

August 19, 2013

# Parables: Riches

## By Bryan Hodge

What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" ~ Mark 8:36-37

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." ~ Luke 12:15

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." ~ 1 Timothy 6:6-7

Let us consider two parables that we will classify as "riches" parables. Let us notice...

### The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)

The setting (Luke 12:13-15): A great multitude has gathered to hear Jesus (Luke 12:1). One from the crowd wants Jesus to decide an inheritance case (Luke 12:13). Jesus wants to part of it. He did not come to earth to spend His time as a judge or an arbitrator, though some seemed to want Him to so function (Luke 10:40; 12:13-14; John 8:3-4). He cautions, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." (Luke 12:15).

The Parable (Luke 12:16-21): A man prospers in farming. He does not even have enough room to store his crops. He plans to build a bigger barn. One day he thinks, "I will retire and take my ease. I will eat, drink, and be merry for many years." However, he did not have many years. He would die that very night.

The application: God calls the man a fool. He was a fool because: (1) He was rich in everything except what really matters. He was not rich toward God (Luke 12:20-21). (2) He had no sense of stewardship. He used the pronouns "I" and "My" ten times (as recorded in NKJV). He spoke of "My crops" and "My goods," but he made no reference to God. (3) He seems to have had no concern for others. His plans revolve around self. Never once does he mention others, not even family. (4) He assumed that death was far off, while it was at the door. "Come now, you who say 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-14). (5) He failed to prioritize the spiritual over the material (Mark 8:36-37; Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-26). (6) He was zealous for what could not be carried to the hereafter (Luke 12:20; 1 Timothy 6:7; Ecclesiastes 2:17-19a). He should have been laying up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). (7) He failed to keep before him the coming judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27).

### The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

A Parable? Some object to classifying this as a parable. It contains proper names. None of the parables contain proper names, unless this is the exception. Moreover, some think that the truth of the teaching is diminished if this is considered a parable.

I have no problem considering it a parable. It begins "a certain rich man" (Luke 16:19), which sounds like the two previous parables, which begin "a certain rich man" (Luke 16:1) and "a certain man" (Luke 15:11). Moreover, the fact that it is a parable does in no way diminish the truth. Parables are always based in reality, unlike fables which have trees walking and animals talking (without miraculous help), parables are told using events that could really happen (e.g. a sower sowing seed cf. Luke 8:4-ff). Furthermore, there is a reason why the name Lazarus may be included. The name means, "God helps." It may have sounded as a joke from an earthly vantage point. However, we should consider the bigger picture.

The setting (Luke 16:1, 13-14): Jesus' disciples are present (Luke 16:1), along with certain Pharisees (Luke 16:14). Jesus teaches, "No servant can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13). The Pharisees, "Who were lovers of money... derided him" (Luke 16:14).

The parable (Luke 16:19-31): Jesus tells a story of two men. One is a rich man. He has all of the luxuries in life that one can imagine. He has fine clothes, a gated house, and he eats well. The second man, Lazarus, is a beggar. He is not a beggar due to laziness or lack of work ethic (He is not corrected for such things). He may be a beggar due to illness. He is sick and full of sores.

Both men die. Wealth does not conquer death. It eventually gets all.

We can imagine that there would be a great difference in the manner and expense with which these two were buried. The text does not elaborate.

Next, Jesus tells us of these two men's states on the other side in the hades realm. The rich man is in torments (majestic, plural, signifying great torment). Lazarus is in comfort and in the company of Abraham. Between the two is a great gulf which cannot be crossed.

The rich man has five brothers. He is concerned about them for they too are headed toward this same unhappy end. Perhaps, they are even following the example of their brother. Can't they be warned? The answer is they have been. They have "Moses and the prophets," in modern terms - they have the Bible.

The application: The point is that one's material success, or lack of success in life, is no indicator of what awaits on the other side.

The issue is not money. The Bible mentions men and women of faith who were wealthy in this life: Abraham, Sarah, Job, Joseph, David, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary the mother of John Mark. The Bible also mentions men and women of faith who were poor in this life: Job, Ruth, Naomi, the poor widow who put in two mites. God wants us to be faithful in whatever financial state we find ourselves. He wants us to be good stewards of what we have, serving Him. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).