

Brief on Rich and Poor ¹

By Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

“And again I say to you: It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 19:24)

Mt. 19:24. **Rich man:** RJMI: This rich man that Jesus is speaking to was greedy and loved his riches more than he loved God and thus idolized them. To remedy his lust for riches, Jesus told him to sell his riches and follow him. The rich man, then, that Jesus speaks of here is the rich man who lusts after and covets riches and thus is evil. “There is not a more wicked thing than a covetous man.” (Eccus. 10:9) “For the love of money is the root of all evils, which some coveting have erred from the faith and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.” (1 Tim. 6:10) The rich man who is greedy and uses his riches mostly for himself and not for others in need nor for good causes is the rich man spoken of here by Jesus. Evil rich men “hoard up silver and gold, wherein men trust, and there is no end of their getting.” (Bar. 3:18) “A covetous man shall not be satisfied with money; and he that loveth riches shall reap no fruit from them... There is also another grievous evil, which I have seen under the sun: riches kept to the hurt of the owner.” (Ectes. 5:9-12) “He that loveth gold shall not be justified; and he that followeth after corruption shall be filled with it. Many have been brought to fall for gold, and the beauty thereof hath been their ruin. Gold is a stumblingblock to them that sacrifice to it; woe to them that eagerly follow after it, and every fool shall perish by it.” (Eccus. 31:5-7) For St. James’ condemnation of greedy rich men, see Ja. 5:1-5.

Whereas, the rich man who uses his riches as if they were not his own and thus shares his riches with the needy and for good causes is as if he were poor even though he hath great riches. “One...is as it were poor, when he hath great riches.” (Prv. 13:7) The good rich man does not lust after or covet riches. “Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish and that hath not gone after gold nor put his trust in money nor in treasures. Who is he, and we will praise him? For he hath done wonderful things in his life. Who hath been tried thereby and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting. He that could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, and could do evil things and hath not done them: Therefore are his goods established in the Lord, and all the church of the saints shall declare his alms.” (Eccus. 31:8-11) Jesus would not tell the good rich man to sell his riches because this rich man uses his riches well and already follows Jesus provided he keeps the faith and is not guilty of any mortal sins. “Riches are good to him that hath no sin in his conscience.” (Eccus. 13:30) This rich man does not idolize riches and thus does not put his riches over God. The good rich man trusts in God above all and not in his riches. “Charge the rich of this world not to be highminded nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches but in the living God, who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy.” (1 Tim. 6:17) Whereas, an evil rich man trusts in his riches over God. Jesus says, “How hard is it for them that *trust* in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Mk. 10:24) A faithful rich man is willing to lose all he has: his riches, his possessions, his family, and even his very life itself, if he must, in order to save his soul. That is what Jesus means when he says, “Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple.” (Lk. 14:33) This does not mean that every believer must sell all of his possessions, for that would be heretical communism, which forbids men to own or possess anything. It means that believers must spiritually renounce their possessions and choose God and the faith in preference to their possessions. They must not put them over God and the faith, and hence they must be willing to sell their possessions if they must in order to remain faithful and save their souls. Jesus, son of Sirach, wisely teaches that the rich man, “when thou hast enough, remember the time of hunger; and when thou art rich, think upon poverty and need.” (Eccus. 18:25) “He that is glorified in wealth, let him fear poverty.” (Eccus. 10:34) “In all thy works remember thy last end [heaven or hell], and thou shalt never sin.” (Eccus. 7:40) Abraham, Joseph, and Job are examples of holy and good rich men, as they had many possessions. See Job 31:16-28.

¹ RJMI’s Briefs are Long Commentaries contained in the end of *The Catholic Bible*, revised by RJMI.

The poor man who covets and lusts after riches has the same evil spirit as the evil rich man. “Through poverty many have sinned, and he that seeketh to be enriched turneth away his eye.” (Eccus. 27:1) For want of riches the greedy poor man cannot commit the sins of the rich man but would if he had the power, the riches. “And if he be hindered from sinning for want of power, if he shall find opportunity to do evil, he will do it.” (Eccus. 19:25)

Jesus warns rich men more than poor men because riches are a great temptation since they can buy and cover up many sinful things and the lust after riches causes men to commit other mortal sins to get and keep their riches, such as stealing, fraud, murder, blackmail, etc. But that does not mean that poor men are good simply because they are poor. Even though we must not judge a person based upon the fact that he is poor (and thus we must “Do no violence to the poor because he is poor” (Prv. 22:22)), we must do violence to the poor when he sins. Anyone who knows poor people knows that they commit many mortal sins. “Poverty is very wicked in the mouth of the ungodly.” (Eccus. 13:30) Even though poor men are more apt to be humble than rich men because of their lowly state, not all poor men are humble. “My soul hateth... a poor man that is proud.” (Eccus. 25:3) We know that most poor men are evil because God says many times that very few men are saved, whether rich or poor. “How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it!” (Mt. 7:14) If all or most poor men were saved, then many men and not few would be saved because there are very many more poor men than rich men. In the final days, most of the rich as well as the poor will take the mark of the beast and thus serve the Antichrist. “And he shall make all, both little and great, rich and poor, freemen and bondmen, to have a character in their right hand or on their foreheads.” (Apoc. 13:16)

Hence when Jesus says blessed are the poor (Lk. 6:20) and the poor in spirit (Mt. 5:3), he means the faithful who are poor and the faithful who are humble, whether rich or poor. And when Jesus says blessed are those who hunger (Lk. 6:21) and those who hunger for justice (Mt. 5:6), he means the faithful who are poor and the faithful who yearn for true justice, whether rich or poor.

Let no one, then, take out of context the word of God in order to idolize the rich or the poor and thus promote class warfare, the rich against the poor or the poor against the rich. “The rich and poor have met one another: the Lord is the maker of them both.” (Prv. 22:1-2) “Rich or poor, if his heart is good his countenance shall be cheerful at all times.” (Eccus. 26:4) “Thou shalt not do that which is unjust, nor judge unjustly. Respect not the person of the poor nor honor the countenance of the mighty. But judge thy neighbor according to justice.” (Lev. 19:15) (See *RJMI Topic Index: Rich and Poor.*)

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Original version: 5/2021; Current version: 5/2021

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