

# Dear God, what if I already have everything I want?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning again, and this is your first time here. You're a visitor or guest passing through. Let me just add my warm welcome.

I'm Pastor Brian. I serve as the pastor of this church. And as we get into this talk, let me just alert you to the fact that there is actually an outline in your bulletin, and that will help you to follow along as I begin.

Now, everybody loves a good rags-to-riches story, and so let me begin by just giving you two. Dr Tiong Sukwok is the founder of CCK Consolidated Holdings, which is one of Sarawak's largest producers of frozen seafood. But he actually started out as a fishmonger with less than five ringgit in his pocket.

When Tiong was 14, he was asked to take over his father's fish store in a wet market. As a result, he had to stop schooling. For 12 years, he had to work 16 hours a day.

[ 1 : 06 ] And when a foreigner asked him which university he graduated from, he replied, Market University. Then, at age 27, he opened Seaboo's first ever frozen seafood outlet at a time when everyone thought that was a stupid idea, even going all the way to Japan to try to understand the technology.

He had no business at all for his first three months and almost gave up. In fact, he had to give away some of his frozen fish for free to try to win some customers.

But now, his food products are sold all over the world. He has factories in Indonesia and he has even ventured into shipbuilding and property development.

Asked about the secret of his success, Dr. Tiong simply says he worked really hard. And even though he didn't achieve straight A's or a degree, he's the greatest achiever in amassing wealth. That's a direct quote. He's content with what he's done. And what he wants now to do is just to sit back and give to charity. And then there's Lim Tianwa.

[ 2 : 24 ] Born in 1964, Lim had a rough start to life when he was infected with polio at only eight months old. And polio has been back in the news recently.

And he's been left wheelchair bound for the rest of his life. Like Dr. Tiong, he came from a poor family with his father being a construction worker and his mother a hawker.

And he also had to stop school early. At the age of 14, he sold guachi and kacang while reading borrowed books and magazines to keep learning.

Finally, he managed to get some money to start his own grocery store. In 1992, he finally opened his first mini market called Pasar Mini 99.

If you've been to West Malaysia, you've probably seen a lot of those around. And by the end of 2013, there were 500 such stores. Another self-made man. He has even been called the King of Mini-Muts by Forbes magazine.

[ 3 : 28 ] Well, before we continue, let me once again welcome you to our December series entitled Christmas is the Answer. In this series, which we will continue until Christmas Day, we will look each week at the common question that people often have for God.

And we particularly welcome those of you who are not Christians this morning. We started two weeks ago by asking, Dear God, what's the point?

And then we continued last week by asking, Dear God, why don't you make yourself clearer? And if you're interested in those questions, those talks are available to listen on our website.

And today, we're asking a third question. And I suppose it's a little bit different in flavor compared to the other two. Dear God, what if I already have everything I want?

Or to rephrase it slightly, the question is, what would Jesus say to people like Dr. Tiong and Mr. Lim?

[ 4 : 39 ] After all, they appear to have accomplished everything they wanted in this life. They have the money. They have the good name.

They appear to have the good life. And perhaps you're sitting here this morning, wondering the same thing. You're not necessarily rich tycoons like Dr. Tiong and Mr. Lim. But you do feel like you've accomplished what you wanted in life. Or you're at least on your way to doing so. Some money in the bank, a happy family, a good name. And really, that's kind of all we need in this life, right? Do I really need anything from God or from Jesus? Well, to answer that question, this morning, we're going to turn to an episode that's mentioned in the Bible.

This episode is recorded by Luke, who is a professional doctor turned historian. Luke is chronicling the life story of Jesus as reported to him by various eyewitnesses and sources.

[ 5 : 49 ] And all throughout the story so far, we've noticed that all sorts of needy people come to Jesus. Many people know of his reputation as a healer.

So, for example, we find friends of a paralyzed man bringing him to Jesus. They know his reputation as a miracle worker. And so plenty of sick people seek him out. Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? If you have a need, you would seek someone whom you think will mean your need. But what's really interesting about the episode that we've just heard read and that we're about to look at this morning is that the man who seeks Jesus has no obvious need. I wonder if you've noticed what sort of person he is. Well, let's jump back into the story and have a look. If you've got a Bible with you, you can open it back to look 18 if you've closed it. And if you don't have a Bible with you, just put up your hand and I think an usher can get it to you. But let's jump back into the story. And notice, firstly, that this guy is a ruler.

[ 7 : 04 ] That's how he's described in the opening words of this story. We're not 100% sure what kind of ruler he is. Quite likely, he's a community leader of sorts.

Perhaps even a well-respected elder in the synagogue. Whatever he is, he's someone with power, someone with authority, someone with influence.

And of course, he's rich. He's the guy who's already become senior partner at the law firm, or the managing partner of the corporate entity, or the top executive at the international bank.

He's got a nice bonus, and he's got a nice car and nice house to boot. And Luke doesn't note this fact, but another one of his friends, Matthew, who also recorded this incident, mentions that this man was a young guy.

So on top of being rich and powerful, he's got youth on his side. Perhaps he's one of those genius entrepreneurs who make their first million before they hit 30.

[ 8 : 18 ] And above all, this guy looks like one of the good guys. He isn't a playboy. He's interested in religion.

After all, he's right there listening to Jesus. He's respectful, calling Jesus good teacher. Check who. Now this is probably the kind of guy that many of us this morning want our daughters to marry. He has power. He has money. He has influence.

He has youth. He's probably got good education, and he certainly has good morals. What's not to like? He has everything.

And that's the interesting thing. Why would such a person have anything to do with Jesus?

[ 9 : 19 ] He has everything. He would certainly fall into the Dato'r Tiong and Mr. Lim category. And yet he comes to Jesus, who in many ways has the opposite profile of this ruler.

Now like this ruler, Jesus is a young man. He's about 30 years old or thereabouts. But that's where the similarities end. Jesus is simply the son of a carpenter.

No position. He's got no home. In fact, he's dependent on the support of others. No wealth. He's already made the religious establishment mad a few times by this point.

They might consider him somebody who's So in many ways, Jesus is at the opposite end of the spectrum.

But this ruler still strikes up a conversation with Jesus. He obviously thinks that Jesus has something worth offering. And so it seems to me that if we want to answer this question, Dear God, What if I already have everything I want?

[ 10 : 42 ] What would be a good idea to follow this man's conversation with Jesus? And to help us to do that, I'm going to take four phrases which all come from this conversation.

And I'm going to use those phrases as our headings today to help us to follow this conversation. And by the end, I'm hoping that we'll clearly see Jesus' answer to this question. So here's the first phrase. You still lack one thing. You still lack one thing. That's what Jesus says to the ruler in verse 22.

You see, this man has everything. But he appears to be a little restless. He's tasted success. But now what?

And that's the same question that people in his position still have 2,000 years later. Boris Becker was one of the top tennis stars of his generation.

[ 11 : 50 ] And he recalls at how, at a fairly young age, he won everything. He's won Wimbledon, the top tennis tournament, a couple of times. He's rich. He has many things. And yet he almost committed suicide.

Why? I had everything, he says, and yet I didn't. I was so unhappy. I had no inner peace. Or listen to Jack Higgins, whose novel, *The Eagle Has Landed*, has sold more than 50 million copies. Asked what he wished he had known as a young boy, he said, that when you get to the top, there's nothing there.

You see, the obvious assumption of our age is that to achieve the good life, you need to pursue wealth. Money is what unlocks happiness.

Why do rags to riches stories like Dr. Tiong's and Mr. Lim appeal to so many of us? Precisely because the moral of the story seems to be, you can have a happy ending and you can have anything you want as long as you work hard and earn enough like them even if you only started with five ringgit in your pocket.

[ 13 : 16 ] But the experience of people like Boris Becker and Jack Higgins complicates that storyline. When you get to the top, there's nothing there.

It appears that you can have everything but still lack something. So what do you do? Well, you could follow the path of Ralph Lauren, the successful fashion designer.

he said, I always feel like I have to keep going. Others can sit back and say, maybe I can stop. But then, you're yesterday and I love tomorrow. You see, he's saying, you have to keep working harder to maintain what you have and just hope that you eventually find that thing you lack before you fade away.

But perhaps the path of this rich young ruler is better. Right before this episode, Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God.

[ 14 : 32 ] If the ruler would have just heard Jesus say, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.

And so he realizes, aha, that's the one thing I'm lacking. I'm missing the spiritual dimension. I don't just need a good life.

I need eternal life. Now, that phrase, eternal life, needs a little bit of unpacking. It doesn't just mean life that goes on forever.

Rather, eternal life is really about entering a relationship with the eternal God. It's about gaining citizenship in his eternal kingdom.

It's about gaining an eternal future where one day everything would be free from death, decay, pain, and suffering.

[ 15 : 36 ] As a Jew, the ruler would have understood eternal life to mean all of that. And he agrees with Jesus. Oh, that's what I'm lacking.

And that's what he comes searching for. And if you're not a Christian present this morning, well, perhaps that's why you've decided to show up in church. on one level, it appears that you're doing well. You might even have everything you want. And yet, you know something is missing.

You know that there's something that feels broken. You're searching for something more. And if that's you, make sure you keep listening.

Because in verse 22, Jesus calls eternal life treasure in heaven. It's something of great value because it's treasure.

[ 16 : 37 ] And it's something that isn't temporary because it's heavenly. And so the question is, how can I get this heavenly treasure? Well, we come now to our second phrase for today, which is also found in verse 22.

Come, follow me. Come, follow me. Now, let's go back to the beginning of this conversation and I want you to notice something interesting.

Let me read verse 18. A certain ruler asked him, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Now, did you notice what this man is actually asking Jesus for? He wants eternal life, but he's not actually asking Jesus to give him eternal life.

Instead, he's simply asking Jesus for instruction about how to get eternal life. What must I do? In other words, he wants to earn it himself.

[ 17 : 51 ] He's asking, Jesus, show me the secret. Tell me your formula so that I can go away and put it into action. And maybe that's what you think Jesus can offer you today.

You see him as the public intellectual who can dispense proverbial wisdom to you. You see him as the life coach who can mentor you through the ups and downs of your journey.

You see him as the religious guru who can teach you how to be more in tune with your spiritual side. And just like someone might go to Dato'r Tiong and ask him, hey, Dato'r Tiong, what advice can you give me to start my business on the right foot?

And so we might go to Jesus and ask, what advice can you give me to receive eternal life? what steps do I need to take to gain PR in God's kingdom?

And at first glance, the answer looks straightforward. Verse 22, when Jesus heard this, he said to him, you still like one thing, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

[ 19 : 12 ] Then come, follow me. Ah, there you have it, we think. So that's what the deal is. If I have everything, I've got to sell it all.

And so it's really quite simple. God is just like Santa Claus. He knows when you've been naughty or nice. If you're naughty, okay, no PR for you. But if you are nice, you get the reward.

And so to get on God's nice list, oh, I have to obey God, I have to be ready to sacrifice, then I'll get in. And then if you look at verse 28, that's how one of Jesus' closest friends, Peter, thinks as well.

He says, we have left all we had to follow you. Jesus, look at how much we sacrifice everything to follow you. And that's what many of us believe.

Not just those of us who are not Christians this morning, but even many of us who consider ourselves Christians. It's ingrained in us. It fits into our idea of religion.

[ 20 : 25 ] Do good, do some good charity, and that means that God can accept you. But there's one big problem with that.

If getting eternal life is really just a matter of doing good stuff so that we can make it onto God's nice list, then we're in trouble.

people. Because look at this rich young ruler. Jesus says to him, verse 20, you know the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother.

And then he replies, verse 21, all these I have kept since I was a boy. this is a good man.

This is a man who should be first in line to get into God's kingdom. Accept that Jesus doesn't think so.

[ 21 : 37 ] He looks at him and says, you still lack one thing. You don't have enough to qualify. But what does the rich young ruler actually lack?

Well, to see this, we need to come back to the beginning of the conversation. The ruler asked, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And Jesus, did you notice, answers in a rather strange way. Verse 19, why do you call me good? Jesus answered. no one is good except God alone.

What's going on here? You know, is Jesus engaging in some false humility? Perhaps he's behaving in a particularly Asian way. You know how Asians receive compliments, right?

Wah, Mrs. Wong, your son's so good, you know, got scholarship, become doctor already, marry a nice girl. Wah, you must have been such a good parent. Tell me, what's your secret? Mrs. Lee, you know, I'm not such a good parent, you know, no secret, it's just only God bless me.

[ 22 : 55 ] See, my son, very obedient last time didn't go play play in the cyber cafe, he listened to me. Now, like that, lah. And just like that, Mrs. Wong has managed to claim more credit for herself.

is that what Jesus is doing? Projecting an air of humility so as to exalt himself further? Ayah, rich young ruler, I'm not so good one lah.

No. Far from fishing from compliments, Jesus is actually challenging the ruler. The ruler wants to know what he must do.

But Jesus shows the ruler that's the wrong question. And here's how he does it. Jesus says to the ruler, you're a Jew, and so you know very well who alone is truly good, God himself.

And so Jesus asks, why is it then that you call me good? Is it because you really believe that I'm God himself because only God is good?

[ 24 : 11 ] Or is it because you're trying to flatter me? It's a masterful reply. With just 13 words, Jesus has now forced the ruler to focus less on what he must do and more on who Jesus is.

Who do you think I really am? He's asking the ruler. Am I just a healer and miracle worker? Am I just a public intellectual?

Am I just a life coach? Am I just a religious guru? Or am I something more than that? Am I the good God that you claim you believe in?

God and then Jesus goes one step further. He says, alright, let's test this.

Let's see what happens if I ask you to give up your wealth. And now we're back to verse 22. Sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven than come follow me.

[ 25 : 28 ] That's the context. You see, Jesus isn't really talking about ethics here. He's not saying, be on your best behavior, be charitable and then you get what you want.

Rather, he's talking about worship. My friend, he says, do you really want eternal life?

Then stop thinking about yourself. Start thinking about who I am. And if I'm God, that means I'm worthy of your worship.

I'm worthy to be followed and let me make this practical. Instead of me simply asking you, do you worship your money and possessions and you most probably say, no, no, no, of course I don't.

Why don't I ask you instead, would you sell your stuff for me? Then we'll see where your heart really lies.

[ 26 : 40 ] And my friends, that's what Jesus is challenging you with today. He's not that interested in your stuff. And He's not interested in wanting to know what you've achieved in the past or what you can do in the future.

Rather, He's challenging you. Who do you really, really, really think I am? Who is Christmas really celebrating? Jesus says, you know, when the world celebrates the births of Gautama Buddha and Prophet Muhammad, they are celebrating the births of mere humans.

And both Buddha and Muhammad would wholeheartedly agree with that. They've never claimed anything more. But I, Jesus, don't belong in the same category.

I'm saying something bigger. I'm saying that Christmas isn't about the birth of a great religious teacher, but about the coming of God into this world.

And Jesus says, if I'm God, then what does it matter if you have everything, but you don't have me? Or as He says elsewhere, what use is it for a man to gain the whole world but for feed his soul?

[ 28 : 07 ] because Jesus says if you want eternal life, the only way is through me. Eternal life isn't just a matter of receiving some teaching or advice or wisdom that you can put into practice apart from me.

It can only come through me. It can't come through anything you already have because eternal life is about relationship, not stuff.

stuff. And if the stuff you have is preventing you from coming to me, Jesus says, get rid of it. Wow. Jesus doesn't shy away from big claims, does He? And I wonder how you would respond. How does our ruler respond?

Well, that brings us now to our third phrase. what is impossible with man is possible with God. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

[ 29 : 15 ] So let's come back to our ruler, verse 23. When he heard this, he became very sad because he was very wealthy.

You see, deep down, does our ruler really believe he lacks what is necessary to obtain eternal life? No, he doesn't.

He has it all. He's rich. He's powerful. He has good morals. And deep down, he believes that that should be enough to get him into the kingdom of God.

He doesn't believe that he actually needs Jesus to receive eternal life. He can't do what Jesus asks of him. After all, he didn't get to where he is without being resourceful, right?

He knows that, hey, I've got to depend on myself, not others, right? He's earned the right to do what he wants to do. And so he walks away.

[ 30 : 23 ] And perhaps your sympathies are with this ruler. But let me invite you now to notice something else about this man's response.

He couldn't do what Jesus asked him to do. And as a result, he became very sad. Now, that's very interesting.

Doesn't this man have it all? And doesn't he have the freedom to make the choices he wants? And surely you wouldn't choose something that would make you sad, right?

So why has he made a choice that has left him with sorrow? Verse 23 tells us, because he was very wealthy, and he couldn't give it up.

You see, his wealth is the very source of his happiness. He believed it grants him freedom, it gives him everything he wants, and he couldn't let it go.

[ 31 : 40 ] But notice the irony here. Actually, it's the other way around. It was wealth that couldn't let him go. His riches had become his master, and he had become a slave to it.

Jesus had promised him treasure in heaven if the ruler would just follow him, but he was chained to his current master. And here's the paradox.

The ruler had chased wealth, believing that it would give him all that he wanted, and set him free, give him all the freedom he needs. But in chasing wealth, he doesn't get what he asked for, eternal life.

And here's the greater irony. He becomes unhappy. He couldn't give up what he believed was the source of his happiness, but now it turns out to be the source of his unhappiness.

You see, this is what the Bible says about each and every human being. We are enslaved. It doesn't matter if we have position, or influence, or riches, or even a good religious reputation.

[ 33 : 07 ] You might already have everything you want, but that's just an illusion. We remain slaves. Well, the heart of the problem is that we don't have a heart for God.

Instead, we pour our hearts on anything but God. It could be riches, it could be something else. But the problem is, what we set our heart on becomes our master, and anything other than Jesus is a bad slave master.

Why? Because those things never calm your fears. For example, if your heart is set on money, this master will whisper to you, there's always more to earn.

There's never enough in the bank. If your heart is set on success, it will whisper to you, well, here's another mountain for you to climb. Here's another more successful person to compare yourself with.

If your heart is set on family, it will whisper to you, you've got to be a better husband, a better wife, a perfect son, a perfect daughter.

[ 34 : 28 ] And so your heart is always fearing that you might be rejected because you're never that perfect son. anything other than God will end up being a bad slave master.

And if you think any of those things will grant you perfect happiness, you'll be disappointed. But our problem is the same problem as that rich young man.

Our hearts remain fixed on those things. We're enslaved to them. and try as we might, we can't seem to disentangle ourselves and our affections from these things.

And the disciples recognize this. Look at what they say in verse 26. Those who heard this ask, who then can be saved? If this rich young ruler can't do it, what hope do we have?

And Jesus says, Christmas is the answer. What is impossible with man is possible with God.

[ 35 : 43 ] Because Christmas isn't a sentimental holiday, it's a rescue mission. It's about a good God who sent his only good son to come into this bad world and to redeem slaves.

Christmas is actually a riches to rags story. It's a story about a God who is infinitely rich, infinitely powerful, and infinitely good.

God, by definition, has everything. He owns it all. But it's a story about how he gave it all up and be born in a town of no importance to a mother potentially marked by scandal and become a human being.

But isn't it amazing how joyously free Jesus is? Money doesn't concern him, reputation certainly doesn't concern him, and most amazingly, his very life doesn't concern him.

Right after this encounter with the rich, young ruler, Luke tells us that he tells his disciples that he's going to Jerusalem to die on the cross, and that's the third time he's told them.

[ 37 : 05 ] And that's the heart of the Christmas mission. Why is he giving up his life? Because his concern is that we be redeemed from slavery to our self-centered hearts.

He knows that we lack the resources to free ourselves, but he can do it. And now even more amazingly, he says, do you want a new master?

A master who, though he was rich, became poor for your sake. A master who died for you to accept you into his kingdom.

this is the heart of the Christian faith. Dear God, what if I already have everything I want, and Jesus says to you, you still lack one thing.

You might have everything, but you're not actually free. You're enslaved to all sorts of things. And if you depend on what you already have, it will disappoint you in the end.

[ 38 : 20 ] Instead, he says, come, follow me, depend on me, and you get eternal life. You get a master like no other.

And that brings us to our final phrase for today. No one will fail to receive many times as much. Jesus says, don't forget, when I'm offering you eternal life, what I'm really offering is treasure in heaven.

In other words, it's of infinite value. You might already have everything you want, but one day, you will leave it all behind when you die.

Its value is insecure. So what should you most value? Peter says, we have left all we had to follow you, but notice how Jesus replies.

Verse 29, truly I tell you, Jesus said to them, no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come eternal life.

[ 39 : 42 ] In other words, Jesus is saying, do you understand the true value of what I'm really offering? You might think that you already have everything you want, but I'm offering you something more, something that will last into the age to come.

I'm offering you the ultimate rags to riches story. that's his promise and that's worth giving up everything for.

And so that's something to think about this morning. Are you willing to trust the words of Jesus?

Well, why don't you read through his biography and ask, has Jesus proven himself worthy of your trust?

If you're not a Christian this morning, why don't you ask your Christian friend, do you think following Christ is of most value? Have you ever regretted your decision?

And it could even be that for some of you this morning, you don't just need to think about it, you need to make a decision. are you ready to follow Jesus by trusting that he alone can give you eternal life?

[ 41 : 11 ] And if that's you, well, I'm not going to embarrass you by asking you to stand up personally or come to the front or anything like that, but I'll be happy to hang around for you to come and talk to me personally after the service if you have more questions or if you're ready to give up your life to follow Jesus.

But let me just invite the musicians back up now, and as we sing our closing song, well, I urge you, don't put this to one side.

Heavenly treasure awaits. Thank you.