

JESUS SHARED

Leader pages on pp. 154-157

THE POINT:
OUR DAILY CONNECTIONS
WITH PEOPLE CAN BE
OPPORTUNITIES TO
SHARE JESUS.

ACTS 17:16-18,22-23,30-31

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols.

¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also debated with him. Some said, "What is this ignorant show-off trying to say?" Others replied, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign deities" — because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

²² Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and said, "People of Athens! I see that you are extremely religious in every respect.

²³ For as I was passing through and observing the objects of your worship, I even found an altar on which was inscribed, 'To an Unknown God.' Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you."

MEMORY VERSE

³⁰ **"Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent,**

³¹ because he has set a day when he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

KEYWORDS

Deeply distressed (v. 16)—The Greek term indicates the apostle was furious and sick to his stomach.

The Areopagus (v. 22)—A hill overlooking the city where Athenian philosophers gathered to discuss and debate their ideas.

Repent (v. 30)—The Greek term means "to change your mind." Repentance is an essential aspect of the conversion process.

Judge the world (v. 31)—The key event of the day God has appointed is His judgment on the world.

HOW CAN BELIEVERS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?

The Book of Acts, teaches us that the early church shared everything in common, inspiring one another in their faith. Just as they connected over meals and prayers, our daily interactions can and should be opportunities to communicate the message of Christ. Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch on the road. He did not just pass by his chariot, but he engaged him in conversation. This ultimately led to the eunuch's conversion. Saints are compelled to engage with those we come in contact with. We are called to shine before men that they may see our good work. We are also called to embody the faith. So, whether we are on the job, at the store, playing basketball, or hanging out with friends, we have the opportunity to reflect God's love, mercy, peace, and humility. God is looking for us to share the good news and inspire others to explore their own relationship with Christ.

As we study, the lesson today, let's learn to make every connection be purposeful. Looking at our daily interactions, whether at work, school, or in our neighborhoods, as opportunities to share Christ.

Be Sensitive // Acts 17:16-18

When Paul arrived in Athens, he stepped into a world that was very much like the world we live in today. We tend to think that the ancient world was very different from ours when, in reality, it was very similar. Luke gives us clues about the cultural forces and challenges Paul encountered in Athens. Many people openly practiced idolatry, and pagan temples littered the city.

Estimates are that Athens was home to 10-15 major temples (such as the Parthenon, the Temple of Zeus, the Temple of Apollo), hundreds of smaller public shrines and altars, and many families across the city had private, pagan shrines.

So, Athens was a significant center of ancient pagan worship. Not only was Athens a center of idol worship, but it also had a large, practicing

Jewish population. The synagogue was the hub of Jewish life outside of Jerusalem in the ancient world. It was a place of worship, community, and culture. It affected how Jews lived and thought. That's why Paul made a beeline for the local synagogue whenever he arrived in a new city. He wanted to start with those who acknowledged God—Jews and Gentiles—and present Jesus as the Messiah to them.



THE POINT:

OUR DAILY CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE CAN BE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE JESUS.

Athens was also the center of Greek and Roman philosophy. Luke mentioned some of the first philosophers Paul encountered there: the Epicureans and Stoics. The Epicureans were hedonists who sought pleasure and avoided pain, believed the gods were indifferent to their personal lives and struggles, and had no fear of death because “when we are, death is not, and when death is present, we are not.” The Stoics focused on reason and logic, believed in a divine, rational principle called the “logos” that governs the universe, and promoted the virtues of wisdom, justice, and courage.

Stop for a second and think about the people Paul encountered in Athens. They’re the same kinds of people we encounter today.

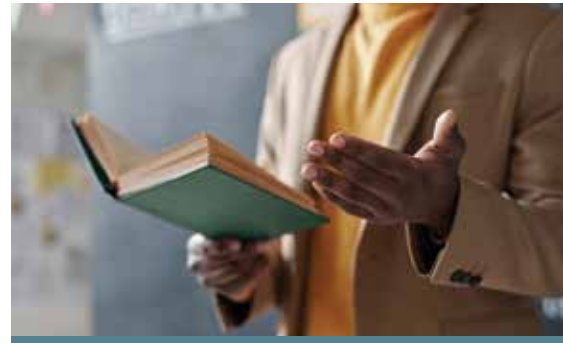
- Idolaters
- Religious but lost
- Pleasure seekers
- Intellectuals

You see, the world in which Paul ministered and shared the gospel is no different from that in which Jesus has sent us to show and share the gospel. Both Paul’s world and ours consist of lost people who need to be saved.

As a young Christian, I had a mentor who made a statement I’ve never forgotten. He said, “We shouldn’t be surprised when lost people act like lost people.” When we encounter people who don’t know Jesus, we should expect them to act and think and live like what they are—lost. That shouldn’t upset us; it should encourage us to do whatever we can to bring them to Jesus. We must start where they are and use those connections and assumptions as launching points to lead them to Christ.

Opportunities to share Jesus are all around us. Just like Paul when he walked into Athens, we are surrounded daily by people who are lost, far from God, and who need to be saved. Many likely don’t even know or realize that reality. They might be living for pleasure, worshiping nature, or living by logic, reason, or science alone, thinking there is no God; or if there is, He couldn’t possibly care about them. Our responsibility as followers of Jesus is to have our eyes open, be sensitive to the needs of those around us, and take every opportunity to step into their world and tell them about Jesus. Think back on this past week and see if there was an opportunity you might have had to share Jesus with someone who was lost.

WHERE MIGHT YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE YOUR FAITH?



DIGGING DEEPER PAUL’S PREACHING

In Acts 17:22-34, Paul uses persuasive strategies to capture his audience’s attention. Paul structures his sermon in a didactic form. He reveals the ability, attributes, and the appointment of God to the hearers. In order to connect his message of God with his audience, Paul connects with them using one of the idols they worshiped. Using the image of the idol to an unknown god, he creatively introduces the people to the true and living God. Furthermore, Paul used a familiar quote to connect with his audience (v. 28). He used metaphorical language “we are the offspring of God” to describe man’s connection with God (v. 28-9). The Apostle also described the Lord using human characteristics when he said, “offspring” and “God winked.” He used the following terms that bring mental pictures and memories to the mind of his audience: temple, hands, judge, dead, and resurrection. The audience’s responses proved the words had emotional appeal. They showed disgust, surprise, confusion, and acceptance.

How will you respond to the preached message of the gospel?

Find Common Ground //

Acts 17:22-23

Paul was incredible when it came to finding common ground and everyday ways to share the gospel with those far from God. Acts 17:22-23 is a master class in how to find common ground with the people around you to serve as a bridge for telling them about Jesus. What I find so encouraging and instructive from this account is how Paul didn't attack the Athenians' ignorance. He used their religious curiosity as a starting point for sharing the gospel with them.

What common ground do you have with the people around you that could serve as a bridge to sharing Jesus with them? I've always thanked God for the various jobs I've worked and experiences I've had because I see them as doors for opening conversations and bridges for crossing barriers so that I can share the gospel with others who might be different from me.

The Areopagus is a unique and significant rocky outcropping that sits in the shadow of the Acropolis. I've been there a couple of times, and I'm always struck by just how important this big rock was for the philosophers in Paul's day and how God used it to show us how to engage those who think differently from us.

One of the biggest challenges we face as Christians when it comes to telling others about Jesus is falling into the trap of isolating ourselves from the world or blending in too much. Paul balanced this challenge effectively when he climbed those steep rock stairs carved into the side of the Areopagus to address the philosophers gathered on top. His example helps model how to effectively engage those who may be antagonistic to the claims of Christ.

WHAT IS THE MOST CREATIVE WAY OF SHARING THE GOSPEL YOU'VE WITNESSED?

Help Others Understand //

Acts 17:30-31

This account of Paul's loving confrontation with the philosophers is a prime example of how we can effectively help others see the truth of the gospel.

Paul started where they were, with something very familiar to them—an inscription on an altar reading, "To The Unknown God"—and used it as an introduction to proclaim Jesus to them.



Paul knew his audience in Athens—philosophers and scholars—would need more than just a declaration; they needed reasoning and clarity about the nature of God, sin, and repentance. Why? Because understanding leads to transformation. The goal of sharing the gospel isn't just imparting knowledge but leading others into a genuine relationship with Christ. That's why people must grasp the weight of sin, the necessity of repentance, and the hope offered through Jesus.

Paul didn't shy away from hard truths like the coming judgment but presented them in a way his hearers could understand. Therefore, clear communication leads to a meaningful response. The clarity of the message impacts how people respond.

Since we've been called to share the gospel with those who are lost, far from God, and might not look or think like us, how can we lovingly but effectively confront them with their need for Jesus, as Paul did, without compromising the truth? Here are some suggestions:

Build genuine relationships. People are more open to hearing hard truths from someone who has shown genuine care for them.

THE POINT:

OUR DAILY CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE CAN BE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE JESUS.

Share your own story. Tell them how Jesus changed your life.

Be clear about the necessity of repentance. Don't sugarcoat the gospel. Paul didn't shy away from calling for repentance, and neither should we.

Point to the cross, not morality. Make it clear that salvation isn't about being "good" but about trusting in Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection.

Stay humble and avoid arguments. Don't win the argument and lose a soul. Trust the Holy Spirit to soften their heart.

Pray before, during, and after. Bathe the whole conversation in prayer. Pray for wisdom and for their heart to be open to the truth.

Offer an invitation, not an ultimatum. Paul clearly called for the philosophers in Acts 17 to repent, but he didn't twist their arms. Once you've shared the gospel, give space for the Holy Spirit to work in their life rather than pushing for a quick commitment.

We have the privilege of sharing the gospel with people from all walks of life. Never take that for granted or think your faithful witness won't make a difference. It does!

DID YOU KNOW?

I have come across people who have an incomplete understanding of repentance. They think it is just praying for forgiveness or just simply confession their sin or just saying that they are sorry. Wayne Grudem described repentance as a "heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ."³³ The term's elements are the intellect which involves knowing that you are guilty of violated God's Word. The second involves the emotive which is being godly sorry for one's sin and a hatred of it. The last element is volitional which involves the will, which is a personal decision to turn from and renounce the sin. This is illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son who found himself in the hog pen desiring to eat the husk of the pigs. (Luke 15:11-22).

Biblical Truth: Genuine repentance results in a changed life.

How will this understanding of repentance change your life?

LIVE IT

When encountering them this week, will you commit to pray for them and offer encouraging words to them?

As you are surrounded by other believers in church or in other settings, be mindful that many might be going through a difficult time, crafting your words in a way that resonates with them personally. Many times, it is evident by their demeanor but sometimes it isn't so obvious. Pray that Holy Spirit lead you as you make conversation with them.

+ + +

- **Pray.** Ask God to send people across your path so that you can witness to them.
- **Prepare.** Plan and train for how you can effectively engage the people God sends with the gospel. Check out some of the North American Mission Board's resources at namb.net/evangelism.
- **Do it.** When you see the opportunity, take it, and tell those God sends your way about Jesus. Their response is not what makes you successful; your faithfulness to share is.

DAILY READINGS

1. HOUSEHOLD SALVATION // COLOSSIANS 3:23-24

Witnessing can be done anywhere that we go and is most significantly done in our households. Modeling the life of Christ to our loved ones is our first ministry. While spouses, children, and other relatives are meant to be a blessing to us to have and to enjoy, the household is the training ground to make disciples, as believers have all been commissioned to do. Couples should experientially witness the order and love of God through marriage. Children should first come to know God through their parents. Sharing Christ in the household has a domino effect. It not only evangelizes the household but will ultimately revolutionize the community.

Christ-centered homes are key to evangelizing the world.

2. FIND COMMON GROUND // PROVERBS 11:30

Proverbs 11:30 states that “he who wins souls is wise.” The Holy Spirit helps one to see what common ground exists to draw souls to Christ. For instance, while Jesus was fully aware that the Samaritan woman at the well was an adulteress (John 4:1–28), He did not initially speak about her situation. He sparked a conversation with her about the well she was drawing from because He knew that would interest her. He ultimately helped her realize who He was and how her life mattered to the Father. In doing so, the woman finished the conversation a believer and went on to evangelize her entire village.

Jesus draws us through love and wisdom, not criticism and shame.

3. SHARING IS CARING // 1 CORINTHIANS 3:6-9

Sharing Christ becomes liberating when we realize that we are not responsible for saving others; that is God’s responsibility alone. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 3:6–9 that some plant, some water, but God gives the increase. Whether the person ultimately accepts Christ or not, we are to simply

obey and share truth. God brings about salvation in His perfect timing. We do not have to feel pressured to force our beliefs on others. God alone knows the thoughts and intents of a man’s heart and gives us all an opportunity to accept Christ in due season. Salvation may not happen upon our initial witness to someone, but we can still rejoice to share life with a dying world.

Sharing Christ is a privilege no matter the immediate outcome.

4. WATCH AND PRAY // MARK 13:33

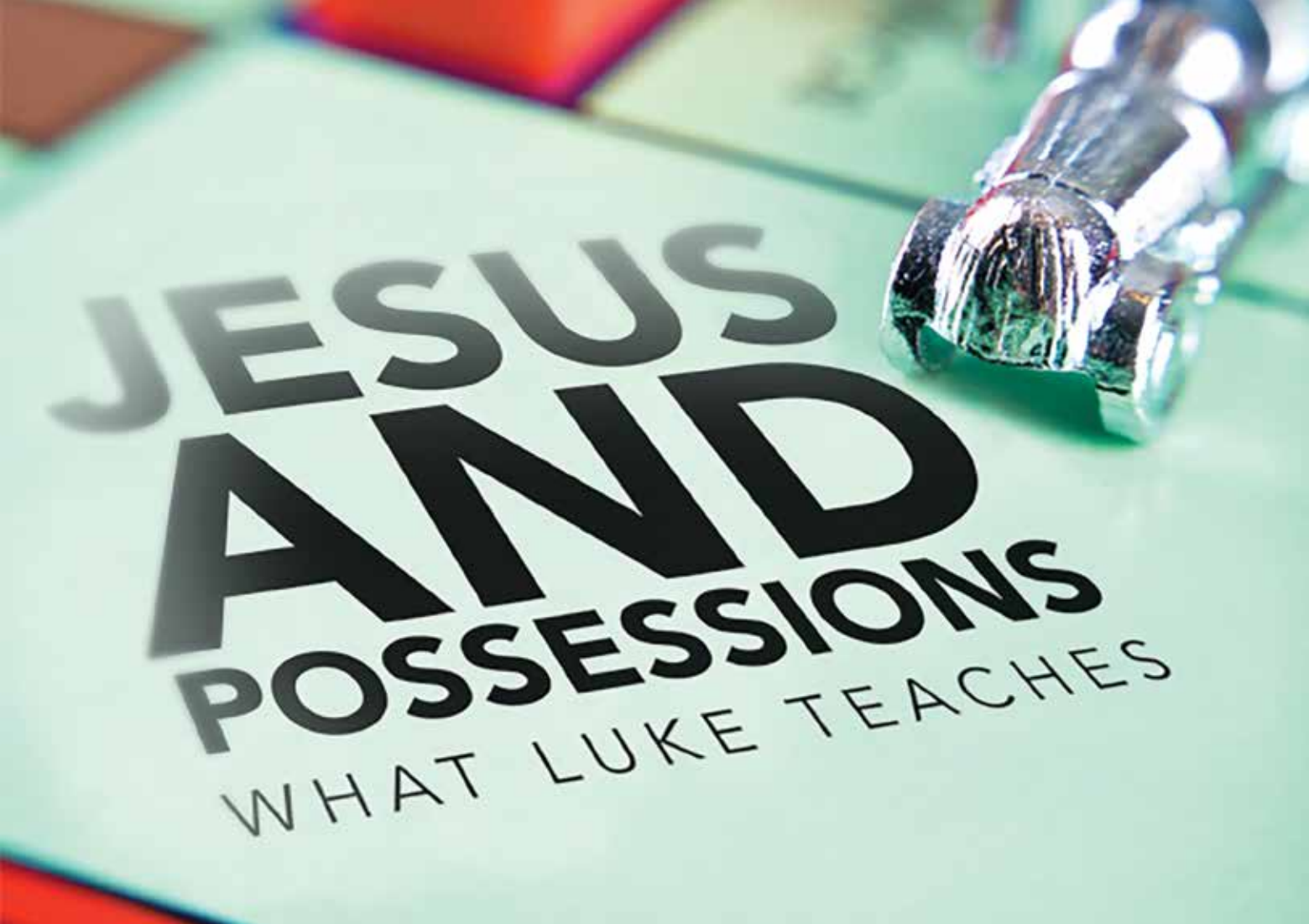
Despite the perversion that now fills this world, believers do well not to become detached from reality. We cannot limit our contacts to people who already know Christ. If the light never goes out into the world full of darkness, how can the lost know the way? We must not only pray but also watch, paying attention to what is going on in the world so that we understand how to minister to them. We err when we choose to isolate ourselves from the lost because of their behavior. Sharing Christ to a lost and dying world is why the Church exists.

The Church exists to saturate the world with hope of Christ.

5. THE HARVEST AWAITS // MATTHEW 9:37

Arthur Blessitt, the man who carried the cross around the world, once stated that what surprised him most was that most people wanted to hear the gospel.³⁴ This observation aligns with what Jesus said in Matthew 9:37: “The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few.” While the hearts of people in this age grow colder and more resistant to truth, there is a remnant who seek rest. Those are the ones God is calling believers to. Christ is in hot pursuit of them, so we must be careful not to let the sin and perversion we see discourage us from being obedient. Hearts are crying out for help, and we must be willing to go and make disciples no matter how dark it gets.

Christ came to compel men to salvation; we must do the same.



Jesus and Possessions: What Luke Teaches

BY PATRICK WARD

Oil baron John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), amassed one of the greatest fortunes in history. “After he died someone asked his accountant, ‘How much money did John. D. leave?’ The reply was classic: ‘He left . . . all of it.’¹

”The implications to this reply are extremely relevant for our twenty-first century. This is because the philosophy of materialism is so prevalent in our modern American culture. The subtle message of materialism tells us, “we are what we possess,” but does not address the implications of using material wealth for eternal

purposes. Jesus said, “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Luke 16:13b, NIV). He knew that money and possessions could take the place of God in a person’s life. The Book of Proverbs states this clearly: “The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall” (Prov. 18:11, NIV). Jesus understood that man could not serve God unless he dethroned his idol of possessions. For a primary source of the teachings of Jesus concerning money and possessions, the Gospel of Luke is an excellent place to start. Luke’s intention was to record what Jesus said and did. Stories and teachings

concerning finance are frequent. They are in the teachings of John the Baptist (Luke 3:11-14) and in many parables—such as the rich fool (12:13-21), the shrewd manager (16:1-15), and the rich man and Lazarus (vv. 19-31). Further, Jesus discussed wealth and possessions with both the rich ruler (18:18-27) and Zacchaeus (19:1-9). These are but a few of the stories Luke used to underscore the importance of having a proper attitude in regard to wealth and possessions. Jesus was concerned that people understand the importance of using earthly wealth for eternal purposes. “In fact, 15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic—more than His teachings on heaven and hell combined.”²

The parable of the shrewd manager (16:1-15) is one of the more difficult passages concerning Jesus’s teachings on the subject of possessions. On the surface, Jesus seems to be commending a rogue. A closer examination reveals, however, that the primary lesson is that of being astute in the use of possessions. Jesus is not teaching us to be dishonest but to be resourceful. We are to learn how to use our resources in intelligent ways that will build up the kingdom of God. Luke closes out this passage by quoting Jesus’s comparison of those things that are valued by men and God’s opinion of them. He said to the greedy Pharisees, “God knows your hearts.

What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight” (v. 15).

The story of the rich man and Lazarus serves as another example for understanding the proper use of possessions (16:19-31). Again, money, and the love of money, which “is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10, NIV), are shown to divide persons rather than united them. Wealth exercised in proper stewardship could have become the rich man’s opportunity. However, his possession of wealth became his obstacle. His attitude toward Lazarus reflected his true attitude toward God.

By not seeking to meet the basic needs of Lazarus, the rich man had squandered opportunities to demonstrate his love for God and his fellowman. In Hades, he was the same self-centered man, complaining about his lack and crying out for attention and help. In short, he was just as egocentric in Hades as he had been in life. The primary lesson from this parable may be that a person’s attitude toward his or her fellow human beings is a reflection of his or her true attitude and relationship with God. Jesus was not prejudiced against rich people, but He warned against the perils associated with the pursuit of riches.



Roman gold jewelry, from the 1st cent. A.D. A gold ring with a garnet stone. The brooch has a baked enamel portrait, unidentified. The pendant has a large blue chalcedony stone and smaller ones near the top. The necklace beads are shaped like seeds.

Also, He taught that possessions are a false, temporary treasure that lures people away from true “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-21; see Luke 12:21).

The fact that the rich man did not share with the impoverished Lazarus ties this passage more closely to John the Baptist’s warnings recorded in Luke 3:10-14 where the emphasis is on showing fruits of repentance by sharing of clothing and food with those in need (3:11). John addressed three groups of people in this scene: (1) everyone should share clothes and food with the poor (v. 11); (2) tax collectors should not take more money than is required (v. 13); and (3) soldiers should not extort money but should be content with their wages (v. 14). Each of these instructions for bringing “fruit in keeping with repentance” (v. 8, NIV) pertain to money and possessions. In his Gospel, Luke recorded Jesus echoing these same instructions and commands.

Jesus warned His followers to beware of their possessions possessing 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” (12:15, NIV). He taught that God is to have no rival in the believer’s heart.

Again, trying to love both God and riches creates a divided allegiance that God will not allow.

Luke 19 presents Zacchaeus as a seeker who had a deeper need than just the wealth he had accumulated through greed and avarice. People of the community hated him, and he suffered isolation because of his collaboration with the Romans and his having taken unfair advantage of his position as a tax collector.

His life radically changed, though, when he met Jesus. “The story of Zacchaeus indicates how it is possible for the rich to share in God’s reign, through a repentance that radically changes their use of possessions.”³ His response also tied his actions to the requirements for bearing fruit of repentance that John the Baptist had given and to the Old Testament law regarding theft (Luke 3:13; Ex. 22:1; 33:15). Also notice the contrast between Zacchaeus’s response and that of the rich young ruler in chapter 18, where a rich young man would not bring himself to comply with Jesus’s command to sell all and follow Him (Luke 18:23). He went away “sorrowful” (KJV), but Zacchaeus’s response indicated that his life would bear fruit of repentance because of his change of heart.



Models of the wealthy homes in Jerusalem in Jesus’s day.



Bedouin tent near Sheikh Mizken (translated “leader of the poor people”) in Syria.

Salvation had indeed come to his house (19:9).

Salvation in Zacchaeus's case was more than an external transaction regarding God. When people are truly converted, change comes in every area of their lives. They become new persons in Christ. Zacchaeus revealed by his testimony that a transformation had taken place. Also, the eagerness of Zacchaeus and the reluctance of the rich young ruler are set against each other in sharpest contrast.

The contrast between the rich young ruler and the disciples is also evident. The disciples had left all and followed Jesus (18:28). The teachings of Jesus concerning possessions in Luke are not obsolete after His ascension. Luke portrayed the life of the Jerusalem church in such a way as to indicate a particular kind of fulfillment of Jesus's teachings on the subject.

The Jerusalem church had all things in common; individuals even liquidated their property in order to care for the needs of the poor (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37).

Their lives gave evidence they understood Jesus's teachings on wealth and possessions.

1. Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 17.
2. *Ibid.*, 8.
3. Robert C Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Act: A Literary Interpretation, Volume 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 123.

Patrick Ward is a freelance writer living in Springfield, Missouri.

