

# With *the* Rich and Famous



---

## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; John 3:1–15; Luke 19:1–10; Mark 4:18, 19; Matt. 19:16–26.*

**Memory Text:** “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (*1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV*).

People,” it has been said, “spend money they don’t have, for things they don’t need, in order to impress people they don’t like.” How much truth that statement contains is debatable; what isn’t debatable, however, is that money can have a powerful influence over all of us. Because personal financial habits comprehensively represent an individual’s values, money is actually a spiritual matter. No doubt that’s why the Bible spends a lot of time talking about it.

Also, fame frequently accompanies wealth. Motion picture stars, outstanding athletes, and national politicians often possess both. Famous people exercise influence, which is one form of power. Jesus, however, was not impressed by anyone’s wealth or power. He simply sought to reach these wealthy people for the same reason that He tried to reach everyone else: He wanted them to have the kind of riches that money cannot buy.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 22.

## Richly Blessed

As fallen human beings, we are subject to jealousy, especially toward those who have more money than we do (regardless of how much money we ourselves might have already). The Bible, however, does not unconditionally disparage wealth or the wealthy. As with so much else in life, problems arise not from things themselves but from the way in which we relate to them.

**What counsel regarding wealth does Scripture offer? *Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; 41:41–43; Job 1:1–3; Dan. 4:28–31.* Why was it so important for Israel not to forget where its blessings came from?**

---



---



---



---

There is no question that people such as Abraham, Joseph, Mordecai, Esther, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Jehoshaphat were wealthy and spiritually minded, as well. Nebuchadnezzar's example, however, shows the danger that comes from making wealth an idol, which is so easy for anyone to do. Conversely, for ancient Israel, acknowledging God's generosity in this supplying of wealth brought spiritual and material blessings. They were specifically warned not to forget from where those blessings came. (A good lesson for all of us, is it not?)

In short, riches themselves do not indicate spiritual poverty or indifference. There have been some very pious and faithful rich people and some pretty nasty and evil ones, as well. Either way, we should not turn a desire for money into an obsession, nor should we despise those who are wealthy. They need salvation as much as everyone else does.

**What are your own attitudes toward the rich? It's easy to be jealous, is it not? How can you learn to move beyond those feelings and to see wealthy individuals as we all are, as souls in need of a saving knowledge of Jesus?**

---



---



---

## Nighttime Rendezvous

Wealthy, well-positioned famous people did not intimidate Jesus. Christ neither resented nor revered the social elite. The Savior recognized that financial prosperity could not supply peace, personal contentment, meaningful relationships, or deep-seated purpose. The wealthiest magnate could easily be lonelier, emptier, and angrier than the simplest, poorest, and most humble Christian believer.

**Analyze** Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus (*John 3:1–15*). Which events probably stimulated Nicodemus's interest in Jesus' message? (*Hint: review John 2:13–25.*) What significance does the darkness play? What is Christ's central message for Nicodemus?

---

---

---

---

Nicodemus had witnessed God's power and authority as revealed through Jesus' ministry and thus sought to meet with Him, but in secret. Jesus might have refused this secretive overture, but, unwilling that any should perish, He readily accepted this opportunity to bring Nicodemus another step closer to the kingdom. Nicodemus's poverty was spiritual not material. Enriched with worldly goods and an elevated social position, he was, nonetheless, spiritually starving.

Instinctively, Nicodemus rebelled against any suggestion that knowledgeable Israelites like himself should require conversion. Jesus, however, persisted, presenting Nicodemus with the eternal choice between judgment and salvation. Fearing denunciation and ridicule, Nicodemus refused to accept Christ's invitation. The interview had apparently failed. That spiritual seed, however, lay buried, slowly germinating beneath his heart's soil.

"After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 177.

## Rich and Infamous

Respectability does not always accompany wealth. Though many do earn their wealth honestly through hard work, industriousness, and the blessings of God, others are outright crooks. Even worse, some make their money legally but immorally, for not everything immoral is illegal, as we all know so well.

**Compare** Matthew 9:10–13 with Luke 5:27–32, 19:1–10. What motivated the criticism that Jesus faced? What does His reaction to the criticism teach us about grace?

---

---

---

---

Jericho, Zacchaeus's residence, had become a significant commercial center and housed the Herodian palace. Because of its geographical location, it maintained a customs gathering station. Zacchaeus could have easily enriched himself *legally* as the chief regional customs officer. The narrative, however, suggests that greed induced him to overstep legal boundaries. Zealous patriots despised even honest customs collectors, seeing them as tools of their Roman oppressors, but they greatly disdained dishonest ones such as Zacchaeus. Matthew (Levi) occupied a similar position in Capernaum, under Herod Antipas. Essentially having assumed the role of Roman governmental agents, they were viewed as traitors, or worse yet, thieving traitors.

Nonetheless, Christ was not deterred. Defying social constraints, Jesus dined with them, drawing intense criticism from priests and commoners alike. And, by Jesus' interaction with them, these despised men were eventually won to the gospel. (For example, Matthew not only became one of the Twelve but also an author in the New Testament!)

Again, we should be careful about the kind of spiritual judgments we make about people. Though not all sins are of the same magnitude, and some are certainly socially worse (and with good reason) than others, all of us are equal before God in that we are all in need of the righteousness of Christ.

**Think of some well-known but despised (and perhaps understandably so) personage in your culture. Imagine what it would be like if you had a chance to witness to that person. Would you even want to? What would you say?**

## Gold-plated Message

**Analyze** the following passages: Mark 4:18, 19; Luke 1:51–53; 6:22–25; 12:16–21; 16:13. What practical advice do these verses contain? What spiritual warnings are found here? How might these Scriptures be utilized by believers to make disciples among the wealthy?

---



---



---



---

It has been said that we don't own our things; our things own us. How easy it is to be consumed by material possessions; hence, Jesus warned above about "the deceitfulness of riches."

Think through just how easy it is for money, or the pursuit of it, to blind our spiritual priorities. How crucial that we keep this truth in mind as we seek to reach those whose wealth might have already blinded them.

At the same time, we all need a reality check. Some people live as if the one question that they will be asked on Judgment Day is, How much money did you make?

Christ reverses our misplaced priorities. While possessions are not forbidden, they must be placed in perspective. Material goods are God's instruments designed to benefit humanity. They become blessings when shared rather than when hoarded. When hoarded, they become curses.

Materialistic persons, whether rich or poor, are in danger of sacrificing their eternal well-being for temporal pleasures. Eternal satisfaction is exchanged for passing fancies that deteriorate and become outdated. Humans serve God or money, never both. Everyone, rich or poor, needs to be reminded: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (*Mark 8:36*).

**This warning about materialism is important for all believers, not only for their own souls' sakes but for outreach as well. After all, how can we warn the wealthy about the potential spiritual dangers contained by their wealth when we ourselves are caught up in the same thing?**

---



---

## Terms of Endangerment

**Study** Matthew 19:16–26. What spiritual dangers are revealed in this passage? How might believers benefit today’s “rich young rulers”?

---

---

---

He possessed credentials, qualifications, abundant material resources, unquestioned morality, and unlimited self-esteem! The youthful disciple-candidate earnestly requested the Master’s formula for salvation. Should Christ have been flattered? “Finally we’re converting the upper classes!” Apparently no such exhilaration polluted Christ’s thinking. Had this petitioner expected commendation, he was sorely disappointed. Instead, Christ established the Ten Commandments as the minimum standard of obedience. Perhaps the young ruler had congratulated himself. By his self-measurement, he surpassed the first hurdle. Christ, however, had elsewhere demanded righteousness that exceeded that which other religious leaders possessed. Would that standard be lowered to accommodate this candidate? Judas would have been ecstatic. Whoever handled public relations would have been overjoyed. Think what having wealthy supporters aboard could mean image-wise.

Spiritual deficiencies, however, cannot be overlooked nor minimized, for the mission of Jesus is sacred. Compromise cannot be tolerated. Every selfish indulgence must be surrendered. Christ outlined the three-step process: sell your possessions, furnish the poverty-stricken, follow Me. This was spiritually dangerous territory. Although young, the would-be disciple had accumulated a sizable fortune. Luxurious houses, beautiful vineyards, productive fields, fashionable clothing, jewelry collections, servants, livestock, perhaps speedy customized chariots—all these might have flashed through his mind. God’s terms were inflexible. Neither bargaining nor negotiating could reduce the price: everything for Jesus; worldly greatness exchanged for heavenly treasure.

“How many have come to Christ, ready to cast their interests in with his, and, like the rich young ruler, earnestly desiring to inherit eternal life! But when the cost is presented to them—when they are told that they must forsake all, houses and lands, wife and children, and count not their lives dear unto themselves—they go away sorrowful. They want the treasures of heaven, and the life that measures with the life of God, but they are not willing to give up their earthly treasures. They are not willing to surrender all to obtain the crown of life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 19, 1898.

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” pp. 167–177; “Levi-Matthew,” pp. 272–280; “ ‘One Thing Thou Lackest,’ ” pp. 518–523; “Zacchaeus,” pp. 552–556, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Ministry to the Rich,” pp. 209–216, in *The Ministry of Healing*.

“Much is said concerning our duty to the neglected poor; should not some attention be given to the neglected rich? Many look upon this class as hopeless, and they do little to open the eyes of those, who, blinded and dazed by the glitter of earthly glory, have lost eternity out of their reckoning. Thousands of wealthy men have gone to their graves unwarned. But indifferent as they may appear, many among the rich are soul-burdened. ‘He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase.’ He that says to fine gold, ‘Thou art my confidence,’ has ‘denied the God that is above.’ ‘None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth forever).’ . . .

“Riches and worldly honor cannot satisfy the soul. Many among the rich are longing for some divine assurance, some spiritual hope. Many long for something that will bring to an end the monotony of their aimless lives. Many in official life feel their need of something which they have not. Few among them go to church; for they feel that they receive little benefit. The teaching they hear does not touch the heart. Shall we make no personal appeal to them?”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 210.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① **Wealthy converts played important roles in financially sustaining the infant Christian movement. Though exceptions existed, sacrificial giving characterized the well-to-do believers. God’s kingdom consists of honest-hearted people from every social class. Christians should be neither intimidated nor enamored by wealthy people but should fearlessly proclaim God’s revelation that they may be saved. Understanding that we should never compromise theology and principle, what practical changes can your church make so that wealthy people will find it easier to find fellowship there? How is your church’s evangelistic strategy addressing the need to make disciples among the well-to-do? What specific things can your church realistically do to reach the rich?**
- ② **Look at the Bible verses that Ellen G. White used in the statement in Friday’s study. What is the essence of what they are saying? How can we help those who think that their happiness will be found in wealth and material possessions to realize that they are on the wrong track?**

## A Flame for Jesus

Daniel Santay is a shining star for Jesus in Cambodia. He says, “Ever since I can remember, I’ve loved Jesus.”

Daniel’s father was the example that inspired the boy to share God’s love with others. “When I was seven years old,” Daniel says, “I told my dad I wanted to be like him and preach someday. He told me, ‘You don’t have to wait. Start now; share Jesus with your friends now.’”

Daniel accepted his father’s challenge and began sharing God’s love with his friends. “I felt God’s power through the Holy Spirit working in me,” Daniel said. “He is working in my heart and helping me share my love for Jesus with other children.” Daniel began traveling with his father and teaching the children while his dad taught the adults.

Then his father became ill. Before long, he was too sick to travel or preach. He became too weak to work at his government job. One day he gathered his family around him and told them he wasn’t going to get well. He challenged them to stay close to God and to continue sharing God’s love with everyone they met. He promised his family that one day they would be together again when Jesus comes. They would never have to say goodbye.

Daniel’s father died when Daniel was just eight. “Some days I miss him so much,” Daniel says. “But I have hope that I will see him soon in heaven. Then I will tell him that I kept my promise to preach to others.”

Daniel and his three siblings and their mother continue sharing their faith in Cambodia. His mother works hard to provide for the children and keep them in a Seventh-day Adventist school.

Daniel helps his mother around the house and enjoys reading. He knows that God is calling him to be a pastor, just like his father. “I want to keep telling others about Jesus,” he says, “to help them know Christ.”

Daniel remembers asking his father when Jesus will come again. His father told him, “Jesus will come when everyone has had a chance to hear God’s message of love through Jesus.” Daniel continues telling others that God loves them and that Jesus died for them. He can’t wait until Jesus can come so he can see his father again, and together they can meet their heavenly Father for the first time.

Our mission offerings help support the Adventist school that Daniel and his siblings attend; this is one way we can help share God’s love in Cambodia and around the world.

---

DANIEL CHOTAL SANTAY *is helping people prepare for Jesus’ coming in his homeland, Cambodia.*