

Read: Luke 18:18-30

If I Were a Poor Man

Luke 18:20-23,26,27

A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

[Jesus answered], “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’”

“All these I have kept since I was a boy,” he said.

When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “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 very wealthy.

Those who heard this asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus replied, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, the lead actor, Tevye, sings a song entitled, “If I Were a Rich Man.” It is a popular song even among those who have never sat through the entire three-hour show. And why not? There are not many popular songs that sing the praises of being poor. Would people be humming the tune if the title had been, “If I Were a Poor Man”? I doubt it.

In the upside-down kingdom of God, we actually sing with honor, “If I Were a Poor Man.” Oddly, it is the question of a rich man that gives Jesus the opportunity to teach us that the kingdom of God is more poor than it is rich.

We are using “rich” and “poor” differently than normal. The kingdom of God is not about material wealth, but about spiritual riches. And the more we understand that sinners are spiritually poor, the wealthier we will be with the riches only God can provide.

Jesus’ conversation helped the rich young man see his spiritual poverty. The young man thought he was spiritually rich, “All these [commandments] I have kept since I was a boy.” But when Jesus asked him to give up his wealth to people who were poor and then follow Jesus, the man became sad. He loved his wealth more than he loved God. Jesus’ request opened the young man’s eyes to his own spiritual poverty.

What if Jesus had the same conversation with us? Would it open our eyes to how spiritually poor we are? But that conversation must happen so that we can realize we cannot earn our way into God's kingdom. We may think we have spiritual wealth to offer God, but we don't. It is better to see that we are spiritually poor. We cannot do it by ourselves.

The crowd grasped what Jesus was saying. How can sinners be saved when we have nothing to offer God? God saves us purely by his grace. He makes the impossible, possible by showering us with *his* riches. "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

Whether you are wealthy, middle-class, or poor, it makes no difference; heaven is only for the spiritually poor!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- With whom did the rich young ruler come to speak?
- How much money did the ruler have?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Why was the rich young ruler sad when Jesus asked him to sell his possessions and follow Jesus?
- How did Jesus show his love for the ruler?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Why is it necessary to be spiritually poor in order to be saved?
- What commandment do you find most difficult to keep? Why?

Closing Prayer:

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously kept me this day. Forgive me all my sins, and graciously keep me this night. Into your hands I commend my body and soul and all things. Let your holy angel be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen.