



LESSON 8: "I Wish I Were A Rich Man" **Date:** _____

KEY VERSE: Proverbs 14:24 – "The crown of the wise is their riches."

INTRODUCTION

A preacher was talking to a farmer when he asked, "If you had \$200 would you give me \$100?" The farmer replied, "Sure preacher but you know that I don't have \$200." "Well," said the preacher, "If you had 2 cows would you give me one?" Again, the farmer replied, "Sure preacher, but you know that I only have one cow!" The preacher responded, "Farmer, if you had 2 pigs would you give me one?" "Come on preacher!" the farmer replied, "You know that I have 2 pigs!"

When we talk about money we always run the risk of getting very close to home. People become very sensitive. Everyone has an opinion. Some Christians almost seem to believe that it's a sin to be wealthy. Other believers seem to believe that it's a sin to be poor. Unfortunately, many Christians never take the time to really consider what the Bible says about the matter of wealth. American Christians have a special responsibility to be familiar with what the Bible has to say about money.

- Americans make up only 5% of the world's population while controlling over 87% of the world's wealth.
- Americans enjoy a per capita income of over \$37,000 per year while the per capita income in Sierra Leon is \$530. In fact, there are 110 countries with a per capita income of less than \$100 per week!

By any standard, Americans are extraordinarily wealthy people. Christians who live in America need to learn to balance the fact that, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10) with the fact that, "The crown of the wise is their riches" (Prov. 14:24).

The book of Proverbs acknowledges the fact that wealth is difficult to handle. That's why wise men learn to pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. 30:8). The book of Proverbs presents a striking contrast between the rich and the poor and provides counsel for both. Let's give careful attention to the rich man in the book of Proverbs.

Theme: Wise believers will learn to pray, "Give me neither poverty nor riches" (Prov. 30:8).

TRUTHS ABOUT THE RICH

Most of us can paint a stereo-typical picture of what a rich person looks like. Thurston and "Lovie" Howell on "Gilligan's Island," Oliver and Lisa Douglas on "Green Acres," or Milburn Drysdale on the "Beverly Hillbillies" come immediately to mind. As we open the book of Proverbs, we discover that stereotypes of the wealthy cross generations and cultures.

1. *The rich are often rude (Prov. 18:23).*

Proverbs 18:23 says, "The poor useth entreaties; but the rich answereth roughly." We've all seen it. Wealthy individuals have a tendency to speak down to others and treat those having little wealth with little dignity. That's why it is striking when a wealthy person is noticed for their graciousness. Riches and courtesy seldom are seen together.

2. *The rich are often popular (Prov. 19:40).*

Proverbs 19:4 says, "Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbor." American missionaries often observe that they must enter impoverished countries with great care because American wealth produces immediate status and the focus of those that they seek to reach may be more on the attractiveness of American capitalism than on Christ. The wealthy are often rude to their subordinates and the poor often bow to the wealthy.

3. *The rich rule over the poor (Prov. 22:7).*

This is true the world over. From slave-traders to demagogues in industry, the battle for equality is easily lost by those who live in poverty. The rich have the ability to make the laws, hire the lawyers and adjust the playing field so that their rule is entrenched.

It is well for every believer to learn that while the world will always be plagued by class-warfare, God looks at every many equally. Proverbs 22:2 says, “The rich and the poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.” Since God is the rightful owner of everything (Hagg. 2:8) and will one day repossess everything, we must realize that God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

Transition: We have looked at some truths about the rich; let’s consider the instructions that the book of Proverbs has for those who are rich.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE RICH

The book of Proverbs clearly presents the characteristics of those who would attain riches. While men and women search for success in self-help books, business journals, and seminars, the book of Proverbs presents ageless truths for those who would know financial success.

1. *The rich are diligent (Prov. 10:4).*

Proverbs 10:4 says, “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.” While there are those who inherit their wealth, the book of Proverbs make it clear that riches come to those who work and flee from those who don’t. Many American’s have long forgotten the challenge given by President John Kennedy when he said, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your country.” Welfare programs have made it easy for the slack to prosper and taxation has made it difficult for the diligent to become rich. Nevertheless, the wisdom of Proverbs remains – those who are diligent tend toward wealth.

2. *The rich are strong (Prov. 11:16).*

Proverbs 11:16 says, “Strong men retain riches.” The word translated, “strong,” in Proverbs 11:16 is the Hebrew word, *Aw-reets*. This Hebrew word is found twenty times in the Old Testament and is often translated with the words, “oppress” or “terrible” (see Job 15:20, 27:13; Ps. 54:3; Is. 25:3, 29:20). Class warfare between the “haves and the have nots” has been around since society began and “strong men retain riches.” Ruthless sharks who take the treasures of the unsuspecting will always be with us. Tyrants will never be vanquished. Those who would walk with wisdom learn to live in dependence upon God to protect their treasures.

3. *The rich are wise (Prov. 14:24).*

Proverbs 14:24 says, “The crown of the wise is their riches.” A crown is something worn outwardly and recognized immediately. Proverbs teaches that the wealth is often an evidentiary indicator of wisdom.

4. *The rich are temperate (Prov. 21:17).*

Simply put, if you try to live high on the hog, you’re going to fall off! “He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich” (Prov. 21:17). While the “Life Styles of the Rich and Famous” may look attractive – it’s a trap. Spenders become paupers. As Franklin wisely advised, “A penny saved is a penny earned.”

5. *The rich are humble (Prov. 22:4).*

“By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life” (Prov. 22:4). At first this statement may seem contradictory. After all, we’ve already learned that the rich “answer roughly,” “rule over the poor” and are “strong.” How can the same person be both rude and humble? We find our answer as we remember that the author of the book of Proverbs is providing both general characteristics and clear counsel. As a general rule, the rich are rude tyrants. For those of faith who would like life wisely, God says, humility brings wealth. It is impossible to have a teachable spirit without

humility. It is impossible to live well in partnership without humility. It is impossible to live temperately without humility. “By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life” (Prov. 22:4).

6. *The rich are fearers of God (Prov. 22:4).*

There are riches to enjoy that money cannot buy. Those who fear the Lord have treasures of inestimable worth. A conscience that is clean, peace that passes understanding, a home in heaven, and crowns to present to Jesus are just a few of the many blessings known by those who fear God.

7. *The rich are faithful (Prov. 28:20).*

“A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent” (Prov. 28:20). Faithfulness to his employer led Joseph to be second only to Pharaoh and Daniel to be the first among Babylon’s princes (Dan. 6). The cost of a broken home is ruinous but those who are faithful to their marriage “abound with blessings.” Faithful oversight of one’s assets is necessary for those assets to grow. The rich are faithful.

Transition: Because “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10), it should come as no surprise to us that the book of Proverbs is jam-packed with warnings about riches.

WARNINGS TO THE RICH

There are those who live to be rich and find no profit in it! Jesus told the story of the man who built and filled barns while saying to his soul, “Eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19). Sadly, the wealthy farmer did not know that God would call him a “fool” and repossess his soul that very night (Luke 12:20). Those who say that “money talks” need to know that it says, “Good-bye!” The book of Proverbs is filled with wise warnings for those who are rich.

1. *Riches bring no profit in judgment (Prov. 11:4).*

Proverbs 11:4 says, “Riches profit not in the day of wrath.” God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11). Those who through bribes have bought pardons on earth will find that the bench of God’s justice is only satisfied by the blood of God’s Son (1 John 1:7). In truth, the more we have on earth, the more we stand to lose in eternity, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48).

2. *Riches gained without labor will vanish (Prov. 13:11).*

Proverbs 13:11 says, “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.” It is no secret that those who win the lottery often lose more than they win.¹ Easy money is easily lost.

3. *Riches tend to make a person feel secure (Prov. 18:11).*

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (Prov. 18:11). Unfortunately, when that security is taken away the formerly wealthy often have no foundation remaining. Depression and suicide not only follow those who suffer the loss of wealth but also partners with those who obtain it.² God is only One source of real security (Dt. 33:27; Phil. 4:19).

4. *Riches may be temporary (Prov. 23:5).*

“Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Prov. 23:5). “For riches are not forever” (Prov. 27:24). There are so many variables at work that there is no lasting promise of plenty. Along with moths and rust, there will always be thieves who break through and steal (Matt. 6:19). America’s Great Depression, the “Housing Bubble,” and recurring “Market Adjustments” all bear testimony to the fact that wealth has a way of flying away. Only what is invested in the vaults of heaven is secure (Matt. 6:20).

¹ www.businessinsider.com/17-lottery-winners-who-blew-it-all-2013-5

² www.livescience.com/15225-global-depression-poor-rich-countries

5. *Riches found quickly tend to be riches found wrongly (Prov. 28:20).*

“He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be found innocent” (Prov. 28:20). The salesman who slants the truth, the business man who cuts corners, the construction worker who slights the contract, and the con-artist who plays upon emotion all have one thing in common—greed. Beware of the temptation to get rich quick!

6. *Riches as an end in themselves tell a lot about oneself (Prov. 28:22).*

“He that hastened to be rich hath an evil eye” (Prov. 28:22). Satan took the Savior up onto the mountain to tempt Him with all that the world has to offer (Matt. 4:9). The eye of the Savior was set on pleasing the Father. By His example Jesus taught us that our focus must first be on pleasing the Father before we focus on any other goal. Those who forget God as they focus on getting rich gain what will ultimately be lost.

CONCLUSION

The Proverbs tell us that there are many things far better than riches.

- “The blessings of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Prov. 10:22).
- “A good name is better than great riches” (Prov. 22:1).
- “Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich” (Prov. 28:6).

D.L. Moody left his impoverished home in Northfield, Massachusetts, with one goal in mind—he wanted to be very rich! It wasn’t until he left his occupation and put the Lord first that he found true riches.³ William Borden of Yale left the family fortune to follow the call of God.⁴

No one knows what kind of financial holdings the distinguished Rabbi Saul of Tarsus may have enjoyed but we know that Barnabas sold his island property in order to follow God’s calling in his life (Acts 4:36-37).

What inspired all of these individuals to give up so much? They followed the One who was rich and became poor in order to make

others rich beyond compare (II Cor. 8:9). Riches are certainly not wrong, but wrongly used wealth is the world’s most wicked snare (I Tim. 6:10). Now we understand why—“The crown of the wise is their riches” (Prov. 14:24).

³ www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/life-and-times-of-moody

⁴ <http://home.snu.edu/~hculbert/regret>