

TRUE RICHES

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TEXT: James 1:9-11

I read a fairy tale that goes as follows.....

■ Once upon a time there was a White Knight looking for adventure. He came to a village where legend told of a terrible ogre in a pit. Bravely the White Knight took up the challenge. He would do battle with the terrible ogre in the pit. The people remembered several courageous men had climbed down into the pit, but no one could remember even one of those champions returning.

The White Knight stood looking at the deep, dark hole. The opening was so narrow that he stripped himself of armor and unnecessary clothing. He took only a long dagger, which he tied around his neck with a leather strap. After securing a rope at the opening and testing its strength, he gripped it firmly and began lowering himself, hand under hand, letting the rope slip between his feet. Soon he felt the cool, smooth floor of the chamber. It took several minutes for his eyes to adjust to the darkness, but soon he focused on a large mound. Then he realized it was the bones of his predecessors, along with their assorted weapons. A little way off he spotted another mound, but he wasn't sure what it was.

Suddenly, he was surprised by the inhabitant of the pit—surprised because he didn't anticipate that the ogre would be only as tall as a rabbit. The ogre waved his arms and screeched with its squeaky voice, trying to appear as fierce as possible. The White Knight picked up a sword from the floor and prepared to do battle, but quick as a rat, the ogre ran into a hole near the second mound.

The White Knight followed, and as the second mound became clearer he was again surprised. Before his eyes there glittered balls of gold as big as grapefruits and diamonds as big as plums. With only a small part of that treasure, any commoner would be a prince for life. The little ogre lost its importance in view of this great treasure.

But the White Knight had a problem. How would he carry it out of the hole? He had no pockets. Who would believe him if he didn't bring back at least one piece?

He suddenly had an idea. He would take one of the diamonds in his mouth and carry it that way until he had climbed out of the hole. He could always come back later for the rest. Hurriedly he chose one of the larger diamonds. It fit comfortably into his mouth, and he began the arduous climb out of the pit, hand over hand, gripping the rope with his feet. His tongue held the diamond tightly against the roof of his mouth. Higher and higher he climbed until the heavy exertion began to render him

breathless. He would have to breathe through his mouth in order to get enough air. As he took in a large gulp of air the diamond slipped and stuck in his throat. The White Knight choked on his treasure, lost consciousness, and fell to his death on the mound of bones below.

You see, the terrible ogre in the pit was not the little troll. The OGRE IN THE PIT WAS GREED -- greed in the hearts of men who saw easy treasure and the hope of unearned gain. The glitter of this world had choked him to death. (Hewett, 372-3)

In a world where society is so materialistic and money-minded, we tend to overlook the true riches that are found only in God. Today let's look at some sobering *lessons* learned from God's Word about men and riches. In our text today James is seeking to enlighten these Christians who are being oppressed by the rich in order that they might have the proper attitude.

He begins by pointing out the obvious.

I. TRIALS ERASE ALL SUPERFICIAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR (v.9).

James is addressing the circumstance of "a brother of low degree" (a poor brother).

A. A poor brother may feel INFERIOR because he lacks riches (v.9).

A feeling of INFERIORITY may cause him to see himself as less valuable than others or cause him to believe that he can't rise from his lowly state. But James tells him to REJOICE. "Rejoice in his exaltation" because the Lord has lifted him up to be equal with every man. In saving him God has given him DIGNITY and WORTH.

B. On the other hand, the rich brother may be tempted to feel SUPERIOR because of what he possesses (v. 10a).

To begin with, when James says, "But the rich," he is not necessarily referring to a Christian. However, James also tells the rich to REJOICE. They should rejoice that wealth means nothing to the Lord, because wealth is easily lost. God is not interested in our money, as some people think, but in our souls.

Next James points out...

II. THOSE WHO TRUST IN RICHES HAVE NO FUTURE (v.10b).

James said of the one who puts his trust in riches, "He will pass away."

A. This misplaced trust will one day cause men to realize that their precious riches are temporal.

■ In Luke 12:20 Jesus said, concerning the man who had built bigger barns to store more and more for himself, "But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"

■ Ecclesiastes 5:10 tells us, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity."

■ Russian author Leo Tolstoy tells the story of a rich man who was never satisfied. He always wanted more and more. He heard of a wonderful chance to get more land. For a thousand rubles, he could have all that he could walk around in a day. But he had to make it back to the starting point by sundown or he would lose it all.

He arose early and set out. He walked on and on, thinking he could get just a little more land if he kept going. But he went so far that he realized he must walk very fast if he was to get back in time to claim the land. As the sun got lower in the sky, he quickened his pace. He began to run. As he came within sight of the starting place, he exerted his last stream of energy and fell dead as he crossed the finish line, blood pouring out of his mouth. His servant took a spade and dug a grave just long enough and just wide enough to bury him.

The title of Tolstoy's story is "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" He concludes by saying, "Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed."
(Hewett, 341)

B. Trusting in riches will one day cause man to realize he is POOR IN GOD (v.10b).

How will he be poor?

- All his riches are temporal; they will pass away.
- All his power and authority will pass away and belong to another.
- It is not God's will that any should perish.

We are His creation and He wants to bless and love us, if only we will hear and respond to His call.

James ends his thought with the one last comparison.

III. THE UNGODLY RICH AND THEIR WEALTH WILL HAVE THE SAME END (v.11).

James compares the ungodly rich and their ways to the grass and flower that is withered by the hot sun -- beautiful for a while and then gone.

A. The riches and pleasures of this world only SEEM to last (v.11a).

There is a physical pleasure in alcohol, until the hangover starts.

There is pleasure in drugs, until you have to fight addiction.

You may have pleasure in unlawful sexual desires, until you find out you have AIDS or some other disease.

You may seek more and more money to buy more and more, to do more and more.

You may keep God as arm's length and not call on Him or give Him first place in your life.

But remember this, when this life is over you will be left with NOTHING.

Riches will pass away and belong to another.

Beauty will pass away, health will pass away. But he that trusts in the Lord will LIVE FOREVER.

B. This is cause enough to remember the riches that Christ offers.

■ Jesus said in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

■ Jesus reassures us in John 10:28, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

The kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. God's riches include a satisfying life because we have His word, His promises, and His power to help us live victoriously.

CONCLUSION

■ In 1923 at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, eight of the most powerful money magnates in the world gathered for a meeting. These eight, if they combined their resources and their assets, controlled more money than the U.S. treasury. In that group were such men as Charles Schwab, president of a steel company; Richard Whitney, president of the New York Stock Exchange; Arthur Cutton, a wheat speculator; Albert Fall, a Presidential cabinet member and a personally wealthy man; Jesse Livermore, the greatest bear on Wall Street in his generation; Leon Fraser, president of the International Bank of Settlements; and Ivan Krueger, head of a large monopoly. Quite an impressive group of people!

Let's look at the same group later in life. Charles Schwab died penniless; Richard Whitney spent the rest of his life serving a sentence in Sing Prison; Arthur Cutton became insolvent; Albert Fall was pardoned from a federal prison so he might die at home; Leon Fraser committed suicide; Jesse Livermore committed suicide; and Ivan Krueger committed suicide. Seven of these eight great money magnates had lives that were disasters before they left planet Earth.

What mistake did they make? Thinking that what they had and what they controlled belonged to them. (Hewett, 340)

Often the problem with us is that we think a message like this is not for us simply because we are not wealthy. Yet, most of the people that I have seen destroyed by money are those who had little in reality but pursued wealth with a passion. They were, and some still are, trying every scheme and plan the world throws their way and still coming up short and unhappy. But in reality, what could we expect from someone who has never let God be first in their lives?

Riches can become a trial for us if we fail to remember that TRUE RICHES ONLY COME FROM GOD.

References

Hewett, James S. (Ed.). (1988). *Illustrations unlimited*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

