the analogy is consistent.

And so, I believe our Lord is talking about the millennial kingdom, when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of His glory. And we know that that's going to be the case in the Millennium. Psalm 2 says that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is going to rule the nations with a rod of iron, they're going to be under His feet. He is going to be the King of kings and Lord of lords, Revelation 19 says. He's coming to reign in glory and power. He's coming to rule the earth for a thousand years, it tells us very clearly in Revelation. Revelation 19:4 to 6, the saints are going to come and reign with Him. By the way, Old Testament saints will be there, Daniel chapter 7 says. New Testament saints will be there, 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 2 says. The Tribulation saints are going to be there as well reigning with Him, according to Revelation 19. And here it says that the Apostles are going to be there. So all the redeemed of all the ages are going to be reigning in that time when the Lord sits on the throne of His glory. He comes after the Tribulation, Matthew 24:29 and 30. He comes in power and glory after the Tribulation. Sets up a kingdom of glory and rules as the King of glory for a thousand years. And while He's doing that, Israel is restored, the nation is restored and the Apostles...of course, Matthias supplanting Judas, will rule over and guide and lead and judge the nations of Israel.

Just think of it in the rebirth. Acts chapter 3, Peter called it the times of refreshing, or the times of rest when the earth rests from the curse. He called it in verse 21 the times of restitution when the earth is restored to the place that it was before the Fall. In Matthew 12:32 it's called the age to come as opposed to this age when Christ returns. It's the time, according to the prophets, when the Messiah will rule on the earth, when Israel will be converted and restored to the land, when truth will dominate the earth, when righteousness will flourish, when peace will prevail, when joy will abound, when the Holy Spirit's power will be demonstrated, when Satan will be bound, Jerusalem be exalted, health and healing will dominate, someone who dies at a hundred years of age dies as a baby, the earth will produce food like never before, the lion will lie down with the lamb, the desert will blossom like a rose, life will be long, the curse will be lifted. It's the great millennial kingdom. And He says in that kingdom, you twelve will sit on twelve thrones, that is you'll be given places of rulership and judgship over the twelve tribes of Israel. Very clear.

I was reading in one of the amillennial commentators this week and I just couldn't help but laugh when I read it. Amillennialists don't believe any restoration for Israel's coming, they don't believe in any kingdom as such. And the...he said, this was the question when it came to commenting on the phrase, "they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel," this commentator said, "Now we have to wonder what our Lord meant by the twelve tribes of Israel." Oh we do? What do you think He meant? Take a wild guess. How about the twelve tribes of Israel? Maybe he meant eight people in Phoenix because if He didn't mean the twelve tribes of Israel, then who's going to say what He did mean? Right? I tell you, if you don't have a Millennium with the Lord reigning over the nation Israel, you've got to do a whole lot of exegetical gymnastics and an awful lot of allegorizing of Scriptures all over the Bible to get Israel out of there when they're in there all the time.

The Son of Man is going to sit on the throne of His glory. And the Apostles are going to be there ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. So, the first thing that comes to the poor is that the poor are going to share in the triumph of Christ. Those that are poor in this life are going to share in the triumph of Christ. We're going to reign and rule with Christ. We're a...1 Peter 2 says, we're a holy priesthood, kings and priests and we're going to reign and we're going to judge angels, even. Or rule them, lead in terms of directing them to the bidding of God.

Second thing that's going to happen to the poor, not only do they share in the triumph of Christ but they receive more than they gave up. Look at verse 29, they receive more than they gave up. "Everyone that hath forsaken houses and brethren and sisters, father and mother, wife, children, or lands for Mine name sake," and Mark says "for My sake and the gospel's, shall receive an hundredfold."

Now what is He saying. He's saying, "Look, when you came to Jesus Christ you may have had to turn your back on a relationship." I mean, you may have realized that your becoming a Christian separates and alienates you from your spouse, and even though it doesn't mean you divorce them and you end the marriage, you know there's a division there, there's a gulf there. Maybe it happened in your family, between your parents and you, or brothers and sisters and you. Or maybe when you came to Christ you were kicked out of your family, you lost the inheritance of the home, you lost the right to the family heirlooms or whatever. I mean, there was a price to pay but nobody has forsaken any of that stuff for My namesake that isn't going to get back a hundredfold...Luke says manifold.

In other words, when you gave that up, you inherited all the body of Christ and you've got mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts and husbands and wives and houses and lands worldwide. A fellowship of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ embrace you. You didn't give up anything, really, to speak of.

And by the way, that isn't future. No, that's not future. Mark 10:30 says, he gives the same list and then says, "Now in this time," right now. We...you know, when you meet a Christian you've never met before, you're off somewhere on vacation and you run into a Christian, it's amazing how immediately there's a bond, isn't it? And you go places and there's a home for you to stay in and somebody to care for you, somebody wants to provide a meal for you. There's a family of people who love Christ. And you come into that family. And there's far more compensation than anything you ever gave up. A hundredfold is just a way of speaking hyperbolically, it's just manifold. Far more is gained than ever is lost.

So, whatever you gave up, look what you gained. I mean, you may have thought you had to get it all for yourself and pile it up and when you abandon it to Christ, you just found out you could go anywhere in the world and somebody there would meet your needs, somebody who belongs to Jesus Christ would care for you, would love you.

And then lastly, the poor not only receive a place of ruling in the Kingdom, sharing in Christ's triumph, not only receive far more than they ever lost in this life...so now you've got this life and the Kingdom, but finally, they'll inherit everlasting life. The poor will be rewarded for eternity. And I think what He means there, very clearly, is they'll enter into the fullness of what God has planned in eternity.

So, we'll have blessing now. We'll have blessing in the Kingdom. And ultimately we'll have the fullness of all that God has prepared for us in eternity. The full inheritance. The completion of salvation for which our bodies, Romans 8 says, now groan, waiting for the redemption of our bodies that we may enter into the fullness. When that mortal, 1 Corinthians 15, shall put on immortality, when that corruptible shall put on incorruption. And that marvelous thing will come to pass that says we shall be like Him for we shall...what?...see Him as He is. That's in the future. All that eternity can bestow, Ephesians 2 says, that He'll pour out His grace and His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus in the ages to come, the ages to come.

So, to be poor in this life for the sake of Christ is to be rich. Rich here and now with houses and lands and relationships. Rich in the Kingdom, ruling and reigning with Christ. Rich in eternity with all that God could ever imagine to give to His beloved children. Take your choice. Rich now, poor forever. Poor now, rich forever.

And add a footnote. If you're willing to be poor, God may make you rich anyway even in this life. But you keep this in mind. You're poor anyway. I have a lot. We all have a lot. We're all the rich, by the way, that this is talking about. We're the rich. Compared to the rest of the world, we are the rich. But you know something? It's not mine. I'm poor in the sense that I don't own any of it. The Lord just keeps depositing it with me to see how I manage it. It doesn't belong to me. A very helpful perspective. I don't own anything. None of the money that I receive is mine. None of the things that I have are mine. They're all His. I gave up everything when I came to Christ. I abandoned it all to Him. But He's got a lot of stuff that He sorts out among us and we're to manage it for His glory in the advance of His Kingdom. And I just want to keep managing it for His Kingdom sake. And I want to keep myself poor in the sense that I never think I possess anything. I only have it to be used as He sees fit.

Jim Elliot, that missionary who was murdered by the Alca Indians in Ecuador some years ago, said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the clarity with which Your Word speaks to us. We thank You for how the Lord has taught us such practical lessons. We love the Word. We cherish it every moment spent in its truths and yet at the same time, Lord, while we enjoy the privilege, we must accept the responsibility. To whom much is given, much is required. And You have given us much...much.

First of all, Father, we ask that You would grant repentance to the acknowledging of the truth to some today who have been unwilling to repent of sin, who like the young man was saying, "What do I lack? I've kept all these things. I'm okay the way I am." Grant them repentance, God. And those who want to hold on to their life style and hold on to their money and hold on to their girlfriend, and hold on to their business and hold on to everything else they've got, their possessions and they're saying the price is too high, Lord, break that hold by Your sovereign power for it's impossible with men. But it's possible with You. And those of us, Lord, who have forsaken all and come to You, may we continually be forsaking all. And may we know that we will always be the poor and that even what you give us, even if you give us back like You did Job, far more than we lost, we don't ever own it. We just manage it for the advance of Your Kingdom and the meeting of the needs of Your people and the extension of Your Kingdom.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).