

History is filled with the names of rulers who desired to gain great riches and rule over many people. Alexander the Great, for instance, was able to conquer most of the known world in the 4th century B.C. Napoleon, who has been described as “one of the greatest military geniuses of all time,” crushed those who resisted him and created a vast empire. His success, however, went to his head. He began to believe he was invincible and eventually suffered some disastrous defeats. The battle of Waterloo, of course, ended his dream of conquering the world. He died on an island “alone and deserted by his friends and family, on May 5, 1821.” The 20th century certainly has had its share of those who sought world conquest. Adolf Hitler’s desire for power led to World War II and the death of millions of people.

Although they had many military victories, none of these leaders were able to bring the entire world into subjection to themselves for even a moment. Furthermore, the power and riches they did gain did not last very long. Hitler gained the support he needed in Germany in 1934, but by 1945 he found it necessary to commit suicide because his empire was crumbling. Alexander the Great did not have much time to enjoy the power he had gained. He died when he was only thirty-three years old.

In spite of the fact that no one has yet been able to gain complete control over the world, one cannot help but wonder what it would be like if it were possible to have all the power, fame and riches that the world can offer. Almost two thousand years ago, Jesus reflected on the issue of obtaining that much power and made this startling observation:

For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and **loses his own soul?**

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (NKJV, Matthew 16:26)

There are at least two very important points in this short verse. First, that our selfish drive to obtain pleasure, fame, money or power can lead to the loss of our eternal soul. Second, that our soul is worth more than all the things of this world. Even though we may have great success and riches in this life, if we fail to set our minds on the things of God, we are spiritually bankrupt. Jesus made this very plain in Luke 12:16-21:

Then he spoke a parable to them, saying: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ So he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.”’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?’

“So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

In our attempt to find happiness through riches, fame or pleasures, we end up setting aside the things God declares to be the most important. In Matthew 22:37-40 we read:

Jesus said to him, “‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

While Jesus calls upon us to love God and those around us with a sincere love, he cautions us against the love of things that distract us from serving God. As our minds begin to focus more and more on the things of this world, we tend to lose sight of the spiritual things which are truly essential. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus explained: “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word [i. e., the word of God], and **the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word**, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). The Apostle John warned:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

People think that they will be very happy if they can only obtain certain things, but even if they do acquire them, the pleasure is usually very short-lived. They are soon striving for something else to fill the emptiness of their hearts. When the movie star Barbara Streisand was asked how the “reality of success” measured up to her “childhood dreams of glory,” she frankly replied: “It doesn’t come close. It hasn’t come anywhere near it. The dream—you never achieve it and that’s what is depressing . . . to me it’s a real drag that you can’t hold success in your hand like a hard-boiled egg.” True happiness is only found when one comes into a right relationship with God.

As C. S. Lewis has explained, “God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing” (*Mere Christianity*, p. 54). God loves us all very much and desires for us to spend eternity with him in his kingdom. Jesus himself has given the following invitation in John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Bible informs us that we cannot really serve God until we have been “born again” (John 3:3). It plainly states that “**all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In chapter 6, verse 23, of the same book, we are informed: “For the wages of sin *is death*, but the gift of God *is eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What we need, then, is to have Jesus set us free from the chains of sin. Our own “good works” will avail us nothing, we need to pray to The Lord with a sincere heart and turn our life completely over to him. It is only through his “grace” (Ephesians 2:8-10) that we can escape the penalty of eternal separation from God and have a place in his kingdom.

All the things we can acquire in this life amount to nothing when compared with the wonderful salvation that has been prepared for us. The Apostle Paul observed that we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7). Apostle Peter noted that in the last day “the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” After emphasizing again that “all these things will be dissolved” he asked, “what manner of persons ought you to be?” (2 Peter 3:10-11)

When we really think about it, it becomes obvious that while some people may be able to obtain great fame and riches in this life, most of us will have to settle for less. Even if we were able to obtain these things, they would not bring us the lasting happiness we all desire. As we have already shown, Jesus said that the rich man, who was more interested in building bigger barns in which to store his goods than in serving God, was a “fool.” Moreover, Jesus declared that even if someone could gain the whole world that person would be making a tragic mistake which would result in eternal separation from God. Since God places a higher value on one human soul than he does the whole world, one would be very foolish indeed to neglect the eternal salvation which God has provided for the momentary pleasures and riches which this world has to offer.

The following poem brings to mind the importance of having one’s priorities right:

***Only One Life,
T’will Soon Be Past
Only What’s Done
For Christ Will Last***

For more information regarding Christianity, we recommend the book, *Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis.

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