

The Rich and the Poor

Proverbs 22:2

There was once a man who was quite rich and had become very fond of his wealth. The man loved his money so much that he instructed his wife that on his death she had to promise that she would bury his money with him in the casket so that he could take it with him in the afterlife.

The day came when he died and in keeping with the promise she placed a box in the casket before it was closed and sealed.

Several days later while talking with a friend, her friend asked if she kept the promise to bury all the man's money with him in the casket. The new widow said that in fact she did keep the promise to which her friend asked "all of it?" The widow responded "yes, I wrote him a check."

The passage we are considering today is found in **Proverbs 22:2**. Turn there with me and follow along as I read the passage.

"Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all."

According to 2008 indicators almost half of the world, or over 3 billion people, lives on less than \$2.50 per day. Abject poverty are those who live on less than \$1.25 per day. Approximately 80% of the world's population lives on less than \$10 per day.

The US census classifies the poverty level for a single person as \$9,400. For each person in a family after that you add \$3,400. For a family of 5, it is \$24,000.

My Grandma used to say she never knew how poor she was until the government told her.

Poverty is defined as personal deprivation of well-being. It is the inability to satisfy one's basic needs

because one lacks income to buy services (or goods) or who lack access to services (or goods).

The UN defines poverty in this way:

"Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit." That sounds to me like they are endorsing an entitlement for free goods and services.

Wealth on the other hand is defined as an abundance of valuable material possessions or resources; riches; the state of being rich; affluence.

A study by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at United Nations University reports that the richest 1% of adults alone owned 40% of global assets in the year 2000, and that the richest 10% of adults accounted for 85% of the world total. The bottom half of the world adult population owned barely 1% of global wealth.

Consider these questions.

How would you define the terms rich and poor?

What in your mind constitutes wealth or poverty?

How might a person's use of money and other resources reflect his/her perspective on the afterlife?

In what way does society favor wealthy people and discriminate against poor people? Why does this happen? Why don't more people help the poor?

What attitudes and beliefs can hinder us from helping people in need? How can we know we are giving enough of our time, money or other resources to needy people?

I want to make it very clear before we continue that I am in no way insinuating that the rich will end up in hell because of their wealth and neither am I implying that the poor will end up in heaven because of their poverty.

The Bible in general does not condemn the rich for being rich although James has a warning for them. Proverbs also has some thoughts about the rich warning them against the tendency toward being impious and tyrannical.

Proverbs 28:11 “A rich man may be wise in his own eyes.”

Proverbs 14:23 speaks to the wicked who oppress the poor and in so doing show contempt for God.

Proverbs 18:23 says that a rich man gives harsh answers.

In contrast Proverbs treats the poor with compassion.

Proverbs 19:1 says it is better to be poor and blameless than rich and perverse.

Proverbs does attempt to provide a balance for us to pursue through the words of Agur who writes **“Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; 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.”** **Proverbs 30:7-9**

Scripture speaks clearly about four groups of people.

Rich/rich

Rich/poor

Poor/rich

Poor/poor

The rich/rich are those who have great wealth from a monetary perspective but also are rich spiritually because they have amassed heavenly treasures. Abraham, Joseph and Job come to mind. They were blessed by God with tangible goods yet they were considered by God to be righteous and

blameless. Today the names of Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart, J.C. Penney and Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy’s are individuals who were rich in material goods and rich in Christ.

Then there are the rich/poor. They are the people who are rich with this world’s goods but have no spiritual wealth. They have no need for God because they believe their riches are all they need. Ahab and Jezebel and Pharaoh had all the wealth of the world, but they were poor because they ignored God’s greatest gift.

The poor/rich are those who according to the standards of the world have no earthly possessions to speak of but who have embraced God’s love through faith in Christ. John the Baptist and Elijah are examples of those who received great riches in heaven but had no earthly riches. We might put mother Theresa in this camp or the Quichua Indians who came to know Christ following the martyrdom of the five missionaries who were slain in Ecuador.

The poor/poor are those who have neither riches here on earth nor riches in heaven because they choose to remain in their sin.

God is no respecter of persons. He does not discriminate.

The passage is a poignant reminder of a very important truth. If you take those who are wealthy on one end of the spectrum and those who are poor on the other end of the spectrum and the 7 billion people in between, the verse reminds us that God made them all, every one of them. There is a common Creator with a common humanity. Both groups live and exist together and God’s intentions I believe are that neither group should live exclusive of the other. When the law was given to the Israelites built into the structure of the law was specific regulations in caring for the poor, the widows, and the orphans. God, I believe has a special place in His heart for the poor.

Now I also believe this verse is speaking both to the physical nature of God's creative work in giving life. According to **Psalm 139** He has fearfully and wonderfully made each person regardless of their economic status. We all come into the world the same way and we all leave the world the same way. Some are born and live in wealth; others are born and live in poverty. God made them all. Let's never forget that God put us in the family and in the country and in the time of His choosing.

Secondly, this verse should remind us that whatever we have or accumulate in this life is His. Whatever the rich owns belongs to Him. He owns the new school clothes and supplies just purchased to start school. He owns the tools we use for business and the pots and pans we use to cook with and the car we use to get from place to place. And whatever the poor owns, He owns that as well. As our Maker it is all His.

Unfortunately some people are victims of poverty. They are there not by their own doing. They may be the victims of oppression by others who are rich. **Proverbs 22:16** speaks about those who come to wealth as a result of oppressing others. Their greed drives them to place burdens on others so that they become rich while keeping others in poverty. Knowing that people need certain commodities whether food or clothing or shelter they drive prices up to fleece others. The rich get richer while the poor become poorer.

Bruce Waltke writes "Sin, not the Lord, creates an order of economic oppression."

Some people are poor and have only themselves to blame. Some are lazy and bring poverty on themselves. (**Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4; 14:23; 20:13; 24:30-34**)

Proverbs 13:18 "He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame..."

The indulgence of others brings them poverty. They have one thing on their mind: buy, buy, buy. They keep spending money on things they don't need or already have. Or they spend all their money on pleasure. The pursuit of entertainment will result in poverty. **Proverbs 21:17 "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich."** Both of these were associated with lavish and wasteful living. **Proverbs 28:19 "...the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty."**

It doesn't say you can't enjoy pleasure, it tells us not to indulge. Ecclesiastes says the pursuit of pleasure does not satisfy.

Many are in poverty not of their own volition, others are in poverty because of bad choices. Many are rich because they have worked hard, others are rich because of greed and dishonesty. The Lord God has made them all.

From this passage I have come up with eight ideas about the rich and the poor.

1. The Idea of Indifference – **Luke 16:19-31**

The rich man had everything he could possibly want: money to live a life of extravagance. Anything he wanted he bought. He had the finest clothes and jewelry. His house was ornately decorated. He had a high status among the community. He had everything he wanted except one thing: charitableness. When a poor beggar asked for even just some scraps that fell to the floor, the rich man didn't even give it a second thought. Responding to Lazarus he said that such generosity would keep his dogs from getting fed.

I have to be honest and sometimes I wonder if I have the same spirit of indifference toward the poor. I see them with their shabby clothes and grungy cardboard placard asking for money or food or both. I sometimes pull into the farthest lane away from

them to avoid eye contact because that would induce guilt. I have to admit that I also give them the once over. How do I know their need is legitimate? I generally don't carry cash with anyway, not so my guilt is lessened by my absence of cash, it's just a habit. Besides if I gave them the cash I had I might not be able to buy the pop I was going to buy that I don't need or the book I've been wanting to purchase. And how do I know they aren't going to turn around and use it on some habit? How do I know they aren't lazy and just want a hand out, that it's a scam? Am I like the rich man in the story Jesus told?

There was a time I remember well, when the buzzer rang at the church where I was serving. It came from the basement entrance. I was greeted by a man looking for a hand out. After all, aren't church's supposed to help the poor? The church didn't keep cash on hand and I didn't have any, but I offered him my sack lunch. He was a bit put out by the offer but he accepted it.

There was a time I was not indifferent to the poor. **What has changed? Like me do you harbor some indifference?** Don't think we can't do anything, let's pray about the something we can do.

2. The Idea of Injustice – II Samuel 12:1-9

This is a familiar story to us. David has sinned with Bathsheba. Time has passed and David thinks he's in the clear when a knock comes on the door of the palace. It's the prophet Nathan. Nate shares a little story with the King about a rich guy who had company. He had flocks and flocks of sheep but he didn't want to slaughter any of them to feed his guests. Now his neighbor had a sheep that he cared for like a family member. But the guy went over to the neighbor's home when he was at work, stole the only sheep he had and cooked it for dinner.

David was furious at the injustice of the rich guy who had plenty but stole the only sheep his neighbor owned.

Some people have a lot, but want more and so they take from what others have even if it's very little, leaving them with less or nothing at all. Proverbs has quite a bit to say about those who oppress the poor and needy.

3. The Idea of Independence – Matthew 19:16-30

One day a young, rich guy came to Jesus and asked about how he could make sure he got into heaven. He wanted to know what good things he could do to earn his way. He wanted to be reassured that his righteous actions were sufficient. Jesus responded that perfection was required. He had to be as good as God. In order to do that he had to keep the whole law. Since the Pharisees had added to them, he asked Jesus which ones he should keep. Jesus named a few to which the rich guy said he had kept them since he was young. Jesus told him he lacked one thing and that was to give his riches to the poor. Now Jesus didn't say that giving to the poor automatically got you a one way ticket to heaven. Jesus was teaching that if the man truly had a transformed heart of righteousness through faith in Him as Savior the rich man would be willing to give up what he had to follow Jesus.

The rich man had an independent spirit that wanted to qualify how he got into heaven. The man was unwilling to trust anything but his riches. Jesus was saying there was only one way. To illustrate the difficulty of the rich to get into heaven because of their dependence on their wealth, Jesus said it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Think about the size of a camel and the size of a needle. That's a pretty small opening. But Jesus went on to say that what was impossible for man – finding his own way into heaven, was possible with God.

To come to Christ we must give up our independence and arrogance to trust Him.

4. The Idea of Inequity – James 2:1-9

In these passages we are taught not to show favoritism. It shouldn't matter what someone looks like or how they dress or what they have or who they are. We are not to treat the poor with contempt or criticism or fawn over the wealthy or famous, but rather treat them with the same respect. God sees them as the same, we should too. One should not receive preferential treatment while the other is treated indifferently. Our response is to love them the same. The wealthy should not look down on the poor and the poor should not look with envy on the rich. Both are a sin.

5. The Idea of Intentionality – Luke 21:1-4

Jesus sat in the temple with His disciples observing those who came to give their offering. The rich lined up dropping in their bags of money. I can just imagine that as they stood in line or as they walked up to the box to drop in their money that they shook the bag so others could hear the coins jingle and left with a smug look. Remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that some people like to do things for show.

Then he noticed a poor woman coming toward the collection box. Just by the way she was dressed He could tell that she was poor. She may have tried to slip in unnoticed, she didn't have much. Just two copper coins. We're not told how much they were worth, but in the scheme of things it wasn't even probably enough to buy a stick of gum or a piece of candy. Yet Jesus admired and applauded her gift over the vast amounts of the others because she gave all she had.

Totally dependent on the Lord she trusted that He would meet her daily needs. **"Give us this day our**

daily bread." No matter how small the amount, what matters is the willingness.

II Corinthians 8:12 "For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have."

II Corinthians 9:6-7 "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

One commentator offered that God is not concerned about the size, He's concerned about the sincerity. When we give let's be intentional, generous, cheerful, and willing.

6. The Idea of Involvement – John 12:1-8; Acts 2:42-47

In this first passage, Jesus is reclining at the dinner table in the home of his friends when Mary took an expensive bottle of perfume and poured it over Jesus' feet. Judas immediately criticized the act indicating that the costly perfume could have been sold in order to feed the poor. Jesus responded by saying that we will always have the poor with us. They may be across the street or across the ocean. According to the earlier statistics, there are many and they are everywhere. Jesus wants us to tangibly help in some way to demonstrate our faith and help bring them to Christ. It may be a classmate, or a co-worker, or a neighbor.

In the Acts 2 passage we see that because of their joy and new faith, people were selling things in order to meet the needs of each other in the body of Christ. **Verse 45** says **"selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need."**

The Lord may not be asking us to sell our possessions, but He may be asking us to get involved in something that will help meet the tangible needs of others in the body of Christ. I think our first obligation is to our own immediate family to help with their needs. Second, I believe we are to assist with the needs of those in the body of Christ. Third and finally look for ways to meet the needs of others, the poor, orphan, widow.

7. The Idea of Investment – Matthew 6: 19-24

One author states that our attitude toward wealth is a barometer of righteousness. The cultural thought of the day as taught by the Pharisees and seen in the rebukes of Job's friends is that God blesses the righteous with wealth and He punishes the wicked bringing them into poverty. The Pharisees were storing their material possessions on earth. That's where they thought God's kingdom would be and so they wanted to be ready with tangible goods when that happened. But Jesus said that those treasures are merely temporal, they won't last. They can rust or decay over time and become worthless, they can be stolen or even as we have seen in recent years with the stock market they can lose value. It's all subject to circumstances. On the other hand treasure that lasts and won't be lost and worth the same today as they will be 10,000 years from now are stored in heaven.

Greed rather than God was their master. Instead of gold our treasures stored in heaven should be the acts of good works we do as a result of our righteousness. Remember that it was James who said that our faith should be revealed by our deeds.

One day two groups of people will stand before Jesus who sits on His throne. To one group he will invite to receive the inheritance prepared for them because in life here on the earth they fed Him when hungry, gave Him something to drink when He was thirsty, clothed Him when He was naked, gave Him hospitality when He was destitute, took care of Him when He was sick, and visited Him when in prison.

In their bewilderment they will question the Lord as to when they did that. Jesus will respond that when they showed compassion on the poor they did it to Him. This group had sent their treasure ahead to be stored for the inheritance they would receive in heaven. Their good deeds demonstrated their faith.

A pastor wrote that the great benefit of riches is not having them, but using them. Ultimately we are giving to the Lord. **Proverbs 19:17 “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward Him for what he has done.”**

8. The Idea of Importance – Matthew 6:25-34

This passage tells us that primary focus of our efforts should not be to pursue earthly riches but rather to pursue the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. That should be our ultimate desire. We are often in pursuit of things that at the end of the day don't and won't matter in eternity rather than pursuing things that will last and matter then. As we pursue growing in Christ likeness, maturing in our faith, He will provide our needs. He knows them. We can trust Him. Worry only shows what little faith we have.

Proverbs 11:4. “Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.”

The rich man thought he had it made. But when judgment came his castle on the sand incurred the wrath of God because he pursued personal riches instead of heavenly reward. He forfeited his soul all for the sake of more.

In contrast is Lazarus who had nothing of material goods. He had to beg for food and assistance, yet his heart was right before God and He was given his reward in heaven.

Just as God offered His Son on the cross for our sin as a tangible demonstration of His love to us, so our tangible demonstration of our love for Him is to help the poor and needy as we can.

People may be at our “gate.” In what way will we help them?