

A rich young man comes up to Jesus and asks, “What must I do to gain eternal life?” (Mt 19:16). Jesus encourages him to sell what he has, give it to the poor and then he will have treasure in heaven. The man goes away sad for he had many possessions.

Sometimes, we ask the opposite question? What must I do to become a rich man? Perhaps you recall the game show with Howie Mandel called Deal or No Deal. When the contestant asks Howie, “What must I do to win a million dollars?” The game show host replies, “You know the rules of the game: ‘You pick one of 26 sealed briefcases full of varying amounts of cash - ranging from a mere penny to \$1 million. Next you must eliminate the remaining 25 cases.’” The young man replied, “Howie, let me have case # 22.”

The pressure mounted with the elimination of one case after another. After all but one of the cases had been eliminated, the Banker offered to buy case 22 for \$500,000. Howie Mandel explained, “You must choose. Do you accept the bankers offer, or do you continue to play the game on the 50/50 chance that you have picked a million dollars? You can have a sure thing and be given \$500,000 or you can gamble that the million is in case 22. If you have chosen the wrong case, you will only win a penny... \$500,000 for the contents of case 22. Deal or No Deal?”

The man wanted to be rich, so he said, “No Deal.” Case 22 contained only a penny. At this the young man’s face fell, and he went away sad. He gambled that he could have it all, but instead he walked away empty handed. How hard it is for those who desire wealth, \$500,000 could have been his but instead of becoming a rich young man, he has lost everything! Had the man who went away sad bothered to look at the penny he received; he would have discovered that he was not empty handed. On the face of each penny are the words, “In God we trust.”

What would you do if Jesus invited you to give up your wealth to store up treasures in heaven? As he was admiring the handmade crafts of a native artist, a rich young professor asked a 21-year old woman how much she earned for the bamboo stools that she made. She replied that she borrowed 9 cents per basket from a middleman for the ingredients she needed. After she sold each item, all but 2 cents went back to the lender. The rich young professor said to himself, “My God, for 9 cents she has become a slave! She is such a skilled artist. How can she be so poor when she is making such beautiful things?”

The following day, the professor asked his students to conduct a survey in the woman’s village. They discovered that 43 of the villagers owed a total of about \$27. Each one was taken advantage of and working like a slave. The professor said, “I must do something to help them out.” He offered the group of villagers \$27 so they could liberate themselves. He lent them the money they needed on the condition that they pay the money back when they could afford to do so on their own terms. With the micro loan, they were able to buy their own materials and cut out the middleman who made them slaves.

Day by day, over the course of a year, each villager paid back the professor. What started with one small village grew into a bank for the poor to finance projects in rural parts of Bangladesh. In the years since he first started with that original \$27 loan, the bank has loaned \$5.72 billion to more than 6 million Bangladeshis many who do not qualify for loans from conventional banks.

When the rich young professor had grown to be an old man, he was offered a Nobel Prize along with \$1.4 million prize. “Deal or no Deal?” The wise professor responded, “Deal.” He did not want the prize money for himself. He wanted to continue to improve the lives of the poor by doing two things. First, he created a new company to make low-cost, high-nutrition food for the poor. Secondly, he set up an eye hospital for the poor.

What must I do to gain eternal life? We receive the rich inheritance of eternal life at baptism. We are called to share our wealth with others ... to give freely as the Lord has given to us.