

O God, who made both rich and poor, preserve us from dire poverty lest we despair and sin against Your commandments in bitterness; but preserve us also from the love of money and from selfish use of Your gifts, lest our earthly possessions prove to be a snare which drag us down into eternal perdition. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on our eternal goals and to regard all things in this life as passing, that they may not hinder us on the way to that home which You have prepared for us through Your Son, our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

... the disciples were amazed at [Jesus'] words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. (Ps. 19)

In Christ Jesus, whose poverty in this life was endured willingly so that we might become rich everlastingly, dear fellow redeemed:

In monastic tradition monks take several vows, one is a vow of poverty. It is believed that if they live a life of poverty they have a better chance of falling into God's good graces, not being held in the bondage of material possessions. In theory it makes sense. On the other hand those who have been enriched in this life with wealth earned by honest labor or through a windfall of income, it is thought that if their money is used for good and noble purposes then they too have a better chance of falling into God's good graces.

Neither the conditions of the rich man nor the beggar in our Gospel lesson secured for them a better position before God. So we observe: **Neither Poverty Nor Riches Secure Heavenly Blessings.**

I

The disciples thought the rich young man who approached Jesus right before our text had every advantage of getting to heaven even before them. But concerning this rich young man who refused to follow Jesus on account of a desire to keep all his wealth, Jesus said: "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

It is possible this rich young man was known by many, even by the disciples, as being generous. Perhaps he made a show of helping the poor in his community, the very ones to whom Jesus directed him to hand over his entire wealth before following Him. The rich man in our Gospel lesson very possibly was generous too, after all, Lazarus the beggar was placed outside his gate. Beggars usually find what is believed to be the most lucrative spot to position themselves.

But regardless of these potential acts of charity on their part, charity does not make up for even one sin against God's holy law. In writing to Pastor Timothy, the Apostle Paul makes this observation: "those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is

through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." It would appear that both rich men we hear about today wandered away from the faith in the promised Messiah trusting in themselves and their wealth as making themselves right before God. The very fact they were rich may have led them wrongly to conclude that God obviously favored them.

But just as wealth in this life does not secure heavenly blessings, so it is true the condition of poverty earns the sinner nothing as well. After our text, impetuous Peter pipes up and makes this observation for Jesus: "See, we have left everything and followed You." In other words, Peter was saying that they had divested themselves of all worldly attachments, so as a consequence they should become worthy before God. Jesus acknowledged their following of Him, which was a good thing, but instead of rich rewards, Jesus told them their following would lead to persecution.

So my fellow redeemed no matter your position in this life, rich, poor, middle income, it does nothing to secure the eternal blessings your Father in heaven desires for you. With wise Solomon we should pray his prayer from Proverbs 30: "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor,

and steal, and profane the name of my God." But keep in mind, even though Solomon prayed this prayer, he would later be caught in the snare of his phenomenal wealth plunging him into gross idolatry.

II

At this point we might be tempted to join in with the disciples in our text and ask with astonishment: "Then who can be saved?" Our sinful natures are just like those of the disciples, we want to find some advantage in ourselves to secure the heavenly treasures before God. But in response to this question Jesus said: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."

We desperately need salvation. Without it we are eternally separated from God our creator as the rich man in the Gospel lesson found out too late. But salvation cannot be produced by us indebted sinners. It must come from outside us. It cannot even come from another indebted sinner. You and I need a perfectly holy Savior. Christ Jesus is that perfect Savior. He is our God made flesh to accomplish what is impossible for us to do for ourselves or for one another.

The blessings of heaven, which Jesus secured for us by the shedding of His holy precious blood for all our sins, are everlasting forgiveness and eternal righteousness. Never again will we be

tempted in our eternal home to envy others for what they have and we do not. Never again will we be discontent with what we do have seeking more to make our lives more complete. Jesus won for us the abundant life. He who was rich from eternity became poor for us, so that in our spiritual poverty we might become rich beyond measure.

About a month ago I rented a car with only 7 miles on it. The new car smell was so very enticing. I could not help but think how long ago it was that I had that experience driving in such a fresh new car of my own. Instead of longing for that new car smell again I needed to remind myself that I have been blessed by purchasing used vehicles which did not have the dirty musty smell of an old neglected car. This broken and fallen world with our broken and fallen lives of sinfulness can grow more and more miserable if we look about us and desire to enrich ourselves, whether rich or poor or in between.

Because you know and trust in Christ Jesus your Savior, who has secured for you the heavenly blessings of life everlasting, you can with Jeremiah confess: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning." Waking up as a redeemed child of God every morning you experience that new mercy "*smell*" every morning and what has begun for you now in this life will continue forever for Jesus' sake.

It is through this condition alone secured for you by your Savior that you will enjoy the heavenly blessings forevermore. So no matter your financial status in this life right now, rich, poor or in between, it means nothing in regard to your status before God. Yes, it is true whatever your condition is in this regard can ensnare you and lead you away from the true everlasting blessings in Christ. But through the work of Christ your Savior, who endured your everlasting poverty willingly, your heavenly riches have been secured forever. This is the eternal inheritance the heavenly Father has prepared for you through His Son's immeasurable expenditure canceling your entire debt and enriching you with His everlasting righteousness. You, for Jesus' sake, are rich indeed! Amen.