

The Rich Man and Lazarus

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Written by Joseph F. Harwood

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

We may sometimes look around at the things we see happening in the world and wonder why God has ordered His creation the way He has. We see that there are those individuals to whom God has given great wealth, or those to whom God has given some exceptional talent, ability, or opportunities by which they are able to obtain some measure of wealth, prestige, or position for themselves. At the same time, we see others who struggle in life. For these the ability to obtain wealth and sometimes even the ability to make ends meet seems to be out of reach. Many of us as believers may look at those who have been given so much of what the world values and esteems highly, and we may find ourselves wondering why God does not give us more in the way of temporal, material blessings, so that our burdens might be eased, and we could enjoy more of the “good things in life”.

In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus gave a teaching characterizing the lives of His disciples, whom He proclaimed to be those who are truly blessed by God. He spoke of the troubles they would endure, and He contrasted their lives with others who experienced many good things in life. In this passage we can see that God’s view of blessing is one that is very much contrary to the views and understanding of men. In Luke 16, Jesus gave us another very similar teaching. In this passage we read:

“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were

falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'" (Luke 16:19-26)

How contrary this scenario is to the world's thinking and understanding. Most people would consider the rich man to be accepted and approved by God because of the many benefits he enjoyed in life. At the same time, they would consider Lazarus to be under some sort of curse because of the afflictions and poverty he endured.

The Scripture says that Lazarus was laid at the rich man's gate, and so it is apparent that he was not even able to walk, or to otherwise get around on his own. He was dependent upon others to take him wherever he needed to go. Since he was laid at the rich man's gate to beg, "longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table", it is again apparent that the extent of his infirmities was so severe that he was not able to work at anything by which he could have earned money to provide for himself. So, he was forced by the circumstances in which he found himself to beg. Added to these infirmities he was also "covered with sores", which the dogs came and licked. One could imagine that he seemed repulsive to all who saw him.

The rich man by contrast lived a life filled with "good things" in that he lived in luxury every day, having received many advantages and benefits in life. By the world's way of thinking, many would consider the "good things" enjoyed by the rich man to be evidence of God's acceptance of him and His approval of the life he lived, but such was not the case.

When the rich man saw Lazarus laid there by his gate, he may have wondered what this poor beggar had done to deserve such a miserable fate. At the same time, he may have imagined that God must be pleased with him because of the material blessings he enjoyed. In the final analysis however, it was the poor,

miserable, and afflicted beggar Lazarus who was accepted by God, and it was the rich man, whom most would have considered to be blessed by God, who was ultimately rejected by Him.

As believers our portion is not in this life. Our portion is an inheritance in Heaven that will last forever. We may wonder why God has ordered and ordained things in His creation the way He has, and we may very much wish that He had done things differently. However, the ways and wisdom of God are beyond man's understanding, as the Bible teaches us in passages such as Romans 11:33, Ecclesiastes 8:16-17, and Ecclesiastes 11:5.

Since God in His wisdom has ordained that we must share in Christ's sufferings now during our lives here on earth in order that we may also share in His glory in Heaven (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:35-40, Romans 8:17), we as God's people may well find ourselves among those who are poor now, who hunger now, and who weep now (Luke 6:20-23). We will be hated, rejected, and excluded by those of the world who do not know God. We could also expect that our lives may be more characterized by having received our "bad things", rather than the many "good things" received by the rich man in Jesus' parable (Luke 16:25). When we consider the life of the rich man, let us also consider Psalm 17 where David prayed:

...Deliver my soul from the wicked with Your sword,
From men with Your hand, O Lord,
From men of the world, whose portion is in this life,
And whose belly You fill with Your treasure... (Psalm 17:13-14).

We as believers are not among those whose portion and reward are in this life. Rather, we are among those who will weep and mourn in this life, while those who belong to the world will rejoice (John 16:20-22). Now is our time of mourning as we share in the sufferings of Christ, but the day is coming for every believer when we will see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12), and then no one will ever take away our joy again. At that time, we will fully understand what God was accomplishing through all the sufferings we endured. Until that day, God requires of us that we walk by faith, and not by the sight of that which can be seen and fully understood (2 Corinthians 5:7).

In Jesus' account of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus, we are presented with a stark contrast in two very different lives lived, and we have what will seem to be a complete contradiction in the understanding of those of this world. On the

one hand we have the rich man, a winner in the eyes of the world, and one whom the world would consider to be blessed by God, enjoying many luxuries and all the benefits that material wealth can bring. On the other hand, we have the beggar Lazarus, a loser in the eyes of the world, and one whom the world might consider to be under some sort of curse by God. He suffered great affliction in his body, and we would surely consider him as one who was poor, hungry, and who wept during his life on earth (Luke 6:20-21).

In His teaching Jesus said: “Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.” (Luke 16:22). From these words we might assume that Lazarus was never healed of his affliction so that he would no longer have to beg, and that he remained a poor man until the day he died.

Ironically in the understanding of many, we see in this parable that the rich man was rejected by God, despite the many temporal blessings he enjoyed in life, and at the same time, we see that the poor, miserable, afflicted beggar Lazarus was known by God and accepted by Him. Let us all be mindful of these things when we encounter the afflicted during the course of our lives. When we come face to face with them, we may be looking at our brother or sister in the Lord. Let us also be mindful of these things when affliction comes into our own lives.

The Scriptures teach us that as believers we should not make valuations in our lives and assess the blessing of God in the same way that the world does. All of the valuations and ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God, as Jesus taught us when He said: “...that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15).