

Who is the wealthiest person in the world? I read that in 2013 that distinction belongs again to Bill Gates from Microsoft with 72.7 Billion. Second place goes to a man from Mexico City called Carlos Slim. He and his family have a net worth of some \$72.1 billion. Who is the wealthiest person in your community? Who is the wealthiest person among your circle of friends? Who is the wealthiest person in your family? Most of us could probably answer those questions with some amount of accuracy. We observe people and make judgments about their wealth. We tend to rank people and classify them based on their wealth...or lack of it. How big is their house? What kind of car do they drive? What type of investments do they have? We spend a lot of time assessing the wealth of people, ourselves included.

God does the same thing for us in his Word. He makes assessments about wealth. But he doesn't do it the way we might think he would according to our worldly way of thinking. As we consider the words from Luke, chapter 16, we do so with the prayer and the encouragement to one another: Let Us View Wealth the Way God Does. **WEALTH IN THIS WORLD IS FLEETING**

Some people call this a parable of Jesus, but I agree with many scholars who believe Jesus is describing an actual occurrence. In the 38 parables Jesus told, he never called anyone by name. In this story, He identifies two of the characters by name, Lazarus and Abraham. I believe there really was a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus and after they died Jesus reported what happened. It was real. You've heard of reality TV--this is even better, it's reality Bible.

Question: True or false. The rich man in Jesus' story lived a miserable and unhappy existence because of all his wealth. False. He was dressed in the finest clothes and ate the best food. He apparently didn't have a care in the world. Sometimes we think that wealthy people who are not Christians are very unhappy. Many aren't. Many are very happy with their lives.

True or false. The rich man in Jesus' story went to hell because he was rich. False. It wasn't because of what he had, but what he didn't have that he went to hell. It was because his material wealth, not God, held first place in his heart. It was because his trust was in his wealth and not in God. It was because his love was for himself and his wealth and not for God and neighbor. He did not believe in God or his promises.

Earthly wealth is a fickle and fleeting god. It is much more like sand than it is like stone. It can be lost. It can be stolen. It can be poorly invested. It can be wasted. It can disappear just like that without fulfilling its promises of peace, joy and happiness. But even, and this is the point of Jesus' story today, if it holds up for this life, certainly it shows itself to be fleeting in the life to come. And that is the warning that Jesus gives to us today. It is a warning message that is sounded forth all through Scripture. God knows the human heart. Wealth has a way of blurring vision. It has a way of becoming all consuming. It has a way of setting itself up in hearts in the place of God. Trust in the giver can easily turn to trust in the gift. That's why the Psalm writer gives this warning: "...though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them." (Psalm 62:10) Because hearts can so easily put their trust and love in riches

The rich man's wealth did him no good when he died. It couldn't buy him eternal happiness. It couldn't buy him entrance into heaven. It couldn't make him right with God. It

couldn't cover his sins with forgiveness. It couldn't make him holy. It couldn't buy him peace. Look for a moment where he ended up. Hell. A place of torment. He cried out for Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in some water to touch his tongue. He was in agony in the fire. That's an interesting point about the afterlife. We will be equipped with bodies that possess a sense of pain or pleasure. Lazarus had a finger and the rich man had a tongue.

I believe the thirst the rich man had was the same thirst everyone has in this life—it's a thirst for God. This thirst cannot be satisfied with anything the world has to offer. Only Jesus can satisfy this thirst. Jesus said, "If anyone thirsty, let him come to me and drink!" (John 7:37) This thirst for God only becomes more intense and agonizing in hell.

One of the worst agonies of hell will be the ability of people in hell to see those who are in heaven. Can you imagine lost husbands seeing their wives in heaven? Lost parents seeing their children in heaven?

In verse 25 Abraham said, "Son remember..." I believe those are two of the scariest words that will ever be heard in hell. People in hell will carry their memories with them. I believe a person in hell will remember all the opportunities they had to learn about the way of salvation. They will remember the Bible that was there for them to read. There is no Alzheimer's in hell. Hell will be a place of eternal remembrance and regret. Have you ever bought something on a whim and later regretted it? It's called "buyer's remorse." Fortunately, you can take a lot of things back for a refund or an exchange. In hell there will be what I call "salvation remorse." It won't be over something you did, but it will be remorse over something you didn't do: believe in Jesus.

How do we view this world's wealth? Isn't that the question God would have us ask today? Do we view it as the be all and end all, the ultimate goal of life – to have as much of it as we possibly can? Do we view it as the thing that gives us status and worth and importance in life and in the eyes of other people? Do we view it as the thing that brings us confidence for the present and the future? Do we view it as the thing that can bring us happiness and goodness? Do we view it as God views it? What does it matter how much money we have in the bank or what kind of wealth status we've achieved when we die?

God, forgive us. God, forgive us for allowing our emotions and our joy to be dictated by the amount of wealth we have. God forgive us for judging status, our own and others based on the amount of wealth that has been accumulated. And God thank you, for pointing this out to us. Because it is only then, when we view wealth and our attitude toward it as God does, that we can return to assessing what true and lasting wealth is all about and where it can be found.

WEALTH IN CHRIST IS FOREVER True or false. Lazarus loved living in poverty and had a great time with it while on earth. False. It was painful and difficult. Poverty is not fun. Poverty is not a status that God would have us try and achieve. In fact, there is a prayer in the book of proverbs that speaks about the difficulties in life and the dangers to faith that come along with extreme poverty. It says, "...give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." (Proverbs30:8b-9)

True or false. Lazarus went to heaven as a reward for his living a life of poverty on earth? False. Living in poverty does not win a person special points with God. It doesn't make them more worthy of God's mercy and favor. It wasn't what Lazarus didn't have, but rather what he had, that ended him up in heaven. Lazarus was in possession of something that far surpassed, far outweighed and far outlasted any kind of worldly wealth. It was a wealth that was viewed by God as the most precious kind. It was a wealth that had nothing to do with a wallet or a bank account. His wealth was found in his heart. We find a clue about why Lazarus went to heaven when we see who he joined there. It was Abraham. We might even note that Abraham was very wealthy on this earth. But he had a better wealth than that in his heart. His wealth came through faith. Remember what was said about Abraham. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Faith in the coming Savior was what made Abraham truly wealthy.

Faith in the coming Savior was what made Lazarus truly wealthy. It was Jesus, the one whom they had as the highest treasure by faith, that they were rich indeed. It was Jesus who gave them things that money could never buy. The problem that money can't fix, sin – the solution in Christ, the forgiveness of sins. The problem that money can't counter, condemnation and eternal death – the solution, salvation and eternal life through Christ. Abraham and Lazarus experienced what Paul writes about. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9) By God's grace, you and I have experienced it too. It was because Jesus died with our sins, that which makes us poor beggars before God, that we have become rich. It was because Jesus gives us his righteousness, that which money can't buy, that makes us richly dressed members of God's family. That's a wealth that isn't fleeting or failing. That's the wealth that we are encouraged to pursue. Paul says it this way, "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." (1 Timothy 6:11) And that great wealth is found in God's Word. It is there that he shows us his son and all the riches that are ours through him. It is through that Word that he wants us to go to others to tell them where true and lasting wealth can be found.

Let's go back to those first questions. Who is the wealthiest person in the world? In the USA? In your community? In your family? Who wants to be a billionaire? By God's grace you are. You are on God's Richest List. You have true treasure and wealth that lasts in your Savior, Jesus. Amen