

“How to Be Rich” Series / Sermon 1: Who, Me?!

August 21, 2016

Okay, let's start here. You don't have to raise your hand, but you do need to be ruthlessly honest. How many of you consider yourselves to be rich? I'm not talking spiritually rich, or relationally rich; I'm talking financially rich. How much money would you have to have for you to call yourself rich? Now, because I can read your minds, there may be 2 or 3 of you who might call yourself rich, but the rest of us ... no way.

Maybe you want a little more context: Rich compared to whom. Compared to Bill Gates, or Warren Buffet, or Mark Zuckerberg? Or rich compared to Mother Teresa, or the homeless guy pushing his stuff around in a shopping cart? And rich in whose eyes? Do I get to decide if I am rich? Or is that up to some banker, or the IRS? What do you think God would say? Would God consider you rich?

Here it is: my goal over the next three weeks is to get most of you to admit that you are rich – I'm talking materially rich. And then I want to try to unpack, from the Bible, how to be rich God's way. You see, there is a way to be rich and honor God. If we are rich, we want to do it God's way. This is serious stuff for those of us who want to do life with God, God's way.

Let me ask the question a little differently. And this time I would like you to raise your hands. How many of you believe you have been blessed by God? How many of you think you have been extravagantly blessed by God? Even materially? Well, by the end of these three weeks I hope most all of our hands will be up, and that we will have a pretty good idea about how to do life as extravagantly blessed people.

So here goes. Now, one of the most important things we can do as a Jesus follower is to read the Bible. You see, reading the Bible is the simplest and the best way to learn how to live a God-honoring life. And the Holy Spirit works on us when we read God's word. He nudges us, encourages us, scolds us ... whatever we need.

And yet, sometimes when we read the Bible we're thinking: "This part can't be for me! There's no way this applies to me!" And sometimes you're probably right. Sometimes the words were meant for a different time and

place. I get a kick out of reading the book of Leviticus ... I know that's twisted. A lot of Leviticus is pretty hard to read. But there are some verses in there that just make me chuckle. Leviticus 19: it says, "Do not mate two different kinds of animals. (Okay. Guess that rules out the dog-o-pus. It says,) Do not plant your field with two different kinds of seed. (Why not? What's wrong with planting beans in with your corn? It says,) Do not wear clothing woven from two different kinds of thread." (Lev 19.19) Really? No cotton blends, wool blends? That's one about everyone in here is violating right now. And that's okay – I don't think that one is for us. It says, "Do not trim off the hair on your temples or trim your beards." (Lev 19.27) I kind of like that one. That's why I am holier than most of you guys – my beard! It says, "Do not cut your bodies for the dead, and do not mark your skin with tattoos." (Lev 19.28) Which means my daughter and most of my staff are in trouble with God! Right? Actually these verses were for a different place, and a different time in God's plan. There were reasons for these rules in ancient Israel.

But sometimes we read something in the Bible and we blow it off too quickly, when it really does apply to us. And when we blow off words God means for us, it always messes up our life with God. You see, God doesn't just expect us to read his Word, he expects us to live it out, because we are Jesus "followers."

Listen to these words, and you tell me if they are directed to you. The apostle Paul, speaking for God, tells Timothy: "Teach those who are rich in this world ..." He's talking financially rich. "Teach those (Jesus followers) who are rich ..." Is he talking to me? Is he talking to you? He can't be. Rich is the other guy, right, the guy with way more than I have. But ... you can be rich and not know it. You can be rich and not feel it. You can be rich and not act like it. He says, "Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment." Is that stuff we need to hear? He says, "Tell them (these rich people) to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others." (1 Timothy 6.17-18) So, do you think these words are aimed at you?

Well, we are going to spend three weeks unpacking these two verses. And, like I said, my goal is to convince you that you are rich. There may

be 2 or 3 exceptions in our church family, but that's all. Nearly every one of us is rich ... in God's eyes. Next week we'll unpack what happens when we rich people let our money compete with God in our lives. And in two weeks we'll unpack how we rich Jesus followers manage the money God entrusts to us in a God-honoring way.

So ... Last week when we were putting this service together Steve Smith, our worship minister, told me about something floating around the internet right now. You can punch in #FWP as a search string and you'll get all kinds of hits. FWP stands for "First World Problems." First World Problems ... you'll see what I mean. Look at these memes ...

- (Cookie and Milk) That pretty much captures it. That's a first world problem, when our chocolate chip cookie is too big to reach the milk. They don't have that problem in places where they don't have chocolate chip cookies and milk.
- (Cereal, no milk) Here's another one. Does this ever describe you? That's sad, isn't it! "I poured my cereal into the bowl without checking to see if we still had milk. ... We didn't" Because you used it all up the night before with your chocolate chip cookies. That's a first world problem.
- (Third world boy re water fights) Check this one out. This little third world guy gets right to it. He says, "So you're telling me you have fights with water, and not over it?" What some people would give for clean water!
- (Third world boy re bread and water) Or this one. The little guy says, "So you're saying that prisoners get water and bread for punishment?" Guys, we really are rich!
- (Shoes & dress) This lady's face is on a bunch of the FWP memes. She's just torn up. She says, "I don't know what shoes to wear with this dress." Any of you rich girls ever been there, done that?
- (Starbucks) Or this one: "I asked for no whip cream on my tall Starbucks order, and they gave me a grande with extra whip cream." Guys, that really is a first world problem, isn't it? Really? That's your pain for the day?!
- (Laptops & Desktop) Here are a couple with kids. This first kid is distraught. "All of my friends have laptops, but I only have a desktop." That's a first world problem, don't you think?

- (What ... no bacon!) This one may be my favorite! Because this one really is a crisis. That's a real crisis anywhere! No bacon?!!

I played around a little and made a few FWP's of my own. Here are a few of my first world problems.

- (Ice Cream) This is me at night: "I want ice cream, but both scoops are in the dishwasher." Isn't that sad?! Sometimes life really is hard, isn't it?
- (Remote) Here's another one of mine: "I lost the remote to my soundbar, so now I have to get off the sofa." Any of you guys feeling for me?
- (Internet) This one is also about my life right now: "We finally got high speed internet, but it won't stream HD on our 60' flat screen." I'm telling you, sometimes life at my house is really hard, guys. Are you with me? First world problems.
- (Kroger) How about this one. I know you're with me on this one. "Kroger rearranged the aisles." I've heard people whining about that one, in the store. We get this huge upgrade, massive quantities of stuff, and we whine because we have to relearn the store. Really?!
- (Scales) And because I like Kroger so much, I have this FWP: "I stepped on the scales ... they told me to eat less and exercise more." Isn't our battle with this (chubby stomach) a First World Problem?
- (Bacon) But I saved the most tragic for last: "I started cooking breakfast ... no bacon!" Now that one is grievable, isn't it?

Mark Driscoll put it like this. He says, Imagine 2000 years ago when the Bible was written ... it was written to those who were mostly poor. Imagine what it would be like if you could teleport a few of those people into your house today.

- One of them asks you, "What's that?" "Well, that's a refrigerator." "What does it do?" "It keeps our leftovers cold and fresh until we throw them out." "Really?" (eyes bugging out)
- What are all those?" "Those are cabinets. That's where we store our extra food." "You have extra food?! Where'd you get all that?"
- "At a store with rows of food piled floor to ceiling. We go there and fill up a cart with food, and bring it home. The store is open year round, 24/7." Well, their minds are blown by now.

- And they turn around and say, “What’s that hanging on the wall?” “Well, that’s a television.” Try explaining that one to an early Christian.
- Then they see the bathroom. “What’s that room for.” “Well it’s a place where we ... eliminate our wastes, if you know what I mean.” “Are you serious?! In the house?! Doesn’t it smell?” “No, you just push that handle and fresh water carries it away.” “You use fresh water to dispose of your waste?!”

You get the idea. Compared to most of the people to whom Paul wrote these words, we are flat out rich! Do you buy that? We live at a level of luxury their kings and queens couldn’t even dream of. But you don’t have to go back 2000 years. Just go back 40, right here in America. Did you know that the average poor in America today have goods and services that were only for the middle class 40 years ago.

- 50% of the poor today live in air-conditioned homes. Do you old guys remember when it wasn’t that way?
- 93% of families that live below the poverty level today have color televisions. Do you old guys remember your first color television?
- And 60% have microwaves. Incredible!

Guys, we live in the richest time of the richest nation on earth.

- Most of us have a 5 day work-week. In other words, we only have to work 5 days to acquire enough money for 7 days of food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, entertainment, and whatever else we want.
- In fact, a lot of families of 3, 4, or 5 only send 1 person out into the workforce, and that 1 person makes enough money in 5 days to cover what is needed by the whole family for a whole week.
- And most of us have at least 50 waking hours left over for leisure.

Do you understand how rich we are? What if I change the wording a little. Do you understand how blessed we are? Maybe you don’t feel rich, yet; do you feel blessed, by God? Incredibly blessed? You should!

I found this article in the Daily Mail. It was written a few years ago, but I suspect the numbers are still close. This economist says that you need to make just \$34,000 a year to be a top 1%er in the world. He says, “Nearly half of the richest 1% in the world live in the US.” He says, “Even the poorest people in many developed countries are wealthy by global

standards. For example (he says), the poorest 5% of Americans earn on average the same as the richest 5% of Indians.” Guys, even when you factor in the differences in the cost of living, by any measure, on the world stage, we are rich.

Now ... does that get you all excited? I doubt it. Does it make you ... grateful? Do you think it's cool to be blessed by God? But we push back against this stuff, pretty hard. Because, we don't think of ourselves as rich. Because we don't compare ourselves to those who have a whole lot less than we do; we compare ourselves to those who have a whole lot more. Rich is Bill Gates, rich is Mark Zuckerberg. Rich is the other guy, the other family, with the bigger house, and nicer cars. Rich isn't just having extra, it's having as much extra as the guy who has more extra than I do.

Guys who study this stuff tell us that most of us define rich as roughly double what we have now. So if you earn about \$30,000 a year, you would tend to think of those who earn \$60,000 as rich. And those who earn \$60,000 a year would tend to think of those who earn \$120,000 as rich. And those who earn \$120,000 would think of those who earn a quarter of a million as rich. And it keeps going. It's always the other guy, with twice as much, who is rich. Most of the guys who read "Money Magazine" have a lot of money. According to one study, the average reader of Money Magazine believes that a person would need at least \$5 million in liquid assets to be considered rich. Really?! 4 million wouldn't do it?! Because we don't measure rich by what we have; we measure rich by what we don't have. And we don't measure rich by those behind us, we measure rich by those ahead of us. So again: ... are you rich? In terms of this world ... are you rich? Are you blessed by God? Are you incredibly blessed by God? Why is it easier to admit that we are blessed, than to admit that we are rich?

... Okay guys, So What! We're spending 3 weeks on just 2 verses, and I'm spending week 1 on just first 5 words: "Teach those who are rich." My whole goal this morning is to get you to admit that you are rich. Is it that important? And the answer is ... absolutely! You see God is going to give a couple of very serious warnings to those of us who are rich, and then he's going to give us some instructions on how to be rich, God's way. And if we are rich, we have to take the warnings very seriously; and if we are

rich, then we have to try to be rich His way. Now some of you guys in here are not Jesus followers yet. So you may push back against some of what the Bible says in these two verses, but guys, these principles will make your life better too.

Now I know that a lot of folks get really squirrely when the preacher starts talking about money. But listen, guys, there are very few things that have more spiritual power than money. Let me show you a couple verses that ought to rattle us rich people.

- This is from 1 Timothy 6.9-10. The Bible says, “People who long to be rich (which describes most of us) fall into temptation and (they) are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. (That’s telling us that money has incredible power. If you pursue it, it has the power to pull you away from God. He says,) For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (And you’ve seen it; maybe you’ve done it. We use people for money, we abuse people for money, we neglect family for money, we neglect God for money. And he goes on; he says,) And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.” Guys, there are very few things that have as much power as money to pull you away from God.
- Jesus said it this way. He says, “You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matthew 6.24) A lot of us try. But unless we intentionally and consciously put God first, money will gradually take his place. It is almost inevitable.

Guys, unless we are careful, we’ll get dragged along by the world. Money is a god in our world, and unless we are careful, we’ll start treating it as our god, too. Our world is just messed up, guys. In our world wants become needs. What I want morphs into what I need. I don’t just want a new truck, I need a new truck, right? I don’t just want a new house, I need more house, to fit all the stuff I have accumulated. I need a new iPhone. I need new shoes. We become delusional, as our wants transmogrify into needs. Because we live in a delusional world! And we are bombarded with hundreds of messages every day telling us we need more, we need newer, we need better.

And if we go along with our world, it will cause us to drift from our God. Did you know that the richer we get, the stingier we get? The richer we are, the less generous we tend to be. Here are a couple of numbers that will blow your mind. Apparently those who are kind of in the middle (about \$50,000 a year) give about 6% of their income to charities. It's not a tithe, but it's not bad. For those who make \$200,000 a year it drops to 4%. They give about 4% of their income to the church, or to charities. And the more you earn, the lower the percentage you give. Now there's something twisted about that, isn't there? Did you know that God thinks those with the most should be the most generous? We'll get back to that one in 2 weeks.

And here's something else money can do to us. It can fuel our envy, and it can stir our pride. We'll unpack this one more next week. Let me just tell you this: We forget that it's not our money ... none of it – the stuff in your wallet, the stuff in your bank account, the stuff in your 401k, your house, your car ... if you are a Jesus follower, it's not yours. And when we act like it is ours, it will pull us away from God...

So, are you rich? You see, I think we are a bunch of haves who act like we're a bunch of have nots, and it ticks God off. Are you incredibly blessed, by God? Because until we admit we are rich we won't do it well. There is a way to do rich really well, guys – God's way. But very few of us have been taught how. And that's what this little series is all about.

Now I need to make this crystal clear. Listen guys, God is not against money, and he is not against the rich. We have an extravagantly generous God. He blesses us with way more than we deserve. The Bible says God "richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment." (1 Timothy 6.17) He's not a stingy God. He just wants us to be rich well. It's not about how much God has entrusted to us, it's about how we manage what God has given us.

Okay, what do we want you to take home today? What are we trying to stir in you that will make you a better Jesus follower? Well, I think there are 3 options open to us rich Christians. We probably drift back and forth between a couple of these, but I think 1 of these options is our goal.

- Option #1: We can go with flow and live like it's all about me. We're going to call that option, "greed." And it's one of the deadliest of sins.

Greed is the insatiable desire for more. The insatiable desire for newer and better. The insatiable desire to accumulate, and to hoard way more than we need. Greed happens when we let our wants morph into needs. It happens when stuff become a god to us. That is an option open to us. In fact, I think for us American Christians it may be the option most often chosen. But it's a terrible way to live, guys. And it won't be judged kindly when we stand before him.

- Option #2: Guilt. We can wallow in guilt. We can be embarrassed about how we have been blessed by God. I'm telling you, a lot of us Jesus followers choose guilt. We are embarrassed by money. We listen to story of Jesus and the rich young ruler, where Jesus tells the young man to sell his possessions, and give them to the poor ... And a lot of us Jesus followers think that if we don't -- give it all away -- God will be disappointed with us. So we live with this guilt, this fear that because we have, because we have more than we need, God must be mad at us. Listen guys, he's not mad at us for being rich. What annoys him is when we don't manage the money he entrusts to us in a God honoring way. Now there are times, I suppose, when we rich people ought to feel some guilt. If you go with option 1 (greed), you ought to experience option 2 (guilt). In fact, the guilt you feel may be a nudge of God's Holy Spirit.

- But our goal this morning is not to dump guilt on you. It's to evoke gratitude. You see, that's option 3: Gratitude. I want us to admit that we have been blessed by God; we have been extravagantly blessed by God. And I want us to feel this overwhelming sense of gratitude. "God, you are amazing, you are extravagantly generous. You constantly give us way better than we deserve. And out of gratitude, we will do whatever we can to use what he entrusted to us in a God-honoring way." We want to be rich ... God's way. We'll talk about what that means the next two weeks.

Guys, there is probably nothing a Jesus follower ought to feel more intensely than gratitude. Are you grateful? Are you grateful for his grace? Are you grateful for Jesus, for what he did for you? Are you grateful for the hope he gives you? Are you grateful every day for your life, for your family, for your friends, for your church, for your mind, for your teachers,

for beauty, for your job, for your house, for everything else he has extravagantly gifted you with? Do you tell him? Do you thank him?

I wish I could get you to try living gratefully just one week. It will change you, guys! The Bible says, "Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5.18) Be grateful! The Bible says, "Give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5.20) Do you? The Bible says, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!" (Psalm 136.1) Do you believe that? Do you believe he is good to you, every day? Do you thank him?

So here's your assignment for this week: Thank him. Be grateful. Every day find some way to thank God for everything that is good in your life. When you pray this week, make sure you start it with thanks, with gratitude. It can change how you do life. And it will prepare you for what's coming next in little series.