

GOD WANTS US ALL TO BE RICH

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Did you know that God wants us all to be rich? *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9). However, God’s definition of the word “rich” in this passage may not be what one expects. Jesus left the riches of Heaven to come to earth, be poor, and die for our sakes. Our Savior and Example has now returned to His riches in Heaven, and that is where our treasure is also, if we are faithful:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19-21; cf. Luke 12:15-40; Jn. 14:1-3; Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

FAITHFUL, BUT NOT FILTHY RICH

The apostle Paul wrote something that likely sounds extreme and fanatical to most people in this materialistic culture: *“And having food and raiment let us be therewith content”* (1 Tim. 6:8; cf. vv6-12; Luke 12:33-34; Phil. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:1-2). Can man be content with the most basic physical necessities, or will he continue to covet until he collapses and dies? What a difficult concept contentment is for many to grasp!

But godliness with contentment is great gain: for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content. But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal... (1 Tim. 6:6-12 ASV).

Although God wants us all to be “rich” in spiritual blessings, the idea that vast amounts of worldly riches will be bestowed upon those who are faithful to God is erroneous. God has promised to give Christians what they need, not every single thing they may want (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12:15-40); and the things God has given should be used with wisdom, in a way that helps others and glorifies Him (Psa. 24:1; Luke 11:41; 1 Cor. 4:2; 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7, 13).

May all men remember that worldly wealth is not confirmation that someone is serving God faithfully; neither is the lack of riches confirmation that one is unfaithful. The account of the rich man and Lazarus makes that point crystal clear (cf. Luke 16:19-31). If it were case that a lack of riches indicated unfaithfulness, why was Jesus poor? (2 Cor. 8:9). Even though He was (and is) the King of kings, He was not born in a palace (Luke 2:7). Later in His life, He had nowhere to lay His head, and no tomb of His own in which to be buried (Matt. 8:20; 27:57-60; Isa. 53:9). Did Jesus’ poverty by worldly standards imply that He was unfaithful? Of course it did not! If worldly wealth is an indication of one’s

faithfulness to God, why did Peter say, “Silver and gold have I none”? (Acts 3:6). Why did Paul have to continue making tents? (Acts 18:3). Men such as these were willing to give up everything to serve the Lord, including their own lives, yet the whole while they had everything they really needed! Their priorities were in order, and they understood that there are things far more important than worldly wealth (Matt. 16:26).

However, the rich young ruler did not understand this. Although he had many good qualities, his master was “mammon” (Matt. 6:24; Luke 18:18ff). After seeing this rich man turned away because of his love of riches, Peter wanted to know what would happen to those who were willing to make great sacrifices for Christ: *“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting”* (Luke 18:28-30). Although Jesus did not promise great worldly riches for every convert, those who become the children of God by being baptized into Christ have spiritual family members all over the world who are willing to share their physical blessings with other family members in need (Galatians 3:26-29; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32; 2 Cor. 8:14-15; Gal. 6:10; James 2:15-16; 1 Jn. 3:16-18). Jesus said we would have those kinds of blessings, and we will also be blessed with everlasting life in the world to come, which is Heaven. Christians need to understand and believe that one way or another, God will take care of His children!

Sadly, however, many of God’s children turn away from Him as soon as adversity strikes, blaming Him for their troubles. Perhaps they should look to the example of Job, who deemed God worthy of his affection and obedience, no matter what blessings Job seemed to lack (Job 2:9-10; 13:15; 23:10). Do we serve God because we love Him, or do we serve Him merely because of “what we can get” by serving Him? If we think we are lacking some type of physical blessing, will we foolishly rebel against our loving Father, the giver of *“every good gift and every perfect gift”*? (James 1:2-4, 17).

WORRYING ABOUT WEALTH

Christians who are considered poor in this world should not be constantly fretting over material needs, allowing worries to consume them and make them ineffective in the Lord’s service (Matt. 6:24-34; Luke 12:21-32; Phil. 4:6-7, 11-13; Eccl. 12:13). No matter how “poor” we think we are, we should always be thankful for what we have and trust in God (Prov. 3:5-6; Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18). He will provide, if we are diligently serving Him (Matt. 6:33).

This is what God was trying to teach the Israelites as they depended on Him daily for their essential needs in a harsh desert: *“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live”* (Deut. 8:3; cf. Matt. 4:4; 6:11). No matter how “mistreated” many of them felt because they no longer had all the luxuries of Egypt, the truth was they had all they needed: *“For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing”* (Deut. 2:7; cf. Num. 11:5-6; Psa. 78). Even though they had all they needed in the wilderness, they would have had so much more in the promised land if they had simply trusted in their Creator (Exo. 3:8; Num. 13:27-31).

What about us? Do we feel abandoned or mistreated because we cannot afford some of the luxuries that our neighbors have? We had better be careful, lest we fail in the same way those Israelites did! The Promised Land of Heaven is waiting for those who keep their faith through this world's "wilderness" (Heb. 11:13-16). In this life we are being tested to see if we really love God and trust Him—let us be sure we pass the test! (1 Cor. 10:1-13; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12; Heb. 3-4).

WORRYING ABOUT THE WICKED

Sometimes those living wicked lives seem to be blessed with great riches. Christians should not be discouraged by such, and we certainly should not be envious of them. Whether the wicked will acknowledge it or not, they are blessed in many ways because of God: "...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45; cf. Acts 17:28). It is up to each individual to decide whether or not he will be thankful to God and serve Him. In any case, all men need to look beyond the temporal blessings of this life and by faith see what will happen in the future: "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end" (Psalm 73:3, 17; cf. Prov. 23:5).

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed...Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass...The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming...A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked...The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever...I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found (Psalm 37:1-3, 7, 13, 16, 18, 35-36).

Do we realize that everything we can now see will one day be gone? (2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Pet. 3:10-13). If we would look into the future and see eternal blessings for the righteous and eternal torment for the wicked, there would be no more envying of the wicked who prosper with temporary blessings of this world (Ecc. 12:13-14; Matt. 16:26; 25:31-34, 46; Rev. 14:11; 20:12-15; 21:4, 8).

CONCLUSION

May we never fall in love with worldly riches that corrupt and fade away, but let us be content and lay up treasures in Heaven, faithfully serving our Lord to the best of our abilities (James 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). If we are not rich in worldly wealth, this does not inherently mean that God has turned His back on us, or that we are unfaithful. Let us focus on things that are eternal (Col. 3:1-4). A wise person I know once observed, "If we could somehow wear special glasses that allowed us to see only things in this world that are eternal, we would only see God's Word and souls."