

MATTHEW 19:16-30

JESUS ON MONEY: IF YOU WOULD BE PERFECT!

“Behold, a man came up to [Jesus], saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.’ He said to him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘All these I have kept. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

“And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’ Then Peter said in reply, ‘See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.’”¹

Do you “own” anything? Do you own your house? Your car? Your clothing? Your bank account? All assets, minus our liabilities, comprise what financial consultants speak of as our net worth. However, the question asked is do you actually own these things? Or, are you actually a manager, holding the possessions of another until you give an accounting of your stewardship? The Christian Faith teaches us that we actually “own” nothing, if we are frank. Perhaps we hold material goods for a brief time; and then we are compelled to surrender the things of this world. Others will hold or administer those same possessions for a similar brief moment. This truth may be hard to accept; yet it remains true that, “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” [1 TIMOTHY 6:7].

This knowledge sets the stage for a study of the doctrine of Christian stewardship, which flows out of the teaching of how one is born into the Kingdom of Heaven. How one handles possessions entrusted to her or him reveals a great deal concerning that individual’s understanding of the grace of God, and even about the individual’s comprehension of God.

Ultimately, there are only two ways that can lay claim to providing a path to eternal life. Either man can, through his own effort, merit acceptance by God, or an individual is utterly dependent upon the mercy and grace of God. Either we will be saved through our own efforts—through manifested character or through meritorious deeds performed, or we will be delivered by the mercies of God absent any effort on our part. Emotion does not enter into the equation, except as the heart is stirred following the New Birth.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The account before us tells of a rich young man who asked Jesus what was necessary to inherit eternal life. Doctor Luke identifies him as a “ruler” [LUKE 18:18]. Consequently, it is common that sermons identify him as “the rich young ruler”; and the sermon today will not deviate from that convention. What is certain is that the man was young and he was wealthy. He was cultured—perhaps a nobleman, almost certainly a member of the upper class. It is virtually certain that any of us would have considered him a good man. Such a conclusion seems abundantly evident through his the record of his interaction with Jesus.

When the young man asked what was necessary to secure eternal life, the Master reminded him of the need to keep the commandments. “Which ones,” was the natural rejoinder. There are, as you perhaps know, over six hundred thirteen commandments. The Master specifically pointed to the fifth through the ninth commandments as recorded in the Decalogue [cf. EXODUS 20:12-16], before adding the second Great Commandment [see MATTHEW 22:39].

Note the young man’s delighted response: “All these I have kept” [MATTHEW 19:20]. Luke again adds the qualifier that the young man contended that he had maintained these laws from boyhood. Though we recognise them, few of us are able to name these commandments, much less say that we have kept them. To aver that we have obeyed the commands of God over an extended period excludes most of us, if that is necessary for eternal life.

The only reasonable conclusion from this exchange is that this was undoubtedly a fine young man—truly a benediction to loving training received from his parents. He was conscientious and considerate. He was also careful to keep the Law, and he was consecrated. Nevertheless, he was lost. How could this be? If this young man was not saved, can anyone be saved? Witnessing the exchange between the Master and this fine young ruler, this was the precise question raised by the disciples.

AT ISSUE IS ETERNAL LIFE. The young man asked Jesus what was required to receive eternal life. Asking this demonstrated that he recognised Jesus as a great teacher, at the least. It also illustrates a great truth concerning eternal life. Only a fool deliberately blind to reality would deny that there must be more than this present existence that we call life. Almost everyone anticipates that there is life beyond this moment.

All the great religions of the world look beyond the moment to an unseen world. Whether adherents of those religions imagine repeated reincarnation until they have achieved perfection, or whether they imagine wandering as eternal shades, or whether they think of rivers of honey and seventy-two virgins waiting for them, every religion looks forward to something. Jihadists are motivated by their vision of the next life to act cruelly as they do.

Likewise, the irreligious and the casually religious are virtually united in anticipating that there must be something more than this moment. There is a definite, if undefined, anticipation of some sort of life beyond the moment. Perhaps there are flashes of this possibility that briefly disquiet the careless soul when such a one is aware of some grievous error in judgement or as result of some deliberate misdeed. At other times, there is an uninvited yearning for rest and security in a life beyond the present. The possibility cannot be casually dismissed even by the most ardent atheist that there is a life beyond the present.

As Christians, we know more about that eternal life than do others. The One who gives life has provided us a revelation concerning that life. He conquered death and emptied the grave of its terrors; and now He offers to all who will receive it the gift of eternal life. Indeed, we who have believed are destined to be transformed into His likeness and to live forever with God; the transformation began for each of us when we were born from above.

Therein lies the great tragedy of our day. While almost all people look for life beyond the moment, they are ignorant of the expression that eternal life of necessity must reflect. Eternal life is not simply a matter of length of days or of unending existence; eternal life is rather associated with the concept of being equipped to enjoy Him who gives life. Since the Creator is holy and righteous, all who will enjoy Him eternally must themselves be holy and righteous. These truths are evident from multiple passages presented in the Word.

Paul writes, “[Concerning] the resurrection of the dead—what is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:42b-49].

Again, Scripture pointedly states, “Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is” [1 JOHN 2:28-3:2].

This rich young ruler is to be commended for knowing that there was something beyond, something better, than the life he had known to this point. This is saying a lot since he was a fine young man. Perhaps you, as was true of this young man, recognise that there is something more than growing up, growing old and dying. If so, you are to be commended. At the heart of the Christian Faith is the knowledge that we are created for something more than what most people ever achieve or even with what most settle for.

To my amazement, I observe that many modern people seem intent on ridiculing the unseen world. It is as though they have deliberately closed their eyes to reality, turned off their brains and operate by wishful thinking. They can only live for the moment, though they are disturbed by the prospect of accountability after this present life is finished. They remind me of little children whistling as they walk past the cemetery in the dark. They appear to hope that by keeping up a brave face nothing will frighten them.

Modern people often speak of a vague hope that their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds, and that somehow this equation will satisfy God. Of course, such thinking is folly-wide-the-mark. We have no good deeds—not if we consider that goodness is defined by comparing the act against perfection. Moreover, thinking that we can somehow compel God to accept us reveals that we really don’t know God. It speaks of a God who is feeble, liable to being duped and manipulated. Of course, that is not the case.

God, through His prophet, revealed His character in a startling statement to Israel.

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand
and marked off the heavens with a span,
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure
and weighed the mountains in scales

and the hills in a balance?
Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD,
or what man shows him his counsel?
Whom did he consult,
and who made him understand?
Who taught him the path of justice,
and taught him knowledge,
and showed him the way of understanding?
Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.
Lebanon would not suffice for fuel,
nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.
All the nations are as nothing before him,
they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

“To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?
An idol! A craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and casts for it silver chains.
He who is too impoverished for an offering
chooses wood that will not rot;
he seeks out a skillful craftsman
to set up an idol that will not move.

“Do you not know? Do you not hear?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

“Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows on them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

“To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,

calling them all by name,
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.”

[ISAIAH 40:12-26]

Despite the foolish denials of atheists and God deniers, mankind continues to believe in life after death. What mankind seeks is what Christians know as eternal life. I concede that most of those who think of life beyond the grave focus on their own desires, failing to realise that what God offers is a transformation of the self, equipping broken humanity to enjoy God. God is not merely offering us a means of avoiding the penalty of sin; the Lord God is changing those whom He has redeemed from the inside so that they will no longer be sinful. Eternal life is God’s gift to prepare people to enjoy God Himself. At issue is not so much that people will go to Heaven, but rather that people will be delivered from the presence of sin. Instead of eternal life being all about mankind and our desires, the Word of God reveals that this new quality of life is all about God preparing people to love Him, to serve Him and to enjoy Him.

I have often said that if the natural man was to go to Heaven, he would be miserable. How can a mere mortal enjoy worship? I speak frankly out of a heart of love to you who hear me now. If you find no joy in worshipping God, you will not enjoy Heaven. If you find gathering with the saints and learning of God boring, you will not enjoy Heaven. If you serving God is repulsive, being led by His Spirit and enjoying His love repugnant, you will not enjoy Heaven. Heaven is all about loving God and serving Him forever.

Through Malachi, God has said, “Those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ‘They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him’” [MALACHI 3:16-18].

Again, those who come out of the Great Tribulation in a future day will be persecuted because of their faith in Christ the Lord. Yet they are witnessed as standing firm in Christ and serving God. Baffled by one of the elders’ question of who he witnessed praising God, John confessed his ignorance. The elder informed him, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

‘Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

[REVELATION 7:14-17]

Note one additional passage of the Word. “The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” [REVELATION 22:1-4]. The redeemed anticipate eternity in the presence of the Lord God.

Eternal life is the life required for us to enjoy God. Eternal life ensures that all sin is forgiven and that we have received a new Spirit. Possessing eternal life, the days of our flesh are henceforth invested in preparing for the transformation that is coming. We are learning to worship God, learning to enjoy Him, learning to serve Him acceptably, learning to rejoice in His love and to revel in His goodness.

The rich young man who approached Jesus so many centuries past recognised a vital truth—there is a life that is pleasing to God; and that life is known as “eternal life.” It is less an issue of the quantity of life than it is an issue of the quality of life. When the qualitative aspect of that life is perfected so that we are prepared to enter into the presence of God, the quantitative aspect of that life will take care of itself.

IS ETERNAL LIFE A COMMODITY FOR WHICH ONE BARTERS, OR IS IT A GIFT TO BE RECEIVED?

This young man attempted to bargain with God. To his dismay, he discovered that God does not shoot dice. You see, the young man realised that there was such a thing as “eternal life.” He wanted to secure that new life. Therefore, he asked the natural question, the question that so many people ask, whether silently or openly, “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

The question this young man asked was not the correct question, unfortunately. His question could only lead to a dead end. There is a proper question, however. A jailer in the city of Philippi asked the proper question. Addressing two prisoners whom he had beaten and placed in stocks, that jailer in Philippi asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved” [ACTS 16:30]?

Do you see the difference between these two questions? Look at them side-by-side. “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” “What must I do to be saved?” The first question assumes that some deed can be performed that will result in pleasing God and securing this new quality of life. The second question simply seeks the life. In one sense, the questions are alike. Each seeks the identical result—eternal life. However, the first question betrays that the questioner is focused on the individual—on deeds and efforts and merit.

The difference between being saved and being lost is the difference between “do” and “done.” Mankind naturally thinks in terms of expenditure of effort in order to secure a position or to achieve a condition. If I exercise consistently and eat a proper diet, I will likely have a fit body. If I study hard and obtain enough knowledge, I will be able to get a better job. If I save a sufficient amount of money and build up a good credit record, I will be able to afford the lifestyle I desire. In our experience, life is worked out in this way—we perform certain acts and desired consequences follow.

Think carefully. What do you have that you could offer to make God accept you? Perhaps you imagine that some deed will suffice to please God? He made you and He gave you the strength you have—even your very life. What can you do that will merit His acceptance? Since God is infinite, you could never live enough lifetimes to perform even one deed or a single action that could impress Him. Any devotion to Him and to His cause that you could muster would be inevitably tainted with the stench of “self.”

There is an even more basic problem in the idea that a mere mortal can perform some act that will please God. God is holy and righteous. Who of us is holy and righteous? If you imagine that you are holy today, can you say that you have always been holy? If you think that you are righteous at this moment, have you always been righteous? The standard for pleasing God is that we must be holy and righteous—not occasionally, but always. None of us qualify as holy or righteous. The rich young ruler kept the commandments from childhood; but he had to learn them at some point. Before learning them, he was unable to keep them.

It is for this reason that the Word of God stresses that we cannot perform an action that will merit God's love. Carefully follow this particular line of reasoning. Those who listen and who have yet to discover the life that God offers in Christ need to know the truths I am about to reveal in order to have eternal life. Those who possess eternal life need to know these truths in order to tell others so that they can receive this marvellous gift that God alone can give.

“God is love” [1 JOHN 4:8]. God's nature is to love mankind whom He created. However, it is also true that God is a holy God; He demands holiness of any who come into His presence. The Apostle Peter states in his first letter, “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” [1 PETER 1:15, 16]. Again, those who would see God must themselves be holy [see HEBREWS 12:14]. This is the problem! We are not holy; but we must be holy if we will know God. God's holiness compels Him to judge wickedness and to segregate the wicked from His presence.

If not for God's divine wisdom, mankind would have been eternally doomed. Whenever we speak of eternal life, whether recognising the fact or not, we are acknowledging mercy and speaking about grace. Mercy impelled God to seek a way for mankind's salvation. Grace is the means by which God reached out to fallen mankind even while man rebelled against God and sought to find his own way to life.

I consider the letter to the Ephesians to be an especially great and encouraging missive. Listen carefully as I read one extended portion of that letter. Here, Paul writes of the mercy and the grace of the Lord God toward all mankind, especially revealed toward those who believe. “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” [EPHESIANS 2:1-10].

Consider the manner in which the Apostle treats this same issue in TITUS 3:3-7. “We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

This, then, is the message we declare. “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures... He was buried... He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,” and He revealed Himself to those whom He chose to see Him as risen from the dead [see **1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-7**]. We testify, “God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” [**2 CORINTHIANS 5:21**]. In grace, God reaches out to sinners to provide that sin can be set aside and fallen mankind can be holy and righteous. The young ruler sought to secure eternal life by performing some meritorious act. He could not perform an act that such would compel God to give eternal life. Many people still imagine that they can do some deed that will compel God to accept them. Before allowing ourselves to think such thought we must remember Paul’s warning penned to the saints in Rome. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” [**ROMANS 6:23**].

ETERNAL LIFE IS REVEALED IN OUR STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE. One great truth that is woefully neglected today is that who we are is revealed through what we do. One cannot be born from above and into the Kingdom of God without being transformed. This transformation, brought about by spiritual rebirth as the Holy Spirit takes up residence in one’s life, is not so much brought about through the deliberate action of the redeemed individual as it is the natural outworking of the presence of God the Holy Spirit in the life of the twice-born individual

On one of the early visits by our daughters after we had arrived in Dawson Creek, one of my wife’s co-workers told me that she could really tell that Susan was my daughter. She continued by noting how much Rochelle looked like me as well. Isn’t that something? A child reflects the heritage received from her parents! Each of us accepts that this is true. A scientist might be tempted to say that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny; however it might be said, our character is shaped in significant measure by our parentage.

In the same way, the divine parentage will also be reflected in the manner of life for the twice-born individual? Jesus spoke of this very issue when he said, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” [**LUKE 6:43-45**].

Therefore, Jesus’ disciples are called to shine brightly in the world. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” [**MATTHEW 5:14-16**].

Having been born from above, the child of God of necessity reflects his divine parentage. The young ruler came seeking what was necessary in order to secure eternal life. Since he specifically asked what must be done, Jesus pointed him to the commandments that related to the manner in which he interacted with his fellow man. “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

You can almost see the mental wheels turning in this young man’s head. “You shall not murder.” Check! “You shall not commit adultery.” Check! “You shall not steal.” Check! “You shall not bear false witness.” Check! “Honour your father and mother.” Check! “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Check! “Man,” he must have thought about this point, “I’m batting a thousand!”

Nevertheless, something was obviously lacking. The great blot in this young man's life was that something vital was missing. "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" In effect, he is saying that he is a good person and he knows it. However, he recognised a void. The lost person says prayers, but she doesn't pray. He performs a liturgy, but he doesn't worship. She reads the Bible, but she doesn't hear the voice of God. Candidly, there is no intimacy with God.

Mark informs us that Jesus loved this young man; and because He loved him, Jesus said, "You lack one thing." "If you would be perfect" is the way Jesus began in the text. Eternal life is being perfect in the sight of God. It is not perfection dependent upon personal exertion or through personal effort—we cannot be perfect. Rather, perfection for mankind results from submitting to God so that He might begin the process of perfecting us for His glory. Perfection is the promise of God and those who have eternal life are now declared perfect before the Father.

Listen to the opening words of the encyclical we know as Ephesians. The Apostle writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" [**EPHESIANS 1:3-10**].

According to Jesus, in order for the young man who was knelling before him to be perfect he would need to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor. In saying this, Jesus put His finger on a truth the young man did not wish to hear and may not have recognised. The young man already had a god—his wealth. It is as though Jesus opened those Ten Commandments and said, "Oh, there is one other commandment to consider. "You shall have no other gods before Me" [**EXODUS 20:3**]." For good measure, the Master could easily have thrown in the Tenth Commandment, "You shall not covet" [**EXODUS 20:17**]; He did infer as much. The point is that no mortal perfectly keeps the Ten Commandments, much less the remainder of the assorted commandments which are given in the Law. The purpose of the Law was not to create perfection; rather, it was to create awareness of our imperfection. This young man doesn't recognise his imperfection. Therefore, he was in a dangerous condition that could only lead to destruction and condemnation before Holy God.

Malachi's prophecy stings my soul each time I read it. How these words must have stung the professed people of God who first read them. "A son honours his father and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts... But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' ... When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favour? says the LORD of hosts. And now entreat the favour of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favour to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! ... From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is

polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations” [MALACHI 1:6-14].

Here is the heart of the message—if Jesus is Lord, my life will reflect that truth through commitment to Him. If He is merely a figurehead, that also will be revealed through my manner of life. Stewardship encompasses far more than handling money. However, the way in which we handle wealth reveals our relationship to the Lord Christ. Whether Jesus is Master of my life or whether He is merely a religious figurehead is demonstrated through how I handle my possessions and in how I invest my time.

Is God Master of your life? Do you honour Him through generous administration of the wealth He has entrusted to you? More pointedly, do you give generously to His cause? Does He receive even a tithe of your time? Can you honestly say that He occupies even ten percent of your thoughts? This is the point Jesus was making to that young man; it is a point which each of us must consider. We call Jesus Master, but whether He is Master or whether we are treating Him as though He were only a fire insurance policy is revealed through our stewardship of life.

The young man who eagerly approached Jesus that day already had a god—his possessions possessed him. His wealth had become for him a god. Though the young man appeared to be seeking that which was good—eternal life, like Gollum pursuing his precious—the One Ring, this wealthy young ruler really did not wish to have another rule his life. Jesus exposed the folly lurking in that young ruler’s life. Likewise, the folly of my own life and the folly of your life is exposed by our response to the challenge of the Master. Are you willing to follow Him wherever He may lead? The question is not merely theoretical. Rather, the question is eminently practical.

Is Jesus your Master? Does your investment of time demonstrate His mastery over your life? Does your giving honour Him? Do the choices dictating your service reveal Him as your Master? These are hard questions that each of us must answer. If, somehow, the answer is unsatisfactory, we must turn to the Lord seeking the mercy that He alone gives.

You must “Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead so that you will be saved.” The reason for this is that “With the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” We must remember that the Scripture says, “‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

The message concludes with a call to each worshipper. First is a call for each of us to ensure that Christ Jesus is Master of your life. Have you openly confessed Him? Have you obeyed His first command to be baptised? Have you openly united with a sound, Bible-believing congregation where you can labour in His Name? Are you walking in obedience to His Spirit? Does He receive the honour due His Name through your commitment to His cause? Does your giving reflect His mastery of your life? These issues must be confronted and resolved so that each of us may honour Him in all things and grow in holiness. Amen.