

What do I have? (1)

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Headings:

<u>The influence of what we possess</u>	Page 2
<u>What is most valuable to have?</u>	Page 4
<u>Your money or your life</u>	Page 5
<u>Your money and your life</u>	Page 5
<u>Giving up money and life</u>	Page 7
<u>How rich are you?</u>	Page 8
<u>The world or your soul</u>	Page 11
<u>True life and freedom</u>	Page 13
<u>Our choice of what to have</u>	Page 14
<u>Example of Ahab</u>	Page 15
<u>Example of the apostle Paul</u>	Page 18

As we seek to appreciate what is of true worth in life, it is good for us to ponder over this subject “What do I have?”

This is a subject that affects us every day: “What do I have?” Or we can say, “What do I possess?” “What belongs to me?”

The influence of what we possess

From very early days, we are all very conscious of our possessions. Whether we come from a poor family... a rich family... can affect us very significantly.

Some children come from poor families, and they may not have much to eat, their clothing is not of good quality, and they may not even be able to buy text books for their studies. When they meet with their friends, and see that they possess much more, they may at times feel ashamed. If someone were to know that the father is a hawker, the mother is a cleaner, they may feel ashamed. To them it means that they are lowly in society.

For people who have more... and they strive to have more... they may also find themselves in a state where they are still uneasy.

We buy something that we like... we possess something that we think is useful, valuable to us... we are quite happy until we see someone with something better: Suddenly all our happiness is gone. We are not in the state to possess that... we may have to wait for quite a long time more... and when the time comes when we can have that, it continues to be a problem because there will be others who have more than that. This leads to "keeping up with the Joneses": Whatever the "Joneses" have, we would also like to have... otherwise we feel inferior.

What we have, what we possess, can very often bring confidence to many people's lives: If you possess much wealth... you have a sense of authority. If you come from a family that is well-known... you have famous parents... you also feel confident. We seek for confidence by seeking to have more.

For other people, they seek to have in order to enjoy - the more I have, the more I can enjoy. Many people strive to earn much because to them, money can buy many things, and some think that money can buy happiness. It is true money can buy you many friends: They will be there as long as you have the money... when your money runs out, they will also run away.

And this is the kind of situation that many of us face. We may lose sight of what is of true worth because we want to have in order that we can derive a sense of happiness... confidence.

Many people work very hard in order to earn. We have heard of those who say, "I want to earn my first million dollars by the time I am thirty years of age." And there are those who succeed. They work hard and they reach that goal.

Other people work very hard to have a "great name". When people hear that name, immediately they know who it is: "This is a great person... well known... he has a great name."

Others seek for security through having family, friends and fans. We have considered in the subject of "What am I worth?" that some people seek for marriage in order to have family to be secure. Of course, there are those who seek for marriage with the right reasons, but there are those who think that having a family will bring about security: There will be those to look after them when they are old; when they are sick and in need, they have people to care for them.

Others seek to have friends: Friends who understand them... friends who will care for them... who will be with them through thick and thin.

Many others, known as “celebrities”, long to have many fans. Wherever they go, many people crowd round: they want to have their autographs... they praise them... they are excited to listen to them... to watch them.

What is most valuable to have?

What do I have? What is it that is most valuable to have? What is of true worth to possess?

Is it your money... your name... your things... or your life?

There was once a boy who came from a poor family. He felt very difficult when on many occasions he did not have enough to eat, and compared with his friends, he was very deprived. There were many things that he liked, but his parents could not afford to buy for him.

As he went to school he thought to himself, “I do not want to remain poor. When I grow up, I want to be a rich man.” So he worked hard, he studied hard, he did well, and as he grew older he began to earn. He found that as he worked hard, he was able to earn much. So he became rich. There was a sense of happiness... he was able to get the things that he wanted.

One day, he decided that he would go somewhere else to make it even better and bigger. He left his job, sold his things, put all his possessions together, and he made his journey to another place.

On the way he met a man who befriended him, and as the man talked to him, he was very happy, as this man was very friendly... asked about him... his background... what he was doing, and the man told him, “You are a great man, you are very capable... you have achieved much. What are you seeking to do now?”

He told him, "I am leaving this place with all my possessions. I am going somewhere else... to make more money, and a bigger name for myself."

Your money or your life

Suddenly the man took out a knife, placed it at his neck, and he said, "Give me all your possessions!" The man said, "I work so hard all my life. How can I give you all this? No! I will not!" The man said, "Your money or your life? You want your money... I may take your life."

The man hesitated, and he said, "All right... I want my life. You can have my money." He tied him up and he went away with all his possessions.

So this poor boy became a rich man, and now he became a poor man again. He was robbed. As he later managed to go back to his hometown, another person met him, asked him about his welfare, and said, "Why do you look so depressed? Why are you so sad?"

And so he told him his story: He had lost all his possessions... he now found it difficult to get a job. He had lost his self-confidence... he found it difficult to carry on.

Your money and your life

This man told him, "What do you want... your money... or your life?" He said, "I will give you both... I will give you money... and your life. You will be a rich man... a powerful man... you can enjoy life."

The man was very sceptical... how can it be?

He said, "There is only one thing that you need to do: You must listen to me. If you listen to me, you will do well." The man was persuaded, and so he began to listen to him.

He taught him how to make money. He taught him how to impress people... how to win friends... how to influence people. He began to teach him how to make money in a dishonest way... how to cheat other people... how to give wrong impressions... how to smuggle things... and so he grew... he became rich.

But increasingly the man was teaching him how to live, and he told him, "You must continue to listen to me."

This man had various enemies, and as a result of this man listening to him, he made use of him to bring destruction to his enemies. At first he was not very willing to do that, but this man told him, "If you do not listen to me, I will expose all your crimes - how many people you have cheated... what you have smuggled... what you have done... I have all the records."

And so this man continued to listen to him. On the one hand, he enjoyed his riches. On the other hand, he had lost his freedom. He was now a slave of this man. He had to follow his instructions. He could not truly live a meaningful life.

One day, another man met him, and found him so miserable, and asked him, "Why are you so miserable?" He said, "I am very rich, I am very powerful, I am very famous, but I have not found true meaning and freedom in my heart."

Giving up money and life

This man said, “You want your money or your life?” He said, “I offer you a path where you must give up your money and your life. I offer you poverty... suffering... pain... difficulties... but you will find true freedom. Your heart will be free.

At first the man was not willing... it took him some time to think over. As he pondered over, he realized that all his riches, possessions and name did not bring him the meaning, the satisfaction, the life that he wanted.

So he said, “If you can give me true freedom in my heart, I will follow you.” This man said, “You must listen to me. If you listen to me, you follow my instructions, you will find that freedom.”

He listened to this man. He taught him how to live a life that is righteous and good. He learnt to correct his mistakes. He confessed where he had failed... he was sent to jail. He suffered. People ridiculed him... said that he was a fool.

But as he went through this process, he suddenly found freedom in his heart. He discovered that he had become truly rich, and he was very glad to serve this man, and to follow him, as he found that he was truly free.

By now you probably know that this is a story, but it portrays and it helps us to understand some major principles in life that many of us go through. The underlying issues are applicable to all of us at some point of time or other.

What is it that we want to have? What is it that is of true worth for us to possess?

It is important for us to think through these issues carefully because if not, we may easily become entangled in situations which seem very attractive... we can have much... but in the end we will lose our true freedom and meaning in our heart.

Let us turn to **Luke 12: 13-21**

- 13 And someone in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the *family* inheritance with me."
- 14 But He said to him, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?"
- 15 And He said to them, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions."
- 16 And He told them a parable, saying, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive.
- 17 "And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?'
- 18 "And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.
- 19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.'"
- 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?'
- 21 "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

How rich are you?

The Lord Jesus told this parable to address an issue that is very common. Many of us may think we are not like this, but it can easily affect us in many ways without our realizing it.

We may say we are not rich... we do not have many grains and goods stored up for many years. But is there within our heart a longing, a desire to have many things which are not truly helpful for us. We want to have things that God does not see fit for us to have.

Greed... covetousness... can come in many different ways. We look at other people... we long to have what they have. We look at life around us... there are many things attractive to us.

We may seek for treasure for ourselves, but are we rich toward God? That is the critical question. Where are our riches?

The Lord Jesus is not saying that possessions are bad in themselves: we should not have possessions... we cannot earn money... we cannot buy things. But He is telling us we must be careful.

The things in this world can easily grip our hearts. There are many things that we may think we possess, but in fact they possess us... they grip our hearts, and we lose our freedom.

The Lord Jesus said, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed..." He says, "not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." What do you want to possess? If you have an abundance of the things of this world would life be fulfilling... would you have found your life?

This man said, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*..." He had many goods. He had many things that he wanted... take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.

Many people work very hard to earn. Many of them will tell you, "I work hard because I have to earn... I need to survive." That is reasonable. All of us should be responsible... do our part as God expects of us as we live in this world. There is a place to work hard, there is a place to earn money, but very often we find that in reality we are not satisfied with what we have, and that pushes us to work to have more.

It is true there are times when work situations are very busy not because we want it that way, but in various situations we become very busy... very involved... because of the things that we want to have.

There was a man who looked very depressed... very deeply stressed. He found that he could hardly cope with life. The reason, he said, was that he was now working in a job that was very demanding. It required far more than what he was capable of doing. This job gave him quite a good income, but it was very, very stressful to him because he could not cope with the demands.

His friend asked him, "Why do you want to carry on this way? You could leave this job, find another job that is not so difficult for you, and you need not be so stressed."

He said, "No, I cannot. I cannot leave this job. I have so many things under hire-purchase. I have so many commitments financially. I need this job to finance all these things that I have. I cannot leave this job." And so he carried on with the job that he had, and continued in that state of deep distress.

Well, that is a situation that various ones may go through in some form or another. We strive in order to have, and as we have, we find that we are actually losing what we truly want to have. We want meaning... we want life. We strive to find that, but when we get these things, when we have them, we in fact lose our life.

When we have a wrong desire in our heart, bear in mind there is someone on the look out for you. He will give you suggestions how you can have more... just as the man spoke to the man who was robbed, and told him that he could be rich... he could have his money and his life. So too, the evil one is on the look out to offer us our money and our life. He says, "I can give you the things of this world... you can enjoy your life... you can have your money and your life."

The world or your soul

Matthew 4: 8-10

- 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory;
9 and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me."
10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

The evil one offers us the world... what is present in this world... the riches... the fame... the glory... the power... enjoyment... in this world. He may not give us, he may not offer us, as much as he offered the Lord Jesus, but he can still offer us sufficient to be very attractive to us.

The evil one offered the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. That is because the issues involved were very great. You may not be worth all that to him, but he can still offer you something in exchange for your allegiance to him.

He said, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me." The evil one can offer us many things that bring excitement to us... enjoyment... satisfaction... happiness... we can have our money and our life in this world.

While the robber may take your money in order to spare your life, the evil one says, "I give you the money and I give you the life. You can enjoy yourself in this world...spend...live...be famous...be popular...enjoy this world." But, it is at the expense of your true ultimate life.

He "gives" you and he "allows" you to have some degree of physical life, but he takes away the potential for spiritual life. And if you already have spiritual life, he wants to take that away from you.

The evil one does not just offer the world to people without life spiritually. He also offers the world to Christians who have spiritual life, but he wants to take that life away, or at least to cause that life to degenerate and to die.

The evil one will teach us his ways: how to make money... how to be rich... how to be powerful... how to be famous. He will teach us how to be proud... how to be arrogant... how to be inconsiderate... how not to care for other people. "Why weep for these people who are so weak? Be strong... have the power to control others... you must not be sentimental... you must not care so much about the poor" ... and so you can learn to become ruthless... deceitful... and yet famous.

At some other time, he will also teach you to be popular... respectable... "Give your money to charity... be a patron of various charitable organizations.... people will know that you are a good man.... you have contributed much to society."

So there are people who, while they exploit other people... while they achieve their fame, their name and their gain by improper means... yet they may contribute much to charity... and be regarded as a very generous man... a philanthropist.

In the end, when we do that, we become enslaved to the evil one: we follow his ways, and we lose our life – our true spiritual life.

The Lord Jesus warns us about such a danger.

Mark 8: 34-37

- 34 And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.
- 35 "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it.
- 36 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?
- 37 "For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

The evil one offers us our money and our life. But in reality he takes away our life. We will lose our life as a result of finding that kind of life that the world offers us... that the evil one offers to us.

True life and freedom

The Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples as well as to the multitude, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me..."

Many people come to the Lord Jesus because they want to have the things of the world. They think that by believing in God they can have comfort... security... wealth... a good name.

The Lord Jesus said, "If you want to come after Me, you have to learn first to deny yourself. You have to take up your cross, and follow Me." He does not offer us a very attractive life.

He does not give you your money and your life. He wants to take that away. He says, "You must give up your money and your life. Deny yourself. All that you have, all that you long to be for selfish reasons – give that up... take up your cross. The cross is the place of suffering... pain... anguish. That is what the Lord Jesus offers us: take up your cross.

Many people think that following the Lord Jesus is a very easy thing. "Just say: 'I accept Him as my Saviour', and I will have a place in heaven. I can then go, and live my life as I wish."

That is not so. If we want to follow Him, we must be prepared to repent, to turn away from our old way of life, no longer seek for great things for ourselves, no longer seek for enjoyment for ourselves, but seek for what is truly meaningful before God.

He says, "...whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it..." If we want to save our life in this world...we want our money and our life in this world, then, He says, "you will lose it." You will lose your spiritual life, you will lose the true life that is meaningful for eternity.

But, He says, "... whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it." If we are prepared to give up our money and our life for the Lord, we will find the true life – a life of true freedom. We will find ourselves free from the bondage of seeking for the things of this world... the fear of what man may say and do to us. We will find the life of ultimate worth and meaning.

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? Gain the world... lose your soul.

We have to consider: What do I have?

Our choice of what to have

Do I have the world or do I have the Lord? Do I have what the world offers me or do I have the life that God wants to give to me? It is a choice that we make. It is not imposed upon us.

When the man offered the one who was robbed, and he told him, "I can give you your money and your life?" he had a choice whether he would take that offer. But, if he wanted that life and that money, he had to listen to him.

So too, the evil one offers us the world... many things in this world. He offers us enjoyment of this world... he offers us satisfaction in self-gratification. But it is at a price: We have to listen to him.

As we begin to listen to him, his grip over us will increase. He will have much more say in our lives. He will arrange for things in your life for you to enjoy yourself... and to become his slave.

When we recognize the bondage of that slavery, perhaps we may come to realize the meaninglessness of such a life. When God speaks to us, and He tells us, "I offer you poverty, pain and suffering, but freedom... meaning..." would we respond?

If we sufficiently recognize the wretched state that we are in, the meaninglessness of life through such pursuit in this world, we may perhaps listen to the Lord and say, "Yes, I am willing to deny myself, to take up my cross, and follow You. I will give up all that I have in order to be Your disciple... to listen to You."

When we do that, the Lord says we will gain our life. We will find eternal life. The choice is ours. "What do I have?" in terms of that which is most important... is determined by us.

Example of Ahab

Let us turn to **1 Kings 21: 17-22**

- 17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying,
- 18 "Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth where he has gone down to take possession of it.
- 19 And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD,' Have you murdered, and also taken possession? "'And you shall speak to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD,' In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs shall lick up your blood, even yours. ""
- 20 And Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found *you*, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD.
- 21 Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel;
- 22 and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked *Me* to anger, and *because* you have made Israel sin.

We see here a man who sought for the world in exchange for his soul. King Ahab is described as one of the most evil kings in Israel. He saw the vineyard of Naboth... he wanted it.

Initially, he wanted to buy it. Naboth was not willing to sell. Ahab was despondent... he was sad... he was upset. His wife Jezebel asked him, "Why are you so sad?" He told the reason.

Jezebel was a scheming and evil woman, and she had great influence on Ahab. She said, "I will give you the vineyard of Naboth." Using his name... his authority... Jezebel arranged for worthless men to falsely accuse Naboth, and to bring about his death. She then told her husband, "You can now take possession of Naboth's vineyard."

Ahab was glad to do so. He took possession of Naboth's vineyard. And so God sent Elijah to him to say, "Have you murdered, and also taken possession?" We may say, "It was Jezebel who brought about the murder. Why did God say that Ahab murdered?"

In many situations of life, we may say, "It is the evil one who instigated me" to do many things. But in reality, why was the evil one successful? It is because we have longings and desires that he can work upon.

King Ahab allowed Jezebel to use his name to bring about the murder of Naboth because he longed for the vineyard of Naboth. Although he was the king... he had so much possession... it was not enough. He wanted that particular vineyard next to his palace. He murdered... he had also taken possession. He wanted to have what was not proper for him to have.

Do we also long to have what is not proper for us to have? If we do that, we are moving in the same direction. The degree of seriousness may not be the same, but the principle is the same. We need to beware.

Elijah said, “you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD”: he sold himself. That tells us it was his choice. King Ahab was not born like that. He was not made like that by other people. He chose that path. He sold himself to do evil.

It may not be that he began by wanting to do evil things. It probably began when he longed for the things of this world. He wanted position, power, money, fame, enjoyment... and in seeking for these things, he was then prepared to do things that were not right, to get what he wanted. He wanted to have, and so he murdered, and he took possession.

The evil one can tempt us, can suggest to us, can offer us many things but he cannot make us do evil if we do not want to. We have the power to refuse him. We have the power to reject him. Submit... to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The evil one cannot make you his slave unless you agree. If you want the things that he offers you... then he will have power over your life, but that is with your agreement: You sell yourself in the direction of evil.

So we need to beware: What do we long for in this world? Do we want what the world can offer us... what the evil one can offer us?

How should we respond?

Example of the apostle Paul

Well, let us look at a positive example: how we can lose everything, and yet gain everything.

2 Corinthians 6: 1-10

- 1 And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain--
- 2 for He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you"; behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation"--
- 3 giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited,
- 4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,
- 5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,
- 6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,
- 7 in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,
- 8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true;
- 9 as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,
- 10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

What do I have? Do I have nothing or do I have everything?

We need to learn how to arrive at that stage where we have nothing and yet we possess all things. We need to learn such that we are poor yet we make many rich.

The apostle Paul testified that that was his life. When he chose to follow the Lord Jesus, he knew that it was not a path of ease and enjoyment in this world. He understood what it meant to deny himself, to take up his cross to follow the Lord Jesus. He knew that it would be a path of suffering, of pain and distress. He willingly, he gladly, chose this path.

The Lord Jesus offered him poverty, suffering and pain. The apostle Paul gladly accepted that offer, and he found freedom... meaning... life.

He said, "...in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger..." As far as the things of this world were concerned, he seemed to be very deprived. He had hardly anything... he suffered... he went through much difficulty. It seemed that God had taken away everything.

Yet in the midst of that, we see the beauty that comes through in his life.

He says, "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" ...His life was a beautiful life, a life of moral and spiritual beauty and quality in his heart. He developed purity in his heart. He developed the fruit of the Holy Spirit. He loved the people around him. He gave his life to serve... to care... to give.

He found his life even as he lost his life. He found everything even as he gave up everything.

He said, "in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left." There was spiritual life and power and meaning in him. God was with him. The apostle Paul was close to God. He experienced God's presence... God's power... God's life... in the way he lived each day.

Christ was formed in him, and that is why he could meaningfully and effectively go through many different kinds of situation. He said, "by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true, as unknown yet well-known..."

He went through different situations. People could say all kinds of things about him: Sometimes, good things... sometimes, bad things. Sometimes, he was honoured; sometimes, he was dishonoured; sometimes, there was a good report; sometimes, an evil report. Some may regard him as a deceiver, and yet he was true.

“... as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death...” Whatever he went through, his life continued... meaningful... rich... and in abundance... and it was a life where he ministered to others... he contributed to the well being of others.

He said, “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.” Yes, he was sorrowful as he saw many people living in bondage... going the wrong way. Yet he was always rejoicing, as he knew that God was always good. He knew that life would always be meaningful if we follow God.

He was poor as far as the world was concerned, but he was making many rich. He was bringing life and meaning to people, freedom and joy.

As having nothing yet possessing all things. He had given up all things, but he possessed all things.

“What do I have?” If we ask the apostle Paul, he will say, “I have nothing.” You ask him, “Please say that again”, and he says, “I have everything.” “Which one do you mean? You have nothing or you have everything?” He says, “Both... I have nothing, and I have everything.

What do we want... temporal riches or eternal riches?

The Lord willing, we will consider in the next message how we can arrive at such a stage in our lives, how we can attain such a state of having nothing yet possessing all things.

Let us come before the Lord to evaluate our lives, and consider: "What do I have?" What stage of your life are you in now? What is it that you have? Are your riches... the things in this world? Are you rich in the things of this world or are you rich towards God? Have you found true riches, which bring true meaning and value and worth to your life... not just for now but for all eternity?

Let us ask Him to search our hearts to help us evaluate ourselves that we may consider how we have been living our lives. What in reality do we have at this stage of our lives? What we have... is it truly something valuable... is it of true worth?

Will we be truly satisfied at the end of our lives to be like this... to have what we have today? Or do we long to have something very different from what we have? Or do we long to have something much more meaningful than what we have already tasted?

Let us thank the Lord for all that He has done for us... what He has made available to us, and let us ask Him to help us to seek for the right things that we may have that which has true and ultimate value.