

God Vs. Wealth

If we are wise, which often we are not, we'll accept Scripture's insight that the secret to human happiness is filling our empty souls, not by amassing worldly pleasures, but by cultivating the miraculous [fruit of the Spirit](#), "Love, **joy**, peace..." Each infinitely and eternally priceless. All derivatives of the Bible's offer to be "*filled with all the fullness of God.*"

Thus increasing in *godliness*, rather than *wealth*, should be our primary pursuit. Particularly since the New Testament repeatedly warns that these two goals are not only at odds with each other but diametrically opposed. A point made by a myriad of passages, including the [Rich Man and Lazarus](#) (the only conversation between humans in eternity recorded in the Bible) and [Rich Young Ruler](#) (one of only two times Jesus is asked directly how to escape [Hell](#) and get to [Heaven](#)).

Along these lines, Paul admonished his spiritual son Timothy, and by extension all Christians, to "*Take with me your share of hardship [passing through the difficulties which you are called to endure], like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service gets entangled in the [ordinary business] affairs of civilian life; [he avoids them] so that he may please the one who enlisted him to serve.*"

Jesus comments directly on the controversy in no uncertain terms:

1. "*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [money, possessions, fame, status, or whatever is valued more than the Lord].*" Most have heard of this passage, but can't quote it correctly. Only a tiny fraction have taken even ten minutes wrestling with its implications.

A primary reason is our having been taught to substitute [presumption for faith](#). After all, if we're going to [assume salvation](#) because of simple belief ([demons also believe](#)) or saying a special prayer ([warned against by Jesus](#)), why not go all the way?

Revealing a fuller meaning of Christ's message is as easy as plugging words into Jesus' equation. First, let's summarize all that mammon might mean into a more common and expansive word like *wealth*. Next, just do the algebra. There are two options:

- "...he will either hate wealth and love God, or he will be devoted to wealth and despise God."

Or the converse:

- "...he will either hate God and love wealth, or he will be devoted to God and despise wealth."

Tellingly, neither of the above statements *seem to be true* for the average **modern Christian**. In all **honesty**, we're **pretty fond of both**. So did Jesus get it wrong, or is He describing a deeper inconvenient truth?

The Bible contains hundreds, if not thousands, of direct and indirect scriptures addressing the topic of wealth. The following are a handful of the more pertinent passages for our generation, starting with a line or two from Mary's Magnificat or Song:

- And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. **His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.** He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ***He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.*** He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”
- "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. "Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have! ***You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.***" Matthew 6:19-24 The Message
- "Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, **“God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.** God blesses you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied. God blesses you who weep now, for in due time you will laugh." Luke 6:20-21
- "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. ***“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.*** Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets." Luke 6:22-26 NIV

- "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. **Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted**, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Luke 12:32-34
- "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. **And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?** And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?" Luke 16:10-12
- "Just then he looked up and saw the rich people dropping offerings in the collection plate. Then he saw a poor widow put in two pennies. He said, "The plain truth is that **this widow has given by far the largest offering today. All these others made offerings that they'll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn't afford—she gave her all!**" Luke 21:1-4 The Message
- "And the seed that fell in the weeds—well, these are the ones who hear, **but then the seed is crowded out and nothing comes of it as they go about their lives worrying about tomorrow, making money, and having fun.**" Luke 18:14 The Message
- "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: **'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'?** **But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'** The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching." Mark 11:15-18
- "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. **But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.** People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.** Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." 1 Timothy 6:6-10
- "Don't be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, **people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated**

windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals. Stay clear of these people." 2 Timothy 3:1-5 The Message

- "But there were also lying prophets among the people then, **just as there will be lying religious teachers among you.** They'll smuggle in destructive divisions, pitting you against each other—biting the hand of the One who gave them a chance to have their lives back! **They've put themselves on a fast downhill slide to destruction, but not before they recruit a crowd of mixed-up followers who can't tell right from wrong.** They give the way of truth a bad name. They're only out for themselves. They'll say anything, anything, that sounds good to exploit you... God is especially incensed against these "teachers" who live by lust, addicted to a filthy existence. They despise interference from true authority, preferring to indulge in self-rule. Insolent egotists... These people are nothing but brute beasts, born in the wild, predators on the prowl... They're so despicable and addicted to pleasure that they indulge in wild parties, carousing in broad daylight. They're obsessed with adultery, compulsive in sin, seducing every vulnerable soul they come upon. **Their specialty is greed, and they're experts at it. Dead souls! They've left the main road and are directionless, having taken the way of Balaam, son of Beor, the prophet who turned profiteer, a connoisseur of evil...** There's nothing to these people—they're dried-up fountains, storm-scattered clouds, headed for a black hole in hell. They are loudmouths, full of hot air, but still they're dangerous. Men and women who have recently escaped from a deviant life are most susceptible to their brand of seduction. They promise these newcomers freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption, for if they're addicted to corruption—and they are—they're enslaved. If they've escaped from the slum of sin by experiencing our Master and Savior, Jesus Christ, and then slid back into that same old life again, they're worse than if they had never left. Better not to have started out on the straight road to God than to start out and then turn back, repudiating the experience and the holy command. They prove the point of the proverbs, **"A dog goes back to its own vomit" and "A scrubbed-up pig heads for the mud."** 2 Peter 1- The Message

Just these handful of Scriptures paint a picture of the emphasis the Bible places on the topic of use or misuse of wealth. We would do well to try and see our pursuit of money and possessions from God's perspective. Not only is He the source of "*every good and perfect gift*" but the Judge before which we will all stand to give account. Seeing we have been given so much, let us pray that we understand and respond appropriately to Jesus who warned "*to whom much is given much is required.*"

It also bears noting that Christ and His apostles were basically broke. Certainly by today's standards. Yet they possessed a wealth of the *Holy Spirit's Fruit and Gifts, power* and presence, that would established the Kingdom of God on earth. Bringing

Rome, the mightiest military and political, religious and social society in the world to its knees.

Jesus declared that Scripture's [smallest letter and stroke of a pen](#) are essential. From this perspective, consider Peter's exact words when performing the first apostolic miracle post Pentecost:

- "Then Peter said, **Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee:** In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." Acts 3:6-8 KJV

Could there be not just a correlation but causation [between what Peter, and all the other Apostles, had and didn't have?](#) Along the lines of the above Scriptures and more?

As mentioned, many significant New Testament passages clearly warn of eternal dangers of misusing worldly wealth in some or all its varieties. These include, but are hardly limited to Christ's [Rich Man and Lazarus](#), [Rich Young Ruler](#), [Good Samaritan](#), [Sheep and Goats](#). [Mary's Magnificat](#). [John the Baptist's alter call](#).

The Rich Man and Lazarus

One of the most important passages in the Bible is Christ's story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. ***Unique in all of Scripture, these verses reveal the only recorded conversation between human beings in the afterlife!*** Marking this account as even more fantastic is that the story is not a parable. Jesus uses no metaphorical introduction such as, "The Kingdom of Heaven ([10 times in the NIV](#)) or God ([3 times in the NIV](#)) is like..." Also the passage is based in real time on the lives of real people making use of real events. Additionally, unlike in parables, Jesus uses actual names to evidence the authenticity of the account. Except for the name of the rich man lost to [eternal torment](#), in keeping with verses such as [Proverbs 10:7](#) and perhaps for propriety sake.

Recording at least one actual conversation between human beings in the afterlife is a great way to pull back the curtain and inform mortal humanity of what awaits. As a real event, this singular story provides long awaited and necessary insight regarding the outcome of eternity on average men living average lives: "*There was a certain rich man...at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus...*" If, against all indications, the passage is reduced to a parable, Christ's language is misleading. Requiring some form of theological higher criticism to be understood seems to unnecessarily add insult to injury, while doing violence to the nature of the Son of God's Divine mandate:

- "If I have spoken to you about things which happen on this earth and you will not believe me, **what chance is there that you will believe me if I tell you about what happens in Heaven?**" John 3:12 PHILLIPS
- "I am the Agent of my Father in everything; and no one really knows the Son except the Father, **and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**" Luke 10:22 TLB

In actuality, the parable status of the passage is largely moot. Should the uniquely important story of the Rich Man and Lazarus prove to be a parable, how would that serve to diminish its crucial content? The more salient questions are whether we paying close attention? And if not, why?

Such considerations and more argue for this passage being among the most studied and taught. Ironically, it is among the least. Might such a disparity arise from its [fearful content](#) and [contention with modern church doctrine](#)?

- "Jesus said, **There was a certain rich man who was splendidly clothed in purple and fine linen and who lived each day in luxury.** At his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. As Lazarus lay there longing for scraps from the rich man's table, the dogs would come and lick his open sores. Finally, **the poor man died and was carried by the angels to be with Abraham.** The rich man also died and was buried, and his soul went to the place of the dead. There, in torment, he saw Abraham in the far distance with Lazarus at his side. The rich man shouted, **'Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames.'** ***But Abraham said to him, 'Son, remember that during your lifetime you had everything you wanted, and Lazarus had nothing. So now he is here being comforted, and you are in anguish. And besides, there is a great chasm separating us. No one can cross over to you from here, and no one can cross over to us from there.'*** Then the rich man said, *'Please, Father Abraham, at least send him to my father's home. For I have five brothers, and I want him to warn them so they don't end up in this place of torment.'* But Abraham said, *'Moses and the prophets have warned them. Your brothers can read what they wrote.'* **The rich man replied, 'No, Father Abraham! But if someone is sent to them from the dead, then they will repent of their sins and turn to God.'** But Abraham said, *'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't listen even if someone rises from the dead.'*" Luke 16:19-31

Comments on the Rich Man and Lazarus

Even a quick overview of this vital story yields several surprising insights and troubling aspects:

- **How rich was the rich man?** All we are told of the rich man is that he was a likely homeowner who dressed and ate well. It's doubtful his home and furnishings, wardrobe or menu were half as fantastic as the average First World citizen's.
- **What was the rich man's sin?** While Lazarus lay at the other's gate, we are left to assume the rich man knew of and ignored the beggar's plight. Outside of the possibility of the sin of omission, there is no record of wrong doing on the part of the rich man.
- **There is no virtue associated with Lazarus:** Scripture is entirely silent as to any apparent faith or righteousness on Lazarus' part. In fact, such dire circumstances suggests quite the opposite. The Bible often assures [God's provision to those faithfully seeking and serving Him](#).
- **Lazarus dies from exposure and is carried into safety by multiple angels.** With nothing more than [extreme poverty](#) and alienation to commend him, the beggar is borne by angels to a place of paradise within Hell.
- **Upon death, the rich awakens in flaming torment.** Rather than demanding an explanation the rich man humbly requests a few drops of water from Lazarus' hand to cool his tongue.
- **Abraham denies this modest request.** The father of the Jews answers he's physically unable to comply with his great, great, great....grandson's request. Abraham lays no charge of sin against the one in torment. **His only explanation is that on Earth the rich man had received "good things" and Lazarus "evil things. Now their roles would be eternally reversed!**
- **The rich man becomes an evangelical.** The tormented man immediately [pleads for the salvation of his family](#). His charismatic request for an appearance of Lazarus to his father and five brothers is denied.
- **The man in torment repeats his request.** Fearing his loved ones lack of respect for Scripture, he presses Abraham to send Lazarus. Again his request is denied.

While God's commands were well known to the Jews of Jesus' day, the theology of Heaven and Hell was far less developed. So much so, that when engaged by the Sadducees who denied the afterlife, [Jesus relied on a verb tense in a passage of Scriptural as proof of a resurrection!](#) ***It was Christ and His apostles who would make the eternal judgment of the wicked and reward of the righteous foundational teachings in the New Testament.*** Given the fabulous lifestyles and wealth technology affords those of us in First World Nations we would do well to ponder the ramification of this and other [teaching by Jesus on this all important topic](#). See also [John Wesley's strategic handling of worldly wealth](#).