

## “GETTING RICH AND LOVING GOD”

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-14

By Pastor YAU

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) Some historical background: After 40 years of leading the Israelites from Egypt, the land of slavery, aiming to enter the Promised Land, Moses had seen everything of the people, the good, the bad and the ugly. Now they had come to the banks of the River Jordan, getting ready to cross the river to take control of the land God had promised to their forefather Abraham. As much as Moses had known this people, he was worrisome of their future. So, here Moses gave the Israelites his final wholehearted farewell admonition on the dangers they may face once they enter and occupy the land. In this chapter 8, he warned them of the danger of prosperity and the corrosive effect on their relationship with God. God is more than happy to give the best thing to his children. (Matt 7:7-11) But his blessing was often times misused to become a stumbling block between God and his people.

2) Some historical phenomenon: Throughout the history of man, prosperity has done more harm than good to people and nations with little exception. What was true in ancient time has been true in all parts of human history. The pursuit or blessing of God in prosperity or riches had done so much harm to their relationship to the Lord who blessed them with his blessings. Many true believers began their Christian life with very little material possession but a lot of fervency, love and dedication in their pursuit of spiritual growth and service in God's kingdom. But once they become rich or richer, the position of God in their hearts was placed in a lower importance. The time they used to grow their spiritual life will be cut in half or less because they are just too busy to do that. The value of God's principles of life is often times forgotten in their everyday life and business deals in this corrupted world. The story of Lot, after he separated himself from Abraham, was attracted by the glamors of Sodom, he inched himself toward that wicked city and eventually moved in to it and became rich and famous there. (Genesis 13:11-13)

### HOW DOES RICHES DRIVE GOD OUT? Way too many possibilities:

1) There isn't room for two masters: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Matt 6:24) These are the words of the Lord. God doesn't hate riches. In fact he gave lots of his

most faithful lots of riches. But God cannot stand people place money and God on the same level, like co-chair of the life of his people. Very early in history in Exodus, God declared, “You shall have no other gods before me.” (20:3) God either has all of our hearts or none. We can't have a divided heart, half for God and the other half for money. When we put the pursuit of money or the world first in our life, God is out.

2) There isn't much devotion to God: “Yet I hold this one thing against you: You have forsaken your first (primary) love (toward me).” (Rev 2:4) Devotion is the key in our heart toward object(s) we revere or pursue. When we devote so much attention, energy, time and efforts to pursue the world, money, there isn't much left to God, and God can't take that. In our life time, we see many of those otherwise devoted and fervent for God turn around and disappear from their devotion for God and his kingdom. They just don't have much time to do anything for God. There isn't much interest in getting close to God and his people and church, and it isn't the primary goal of their life to love God or follow God's principles in their life.

3) There isn't much need of faith in God: “And I will say to myself: You have plenty of good thing laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.” (Luke 12:19) These too are the words of our Lord Jesus. When riches increases, our need of faith in God will decrease: We will begin to have more faith in ourselves and our possessions than in God. We will build our faith and the security of life in the possessions we have accumulated to the point we feel that we don't need to have faith in God any more.

4) There isn't much room for God's values: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.” (Matt 7:13-14) Again, these are the words of the Lord. The approach, the value and purpose of life, ways of handling business and relationships of the world are more attractive to people of this world than that of the Bible. Many of God's people find it easier to follow the world than God. Today, March 20, the Presbyterian Church, USA, the most liberal part of the Presbyterian denomination, approved a new definition of marriage: “Marriage is a covenant between two persons, although traditionally between a man and a woman.” The reason behind the redefinition is “because there are more acceptance of LGBT in the current culture.” Any time a Christian or a church or a denomination looks to the world for moral direction, there isn't much room to follow God's value. Many Christians had departed from God's

moral principles in their pursuit of money, and wandered away from biblical boundaries of everyday life, and abandoned their duties to God from whom they had received so much blessings in material possession.

5) There is always room for more: “Then he said to them: Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15) Many Christians try to comfort themselves or answer to others that they will stop pursuing riches once they have enough, they will return to God and do right. But in reality, greed is like a black-hole, a bottomless hole. You can never fill a black hole to the brim. Greed is a very attractive but deadly spiritual disease. It is very contagious, very deadly that will never have enough. The size of greed is bigger than your heart, mind and wishes combined. This is true in many areas of life: money, power, prestige, position, glory, fame and many others.

FIVE WAYS TO HANDLE RICHES: The worst failure in our Christian living is to abandon God when He blesses us with all the things we have. Getting rich doesn't have to run away from God, doesn't have to do things against God's principles, and doesn't have to be so proud of yourself to the point you feel you don't need God. We certainly can learn something from the five important warnings or advices Moses gave to the Israelites on this subject:

1) Never forget your humble beginning: “You will forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” (8:14b) Too many people want to forget their humble beginning when they had nothing. In the Bible, particularly the O. T. many prophets wanted the Israelites to remember how the Lord God brought them from Egypt when they all were slaves, and had nothing. Remembering our humble beginning can help us to be content and grateful for what we have today. It can also help us to see how much the Lord has blessed us. We don't have to compare what we have with others, but we can always compare what we have today to what we didn't have many years ago. This may be applied to all of us, be it native born or immigrants came here from other countries.

2) Never forget how the Lord had blessed you: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these 40 years...He humble you, feeding you with manna. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these 40 years. (8:2-4) Many of the success stories always want to credit the self, his hard work, his smart decisions, his connection with the

right people or his strategy that worked well, it's always "I made it" like that rich fool talking to himself after God blessed him with a great harvest. But all we should do is to remember how the Lord has led us to this day, provided us with all the contributing factors, environment and opportunities, and after all, the good health He gives us so we can work, produce and bring results. To ignore what God has done for us in the past is unthinkable and despicable.

3) Never forget that you didn't make all these: "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams, and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills, a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees...a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing." (8:7-9) This is the land God promised to give to Abraham and his children, and is now given to them. The land is full of natural endowments, all kinds of resources, convenience and productivity. Without any of these, the Israelites won't be able to get rich and become proud. In my grade school years, I had a very good friend. When I had the opportunity to move to Hong Kong, he was still in China. Later on, when I moved to Singapore to become a pastor, he was in Hong Kong working a labor job in a garment factory. Few years later, I came to this country, and he was still in Hong Kong. I didn't help anything to build this country, but God brought me here to enjoy every good things I had never worked for to make me and my family we are today. So, we should never give all the credits to ourselves when God has given us some success.

4) Never be proud of what God has given you: "When you build fine houses and settled down, and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud." (8:13-14) Pride is one of the most difficult dilemma many of us have to deal with particularly when we have achieved something good. But in this case of God given success, there isn't much we can or need to feel proud of. After all, most of what we have or have achieved are from God and God's provision, we have very little, if any, to be so proud of.

5) Never forget God can give and God can take back: "If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord had destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God." (8:19-20) We need to always remember, what we have is all from God and He can take it back when we violet his trust. Many years later when God allowed everything Job had to be taken away, Job humbly

acknowledged the sovereignty of God in giving and taking: “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.” (Job 1:21) No one may claim or assume that what we have today is going to stay forever. It is God's grace to give, and it is God's right to take away. We should love the giving God instead of the things God has given us.

STEPS WE NEED TO TAKE: I want to quote a couple of verses of the Bible to share with you all how I feel in my heart in presenting the biblical teaching to you each Sunday: “For you know we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom.: (1 Thess 2:11-12)

1) What is the purpose of God in your life: When we accept Jesus as Savior of our soul, we also accepted him as the Lord of our life. So, when we pursue the goals of our life, we can't leave God out in that matter. We promised to be his disciples, people who follow his teaching, life principles and goal. So, in all things we pursue, we should never do it on our own. We need the Lord in our life here on earth as much as we need him in our life there in heaven. Remember what Jesus had promised us: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt 6:33)

2) What is the purpose of God in your riches: Don't forget that God has a purpose in your life. God also has a purpose in what he has given you. God never do anything without a good purpose, be it in people or in things. As we live our everyday life, making money, accumulate wealth, we need to ask ourselves a question: What does God want me to do with all these? Don't make your riches for any selfish purpose, and don't use those wealth God gave you for your selfish purpose either. We need to seek his will and follow his way in making and using all our possessions for his glory and purpose.

3) Regularly checking your direction: If life is like a journey, we need to check periodically if we are on the right route. Getting riches also needs to have regular checkup. Never allow yourself lost in the personal, often selfish pursuit of riches to the point you forget your primary relationship with the Lord you God. Where are you now and where are you going? Be honest.