

# Earthly vs. Heavenly Wealth



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## What is Permanent and What Is Not?

Jesus said that one of the differences between earth and Heaven involved the former being temporary--meaning subject to change--versus the latter permanent--or eternal. Whatever people sought for their lives was subject to one of these two dominions. Therefore, craving and hoarding things that belonged to this planet was to value things that could be owned only for a specific amount of time. Even if that interval was hundreds or thousands of years, like a business conglomerate or a royal title and lineage, it would end at some point in history, as would its influence and power.

However, Heavenly goods lasted forever. Wherever people considered their treasures to belong dominated their hearts, thoughts, emotions, words, and consequently their openness to His message. What they looked at, or took care of demonstrated their genuine intentions, no matter what they ever claimed or even considered being their intentions. It was impossible to be loyal to both the Kingdom of God and those of the earth simultaneously. One would diminish in importance to individuals eventually and they would bear the consequences of every single one of their selections.

*"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth--where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But, lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven--where neither moth nor rust destroys and thieves do not break in and steal. For, where your treasure is there your heart will be also.*

*The lamp of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is good your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore, the light that is in you is darkness how great is that darkness!*

*No one can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot*

*serve God and riches. Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life--what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body--what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*

*Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. They neither toil nor spin and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. (1 Kings 3:13)*

*Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' for after all these things the Gentiles seek. For, your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.*

*But, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:19-34)*

Jesus likewise taught people not to fear anything at all that concerned them--not anything at all their lives, nor shelter, nor clothing, nor how to find or pay for any of it. He said to observe that birds and flowers did not work to achieve anything yet God still took care of them. Consequently, He certainly did the same for the children He had created even though they had turned away from Him. In fact, Jesus even asked why anyone would choose to worry instead of rejecting negative thoughts, feelings, and speech because those did nothing but alienate people from their Source of comfort and hope.

The only earthly way to get everything involved assets of some form, whether they were earned, given, or stolen. People had to have food or drink, shelter, and the appropriate clothing to protect them from the weather. Those things were absolute necessities. Whenever sickness attacked they also needed some kind of medical attention or a place to rest (which came with their shelter). They may have required only nominal care, but they needed transportation and funds to acquire them. If the sick person had no assets and another person supplied the medicine then those people needed those things. No matter how or where anything was obtained, somewhere down the line someone required money to get it. In a more serious predicament a consultation with one or several physicians may have become necessary, like the woman with the twelve-year blood flow who saw multiple physicians. These things all demanded payment of some kind and God knew it.

*"Those who covet to be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For, the lust of money is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6:9-10a)*

*"The Pharisees who were lovers of money also heard all these things and they scoffed at (Jesus) and He said to them, 'You are those who justify*

*yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For, what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God." (Luke 16:14-15)*

However, Jesus taught that the Heavenly way to get anything was by searching for God the Father and His, not merely human attributes and solutions to problems. He would make sure that people's needs were taken care of as well as provide whatever was required to help them at every stage of their spiritual development. He would supply all of their necessities, but they only could benefit from whatever they had the faith to receive. Jesus Himself, God's Son and Ambassador was the Light to look at to see that this was true. Jesus never lacked for anything that He needed and He even provided for those who did not. He healed every single person who came to Him asking for it in faith; He provided food and calmed severe and threatening weather. However, Jesus never pursued recognition, fame, or earthly riches in order to do these things. He only followed whatever His Father told Him to do to get everything He ever wanted, even something as common as tax money.

*"When they had come to Capernum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, 'Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?'*

*'He said, 'Yes.'*

*And, when he had come into the house Jesus anticipated him, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?'*

*Peter said to Him, 'From strangers.'*

*Jesus said to him, 'Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first, and when you have opened its mouth you will find a piece of money. Take that and give to them, for Me and you.'" (Matthew 17:24-27)*

## **Generosity: the Rich People versus the Poor Widow**

*"Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how people put money into the treasury and many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites (very small copper coins)--which make a Roman coin. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury. For, they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had--her whole livelihood.'" (Mark 12:41-44)*

We have discussed what Jesus taught about how God looked more at inward, invisible things more than outward, visible ones when judging people. He evaluated their hearts and intentions, not only their noticeable actions. When individuals or groups gave from their resources God valued the percentage that they donate out of their total assets, not just the amount of their contribution. Consequently, He esteemed one penny offered by a homeless person with little or no income as being far more generous

than a million dollars given by a billionaire. The smaller gift affected the lifestyle of the former much more than the larger did the latter and God saw whoever presented a *greater* proportion of their money or property as being the more blessed of the two economic groups represented above.

## Giving for Recognition

*"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in Heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret and your Heavenly Father Who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Mark 12:41-44)*

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As well as giving abundantly without worrying about what would happen to them if they ever give too much and needed or wanted the gift back later, Jesus taught that people should not offer their money, time, or resources merely to emulate true generosity and impress other people. God was the One who saw their thoughts and intentions and He was the One to imitate and please, not human beings. Whenever someone decided to inspire, receive applause or adulation from humanity only, and definitely ignore or deny Jesus' instruction, they could expect nothing from God, for they already had chosen to please mankind in favor of Him. Thus, they would receive their reward from whomever they sought to get attention and, like everything else on earth, it merely would be transitory approval, subject to change depending on breaking news and impressions.

## A Rich Young Ruler Asked Jesus How to Inherit Eternal Life

*"A certain ruler asked Him, saying, 'Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal Life?'*

*So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One. That is, God. You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery', 'do not murder', 'Do not steal', 'Do not bear false witness', 'honor your father and your mother'?''*

*And he said, 'All these things I have kept from my youth.'*

*So when Jesus heard these things He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in Heaven, and come follow Me.' But, when he heard this he was very sorrowful for he was very rich.*

*And, when Jesus saw that he became sorrowful He said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God! Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God!'*

*When His disciples heard it they were greatly astonished, saying, 'Who then*

*can be saved?'*

*But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.'*

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, 'See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?'*

*So, Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And, everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or land for the sake of the Kingdom of God for My Name's sake shall receive a hundredfold in this present time and inherit eternal Life. But, many who are first will be last, and the last first.'" (Matthew 19:23-30 & Luke 18:18-30)*

*"Woe to you who are rich, for you already have received your consolation." (Luke 6:24)*

A rich, young ruler approached Jesus, not in reverence and humility but self-importance. That man obviously considered himself godly because he bragged about his devotion to God. However, it was a false piety and sense of security because he looked at himself and his own possessions without even considering the situations of other people. He counted on his outward works and obedience to the letter of the Law as being sufficient enough to please God instead of following the spirit of His commands to humanity. During their exchange, it seemed as if this man were trying to equate himself with Jesus as a fellow righteous individual instead of a sinner like the people surrounding him.

After Jesus listened to the rich young man brag about his obedience, He told him that although he claimed always to live by the ten commandments he still had to do several more things before God would allow him to enter into Heaven. First, he needed to liberate himself of the confidence that his possessions provided and instead look to Jesus for security. In order to be able to do that in his case he would have to sell what bound him to a worldly frame of mind and give those riches away to the poor, all of them. Second, he had to follow Jesus and learn from His teaching how to be able to look to God to supply whatever he required, instead of his former transitory wealth which could be lost or stolen at any moment.

When Jesus saw the rich man's sad reaction, He used the opportunity to reinforce something to His disciples--namely the strength of the mindset of wealth and its ability to bind someone hostage to it. It was nearly impossible for a person with many resources ever to come to Jesus. Riches possessed a deception, false sense of security, and invincibility that seemingly always would protect them from anything bad that ever happened in the world. In fact, Jesus used an extreme analogy to show His listeners just how unlikely it was that people could disengage themselves from their influence--a large animal being able to go through a hole in a tiny object.

Peter was aghast when he heard Jesus example, for he had done at least the second requirement that Jesus commanded the rich young man. Although Peter had been a fisherman and could not have been wealthy or had many possessions to deny,

he had left everything including his wife (*Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:30; Luke 4:38*) to follow after Jesus and learn from Him as He toured the country on foot. By the tone of Peter's question to Jesus however, he possibly could have owned enough property to induce him to ask who qualified for salvation. Jesus reassured him that God could make all things possible, even change the heart of someone tied to their wealth so much that they had defined and identified themselves more with it than with God.

Peter then wanted to know what would a person receive if they indeed had relinquished everything and followed Jesus. He revealed a slice of what Heaven was like and that His disciples would not be disappointed in their choice to put Heavenly concerns above fleshly centered ones. God would make sure that they recouped what they ever needed back on earth. Jesus added one other important thing, very likely so that the rich young man could hear it. He said that whoever was or considered themselves to have high status, or "first" on earth would have low rank, or be "last" in Heaven. As usual, Jesus reaffirmed the vastly greater importance of Heavenly distinction over earthly conditions.

### **The Beggar Lazarus and the Rich Man**

*"There was a certain rich man clothes in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day, but there was a certain beggar named Lazarus full of sores who was laid at his gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried, and being in torment in Hades he lifted his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his warmth.*

*Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip his finger in water and cool my tongue. For, I am tormented in this flame.'*

*But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things (*Matthew 6:2*), and likewise, Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted and you are tormented. And, besides this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'*

*Then (the rich man) said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my house for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them lest they also come to this place of torment.'*

*Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.'*

*And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if one goes to them from the dead they will repent.'*

*But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'" (*Luke 16:19-31*)*

Jesus once more told people a true story about specific people and their lives, but this time He also spoke about what happened to them after they died as well as

before. The first (unnamed) person mentioned was a rich man who enjoyed all the trappings of personal wealth. He had a fine house big enough to have a wall around it with a gate, wore expensive clothes, ate abundant and wonderful food, and probably was or seemed to be healthy. In contrast, there also was a second man, named Lazarus, who not only was so poor that he did not have a nice home but was laid outside the rich man's gate on the ground. He was very sick, had obvious sores, and probably could not even walk. He was so hungry that all he wanted was to eat the crumbs that fell from the other's table. As a further indignity, only the dogs went to show him that they noticed him when they came and licked his sores, possibly causing him further discomfort and embarrassment. The rich man never even acknowledged the poor man's existence, let alone helped him in any way.

Both men died and ended up in different places. The poor man went to a place of warmth and comfort with Abraham--a man covenanted to God. The rich man ended up across a huge gulf from there, stranded, tormented in flames, and thirsty. They could see one another, but even if the more fortunate people wished to help or comfort the less fortunate they could not because of the expanse between them. Neither were the people in agony able to leave the place where they were in constant suffering, burning, and thirst.

The rich man was just as demanding as he most likely had been before he died. Curiously, he recognized Abraham, a man whom he could not have seen before, and called out to him without any introduction or greeting whatsoever. The rich man told, not asked Abraham to command the poor man to do something to comfort him. Even though the rich man was in great pain and suffering, this man was just as overbearing and arrogant as before he died. He still treated Lazarus like an underling, not an equal. He never spoke to him directly, only to Abraham. The rich man's personality did not change just because his physical body was dead.

When Abraham informed the rich man that no one from either side could cross the abyss, the rich man softened, but just a bit. He begged Abraham to do him a favor this time instead of demanding it. However, the rich man's air of superiority toward Lazarus was the same as before; he still talked *about* him, not *to* him. This time the rich man selfishly wanted Lazarus to go back to a place where he had been poor, sick, crippled, and in agony in order to warn the rich man's brothers about their impending fate. He had no thought for Lazarus' comfort, but only thought about his own family. The rich man still did not seem to grasp why he and Lazarus had ended up in different places after they died, and he evidently was not at all remorseful about how he had treated Lazarus while they both were alive.

Abraham told the rich man the same thing that Jesus had been teaching His followers--listen to and obey the messages from Moses and the prophets. If they did not heed their warnings, neither would a man rising from death convince them to repent. It turned out to be true even if said man were God's Son Himself.