

How to Be Rich
What Nobody Tells You
February 9, 2020

Good morning everyone.

As Cary said, today we're beginning a brand new series called *How to Be Rich* and I think the little video we just saw illustrates some of the confusion that we're, hopefully, going to clear up in this series.¹

And that is that there is a difference between *becoming* rich and *being* rich. Let me say that again: there's a difference between *becoming* rich and *being* rich.

And the former is much easier than the latter ... which is why there are lots and lots of people out there who promise that they can tell you – for a price, of course – how to *become* rich, but nobody tells you how to *be*

rich ... and more specifically, how to *be good* at being rich.

And that's a shame because being good at being rich is an acquired skill. It requires learning. It requires some practice, some discipline because wealth doesn't come with a set of instructions. Having lots of money doesn't make you good at being rich any more than having lots of children makes you good at being a parent.

They're two completely different issues. Being rich is not the same as being good at it.

So, that's what we're going to be talking about over the next four Sundays: how to be rich ... and how to be good at it.

And I hope you'll make it a point to be here each week but, if you can't, as always we'll be posting up the video, audio and text from

each message to the media section of our website, app and our podcast (although that's just audio).

Now, if you're not a Christian or you're not very familiar with the Bible, it might surprise you to learn that one of the major writers of the New Testament – the Apostle Paul – actually addressed this issue of “how to be good at being rich.”

I say it might surprise you because a lot of people think that Jesus and Christianity and the Bible are anti-wealth. A lot of people think that in order to be “really spiritual” and “godly” you have to be poor.

And while it's true that the overwhelming testimony of the scriptures is that God has a special place in His heart for those who are not at the bottom of the economic ladder, it's just as true that God has no particular axe to

grind against those who are at the top.

God's concern with that group – as we'll see throughout this series – is being good at being rich.

So, let's read through what Paul wrote to a young pastor by the name of Timothy, who had been put in charge of preaching and teaching in places like the first century city of Ephesus and many other port cities throughout the Mediterranean.

And, just to give the context ... because those cities were the center of trade, there was a lot of wealth among the people who were becoming believers in and followers of Jesus.

And Paul, who had planted many of the churches in that region, knew that rich people were going to face some challenges as they adopted the new worldview that was being

given to them as Christians, so he gives specific instructions to Timothy about how to lead them to be good at being rich.

And here's what he wrote:

*Command those who are rich
in this present world ...*

Interesting choice of wording: "command" Paul says, which implies that what he is about to say is of utmost importance; that there is very little wiggle room on this (and we'll see why in just a bit) ...

*Command those who are rich
in this present world not to be
arrogant*

*.... nor to put their hope in
wealth, which is so uncertain
...*

*... but to put their hope in God,
who richly provides us with*

*everything for our enjoyment.
1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV)*

*Command them to do good, to
be rich in good deeds, and to
be generous and willing to
share. 1 Timothy
6:18 (NIV)*

In this way they will lay up ...

This is an interesting thing to say to people who are already rich.

*In this way they will lay up
treasure for themselves as a
firm foundation for the coming
age, so that they may take
hold of the life that is truly life.*

1 Timothy 6:19 (NIV)

So, if you're a Christian and you want to be good at being rich, that's the instruction

manual (so to speak).

And, over the next four weeks, we're going to go through that manual – that passage – thought-by-thought because I want you to know how to be good (as God defines “good”) at being rich.

Defining “Rich”

Having said all of that I'm pretty sure that many of you in this room or watching online right now are thinking, “Rick, I'm sure you meant well when you came up with this series, but I'm *not* sure you thought it through very well ... because ... *I'm not rich.*”

“I mean, I'm not really *poor* but, when I look around, there are a lot of people who have a whole lot more money and stuff than I could ever hope to have. *They're* the ones who you need to be talking to Rick, not *me*. *They're* the

rich. I'm not."

And I understand why you might think that because, quite frankly, I'm tempted to think the same thing.

I'm not rich.

He's rich.

She's rich.

They're rich.

... which illustrates part of the problem, which is that ...

Nobody knows where the "rich line" is!

For example, when you get paid on the 1st of the month or the 15th of the month, I doubt you ever say to yourself, "Awesome, I just crossed

it. I mean, yesterday, I wasn't rich. But today, woo-hoo, I'm rich. I finally got there."

So, let's talk about where that line might be for most of us.

Several years ago, a study asked different people, at different wages, "How much would you need to earn to be rich?" Most people gave a number that was basically double what they currently earned.ⁱⁱ

In other words, for those making \$30,000 a year, being rich meant earning \$60K a year. For those making \$50K, rich was \$100K. For those making \$100K, it was \$200 and so on and so forth ...

However – this is fascinating to me – according to a report by investment bank UBS, only 3 of 10 of people with \$1 million to \$5 million in assets considered themselves wealthy.

Even when you ask people with more than \$5 million in assets, only 3 in 5 consider themselves wealthy.

What's funny about that is that if your net worth is \$1.9M, you are in the top 5% of wealth in the entire country.

And yet, about 60% of those with \$2M in assets do not think of themselves as “rich!”ⁱⁱⁱ

That's crazy!

The moral of the story?

“Rich” is a moving target. No matter how much money we have or make, we will probably never consider ourselves rich. The biggest challenge facing rich people is that they've lost their ability to recognize that they're rich.

So, today I'm going to tell you something that

nobody tells you. Are you ready? Here it comes.

You're rich!

You really are.

In fact, let me give you two statistics to prove it.

According to the Census Bureau, the median per capita income of Platte County is about \$39K per year.^{iv} So, if you make that amount – and, in reality, the average income of the adults in this congregation is significantly higher than that – but let's just say you make \$39K per year.

According to the Global Rich List (google it sometime) ...

According to the Global Rich List you are in the top 1% ...

... of all wage earners in this world today. You're a 1-percenter. You are in the top 1 percent of people alive on earth today; that's how rich you are.

And some of you – you didn't realize this but, you are mega, mega rich because if you \$80,000 a year or more ...

You are in the top .1% of wage earners in the world; the top 1/10th of 1%.

That's how crazy rich you are. 1/10th of 1 percent of everybody alive today; you are rich.

And I want to be sensitive when I say this, because I know that there are those who have significant financial challenges right now and I don't want to minimize that.

- Some of you are racked with medical

bills because of something that you didn't expect, and you don't know how you'll climb out.

- Some of you are not employed right now, and it's a scary and challenging time for you.
- Some of you are single parents working multiple jobs, trying to feed kids and it's very, very difficult, and I acknowledge that.

But let's be honest, okay?

For most of us who would push back and say, "I'm not rich. Who cares what that stupid website says!"

For most of us, financially speaking, the difference between us and Bill Gates (one of the richest men in the world) is smaller than

the difference between us and the average person living outside the U.S.

In fact, several years ago, Gates traveled to India and, at one point, he stopped to visit with a woman who was living in a hut. Through a translator, they discussed the state of health care and other challenges her people were facing.

After he left, a journalist asked her “do you realize that the richest man in the world was just in your home?”

Her response? “*Everybody* who visits from the West is rich.”

In her eyes, the average American is so rich, we’re all the same.

Here’s another statistic.

If you own a car, you're in the top 7 percent of the wealthiest people alive. That's rich.^v

... which means that when people from developing countries talk about rich people, about 3 billion people would describe rich people this way. About half the world's population would say, "Let me tell you about rich people ... rich people own cars."

"Not only that, some of the rich people, they're so rich they have *an extra car*. They've got one for him and one for her. They've got two cars.

"And some people, they're so rich, you're not going to believe it: they've got houses for their cars. They call them garages. They drive their cars into garages to keep their cars safe from the elements."

"And some of these rich people, they're so

rich, they have *three-car* garages, one for both of their cars and an extra one for the junk that won't fit in their house. That's how rich they are."

"These rich people, it's amazing. They'll drive their cars past 15 buildings called restaurants to get to their 16th one, because it's their favorite."

"And then they'll order *three* meals.

- The first one's called an appetizer.
- The second one is called the main course
- And the third one is called dessert."

"And when they drive home into their house, some of them have closets that you can walk into, and some of these closets, they're bigger than the homes of people all over the world. Some of them even have a 'his closet' and a

'her closet.'"

"And they walk by, these rich people and they touch all their clothes, and they say, 'I've got nothing to wear.'"

Friends, that's how rich we are.^{vi}

Even of Americans officially designated as 'poor' ...

- 99 percent have electricity, running water, flush toilets, and a refrigerator;
- 95 percent have a television
- 88 percent a telephone
- 71 percent a car
- And 70 percent air conditioning.

The richest people in American history had none of these. And neither does much of the world today.^{vii}

Friends, you and I are rich.

Of course, just because we *are* rich doesn't mean we *feel* rich.

And we don't feel rich for two reasons.

First, we don't feel rich because we keep moving the "rich line." We keep looking up the ladder.

- Rich, to us, is the other guy. Rich is that other family.
- Rich isn't just having extra. Rich is having as much extra as the person who has *more extra* than we do.
- Rich is having more than we currently have.

If that's the case, 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.

Second, the reason many of us don't feel rich is because we *consume everything God gives us*. If we get more, we consume more. And there's very little to show for everything we've been given.

Now, here's the point I'm making in all of this – and I know I've spent a lot of time trying to make it.

When Paul gives instructions to Timothy of what to tell "those who are rich in this present world," ...

He is talking about you and he is talking about me!

Because you and me ... in this present world

in which we live ... compared to everyone else in this present world in which we live ...

You and me? *We're rich.*

And if we're going to *be good* at being rich, the first step is to admit that we *are* rich ...

... to stop looking at everyone else around us
... to stop discounting the wastefulness and foolish decisions that make us feel like we aren't rich ... and simply own the truth.

We are rich and our lives are full of "rich people opportunities" and this is incredibly good news.

So, here's what I want you to do. It's a little bit of a challenge but I want you to say out loud with me – I *dare you* to say out loud with me – "I'm rich."

Ready? "I'm rich."

Let's do that again. What are you? "I'm rich."

You are rich, and you need to believe it.

In fact, when you recognize that this is a gift from God; that, for some reason, He has blessed you in a very significant way, it changes your heart, your stature, and what you're capable of doing. Your "rich people opportunities" mean that you can make a difference in this world (and we'll talk about that in a couple of weeks).

But, for now, the point is that we're all rich.

The only question is ... are we any good at it?

Two Dangers of Being Rich

Now, if you're not a Christian – and I know we have folks who show up and folks who tune in

who are not, and we're glad to have you ...

If you're not a Christian, this doesn't apply to you. You don't have to be good at being rich, though you're certainly welcome to put into practice the things we're going to talk about.

But if you *are* a Christian – if you're someone who believes that Jesus died for you so that you can be forgiven of every sin, past, present, future, known and unknown and so that you can be “made new” (as we sang about earlier) ...

If you're a Christian, you *do* have to be good at being rich.

Now, we'll get into *why* you need to be good at being rich next week but, for the rest of this message, I want us to get into what it means to be good at being rich by looking more closely at the first part of what Paul wrote to

Timothy.

He wrote:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain but to put their hope in God ...

1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV)

Now, what Paul is getting at here is that there is an invisible dynamic that affects every single rich person. Very specifically, having a lot of money tends to do two things to people.

- First, it can make us arrogant.
- And second, money can become our primary source of hope, leaving us with the impression that we are self-sufficient.

This is why being good at being rich is not just a matter of deciding what to do with your money. You must also pay attention to what your money is doing to you. The key, as the old saying goes, is to possess money without it possessing you.

So, let's talk about arrogance cause that's the first one Paul brought up.

What is arrogance? Well, the definition of being *arrogant* is "having an inflated sense of self-worth."

You ever met any arrogant rich people? I'm sure you have.

And it's easy to see why rich people would lean in that direction.

When your net worth is inflated, it only makes sense that your self-worth should be inflated too.

The reverse is true as well.

If you have only a little (by comparison), you tend to feel *little*; you tend to feel unimportant compared to people who are richer than you – especially in a culture that puts so much emphasis on material things.

But, if somehow your overall estate grows, your sense of self-worth tends to grow right along with it.

And it's not just "overall self-worth" either. Rich people tend to see themselves as superior in each and every category that makes up a person's self-worth.

When you're wealthier than those around you, there is an inclination to see yourself as ...

- Smarter than other people
- Better looking than other people
- And more competent than other people.

And the people around you, if you're rich, tend to reinforce those ideas ... because the richer people are, the more inclined we are to respect them and their opinions and decisions. It's just human nature to do so.

So, is it any wonder that people who have a lot of money — who are constantly surrounded by people bowing and scraping to their superior self-worth — would, over time, begin to see themselves differently ... and become at least, to some extent, arrogant?

It's no wonder at all ... which is why Paul says to Timothy "command rich Christians *not* to do that. Get in their faces if they start to think they're better or smarter than everyone else

just because they're rich."

And then he goes on to warn Timothy of a second problematic tendency for rich people – and this one's even worse than the first.

According to Paul, when you're rich, there's a natural inclination for your hope in life to migrate towards those riches. And what makes this so dangerous is that once you start down that road, the wealthier you get, the more you will trust in those riches. It becomes like a flywheel.

The more wealth you have, the more it makes sense to trust in the wealth you have.

At first that might not sound like much of a problem. After all, there always seems to be a greater sense of hope if there's a pile of money available to you, right? Where there's money, there's hope.

Things are more hopeful when you know you can pay the bills, when you know you can save for the future and even have some leftover to share with others. Hope often accompanies riches. That's just a fact.

But placing your hope *in* those riches is something completely different, and that's where Paul draws the line.

If you're a Christian and riches become the basis for your hope – the source of it – you're heading for trouble.

Now, many of us will assume that isn't an issue for us because we're not rich enough. We don't have to worry about that because we don't have enough money.

But even if you've just got a basic savings account or a simple 401k or an insurance policy – even if you've engaged in just the most basic steps of financial planning – truth

is, you've already waded out into the river with the current drawing you downstream towards self-sufficiency (which is the idea that it's all up to you and your wisdom).

I'll use myself as an example. I've mentioned several times that we're about to embark on a new financial stage of life. After 20+ years of teaching, Jetta is retiring at the end of this school year which means that our income is going to go down and that we are going to be more and more financially dependent on what have saved and how our investments do ...

... which means that the great temptation for me will be (and, frankly, already is) to worry and fret about ...

- What the stock market is doing
- What the Congress is doing
- What the President is doing

- What some unknown virus is doing
- What oil prices are doing
- What China and North Korea and Iran are doing.

... and how all of that (and a dozen other things I'm not smart enough to know I should worry about) ... how all of that is going to impact our little nest egg.

... which illustrates exactly the problem that Paul warns of: *that wealth is so uncertain.*

And why he says if you're a rich person, don't be fooled. Don't put your ultimate trust in your wealth. Put it in God.

Trusting Riches

Now, that doesn't mean you shouldn't plan for the future if you're a Christian. You absolutely should.

That's just being responsible. You need to think about things like life insurance and savings and retirement. Those all matter. You just need to figure out how to keep your hope centered in God and not your 401K or your paycheck.

So, how can a rich Christ-follower know if they're trusting money more than God?

There's not an exact way to measure that but I do think there are three warning signs.^{viii}

1. You never have enough.

People who trust riches more than God never have enough. They're always telling themselves "if I just had a little bit more, then I would be safe. Then I would be happy."

That's always the goal, every single time.

Now, truth is that a little more money can make a big difference to those who are truly poor, but there is evidence to suggest that beyond a basic level of security, increased wealth is only slightly correlated with an increased sense of well-being.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs notes in the *World Happiness Report 2018*, that in the US, “income per capita has more than doubled since 1972 while happiness (or subjective well-being) has remained roughly unchanged or has even declined.”^{ix}

More personally, many of us today have twice as much as we had ten years ago and we weren't happy then, and we're still not happy now.

So, that's the first warning sign you're trusting money more than God. No matter how much

you have, it's never enough.

The second sign is that ...

2. You hesitate to give big.

You have a big pile. You have a big stack and you could give big. But you're afraid to let go of it because you fear you might need it.

And this is the reason why many Christians who believe in what God is doing through their church and would love to tithe – who would love to worship God with the first 10 percent of their income – don't. Even though they have more than enough, even though they're rich, they hesitate to give big.

Or they see someone in need and they think, "I really want to help them out. I'd really like to help that person who can't pay their rent" or whatever.

But they don't because, in their mind, they worry that their stack is not big enough. And it would be too risky and financially dangerous to do such a thing.

And this is why – and studies show this over and over again – this is why the wealthier a person is, on average, the smaller percentage that they give away.

Doesn't make sense does it? The more money you have, the more headroom you have (so to speak). But because the more money you have the more you are drawn to trust that money instead of God, the more you're tempted to hoard it.

Do you know who gives the largest percent, on average, in our country? Those who make below \$12,000 a year. Those who make the least give the highest percentage.

So, that's the second sign you might be trusting in riches instead of God. You hesitate to give big even if it only represents a tithe.

Here's the third sign.

3. You have money in the bank, but no peace in your heart.

And this kind of gets back to what I was saying before about watching and worrying about the stock market and your job and the economy and the Congress and ... and ... and ...

When you trust riches more than God, you have all the ducks in a row, so to speak, but you're worried.

And not just about financial things because one day it dawns on you that ...

- More money is not going to keep your kids off drugs.
- More money is not going to cure the person you love of cancer.
- More money is not going to make your marriage better. If you don't love each other when you got no money, you're going to fight about money when you have money.
- More money will not solve most of your problems.

And when you trust in money, those realizations are terrifying because you have money in the bank and no peace in your heart.

Conclusion

Well, I think you can see that wealth has some very powerful side effects.

In fact, wealth was an over-the-counter drug, there would be bold warnings printed all over the outside of the packaging.

“Warning! May cause arrogance! Beware! May lead you to trust in it instead of God.”

If there was a commercial on TV for wealth, it would be a happy couple holding hands walking with a puppy while, at the same time, an announcer in the background would be describing all the ways it can ruin your life.

... which is why, again, Paul says to Timothy ...

Command those who are rich in this present world, not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so

uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

So, let me give you a little phrase that sums it all up – sort of a declaration of intent that maybe we could repeat every so often.

It goes like this:

I will not trust in riches but in Him who richly provides.

Why don't we all say that out loud together, OK?

I will not trust in riches but in him who richly provides.

Simple to say, hard to do, right?

I will not trust in riches, but in him who richly

provides.

So, what I want to do as we close is to pray for you and then, when I'm finished, I'm going to invite you to join the band in singing a song of worship that expresses the same idea.

So, let's pray.

<PRAYER>

<invite to stand and sing>

Worship – Trust in You (4)

CLOSING COMMENTS (2)

1. Offering
2. Next week – don't miss, very special event in service

Endnotes

ⁱ This message is based on material from Andy Stanley's book of the same title. I've also used some concepts from Craig Groschel's series based on Stanley's book.

ⁱⁱ See <https://www.supermoney.com/much-money-take-considered-rich-us/>

ⁱⁱⁱ This is my rough calculation based on preceding stats.

^{iv} See <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/plattecountymissouri>

^v <https://www.awaken.com/2019/03/how-to-stop-worrying-about-money-jonathan-robinson/>

^{vi} This great illustration is directly from Groschel.

^{vii} See <https://www.fool.com/investing/general/2011/10/28/attention-protestors-youre-probably-part-of-the-1-.aspx>

^{viii} This section is from Groschel's second message in the series.

^{ix} McLaughlin, Rebecca. *Confronting Christianity*. Crossway. Kindle Edition.