

Luke 18:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

Analysis

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich—Jesus's command to sell everything and follow Him (v. 22) produces *perilypos egenēthē* (περίλυπος ἐγενήθη)—'he became very sorrowful.' *En gar plousios sphodra* (ἢν γὰρ πλούσιος σφόδρα) —'for he was extremely rich.' The *gar* (γάρ, 'for') reveals causation: his sorrow stems from his wealth.

Jesus exposed the tenth commandment: 'You shall not covet.' The ruler coveted wealth more than God, violating the first commandment too: 'You shall have no other gods before me.' His riches were his functional god. He wanted eternal life as an addition to earthly treasures, not as replacement. But Jesus offers Himself as pearl of great price worth selling everything to obtain (Matthew 13:45-46). The ruler's sorrow reveals that wealth held his heart more than God.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism viewed wealth as divine blessing for righteousness (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). The rich were considered God-favored; poverty suggested divine curse. This makes Jesus's teaching doubly shocking: the wealthy ruler—seemingly blessed by God—was actually enslaved to idolatry. His riches were stumbling block, not blessing. This anticipates Jesus's coming statement about camels and needle's eyes, completely inverting conventional assumptions about wealth and salvation.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does the ruler's sorrow reveal about what he truly loved more than eternal life?
2. How did Jesus's command expose the tenth commandment (coveting) and first commandment (no other gods)?
3. What 'riches'—money, reputation, comfort, control—might Jesus be calling you to surrender as competing gods?

Interlinear Text

ο	δὲ	ἀκούσας	ταῦτα	περίλυπος	ἐγένετο·	ἢν	γὰρ
G3588	And	when he heard	this	very sorrowful	he was	he was	for
G1161		G191	G5023	G4036	G1096	G2258	G1063

πλούσιος σφόδρα

rich	very
G4145	G4970

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 33:31 (Parallel theme): And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

1 John 2:15 (Parallel theme): Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Mark 10:22 (Parallel theme): And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

Matthew 19:22 (Parallel theme): But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Luke 21:34 (Parallel theme): And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Luke 8:14 (Parallel theme): And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

Luke 12:15 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.