

*St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty*

**A Thematic Study of St. John Chrysostom's Sermons on Luke 16: 19-31**



St. John Chrysostom receives Gospel from the Apostle and Evangelist Matthew  
Image from the *St. John Chrysostom Webpage*

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## **Lazarus and the Rich Man as Exemplars for our Salvation**

Lazarus and the Rich Man as examples set forth in Luke 16:19-31 would seem a rather obvious point, given the eternal reward given the former and the enduring torments inflicted upon the latter. But just because a conclusion is evident does not render it less valuable. In fact, seemingly simple notions often bear much fruit when examined closely. Such clear points can also serve as stepping stones to less evident points. Let us keep this in mind when examining this subject.

Lazarus and the Rich Man as examples can be broken down into three specific questions. *Why is Lazarus a good example for Christians? Why is the Rich Man a poor example? And finally, how should we use these examples?* We shall now investigate how St. John Chrysostom elucidates these points in his homilies on the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man.

*Why is Lazarus a good example for Christians?* It is not because he was poor, ill, and in extreme distress. St. John makes it clear that virtue is the true measure of a man, and thus neither his social rank nor wealth.

*I do not despise anyone; even if he is only one, he is a human being, the living creature for which God cares. Even if he is a slave, I may not despise him; I am not interested in his class, but his virtue; not his condition of master or slave, but his soul.*<sup>1</sup>

Since it is virtue and the soul, and not social status, which truly matters, Lazarus' character and behavior is what sets him apart as an example. It is not *that* he is poor and miserable which makes him a hero, rather *how* he bears his condition. St. John makes quite clear, however, how miserable Lazarus' external state really was. He was not only poor, but also excessively ill and lonely. He sat near others who seemingly fared well in wickedness, and furthermore, he saw no one else in his own condition. Being an Old Testament saint, he had not the consolation which comes through knowledge of the Resurrection. Finally, his reputation was slandered by fools who attributed his sufferings to sin. All these together placed a nearly unbearable burden on Lazarus, perhaps heavier than anyone else ever bore.<sup>2</sup>

*Nevertheless, although the waves were so great and came so close together, the boat did not sink, but he strengthened himself with wisdom like dew continually refreshing a person lying in the furnace.*<sup>3</sup>

Lazarus endured his extreme misfortunes with wisdom, courage and patient endurance, refusing to comfort himself with worldly wisdom. He did not question the providence of God when he saw the wicked Rich Man and his flatterers prosper in contrast to his own misery. Instead, he submitted himself to the *incomprehensibility of God's love for mankind*.<sup>4</sup> Lazarus also refrained from discouragement, complaining words and refused to blaspheme God.<sup>5</sup> In place of blasphemy, he praised and gave thanks to God.

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<sup>1</sup>John Chrysostom, *St. John Chrysostom on Wealth and Poverty* (trans. Catharine P. Roth; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984) 99-100.

<sup>2</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 29-32.

<sup>3</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 32.

<sup>4</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 108.

<sup>5</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 28.

In all this, Lazarus becomes an instructor in virtue for both rich and poor. Through his heroic life, he shows that in itself poverty is nothing evil, and that wealth is worthless without virtue.<sup>6</sup>Nobody has an excuse for complaining when Lazarus refrained from complaint in his dire straights.

*This man is presented as a teacher for you both. For if he did not complain when he was poor, what pardon will those have who complain when they are rich? If he gave thanks in hunger and so many troubles, what excuse will those have who do not try to approach the same virtue when they enjoy abundance? Likewise, what pardon will the poor have who grumble and complain because they have to beg for a living, when this man, who lived continuously in hunger, poverty, loneliness, and illness in the house of a rich man, ignored by everyone, and could not see anyone else who had endured the same sufferings as he had, nevertheless showed such wisdom?<sup>7</sup>*

Lazarus teaches us not to call the rich fortunate and the poor unfortunate. Indeed the rich man is not the one with many possessions, but the one with few needs. The poor man, as well, is not the one with few things, but with many desires. This is the true measure of wealth and poverty.

*For we are accustomed to judge poverty and affluence by the disposition of the mind, not by the measure of one's substance. Just as we would not call a person healthy who was always thirsty, even if he enjoyed abundance, even if he lived by rivers and springs (for what is that luxuriance of water when the thirst remains unquenchable?), let us do the same in the case of wealthy people: let us never consider those people healthy who are always yearning and thirsting after other people's property; let us not think that they enjoy any abundance. For if one cannot control his own greed, even if he has appropriated everyone's property, how can he ever be affluent?<sup>8</sup>*

Hence both rich and poor learn to bear their woes with equanimity, and the rich learn self-control. When we learn the meaning of true wealth and truly good fortune, and that providence indeed rules and metes out justly to all, we will avoid letting the joys of this life puff us up and its griefs deject us.<sup>9</sup>

*A person who is noble and lofty in spirit will not be lifted too high by any of the brilliant and glorious conditions nor cast down by any humble and despised circumstances.<sup>10</sup>*

Finally, Lazarus heeded the wisdom of Matthew 7:13, "*enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat*". In contrast to the Rich Man, Lazarus entered via the narrow gate, i.e., the life of virtue and suffering. By attending to the road's wide end more than to its narrow beginning, he received an eternal and glorious recompense for all his earthly sufferings.<sup>11</sup> Lazarus learned, as we should, not to judge a man lucky *before* his end.

What marvelous lessons these are! From Lazarus we learn what it is to be truly noble in spirit. Such nobility frees us from the vicissitudes of this life, allowing us to bear misfortunes with patience and wisdom. We learn that true wealth is self-control, not the indulgence of our appetites and acquisitiveness. We also learn how to come to a good end, and thus be fortunate in truth and not in shadow.

<sup>6</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 39.

<sup>7</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 40.

<sup>8</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 40.

<sup>9</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 82-83.

<sup>10</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 83.

<sup>11</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 132-137.

*Why is the Rich Man a poor example for Christians?* Once again, outward circumstances are not the proper measure. The Rich Man was not condemned because he was wealthy, rather because how he used, or more properly speaking, *misused*, his wealth. Wealth is not good in itself, but is good or bad, according to how it is used. Hence wealth has its proper use.

*None of these things is good, not luxury, not wealth, not excessive clothing; they have only the name of goodness. Why do I say that they have only the name? They often indeed cause our destruction, when we use them improperly. Wealth will be good for the possessor if he does not spend it only on luxury, or on strong drink and harmful pleasures; if he enjoys luxury in moderation and distributes the rest to the stomachs of the poor, then wealth is a good thing. But if he is going to give himself up to luxury and other profligacy, not only does it not help him at all, but it even leads him down to the great pit. This is what happened to this rich man.*<sup>12</sup>

The Rich Man gave himself up to luxury, feeding flatterers, parasites, attendants, i.e., people who told him what he wanted to hear, regardless of how destructive it was for their benefactor's soul. In fact, they were wolves, *the theater of the devil*, who destroy the souls of the rich with praise and flattery and in the process fatten themselves. They blind him to his true spiritual plight and thereby increase his spiritual infection. But should unpleasant circumstances befall him, they vanish in an instant.<sup>13</sup>

Instead of Lazarus, he fed these plague bearers. Every day Lazarus was at his gate, yet he ignored the one whom God sent as a means for his salvation. The Rich Man had in Lazarus an opportunity to learn virtue and to show forth love. Instead of accepting Lazarus' help, he betrayed himself with heartless greed and an unwillingness to share his own wealth.<sup>14</sup>

*He lies at your entrance, the pearl in the mud, and do you not see him? The physician is at your gate, and do you not accept the treatment? The pilot is in the harbor, and do you endure shipwreck? Do you feed parasites, and do you not feed the poor?*<sup>15</sup>

Rather than using his wealth to purchase his salvation. He deadened himself in luxurious living. He buried his soul in his luxury-laden body. In addition, he made his body useless with gluttony and drunkenness. Unlike Lazarus, who was carried away by angels, when the Rich Man died, his body was buried, just as he buried his soul in his deadened body.<sup>16</sup> Leading a very comfortable life, his prosperity, in fact, drowned his reasoning, and he was totally unaware of the end awaiting him.<sup>17</sup> He was unspeakably savage and beastly in that he passed by Lazarus daily without ever helping him. He was worse than any beast since neither his own good fortune nor Lazarus' misery ever softened his heart, even though he saw Lazarus lying daily at his gate.<sup>18</sup>

In eternity, Lazarus enjoyed the company of Abraham, who sought guests for his hospitality and thereby entertained angels unaware. Seeing Abraham together with Lazarus in eternity was the ultimate rebuke for the Rich Man's inhospitality.<sup>19</sup> Abraham made special efforts to find guests, whereas every day the

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<sup>12</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 136-137.

<sup>13</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 105-106.

<sup>14</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty*

<sup>15</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 107.

<sup>16</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 45.

<sup>17</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 131-132.

<sup>18</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 22.

<sup>19</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 50-51.

Rich Man ignored the saving guest at his doorstep. This made the Rich Man not only inhospitable, but also a thief since he withheld his own wealth from the one in need.

*God says, "The earth has brought forth her increase, and you have not brought forth your tithes; but the theft of the poor is in your houses." Since you have not given the accustomed offerings, He says, you have stolen from the poor. He says this to show the rich that they hold the goods of the poor even if they have inherited them from their fathers or no matter how they have gathered their wealth.<sup>20</sup>*

The Rich Man was self-indulgent, inhospitable, a thief, and even a beast. Since he combined wealth with robbery, he was a wolf. Since he combined wealth with brutality, he was a lion. He was a tree bearing leaves, but without fruit; a man without fruit for men. Therefore, *he has lost his nobility by the meanness of evil.*<sup>21</sup> He had wealth in name but not in fact. He had wealth, yet had no name at all. Lazarus was poor, but had a name. His wealth, unaccompanied by virtue, was worthless.

*. . . and there was another man, a poor man named Lazarus. And where is the name of the rich man? Nowhere; he is nameless. How much wealth? And his name is not found. What kind of wealth is this?<sup>22</sup>*

He refused to feed Lazarus and thus starved his own soul. He suffered spiritual shipwreck since he did not unload his wares with discretion.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to Lazarus, the Rich Man took the easy road, attending only to its soft beginning. Ignoring this road's end, he finally found himself on a grill. Even Abraham's gentleness in speech to him was of no avail since the Rich Man had betrayed himself in this life.<sup>24</sup>

Self-indulgent, self-betrayed, inhospitable, a thief, a beast, unreasoning, spiritually ill without treatment, nameless, spiritually base, and finally, damned; such was the Rich Man who would not share his wealth. Heedless of his end, he came to a frightful one. Surely his example chills the heart of sincere Christians.

*How should we use these examples?* Avoiding luxurious living is a good first step. St. John provides some telling examples. The Old Testament Sabbaths were intended for spiritual endeavors, not for feasting, drinking and merriment. Citing Amos 6:4-6, St. John states,

*He reveals what I am saying by what he adds immediately: "Who sleep upon beds of ivory, and live delicately on their couches, and eat kids out of the flocks, and sucking calves out of the midst of the stalls . . . who drink filtered wine, and anoint yourselves with the best." You received the sabbath to free your soul from wickedness, but you have enslaved it further. For what could be worse than this frivolity, this sleeping on beds of ivory<sup>25</sup>*

In condemning "sleeping on beds of ivory," St. John condemns all pointless luxuriating. What additional pleasure would such a bed provide? Drunkenness, greed, and profligacy at least provide some pleasure, but not this type of overly delicate living. If one has any sense at all, it would be more onerous and

<sup>20</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 49.

<sup>21</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 105.

<sup>22</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 105.

<sup>23</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 106-107, 23.

<sup>24</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 133-136.

<sup>25</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 24.

burdensome to the conscience. If the poor have not sufficient bread, how can one not condemn himself for such pointless extravagance?<sup>26</sup>

Instead of wild luxuriance, St. John recommends the best bed of all, a kingly bed, namely that of King David. Citing Psalm 6:7, "*I shall wash my bed every night; I shall water my couch with my tears,*" St. John recommends confession, prayer and tears. If such was the bed of the greatest king of all, what else could we possibly desire?<sup>27</sup> Jacob also avoided frivolity. Since his bed was but earth and a stone, he saw the Spiritual Rock and the ladder ascended and descended by angels.<sup>28</sup> Citing II Timothy 2:4, St. John points out that, as spiritual soldiers, we are not to busy ourselves with civilian concerns. Soldiers do not trouble themselves with fancy beds and perfumes. Those are the pursuits of corrupt men. The Christian should smell of virtue rather than of scented oils. Reap the greatest benefit by letting your soul breathe a spiritual fragrance instead. Feed the soul, don't pamper the body!<sup>29</sup>

Nothing is worse than luxury. Citing Moses in Deuteronomy 8:11, St. John warns,

*And elsewhere Moses says, when you have eaten and drunk, "take heed to yourself, that you forget not the Lord your God." In this way luxury often leads to forgetfulness. As for you my beloved, if you sit at table, remember that from the table you must go to prayer. Fill your belly so moderately that you may not become too heavy to bend your knees and call upon your God. Do you not see how the donkeys leave the manger ready to walk and carry loads and fulfill their proper service? But when you leave the table you are useless and unserviceable for any kind of work. How will you avoid being more worthless even than the donkeys?*<sup>30</sup>

Instead of gluttony and drunkenness, Christians are to be awake, sober, and prayerful. If we fail to choose prayer over excess, we risk becoming more irrational than irrational beasts. Eat moderately, i.e., to live. Avoid living to eat and drink.<sup>31</sup>

Instead of luxurious living, the Christian life is distinguished by prayer, spiritual endeavors, and moderation. As did Lazarus, we should choose the narrow path which ends with ample recompense. We too should focus on its easy end and not on its rigorous start. Living with our end in view, we can settle all of our debts from sin here, and thus approach the final judgment without worry.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the good hopes of eternal reward can encourage us, making the narrow path light. Although we may not experience major woes here, we can embrace a laborious life through avoiding luxury, practicing self-control, voluntary fasting, chastity, poverty and prayer. Such a life is hardly easy. Life, however, is a contest and to win the crown one must compete according to the rules. So if we seek eternal honor, we must avail ourselves of God's forbearance and embrace the difficult life, i.e., the narrow path here.<sup>33</sup>

Knowing the recompense which awaits us, an advantage not shared by Lazarus, we can become truly noble. The vicissitudes of life need not thwart us, elating us in good times and depressing us in difficult

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<sup>26</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 24.

<sup>27</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 24-25.

<sup>28</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 25. And Genesis 28.

<sup>29</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 25-26.

<sup>30</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 27.

<sup>31</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 27-28.

<sup>32</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 44-45, 138-139.

<sup>33</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 68, 71-74.

ones.<sup>34</sup> As did Lazarus, we too can learn to bear our difficulties, whether voluntary or not, with courage, patience and wisdom.

Fortitude and self-control tell only half the tale, however. If one is to be truly Christian, he must share his goods with the poor, i.e., *he is to be an almsgiver*. The very reason why we have wealth allotted to us is to share it with the poor. Whereas self-indulgence is an abuse of wealth, indeed even theft from the poor, sharing it with the needy is its *proper* use.

*By this we are taught that when we do not show mercy, we will be punished just like those who steal. For our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty. This is why God allowed you to have more: not for you to waste on prostitutes, drink, fancy food, expensive clothes, and all the other kinds of indulgence, but for you to distribute to those in need.*<sup>35</sup>

We are stewards, rather than owners of wealth. Not to use it moderately, distributing the rest to the poor is abuse. Such abuse will bring only the harshest penalty hereafter, since as stewards we abused our posts and utterly failed in our duty to Christ and the poor. If we desire wealth which is truly our own, we are to use it sparingly, as if belonging to others. We will spend upon our needs and give equal shares to the poor. Through God's mercy and rewards, by giving of the wealth entrusted to us, we will receive wealth of our own.<sup>36</sup>

In giving alms, we are to be neither niggardly nor choosing. We are to be generous and hospitable. We are *not* to inquire into the lives of the poor, setting standards for help beyond their need. *We are to be almsgivers, not judges!* We are to fill the need of the poor, regardless of their sins. We have our own sins, in any case, and as we judge so shall we be judged. The poor man has one plea, his need. We are to correct his poverty, fill his need, and must not require anything else. This is the true hospitality shown by hospitable Abraham, and his example we are to follow.<sup>37</sup>

*The almsgiver is a harbor for those in necessity: a harbor receives all who have encountered shipwreck, and frees them from danger; whether they are bad or good or whatever they are who are in danger, it escorts them into its own shelter. So you likewise, when you see on earth the man who has encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek an account of his life, but free him from his misfortune. God has excused you from all officiousness and meddlesomeness. . . . A judge is one thing, an almsgiver is another.*<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, as Christians, we practice moderation, self-control, and a disciplined life not just for ourselves, but for God's glory and to help the poor. A strict life without generosity is dour and un-Christian. Self-control accompanied with generosity to those in need is a life rich with good hopes and lasting honors. This mode of life enables us, by God's grace, to be truly noble and bear all things well.

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<sup>34</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 83.

<sup>35</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 49-50.

<sup>36</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 50.

<sup>37</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 51-52.

<sup>38</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 52.

### **The Proper Evaluation of One's Life**

How should one evaluate his own life? In his sermons on the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, St. John Chrysostom makes it clear that neither external circumstances nor social status are adequate measures of a man. But what are appropriate criteria? St. John gives two poignant suggestions: *Judge no one lucky before his end*, and, *evaluate by the disposition of one's character*. Let us attend to how he develops these notions.

*Judge no one lucky before his end.* The reversal of fortunes experienced by Lazarus and the Rich Man in this parable illustrates the point quite well. Lazarus proceeded from poverty and misery in this life to the bosom of Abraham. The Rich Man, on the other hand, fell from a comfortable, even luxurious, life to eternal torments. Why did this happen?

St. John sets forth one reason on the occasion of Abraham's refusal of the Rich Man's request that Lazarus moisten the former's tongue with a little water in Luke 16:25. Seeing the verbal form ἀπέλαβες used in place of ἔλαβες, St. John understood Abraham to say, "you have received as your due," rather than "you have received your good things."<sup>39</sup> Upon this prefix hangs a great deal of meaning. The Rich Man did not just receive his good things in life, but the good things *which were due him*. In contrast, Lazarus received not just evil in this life, rather *the evil due him*. This obviously needs further explanation.

No one is perfect, neither perfectly good nor perfectly evil. The most righteous person is not without some sin. For example, the wicked judge of Luke 18:1-5 gave relief to the persistent widow. Certainly no right thinking person would ever claim to be entirely without sin. Likewise, no one is so evil as never to have done any good.<sup>40</sup>

*So if this rich man was foul and repulsive, cruel and inhuman, why did Abraham not say to him, "You have received your good things," but, "You have received the good things due to you," as if they were debts owed to him? What do we learn from this? That even if some people are foul and have reached the extremes of evil, often they have done one or two or three good things. . . . We ought to suspect the same also in the case of good people. Just as the most worthless people often do something good, so those who are earnest and virtuous often fail completely in some other respect. "Who will boast," it is written, "that he has a pure heart, or who will say confidently that he is clean from sin?"<sup>41</sup>*

God is also just. Therefore, there is requital for everything, either here or in eternity.<sup>42</sup> Both Lazarus and the Rich Man received their due in this life, leaving them unencumbered with any debt. Hence Lazarus faced the fearful judgment stripped of sins, but the Rich Man stripped of righteousness. As a result, both received unmitigated fates in eternity. Lazarus encountered unbounded joy, the Rich Man unendurable torment.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 61-62, 117-118.

<sup>40</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 61-62.

<sup>41</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 61-62. Also Proverbs 20:9.

<sup>42</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 122.

<sup>43</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 72.



In varying degrees do people receive their rewards both in time and in eternity. Some receive all their punishments here, as did Lazarus and the fornicator of I Cor. 5:5, allowing them to enter eternity stripped of evil. Some, in God's forbearance, experience few difficulties here. But failing to use this opportunity for repentance, they store up harsh retribution for themselves in eternity.<sup>44</sup> Some, however, suffer punishment in this life and therefore receive a milder fate at the final judgment, although the relief is not total. For example, those who would reject the disciples according to John 5:14 would be punished more severely than Sodom and Gomorrah since these notorious cities suffered God's wrath in this life.<sup>45</sup> Both cities remained punished in eternity, however, but with a lightened load.

Therefore the most fortunate ones are those who receive *all* their woes in this life, allowing them to face eternity free of sin and care. The next most fortunate are those who release *some* of their sins here, lightening their potential burden in eternity. The least fortunate are those who release *none* of their sins here and thus can expect unmitigated hell. As did the Rich Man, these latter live easy lives here and thus fail to make good use of God's forbearance. If anyone should rejoice, it is the sufferers since they may have good hopes of a bright reward in eternity. If we are to mourn for anyone, it is for those who live comfortable lives in wickedness due to the frightful end which awaits them. We ought to mourn for them since they are spiritually ill, but without treatment.<sup>46</sup>

But why does God not punish all men in the same way? In answering this question, St. John broaches the mystery of God's forbearance.

*"But why," someone asks, "are some punished here, but others only hereafter and not at all here?" Why? Because if all were punished here, we would all have perished, for we are all subject to penalties. On the other hand, if no one were punished here, most people would become too careless, and many would say there is no providence. . . . For this reason God punishes some here, but does not punish others. He punishes some, cutting short their evil ways, and making their retribution hereafter the lighter, or even completely releasing them, and making those who live in wickedness better by the punishment of these people. Others, however, He does not punish, so that if they attend to themselves, repent, and respect God's forbearance, they may be freed from both the punishment here and the retribution hereafter; but if they persist, without benefiting from God's tolerance of evil, they may undergo a greater retribution because of their great contempt.*<sup>47</sup>

God metes out punishment as He does for the good of mankind. Some suffer here, lightening or totally releasing their retribution hereafter. If such sufferings befall the righteous, they serve the purpose of preparing more glorious crowns for the righteous. Those who suffer little here, however, can benefit from the example of others and repent, making good use of God's forbearance. If they remain heedless, however, they reserve more retribution for eternity. One ought not to blame God for their miserable end, rather their heedlessness. As a result, tribulation brings benefit to all, if borne with thanksgiving and heedfulness. Those who avail themselves of God's forbearance with care and watchfulness reap eternal rewards.<sup>48</sup>

God is just, meting out justice either here or hereafter, and we are all sinful. Thus one cannot hope to lead easy lives both here and there. Since that is not possible, the righteous must lead laborious lives

<sup>44</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 64-65.

<sup>45</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 65-66.

<sup>46</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 63-64, 68, 71-74.

<sup>47</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 71-72.

<sup>48</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 72-73.

here. St. John cites several scriptural examples wherein the righteous endured hardships here, for example: Abraham and his peregrinations, the sufferings of Jacob, David, Jeremiah, Elijah, and so forth.<sup>49</sup> If one hopes to please God, therefore, he must lead a disciplined life here.

*In a word, it is absolutely necessary for one who hopes to please God and to be acceptable and pure, not to pursue a relaxed and slippery and dissolute life, but a laborious life, groaning with much toil and sweat; for no one is crowned, Paul says, "unless he competes according to the rules." And elsewhere he says, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things," in speech and in sight, avoiding shameful words, abuse, blasphemy, and obscenity. From Paul's words we learn that if trials are not brought to us from somewhere outside, we must exercise ourselves every day with fasting, austerity, cheap nourishment, and a frugal table, always avoiding sumptuousness; otherwise we cannot please God.<sup>50</sup>*

One therefore may suffer trials which lighten or release one's burdens in eternity. Even better, one can make good use of God's forbearance through repentance and taking up the disciplined life of moderation and voluntary asceticism. The wicked cannot have good things both in this life and hereafter. In a way, however, the righteous can. By choosing the laborious life, i.e., entering via the narrow gate, they can learn that, "my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). How is it easy and light? The narrow path becomes so through the willingness of the travellers.<sup>51</sup> Why should they be so willing? They have the good things of the next life which is eternal. They also have good things in this life when nourished by the hope of eternal honors and rewards hereafter.<sup>52</sup> The lives of the righteous may be neither loose nor slippery, rather happy and joyous due to the faithfulness of God.

The *lucky man*, therefore, is not the one who leads an untroubled and luxurious life here. The lucky one is he who uses God's mercy and forbearance in this life through repentance, a disciplined life, and generosity to the poor, to save himself. Also those in misery here ought not to be held in contempt since they may be storing up great rewards for the afterlife.

The final judgment is the last word, the final criterion for who is fortunate or not. Let no one doubt God's providence, the Resurrection, nor the Last Judgment, however. For if such were not forthcoming, why would He have placed such an incorruptible judge within us, and which pushes us to repentance, namely the conscience?<sup>53</sup> The conscience harries us intermittently throughout life, not to damn us, but to save us by coaxing us to repentance. It is a gift of God's love, the God Who would prefer that we repent rather than face unbearable punishments hereafter.<sup>54</sup> Seeing where the last word resides, however, *judge no one lucky before his end.*

The only truthful way to evaluate anyone's life is to *evaluate it by the disposition of his character*. Outward circumstances, such as wealth or poverty, social standing, and so forth reveal nothing of lasting value. In fact, judging by any outward criteria is positively deceiving since they often stand at odds with one's true status before God. Only one's character and deeds help at the Final Judgment.

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<sup>49</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 74-75. Also Genesis 47:9, Psalm 90:10, Jeremiah 20:14, Numbers 11:15, 1 Kings 19:4, Hebrews 11:37.

<sup>50</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 76-77. Also II Timothy 2:5, I Corinthians 9:25.

<sup>51</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 67.

<sup>52</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 76.

<sup>53</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 95.

<sup>54</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 88-91.

St. John illustrates the fallibility of judging by external criteria with the imagery of the theater. This world is effectively a theater at midday, with the stage set and actors wearing masks and playing various roles. The roles they play, however, do not necessarily correspond with their identity and character in true life. On the stage, everyone appears otherwise than as they truly are. As long as the spectators remain seated, the masks are valid. But come evening, the play ends, the masks are removed, and the actors are revealed for who they really are.<sup>55</sup> As the play corresponds to its end, so does the present life with its end. Hereafter all roles cease and the truth shines forth.

*Evening overtakes them, the play is ended, the truth appears. So it is also in life and its end. The present world is a theater, the conditions of men are roles: wealth and poverty, ruler and ruled, and so forth. When this day is cast aside, and that terrible night comes, or rather day, night indeed for sinners, but day for the righteous - when the play is ended, when the masks are removed, when each person is judged with his works - not each person with his wealth, not each person with his office, not each person with his authority, not each person with his power, but each person with his works, whether he is a ruler or a king, a woman or man, when He requires an account of our life and our good deeds, not the weight of our reputation, not the slightness of our poverty, not the tyranny of our disdain - give me your deeds if you are a slave but nobler than a free person, if you are a woman but braver than a man. When the masks are removed, then the truly rich and the truly poor are revealed.<sup>56</sup>*

One's deeds and character are the only items which pass over into the next life and therefore are the only proper means to evaluate one's life. One must have his own deeds at that dreadful day. Neither righteous friends nor relatives can help if unaccompanied by one's own righteousness. Abraham, for example referred to the Rich Man as "son," but that did not help the latter since he had betrayed himself in this life. True nobility is not the eminence of one's ancestors, rather the virtue of one's character. Righteous relatives are no help, but accusers instead, if one fails to imitate their virtue.<sup>57</sup> Righteous friends will not help in that day either. Virtue and almsgiving are the best vouchers at the fearful judgment.

*It is not friendship in this which will vouch for you, but almsgiving. If friendship by itself could vouch for you, He would have needed to say simply, "Make friends for yourselves;" but as it is, showing that friendship alone does not vouch for us, He has added, "by means of unrighteous mammon." . . . But to teach you that it is almsgiving which vouches for you, and your righteous action, He urged you to have confidence not simply in the friendship of the saints, but in the friendship gained by mammon.<sup>58</sup>*

One's whole way of life and disposition provide the best criteria for evaluation. St. John illustrates this point using imagery from wildlife to reflect one's inner character. A man who loves the poor is a human being, whereas the man wholly involved with commerce is an oak tree - impressive, but without fruit for men. The man with a savage temper is a lion. The rapacious one is a wolf, the deceitful one a cobra. As impressive as such folks seem, our response to them (and to ourselves if we fall into these categories) should be, "I am looking for a human being; why have you shown me a beast instead of a man?" We ought to learn what the true virtue of a human is, putting away all confusion.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 108-109, 46-48.

<sup>56</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 109-110.

<sup>57</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 111-112, 77.

<sup>58</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 77. Also Luke 16:9.

<sup>59</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 107-108.

Outward appearances and social standing are very misleading, often making one appear the opposite of what he truly is. Lazarus had the mask of a poor man, while the Rich Man had the mask of a rich man. So they appeared in this life. But the angels escorted Lazarus to Abraham's bosom whereas the Rich Man ended on a grill.<sup>60</sup> Hence one ought never to despise the man of lowly status since it is his virtue which matters most. He is the living creature for which God cares and for whom Christ became incarnate and died. The Lord, after all did not despise the Samaritan woman because she was a Samaritan, but because she had a soul He cared for her.<sup>61</sup> The man who is in reality of low status is the one which a shackled and slavish character.

*For my part, I may call even a slave noble, and a master shackled with chains, if I learn his character. For me the person of high rank belongs to the lowest class if he has a slavish soul. For who is truly a slave, if not the person who commits sin? Other slavery is a matter of our external circumstances, but this slavery is a difference of interior disposition.*<sup>62</sup>

Yet the outward slave can be truly free and noble according to his character, as was Onesimus. Character and virtue are real, slave and free, properly speaking are merely names. Who, for example, is really the slave, the sober slave attendant or the drunken master? Which is worse, slavery to a man or captivity to passion? The former's slavery is borne outwardly, while the latter bears it inwardly. Put aside all confusion and deception! The slavish character is the real slave, both here and hereafter.<sup>63</sup>

Judge by character and virtue, not by wealth, social standing nor by other outward circumstances. Our mortality, in any case is the great leveller. Neither Riches nor poverty help in the face of this giant. St. John illustrates this point when commenting on a recent earthquake in Antioch and its region.

*Have you seen the mortality of the human race? When the earthquake came, I reflected with myself and said, where is theft? Where is greed? Where is tyranny? Where is arrogance? Where is domination? Where is oppression? Where is the plundering of the poor? Where is the arrogance of the rich? Where is the domination of the powerful? Where is intimidation? Where is fear? One moment of time and everything was torn apart more easily than a spider's web, everything was shattered, the city was full of shrieking, and everyone ran to the church.*<sup>64</sup>

Human mortality puts greed and ostentation into proper perspective. To be mindful of mortality leads the spiritually ill to repent and the spiritually healthy to stay well. Be not overly attached to this world!

*Have I not been asking all along, as I ask now, and do not cease asking, how long will you be attached to the things of this world? . . . How long does money last? How long does wealth? How long ostentatious houses? How long the frenzied quest for pleasure in material things? See, the earthquake came: how did wealth help anyone? The labor of both rich and poor was shattered. The possession perished along with the possessor, the house along with the builder. The city became the common tomb of all, a tomb not constructed by the hands of a craftsman but prepared by the disaster itself. Where was wealth? Where was greed? Do you see that everything was slighter than a spider's web?*<sup>65</sup>

<sup>60</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 110-111.

<sup>61</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 100. Also John 4:7-42.

<sup>62</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 112.

<sup>63</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 116-117. Also Philemon 10-17.

<sup>64</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 97-98.

<sup>65</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 99.

In fact, as a night's passing dream is to the reality of the waking day, so also is this life when compared to all eternity<sup>66</sup> All the outward circumstances of this life, no matter how impressive they seem, are but as a spider's web - insubstantial and easily rent. So to are all evaluations which are based upon them. They appear valid while the stage is set and the spectators are yet in place. But let the play's end come and they vanish immediately.

What truly lasts is that which is internal and intrinsic to a man, namely his character and deeds. These survive the stage of the present world and shine forth clearly in the next. One's character, one's virtue, one's deeds; these will either help or harm us in that awesome day. In fact, the full truth of each person will not be revealed until that day. For these reasons we should learn to *judge no one lucky before his end*, and that the true measure of a man is the *disposition of his character*. Let us also take full advantage of God's forbearance today, exercising ourselves in repentance, thanksgiving, moderation, and almsgiving. In this manner we can take full advantage of God's merciful rewards hereafter.

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<sup>66</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 33-34.

## **The Meaning and Use of Wealth**

In St. John's view of wealth, it is neither defined, possessed, nor properly utilized in a manner most people would consider usual. If so then, what is his understanding of wealth? To grasp this, the following three questions must be answered. *What is wealth? In what manner does one possess the wealth of this world? And finally, what should one do with worldly wealth?* Let us proceed to the first question.

Early in his second sermon on the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, St. John discusses how the parable teaches everyone neither to call the rich fortunate nor the poor unfortunate. While doing so, he gives a penetrating insight into the nature of wealth. Perhaps one finds here St. John's most pithy definition of wealth and poverty.

*Let us learn from this man not to call the rich lucky nor the poor unfortunate. Rather, if we are to tell the truth, the rich man is not the one who has collected many possessions but the one who needs few possessions; and the poor man is not the one who has no possessions but the one who has many desires. We ought to consider this the definition of poverty and wealth. So if you see someone greedy for many things, you should consider him the poorest of all, even if he has acquired everyone's money. If, on the other hand, if you see someone with few needs, you should count him the richest of all, even if he has acquired nothing.<sup>67</sup>*

True wealth is the want of raging greed. True poverty is the possession of such greed, or more aptly put, to be possessed by such greed. Lazarus was wealthy since he lived virtuously, in spite of severe illness and his lack of means. Because the Rich Man gorged and drank and could not part with any of his things, he was the poorest of all. Possessed by his things, he would not let go of any, not even to show mercy on Lazarus and thus save his own soul. His mind was diseased, but it is the mind's disposition which is the best measure of wealth.

*For we are accustomed to judge poverty and affluence by the disposition of the mind, not by the measure of one's substance. Just as we would not call a person healthy who was always thirsty, even if he enjoyed abundance, even if he lived by rivers and springs (for what is that luxuriance of water when the thirst remains unquenchable?), let us do the same in the case of wealthy people: let us never consider those people healthy who are always yearning and thirsting after other people's property; let us not think that they enjoy any abundance. For if one cannot control his own greed, even if he has appropriated everyone's property, how can he ever be affluent?<sup>68</sup>*

To die of thirst amidst an abundance of fresh water - and that not for a want of drinking - what a disturbing image that is. But such is the soul's state which is possessed by greed. The wealth of the greedy never satisfies since they always want more! How can that be called healthy or even sane? An acquisitive society may lionize such foolishness, but St. John warns his hearers away from it as from the worst possible plague. What good are one's own things when one's eyes are always focused on what the other has and how to get it for oneself? The body is enriched but the soul is starved of virtue. This is hardly health, rather death awaiting burial. The man who is satisfied with what he has, however, is free. He is not enslaved by greed. He is the richest of all since his mind is healthy.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 40.

<sup>68</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 40.

<sup>69</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 40-41.

One must never judge wealth by outward appearances but by the character of the soul. Outwardly Lazarus was poor and the Rich Man wealthy. But when the theater of this life ended, their situations were reversed and Lazarus was the richest of all while the Rich Man was the most impoverished. Eternity revealed who was truly rich and who was truly poor.<sup>70</sup>

But how is this the case? If one looks beyond the actor's mask and peers into the soul, the truth of a man is revealed. One's character and deeds are the best measures of wealth.

*. . . so also the rich man often turns out to be the poorest of all. If you take off his mask, open up his conscience, and enter into his mind, you will often find there a great poverty of virtue: you will find that he belongs to the poorest class of all. . . . so also now when death arrives and the theater is dissolved, everyone puts off the masks of wealth or poverty and departs to the other world. When all are judged by their deeds alone, some are revealed truly wealthy, others poor, some of high class, others of no account.*<sup>71</sup>

Virtue, good character, and righteous deeds; these are the true measures of wealth. Once the veil of the present is removed, these will remain. They are the only true possessions in eternity. Possessing them makes one everlastingly wealthy. Deprivation of them is the worst kind of poverty. This truth is even more telling since eternity is as real as the waking day whereas the present life is as a fleeting dream.<sup>72</sup> For these reasons, poverty in this life, if accompanied with virtue, is no evil. Wealth in this life, on the other hand, is totally worthless without virtue.<sup>73</sup>

Wealth in this life certainly makes quite an impression on the senses. But sight and senses often deceive if the object of observation is not closely examined. One does well to judge a tree by its fruit rather than by its leaves. The latter please the eye, but the former nourishes. As an impressive visage may hide bitter fruit, so wealth in this world may conceal a man without character and hence without true identity.

*. . . and there was another man, a poor man named Lazarus. And where is the name of the rich man? Nowhere; he is nameless. How much wealth? And his name is not found. What kind of wealth is this? A tree bearing leaves but deprived of fruits; an oak reaching aloft, providing acorns as food for beasts; a man without fruit for men.*<sup>74</sup>

Wealth without the identity which comes from character is no true wealth, and it is our character which is required of us in that fearful day. Character and deeds count there. Before that great judgment, virtue and almsgiving are the best vouchers, not the reputation of one's family. In light of these will one be judged either rich or poor in eternity.<sup>75</sup>

As a result, never judge anyone lucky on the basis of his present visible goods. One would never call the opulent bandit fortunate, even if not yet imprisoned. One should consider him miserable in light of the likelihood of his incarceration. So too with the wealthy without virtue, living by fraud and theft they face eternal misery. Instead one should call them what they are, miserable.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 46.

<sup>71</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 47.

<sup>72</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 33, 117, 130-132.

<sup>73</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 39, 112, 116.

<sup>74</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 105.

<sup>75</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 46, 77, 110-112.

<sup>76</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 36-37.

*True wealth then is a healthy and virtuous disposition of mind.* Possessing this makes one wealthy. Without it one is nothing. Knowing the true nature of wealth, honor, and the fleeting nature of this world compared to the permanence of the next, places everything in proper perspective. This knowledge banishes all confusion, engenders true nobility, and frees us from the vicissitudes of this life. It is a genuinely liberating knowledge.

*Just as, when we see the rich man and the poor man painted on the walls, we do not envy the former nor ignore the poor man, because what we see is a shadow and not factual truth; so also if we learn the true nature of wealth and poverty, of glory and dishonor, and of all other bright or gloomy conditions, we shall be freed from the disturbance which each of these produces in us. All these things are more deceptive than shadows. A person who is noble and lofty in spirit will not be lifted too high by any of the brilliant and glorious conditions nor cast down by any humble and despised circumstances.*<sup>77</sup>

How does one possess wealth in this world? To clarify the question, wealth here refers to worldly riches, not to St. John's loftier notion. *In what sense then does one possess the riches of this world?* To answer this question one must grasp one point, *we do not own the riches of this world in the way that we think we do.* The riches which we have in this world are not our private property to be disposed of as we wish. Whose then are they?

Our goods belong to God. This is true *without qualification.* No matter how we have gathered our worldly possessions, no matter how hard we have worked to obtain them, no matter how much we guard or horde them. They belong to God.

*By this we are taught that when we do not show mercy, we will be punished just like those who steal. For our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty. This is why God allowed you to have more: not for you to waste on prostitutes, drink, fancy food, expensive clothes, and all the other kinds of indulgence, but for you to distribute to those in need.*<sup>78</sup>

In his tenth sermon on 1 Corinthians (here dealing specifically with 1 Corinthians 6:19-20), St. John points out that even our soul is not ours. How much less then do we own our worldly goods?

*Speaking of faith, Paul says: "You are not your own," and "You were bought with a price." All things in fact are God's. When then he calls and chooses to take things away from us, let us not, like ungrateful servants, flee away from him and steal out Master's goods. Your soul is not yours, much less are your riches your own. How is it then that you spend on what is unnecessary the things which are not yours? Do you not know that we will soon be on trial if we use them badly? But since they are not ours but our Master's, we should spend them for fellow-servants. . ."*<sup>79</sup>

Our goods are God's and are for the caretaking of our fellow men. Misuse of them is theft from God. Such misuse also deprives us of what is truly ours, our piety, virtue and character. It is virtue which

<sup>77</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 83.

<sup>78</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 49-50.

<sup>79</sup>Cited from Peter C. Phan, *Social Thought* (Message of the Fathers of the Church 20; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1984) 151.



makes us rich not our goods. We are, in fact, stewards with a trust, and are accountable for how we use what God entrusted to us.

*What benefit is it to a man who has other people's possessions but does not have his own? What benefit is it to a man who has gained money but has not gained virtue? Why do you take others' possessions and lose your own? "I have," he says, "fruitful land." What of it? You do not have a fruitful soul. "I have slaves." But you do not have virtue. "I have clothing." But you have not obtained piety. You have what belongs to another, but you do not have what is your own. If someone gives you a deposit of money in trust, I cannot call you rich, can I? No. Why not? Because you have another's money. For this is a deposit; I wish it were only a deposit, and not a sum added to your punishment.<sup>80</sup>*

Our worldly goods belong to God. Secondly, however, they belong to the poor since they are intended for the use of the poor. God, after all, has no need for our money Himself. *The poor's ownership of our goods is just as unqualified as God's ownership of them.* This is true no matter how we got them or how long they have been in the family.

*God says, "The earth has brought forth her increase, and you have not brought forth your tithes; but the theft of the poor is in your houses." Since you have not given the accustomed offerings, He says, you have stolen from the poor. He says this to show the rich that they hold the goods of the poor even if they have inherited them from their fathers or no matter how they have gathered their wealth.<sup>81</sup>*

If we do not distribute them properly, i.e., to those in need, we will be punished as thieves. It seems that our guilt would be twofold. Since our goods belong firstly to God and secondly to the poor, withholding them for our own use would be theft from both.

*By this we are taught that when we do not show mercy, we will be punished just like those who steal. For our money is the Lord's, however we may have gathered it. If we provide for those in need, we shall obtain great plenty. This is why God allowed you to have more: not for you to waste on prostitutes, drink, fancy food, expensive clothes, and all the other kinds of indulgence, but for you to distribute to those in need.<sup>82</sup>*

We are therefore stewards, and not owners, of our worldly goods. To hoard these goods is theft and even deprives us of our own wealth, namely virtue and the rewards to come.<sup>83</sup> To distribute them to the poor is a wise investment, since by doing so we will reap marvelous returns in eternity. This is how we come into our own possessions.

*What then should we do with worldly wealth?* Nowhere does St. John condemn worldly goods as evil in themselves. Neither does he praise them as good in themselves. They are merely things on loan and are morally neutral. How they are used, however, is far from morally neutral.

*Do not call these things good without qualification, O man, bearing in mind that they are given by the Master in order that by enjoying them in due proportion we may have the sustenance of*

<sup>80</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 116.

<sup>81</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 49.

<sup>82</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 49-50, also Peter C. Phan, *Social Thought*. 151 (quoted on page 15).

<sup>83</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 116.

*our life and may overcome the weakness of our bodies; but the truly good things are somewhere else. None of these things is good, not luxury, not wealth, not excessive clothing; they have only the name of goodness. Why do I say that they have only the name? They often indeed cause our destruction, when we use them improperly. Wealth will be good for the possessor if he does not spend it only on luxury, or on strong drink and harmful pleasures; if he enjoys luxury in moderation and distributes the rest to the stomachs of the poor, then wealth is a good thing. But if he is going to give himself up to luxury and other profligacy, not only does it not help him at all, but it even leads him down to the great pit. This is what happened to this rich man.*<sup>84</sup>

We are allowed some use of the goods entrusted to us. We are to care for our bodily health. But merely a moderate use of our goods should suffice for that. *The rest is for the poor.* No self-indulgence, but self-control and moderation are the watchwords. But this is self-control with a purpose, namely the welfare of others. Self-discipline without concern for our fellow man is pointless and stands far from Christian perfection. St. John makes this very clear in his twenty-fifth sermon on the *Essence of Christianity*.

*This is the rule of the most perfect Christianity, its most exacting definition, its highest point, namely the seeking of the common good. Paul states it himself when he says: "Even as I am also of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). For nothing can so make a man an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbors. Indeed, even though you fast, or sleep on hard ground, or even suffer unto death, but should take no thought of your neighbor, you have done nothing great; despite what you have done, you still stand far from this model of a perfect Christian.*<sup>85</sup>

Our goods belong to God and to the poor, although we are allowed moderate use thereof for our own needs. Our moderation is not intended to affect being better than others, rather to glorify God and benefit our fellow man. It is their wealth, after all, that we administer. When we aid the poor as we ought, we do it not only to the poor, but also to Christ through them.

*If you cannot remember everything, instead of everything, I beg you, remember this without fail, that not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs. If we have this attitude, we will certainly offer our money; and by nourishing Christ in poverty here and laying up great profit hereafter, we will be able to attain the good things which are to come, by the grace and kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Whom (be glory, honor, and might,) to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.*<sup>86</sup>

This then is the highest use of worldly goods, to nourish Christ in poverty here. This glorifies God, benefits humanity, and brings eternal profits to us, its stewards. Investing wisely the wealth of God and the poor, we harvest the true wealth of lasting virtue. Saving others saves ourselves.

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<sup>84</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 136-137.

<sup>85</sup>Taken from, Peter C. Phan. *Social Thought* 153.

<sup>86</sup>John Chrysostom. *On Wealth and Poverty* 55.

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