

# *What about My Money?*

## **WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY**

Last in an eight-part series

March 3, 2019

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*Luke 18:18–23 (CEB)*

<sup>18</sup> A certain ruler asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus replied, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God.

<sup>20</sup> You know the commandments: *Don’t commit adultery. Don’t murder. Don’t steal. Don’t give false testimony. Honor your father and mother.*”

<sup>21</sup> Then the ruler said, “I’ve kept all of these things since I was a boy.”

<sup>22</sup> When Jesus heard this, he said, “There’s one more thing. Sell everything you own and distribute the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me.” <sup>23</sup> When he heard these words, the man became sad because he was extremely rich.

*1 Timothy 6:6–11 (NLT)*

<sup>6</sup> Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. <sup>7</sup> After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. <sup>8</sup> So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

<sup>9</sup> But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

<sup>11</sup> But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

*“Money is personal, and so is faith.” (Arthur and Scott Jones)*

When it comes to our use of money, John Wesley was clear and succinct:

Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.

Wesley lived what he preached. When he was a young man, he made 30 pounds a year. He figured out that he needed 28 pounds a year to live on and gave two pounds to the church. When his income increased to 50 pounds, he kept 28 and gave 22. When he made 100 pounds a year, he kept 28 and gave 72.

You might be thinking to yourself, “That is fine for John Wesley, but I live in the real world. There are demands and expectations coming at me from all sides. Can’t we talk about something else?” If so, you are like many of us. But we really can’t ignore talking about money; it is too big a part of our lives. We are tempted to set our money apart from our faith, even though they are bound together. Jesus knew this. That is why he talked so often about the dangers of wealth, about our possessions and bank accounts taking over our hearts.

And so we come to today’s story from Luke 18. We don’t know why this wealthy and important man asks Jesus the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Perhaps he is sincere. Perhaps he is simply looking for an endorsement. Regardless, he gets the question wrong. One does not “do” anything to “inherit.” Either the man wasn’t paying attention or had stepped away when Jesus taught that we are to receive the kingdom like children (Luke 18:15-17, the verses immediately preceding this story). Like children? There is no place here for merit or achievement. The inheritance is a gift which cannot be earned.

Nonetheless, Jesus lets the man go ahead with his “doing,” reminding the ruler that he knows the Law – no adultery, no murder, no theft, honor your parents, etc. The man believes that he has “done” all this. Surely, the man is feeling pretty good about himself

at this point, eternal life is in his grasp! But then Jesus asks him to “do” one more thing: sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus. Luke tells us only that the man “became sad, for he was very rich.”

What a change Jesus asks of this man. Sell all that he has! Surely Jesus can’t mean what he says. What about the man’s financial independence? His financial security? Jesus promises the man a large bank account in heaven, but what about his T-bills on earth?

Fred Craddock helps us to see the heart of this story in his commentary on Luke:

Jesus knows the condition of the man and writes the prescription for life, a prescription we have met frequently in Luke, perhaps most forcefully at 12:33. The ruler is invited to trust God completely, but he cannot or, rather, will not. He is no longer in the position of being bedazzled and enticed by the prospect of wealth; he has lain too long in silken ease, fared too well at banquet tables, rested too comfortably on the security of his surplus, moved too far from the cries of the hungry, enjoyed too obviously the envy of those less prosperous, assumed too much that he could buy everything he needed. He depends on his money. In short, he is an idolater. His encounter with Jesus ends sadly, because, upon the realization that he cannot serve God and mammon, he has chosen mammon. It is most likely not the case that there was ever a time or place when he said to himself, “I choose mammon over God”; experience and observation teach us that his condition is one to which people awaken after years of the creeping spread of materialism. Earlier he might have extricated himself, but now he is “very rich.”

Luke does not say the man went away (as in Mark 10:22) but only that Jesus enlarged upon the sad case before him and said, not solely to him but to those nearby who could overhear, “How hard it is for the rich.” The statement sounds more like an observation than a regulation. A camel going through the eye of a needle (v. 25) is a proverb about the humanly impossible and not a description of a camel, stripped of his burden, crawling through a small gate. The question from bystanders is a proper one: How can anyone be saved, since all of us participate to a lesser or a greater extent in the love of money which afflicts this ruler? The answer is the same one given to Abraham and Sarah when they were told that they would have a child, the same one given to the Virgin Mary as she stood in awe and bewilderment: nothing is impossible with God. Only God can save, whatever one’s condition.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, this is a story about our attachment to possessions and our imagined independence. But it is also a story about trust. The man trusts what he can put his hands on, namely his money. He professes to trust God, but it is a timid trust, a trust that is unable to sustain him when he faces the challenge posed to him by Jesus. The change Jesus demands is simply too much for him. Jesus has exposed the man to be a person of little faith – or at least little faith in God, for he seems to have much faith in his possession. The man has chosen the idol. He has chosen to trust in his wealth rather than in God.

It is our faith in, our trust of, the Lord God that sustains us through the fears and anxieties of our lives. It is our trust in God that encourages us to be ever more generous, not filling up barns and bank accounts, but giving with wild abandon so that others may be fed and clothed and hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

#### *Affluent and faithful?*

The story of the rich ruler in Luke 18 is only one of many passages in Luke’s gospel about the dangers of wealth. In Luke, Jesus has more to say about the dangers of wealth than in any of the other gospels. Beginning with Jesus’ command that his disciples are

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock, F. B. (1990). *Luke*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (213–214). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

to “leave everything” to follow him, there is an unrelenting emphasis on Jesus’ radical demand. “Blessed are you who are poor . . . But woe to you who are rich” (6:20,24). “Sell your possessions and give alms . . .” (12:33). “So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (14:33). By the time that we get to Jesus’ encounter with the rich, young ruler, we aren’t the least surprised when Jesus tells him to sell everything and give the money to the poor (18:18-30). The question seems to be whether disciples can be both affluent and faithful – and the answer seems to be clearly “no”!

Yet, no sooner has Jesus sent away the rich, young ruler than he invites himself to the home of a tax collector, Zacchaeus (19:1-10). Zacchaeus gives away a large portion of his wealth and makes amends to those he has cheated, but he does not give away all that he has and Jesus never tells him to give away any of it. What is going on? Perhaps it is something like this: the rich ruler has money and loves the money whereas Zacchaeus has money and loves Jesus. Going further, I suspect that Zacchaeus has come to realize that the wealth is not really his but God’s. He is a trustee charged with managing and using well what God has entrusted to him. This is not so much matter of bank accounts as it is a matter of the heart. In today’s passage from 1 Timothy, Paul does not say that money is the root of all evil; rather, it is the love of money and, I would add, the love of what money can buy, whether it is stuff or status. The question for us is this – where is our heart?

*Longing to be rich – or at least look rich!*

The heart. Look again at what Paul writes: “people who long to be rich . . . the love of money . . . craving money.” Longing, loving, and craving are all matters of the heart. Who or what do we love? Who or what do we long for? Who or what do we crave? Do we strive first for wealth or do we strive first for the kingdom?

Paul lived two millennia ago in a world far different from our own. But when it comes to the dangers of pursuing wealth, his world must have been much like ours. I spent much of my adult life in the business world. I have an MBA from Harvard Business School. And I could not count the number of people I have known whose pursuit of wealth has wrecked their lives. For many, their pursuit of wealth was successful. They achieved fat bank accounts, piles of stuff, and the status that goes with it. Yet, they also reaped lonely, isolated lives filled with brokenness and pain. One of my classmates from HBS served a long sentence in prison. So many temptations. So many harmful and foolish desires. So many bad choices.

*Contentment and the godly life*

Paul gives Timothy two pieces of practical advice for avoiding danger marked “the pursuit of money, stuff, and status.” First, he urges Timothy to learn the art of contentment. Despite the numerous hardships of his own life, Paul has “learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need” (Philippians 4:11-12, a letter written from prison). How has Paul learned this? He has learned this from God. It is God who gives Paul the strength that he needs to be free from worry and anxiety.

Second, Paul urges Timothy to pursue a godly life rather than pursue wealth or possessions or status. Timothy has his life headed in the right direction, but there are many potential wrong turns and dead-ends ahead that will tempt Timothy and few of them are more attractive than the love of money. Timothy must ignore the traps, even stepping on the accelerator to hurry past them. He must actively pursue his life with God, never taking it for granted.

We live in an anxiety-filled world, where contentment and peace seem endlessly elusive. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Earthly possessions dazzle our eyes and delude us into thinking that they can provide security and freedom from anxiety. Yet all the time

they are the very source of anxiety. If our hearts are set on them, our reward is an anxiety whose burden is intolerable.” If we are to find the peace and contentment that God desire for us, we must embrace God’s way and genuinely put our trust in his love and grace. For, even as we are anxious and worried . . . Jesus stands ready to take our burdens from him, if we will just loosen our grip on them.

## Daily Bible Readings

*More on money*

**Monday, 2 Kings 12** Josiah rebuilds God’s temple.

**Tuesday, Job 20:17-24** Wealth gained by immoral means is not wealth that can be truly enjoyed

**Wednesday, Luke 19:1-10** Jesus does not ask this wealthy tax collector to sell all he as. Why not, do you think?

**Thursday, Acts 4:32-5:11** The new believers share what they have but one couple decides to lie about their generosity.

**Friday, 2 Corinthians 9:12-13** Paul commends the Corinthians for their generosity.

**Saturday, 3 John 1:5-8** Working together, in generosity, for the truth.

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Daniel.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott’s 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *Embracing the Bible: an introduction to Scripture*

Beginning March 10: *Deep Impact: five crucial turning points in the biblical story*

Video of each week’s class is posted here: [vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy](https://vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy)