

# ***PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL***

**November 20, 2016**  
**9<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Luke**  
**Revision E**

## **Gospel: Luke 12:16-21**

Today's Gospel lesson is commonly used in the West also, either for the 1<sup>st</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

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## **Background for the Parable of the Rich Fool**

The Parable of the Rich Fool is part of a series of teachings that is recorded almost entirely in Luke. This series begins in Luke 10:1 with the sending out of the Seventy (of which Luke himself was a member), and continues to Luke 18. The time frame for these events is late 29 AD and early 30 AD.

As the Gospel lesson begins, someone in the crowd asked Jesus to mediate a dispute over an inheritance (Luke 12:13). It was a tradition for respected rabbis to arbitrate personal disputes over property or money<sup>1</sup>. Jesus however refused to take this role (Luke 12:14). Instead, he said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). This incident led Jesus to tell the parable of the Rich Fool.

Jesus had begun teaching people over a year earlier to beware of getting trapped into having their life and happiness depend on their possessions. For example, in mid 28 AD, during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of not worrying about one's life in terms of food, clothing, and shelter (Matthew 6:25). The analogy Jesus made then was the birds and the flowers: they don't sow, reap or gather into storehouses, nor do they spin thread or sew clothing. Yet they are well provided for by their Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:25-33). Following the Parable of the Rich Fool, Jesus repeated the same message for the people here in Judea (Luke 12:22-31) that He gave to the people just outside Capernaum at the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-34).

Under the Old Covenant, there was a relationship between the fruitfulness of the land and the peoples' obedience to God (Deuteronomy 28:1-2). As the people were faithful to honor the Lord and love their neighbor, "the Lord will command the blessing upon you in your storehouses and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the Land which the Lord your God

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 119-120.

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gives you” (Deuteronomy 28:8). As they were generous with their bounty (Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 26:12-15; 15:7-11), “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12; 15:6). Thus they were to be a holy people, chosen to be a people of His own possession out of all the people on the face of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:19, 28:1).

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century grain was stored in large structures similar to crude grain elevators today. There was an opening at the top for putting grain in and an opening at the bottom for removing it. The walls of these “barns” or silos were thick, made of brick, and the inside walls were plastered. Thus the grain could be kept dry and away from pests for storage for many years<sup>2</sup>. In ancient civilizations, entire cities were sometimes devoted to the storage of grain, wine and oil (1 Kings 9:19, 2 Chronicles 8:4-6, 16:4, 17:12, 32:28, Exodus 1:11). When the rich man said to himself, “You have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry” (Luke 12:19), this was a realistic expectation for him. And it put him in a commanding position economically just as it was for Joseph in Egypt when Joseph was in charge of the Egyptian storehouses (Genesis 41:28-57). When he died suddenly, however, the question is whether the new silos were built yet, and whether the old silos had already been torn down. If the old silos were torn down, there was no one to supervise construction of the new ones, or pay the workers for building them. If the old silos were still there, but the new ones had not been finished yet, there was no place to store the excess grain. In order that the grain might not be wasted, it would probably just be distributed to the poor – which is what the rich man should have done anyway.

### **The Burden of Wealth**

The parable began with a rich man’s land yielding plentifully (Luke 12:16). But this rich man did not respond according to the Mosaic Law to the bounty of his land. According to the Mosaic Law, the more he obtained, the more generous he was to be. Instead, he decided to keep it all for himself; since he couldn’t even store it all; he decided to build bigger storehouses (Luke 12:18).

Cyril of Alexandria commented<sup>3</sup> to say that the rich man was speaking like someone in poverty due to the poverty of his spiritual awareness.

“What, therefore, does the rich man do, surrounded by a profusion of so many blessings beyond all numbering? In distress and anxiety he utters the words of poverty. ‘For what’, he says, ‘shall I do?’ The man who is in want of necessities constantly emits this miserable language; but here one of boundless wealth uses similar expressions. He determined then to build more spacious storehouses; he purposed to enjoy for himself alone those revenues that were sufficient for a populous city. He doesn’t look to the future; he doesn’t raise his eyes to God; he doesn’t count it worth his while to gain those treasures, which are above in heaven. He doesn’t cherish love for the poor, nor desire the estimation to be

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<sup>2</sup> Ralph Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 101.

<sup>3</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Gospel of Luke, Chapter 12, Studion Publishers, 1983, p. 361..

gained thereby; he doesn't sympathize with suffering; it gives him no pain, nor awakens his pity. And what is still more irrational, he settles for himself the duration of his life, as if he would reap this too from the ground; for he says, 'I will say to myself, Self, you have goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, enjoy yourself.'"

However, God referred to him as a fool. "This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20). This connects right back to the dispute over an inheritance that started the Parable (Luke 12:13). Now someone else has an inheritance to fight over, which goes right back to the question that started the Parable.

### **The Definition of "Fool"**

The term "fool" in an Old Testament culture carried more connotations than it does in English today. Consider Matthew 5:22; Jesus said that whoever calls his brother a fool shall be in danger of hell-fire. In our English culture, calling someone a fool is no big deal; stand up comedians make big money doing just that. To understand the connotations involved, we need to go primarily to the writings of Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Riches and fools are an often-recurring theme in the writings of Solomon. Solomon himself was very rich; and as king, met his share of fools. Table 1 is a compilation of the writings of Solomon regarding the characteristics of fools as compared to the wise. Two Hebrew words are used to convey these characteristics: "*kesil*" meaning a fool in the sense of a stupid person and "*evil*" meaning generally a fool.

Some trends apparent from Table 1 are that a fool does not fear God and even denies He exists. He thinks himself to be wise and is always right in his own eyes, but he does not seek wisdom or knowledge. He is quarrelsome, temperamental and arrogant; one can't tell him anything or make him change his behavior. He's perverse, deceitful and spreads slander; he mocks the idea that he might be sinning. This reads like an indictment of our generation. Solomon contrasts the wise man as having opposite characteristics.

Psalm 49 might also be titled, "The Parable of the Rich Fool" and is a more detailed version of the same theme as the Gospel lesson. Jesus may even have drawn the Parable of the Rich Fool from Psalm 49. The Psalm was written as a riddle and a proverb (Psalm 49:3, 4), and set to a string accompaniment (Psalm 49:4). A number of themes are included:

- One need not fear even though surrounded by wealthy men working iniquity. All their wealth can't even redeem their brother never mind buy eternal life (Psalm 49:5-9).
- Everyone will die, rich and fool alike, and leave their wealth to others. They may think their houses are forever and even name their land after themselves; but it won't endure. This is the way of the foolish (Psalm 49:10-13).
- They are sheep appointed for Sheol with death as their shepherd. God will redeem the righteous from Sheol and the righteous shall rule over them in the morning (Psalm 49:14-15).
- Do not be afraid of a rich man when the glory of his house increases. When he dies, he will carry nothing away and his glory does not descend after him. He will never see the

Light; he is without understanding; and he is like an animal that perishes (Psalm 49:16-20).

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Fools Versus the Wise**

<b>The Fool</b>	<b>The Wise</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>Toward God</b>		
Denies existence of God	Seeks God	Psalm 14:1,2; 55:1,2
Speaks error against Lord	Fears Lord	Isaiah 32:6, Proverbs 1:7
Sacrifice of Fools	Guards steps	Ecclesiastes 5:1, 4
<b>On Understanding</b>		
Thinks self wise, but hates knowledge, wisdom	Has wisdom	Proverbs 1:22, 14:33, 1:7, 17:16 Romans 1:22
Right in his own eyes	Listens to counsel	Proverbs 10:8, 12:15, 18:2, 26:5, 12, 28:26, Ecclesiastes 10:6
Feeds on folly	Seeks knowledge	Proverbs 15:14, 16:22
Walks in darkness	Eyes in head	Ecclesiastes 2:14
<b>Behavior</b>		
Arrogant & careless	Turns from evil	Proverbs 14:16, Ecclesiastes 7:7
Rejects father's discipline	Regards reproof	Proverbs 15:5, 17:21, 25
Even blows won't correct	Rebuke goes deep	Proverbs 17:10, 19:29, 26:3, 27:22
Quarrelsome	Avoids strife	Proverbs 20:3, 27:3
Sport = wickedness	Sport = wisdom	Proverbs 7:22, 10:23, Isaiah 32:6, 7
Always loses temper	Holds his anger	Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:9
Companions suffer harm	Companions wise	Proverbs 13:20, Psalm 107:17
<b>Control of Tongue</b>		
Speaks slander, deceit	Restrains lips	Proverbs 10:18, Ecclesiastes 10:12, Isaiah 32:7
Mocks sin	Has goodwill	Proverbs 14:9
Perverse, hasty in speech	Feeds many with lips	Proverbs 10:21, 17:7, 19:1, 29:20
Spouts folly	Builds bridges	Proverbs 15:2, Ecclesiastes 10:13

These are very strong words; but they fit the context of our Gospel lesson quite well (compare Luke 12:19-20).

### **Becoming Rich toward God**

In contrast to the behavior of the rich fool, the Lord encourages us to be “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). There are two parts to this: (1) discovering what are the riches of God, and (2) determining how one obtains such.

The key to both is faith: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). If we could see what it is we’re hoping for, it wouldn’t be hope and we wouldn’t need faith (Romans 8:24).

Concerning the riches of God, we are told of the riches of His kindness (Romans 2:4, Ephesians 2:7), the riches of His glory (Romans 9:23, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 1:27) and the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7, 2:7). These riches are unsearchable (Ephesians 3:8) and have incredible depth in wisdom and knowledge and judgment (Romans 11:33). Yet the riches of God are also a mystery (Colossians 1:27). He bestows His riches equally to Jews and Gentiles who call upon Him (Romans 11:12, Colossians 1:27). But it takes

the eyes of faith to see it. Moses saw it (through faith) and regarded the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt (Hebrews 11:26).

Concerning one's obtaining the riches of God; earthly riches can get in the way. In cases of fixation on earthly riches, Jesus advised people to sell everything and give to the poor in order that they might have treasure in heaven (Luke 12:33, Matthew 19:21). The Rich Young Ruler was so fixated on earthly riches that he couldn't do this (Matthew 19:22, Luke 18:23). Treasure in heaven is described as wealth that doesn't grow old, that doesn't fail, that can't be stolen and that can't deteriorate (Luke 12:33).

Leo the Great stated<sup>4</sup> that we should be thankful no matter what we have received from God, much or little. To do otherwise is to blame Him and murmur against Him. All things are in His hand, and whatever pleases Him should please us also.

“God wishes us to be good, because He is good; none of His judgments ought to displease us. If we don't give Him thanks in all things, what else is it but we blame Him in some degree. Man's folly too often dares to murmur against his Creator, not only in time of lack, but also in time of plenty, so that, when something is not supplied, we complain, and when certain things are in abundance we are ungrateful. The man who had rich harvests scorned his well-filled silos, and groaned over his abundant grape-gathering; he did not give thanks for the size of the crop, but complained of no place to store it. If the ground has been less prolific than usual, and the vines and the olives have failed in their supply of fruit, the year is accused, the elements are blamed, and curses fill the air and the sky. On the other hand, nothing better fits the faithful disciples of Truth than the persistent lifting of praise to God. As Paul says, ‘Rejoice always, pray without ceasing; in all things give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus in all things for you’ (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). But how shall we be partakers of this devotion, unless changes of fortune train our minds in steadfastness, so that the love directed towards God may not be puffed up in prosperity nor faint in adversity. Let that, which pleases God, please us too. Let us rejoice in whatever measure of gifts He gives. Let him who has used great possessions well use small ones well also! Plenty and scarcity may be equally for our good, and even in spiritual progress we shall not be downcast at small results, if our minds have not become dry and barren. Let this spring from the soil of our heart. He that continues to be generous will always be supplied with means to give. Therefore let us use all the works of godliness that each year gives us, and let not seasons of difficulty hinder our Christian benevolence. The Lord knows how to replenish the widow's vessels, which her pious deed of hospitality has emptied (1 Kings 17:8-16). He knows how to turn water into wine (John 2:1-10); He knows how to satisfy 5,000 hungry persons with a few loaves (Matthew 14:15-21).”

Paul advised Timothy concerning those in his area who were wealthy that they trust in God rather than their earthly riches. Especially, Paul said, “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). By our deeds, our

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<sup>4</sup> Leo the Great, Sermons, XII, 3.

good works, we treasure up for ourselves glory, honor and immortality (Romans 2:8-10 loosely). These deeds or good works are written (and treasured) in books in heaven (Revelation 20:12). On the basis of these books plus the Book of Life, everyone is judged (Revelation 20:12-15).

John Cassian stated<sup>5</sup> that covetousness could only be overcome by stripping oneself of everything. Examples he used are the Apostle Judas, Ananias and Sapphira and Elisha's servant, Gehazi. Jesus allowed Judas to steal from the moneybag to curb his covetousness, but it didn't satisfy him. Ananias and Sapphira lied to escape poverty because of covetousness. Like Gehazi<sup>6</sup>, they were all lepers in spirit and heart. We need to consider our weak and shifty nature in order that we don't get carried away like the rich fool.

“The tyranny of avarice, once the mind is taken prisoner by it, allows it to keep to no rules of honesty, nor to be satisfied with any additions to its gains. We must seek to put an end to this madness, not by riches, but by stripping ourselves of them. Judas had received the bag set apart for the distribution to the poor, which was entrusted to his care, that he might at least satisfy himself with plenty of money, and set a limit to his avarice. Yet his plentiful supply only broke out into a still greedier incitement of desire, so that he was ready no longer secretly to rob the bag, but actually to sell the Lord Himself. For the madness of this avarice is not satisfied with any amount of riches.”

“Peter, taught by these instances, and knowing that someone who has avarice cannot bridle it, and that it cannot be ended by a large or small sum of money, but only by the renunciation of everything, punished with death Ananias and Sapphira, who had kept back something out of their property. The death, which Judas had voluntarily met with for the sin of betraying the Lord, they might also undergo for their lying avarice (Acts 5:1-11). How closely do the sin and punishment correspond in each case! In the one case treachery, in the other falsehood, was the result of covetousness. For though the issues of their deeds may appear different, yet they coincide in having one and the same aim. Judas, in order to escape poverty, desired to take back what he had forsaken<sup>7</sup>. The others, for fear lest they might become poor, tried to keep back something out of their property, which they should have either offered to the Apostle in good faith, or have given entirely to the brethren. In each case the judgment of death follows, because each sin sprang from the root of covetousness. If there resulted so severe a sentence against those, who did not covet other persons' goods, but tried to be sparing of their own, what should we think of those who desire to amass wealth, without ever having had any of their own. That is, if we make a show of poverty before men, but before God we are convicted of being rich through the passion of avarice, how will we fare?”

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<sup>5</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, VII, 24-26, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Elisha had just healed Naaman of leprosy. Naaman offered Elisha a present of a great deal of gold, silver and clothing, but like all the Unmercenary Healers, Elisha would not accept payment for what he had been freely given. Gehazi, however, ran after Naaman and asked for a small portion of the gift Naaman offered. Naaman was happy to give it to Gehazi. When Gehazi returned to Elisha, Elisha informed him that he had also inherited Naaman's leprosy because of his covetousness.

<sup>7</sup> Judas, along with the rest of the Twelve, had left everything in following Jesus (Matthew 19:27-29). Yet Judas was in charge of the money box containing alms for the poor, and he pilfered what was in it (John 12:6).

“Such are seen to be lepers in spirit and heart, after the likeness of Gehazi, who desired the uncertain riches of this world, and was covered with the taint of foul leprosy (2 Kings 5:20-27). He left us a clear example that every soul which is defiled with the stain of avarice is covered with the spiritual leprosy of sin, and is counted as unclean before God with a perpetual curse.”

“Keeping then in mind the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira, let us dread keeping back any of those things which we gave up and vowed to forsake. Let us also fear the example of Gehazi, who for the sin of covetousness was chastised with the punishment of perpetual leprosy. From this let us beware of acquiring that wealth which we never formerly possessed. Moreover dreading both the fault and the death of Judas, let us with all the power that we have, avoid taking back any of that wealth, which we once cast away from us. Above all, considering the state of our weak and shifty nature, let us beware lest the day of the Lord come upon us as a thief in the night, and find our conscience defiled even by a single penny. This would void all the fruits of our renunciation of the world, and cause that which was said to the rich man to be directed towards us also. ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have prepared? (Luke 12:20) And taking no thought for tomorrow, let us never allow ourselves to be enticed away.”

Cyprian of Carthage exhorted<sup>8</sup> his people very strongly to demonstrate their faith by their works (James 2:18-26), where offerings to the Church and to the poor are the best investment one can make. The righteous man will never lack for resources, and he who feeds Christ will be himself fed by Christ. We sometimes bring forward vain excuses regarding why we can't do this, and the Parable of the Rich Fool is a warning to us. Those who think themselves rich in this world are deceived and cannot properly labor in the Church or celebrate the Lord's Supper. Their eyes are covered with the gloom of blackness, and they cannot see their brothers, the poor and needy, with whom they share the Christian life.

“Are you afraid that your inheritance may fall short, if you begin to give liberally from it? Yet when has it ever happened that resources have failed the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not slay the righteous soul with famine’ (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). Ravens fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kings 17:1-6); and a meal from heaven was made ready for Daniel in the lions' den<sup>9</sup>. And you are afraid that food should be lacking to you, laboring and deserving well of the Lord? He Himself bears witness, for the rebuke of those whose mind is doubtful and whose faith is small, ‘Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?’ (Matthew 6:26) God feeds the birds, and daily food is available to the sparrows; to creatures, which have no sense of divine things, there is no lack of food or drink. Do you think that to a Christian, to a servant of the Lord, to one given to good works, to one that is dear to his Lord, anything will be lacking?”

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<sup>8</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises*, VIII, 11-15.

<sup>9</sup> Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

“Do you imagine that he who feeds Christ is not himself fed by Christ, or that earthly things will be lacking to those to whom heavenly and divine things are given? Where does this unbelieving thought, this impious and sacrilegious consideration come from? What does a faithless heart do in the home of faith? Why is he, who does not trust in Christ, called a Christian? The name of Pharisee is more fitting for you. When the Lord was speaking about almsgiving, He warned us to make to ourselves friends of our earthly lucre by provident good works, which might afterwards receive us into eternal dwellings. The Scripture added after this, ‘But the Pharisees heard all these things, who were very covetous, and they derided Him’ (Luke 16:14). Some people like this we see now in the Church, whose closed ears and darkened hearts admit no light from spiritual and saving warnings. We need not wonder that they criticize the servants of God, when we see the Lord Himself was despised by such.”

“Why do you applaud yourself in those vain and silly conceits, as if you were withheld from good works by fear for the future? Why do you lay out before yourself certain shadows and omens of a vain excuse? Confess what is the truth; and since you cannot deceive those who know, utter the secret and hidden things of your mind. The gloom of barrenness has besieged your mind; and while the light of truth has departed, the deep and profound darkness of avarice has blinded your carnal heart. You are the captive and slave of your money; you are bound with the chains and bonds of covetousness; and you whom Christ had once loosed, are once more in chains. You keep your money, which, when kept, does not keep you. You heap up an inheritance, which burdens you with its weight; and you do not remember what God answered to the rich man, who boasted with a foolish exultation of the abundance of his exuberant harvest. ‘You fool’, He said, ‘this night your soul is required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) Why do you watch in loneliness over your riches? Why, for your own punishment, do you heap up the burden of your inheritance, that in proportion as you are rich in this world, you may become poor to God? Divide your returns with the Lord your God; share your gains with Christ; make Christ a partner with you in your earthly possessions, that He also may make you a fellow-heir with Him in His heavenly kingdom.”

“Those are mistaken, and are deceived, that think themselves rich in this world. Listen to the voice of your Lord rebuking men like you with righteous reproaches. ‘You say I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and you don’t know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothing, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness may not appear in you; and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see’ (Revelation 3:17-18). You therefore, who are rich, buy for yourself from Christ gold tried by fire; that you may be pure gold, with your filth burned out as if by fire, if you are purged by almsgiving and righteous works. Buy for yourself white clothing, that you who had been naked according to Adam, may be clothed with the white garment of Christ. And you who are a wealthy and rich matron in Christ’s Church, anoint your eyes, not with the eye wash of the devil, but with

Christ's eye wash, that you may be able to attain to see God, by deserving well of God, both by good works and character.”

“You who are such as this cannot labor in the Church. For your eyes, overcast with the gloom of blackness, and shadowed in night, do not see the needy and poor. You are wealthy, and do you think that you celebrate the Lord's Supper, not at all considering the offering, who come to the Lord's Supper without a sacrifice, and yet take part of the sacrifice, which the poor man has offered? Consider the widow that remembered the heavenly precepts, doing good even amid the difficulties and straits of poverty, casting two mites, which were all that she had, into the treasury. The Lord observed and saw, regarding her work not for its abundance, but for its intention, and considering not how much, but from how much, she had given. He answered, ‘Truly I say unto you, that widow has cast in more than anyone into the offerings of God. For everyone else has cast in to the offerings of God of that which they had in abundance; but she out of her poverty has cast in all that she had’ (Luke 21:3-4). Greatly blessed and glorious woman, who even before the Day of Judgment has merited to be praised by the voice of the Judge! Let the rich be ashamed of their barrenness and unbelief. The widow, needy in means, is found rich in works. And although everything that is given is conferred upon widows and orphans, she gives, who ought to receive, that we may know from this what punishment awaits the barren rich man, when by this instance even the poor ought to labor in good works. And in order that we may understand that their labors are given to God, and that whoever performs them deserves well of the Lord, Christ calls this ‘the offerings of God’. He intimates that the widow has cast in two mites into the offerings of God, that it may be more abundantly evident that he who has pity on the poor lends to God.”

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>10</sup> that the issue in choosing between God and mammon involves neither fear of punishment nor the promise of earthly gifts, since both produce mere hirelings. We should want to do this, and not have to be driven by punishment or lured by earthly gifts into it. We should desire to seek the good and live according to the likeness of Christ and not according to the love of money, which He calls “mammon”. Honor, marriage and even voluntary poverty can produce the same effects and “choke” the word of God for us if it's not something we freely choose to do. Our true treasure is in what produces righteousness in our lives.

“We must pursue the word of salvation neither from fear of punishment nor from promise of a gift, but on account of the good itself. Those who do so stand on the right hand of the sanctuary (Matthew 25:32-40, Hebrews 8:1, 1:3). But those who think that by the gift of what is perishable they shall receive immortality in exchange are, in the parable of the two brothers, called ‘hirelings’ (Matthew 21:28-31). This sheds some light on the expression ‘in the likeness and image’ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Some live according to the likeness of Christ, while those who stand on the left hand live according to their own image. To choose by imitation differs

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<sup>10</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 6.

from him who chooses according to knowledge, as that which is set on fire differs from that which is illuminated”.

“What does the parable of Lazarus mean, by showing the image of the rich and poor? (Luke 16:19-26) And what does the saying mean, ‘No man can serve two masters, God and mammon?’ (Matthew 6:24), the Lord so terming the love of money. For instance, the covetous, who were invited, did not respond to the invitation to the supper (Luke 14:15-23), not because of their possessing property, but because of their inordinate affection to what they possessed”.

For not riches only, but also honor, marriage and poverty, have ten thousand cares for him who is unfit for them. And those cares He indicated in the Parable of the Sower, when He said that ‘the seed of the word which fell among the thorns’ (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23) was choked by them, and could not bring forth fruit. It is therefore necessary to learn how to make use of every occurrence, so as by a good life, to be trained for eternal life. For it said, ‘I saw the wicked exalted and towering as the cedars of Lebanon; and I passed’, says the Scripture, ‘and he was not. And I sought him, and his place was not found. Keep innocence, and look on uprightness; for there is a remnant to the man of peace’ (Psalm 37:35-37 LXX, Isaiah 2:12-14). Such will he be who believes unpretentiously with his whole heart, and is tranquil in his whole soul. ‘For different people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from the Lord’ (Isaiah 29:13).

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break through and steal’ (Matthew 6:19), says the Lord, in reproach to the covetous, to those who are full of cares, and to those who indulge their bodies. For amours, diseases, and evil thoughts ‘*break through*’ the mind. But our true ‘treasure’ is where what is allied to our mind is, since it produces righteousness, showing that we must reform our old conversation by asking for mercy. ‘For I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy’ (Romans 9:15, Exodus 33:19), said the Lord. For so He says, ‘Fool, this night shall your soul be required of you; and whose shall those things be which you have prepared?’ (Luke 12:20)

Therefore, our Gospel lesson is a call to consider where our treasure is; for where our treasure is, there is where our heart will be also (Luke 12:34). And as we realize that our real treasure is in heaven, good works are a natural, joyful result.

### **The Transient Nature of This Life**

One of the Psalms attributed to Moses states, “The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psalm 90:10). Thus it is with all of humanity; we have a transient existence in this life, and what matters is what we store up for eternity.

Cyprian of Carthage addressed<sup>11</sup> the transient nature of this life using the words of the Lord's Prayer. There is both a spiritual and a literal understanding to the words, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). The spiritual understanding relates to the Eucharist, which is our true food, where we have no life without it (John 6:51-58). The literal understanding relates to those who have renounced the world with its riches and pomp, and who ask for themselves merely food and support. Both understandings stand in utter contrast to the "rich fool", where Jesus spoke of a man becoming perfect and complete by selling all his goods, not by hoarding them. On the other hand, the Scriptures promise that daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man.

"We ask in the Lord's Prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. And this may be understood both spiritually and literally, because either way of understanding it is rich in divine usefulness to our salvation. For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. Accordingly we say, 'Our Father', because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it 'our bread', because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. We ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by injecting some heinous sin, be prevented from partaking of the heavenly bread, and be separated from Christ's body. He Himself warns, 'I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eats of my bread, he shall live forever; and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world' (John 6:51-58). When He says that whoever shall eat of His bread shall live forever, it is clear that those who partake of His body and receive the Eucharist by the right of communion are living. On the other hand, we must fear and pray lest anyone who, being withheld from communion, is separate from Christ's body should remain at a distance from salvation. He Himself threatens, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you' (John 6:53). And therefore we ask that our bread — that is, Christ — may be given to us daily, that we who live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body."

"Another understanding of, 'Give us this day our daily bread', refers to those who have renounced the world, and have cast away its riches and pomp in the faith of spiritual grace, and who ask simply for food and support. The Lord instructs us, 'Whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33). But he who has begun to be Christ's disciple, renouncing all things according to the word of his Master, ought to ask for his daily food, and not to extend his petition to a long period. The Lord prescribes, 'Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow itself shall take thought for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof' (Matthew 6:34). With reason, then, does Christ's disciple ask food for himself for today, since he is prohibited from thinking of tomorrow. It becomes a contradiction for us to seek to live long in this world, since we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly. Paul admonishes us, giving substance to the steadfastness of our hope and faith. 'We brought nothing into this world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and

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<sup>11</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, Treatises, IV, 18-21.

a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:7-10).

“He teaches us that riches are not only to be scorned, but that they are also dangerous; that in them is the root of seducing evils, that deceive the blindness of the human mind by a hidden deception. God rebukes the rich fool, who thinks of his earthly wealth, and boasts himself in the abundance of his overflowing harvests, saying, ‘You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided?’ (Luke 12:20) The fool who was to die that night was rejoicing in his stores, and he to whom life already was failing, was thinking of the abundance of his food. But, on the other hand, the Lord tells us that he becomes perfect and complete who sells all his goods, and distributes them for the use of the poor, and so lays up for himself treasure in heaven. He says that that man is able to follow Him, and to imitate the glory of the Lord’s passion. Free from hindrance, he is involved in no worldly entanglements, but he accompanies his possessions, which earlier have been sent to God. Every one of us may be able to thus prepare himself, let him thus learn to pray and know, from the character of the prayer, what he ought to be.”

“For daily bread cannot be lacking to the righteous man, since it is written, ‘The Lord will not slay the soul of the righteous by hunger’ (Proverbs 10:3 LXX). And again ‘I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging their bread’ (Psalm 37:25). The Lord moreover promises, ‘Do not worry saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or how shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the nations seek. And your Father knows that you have need of all these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you’ (Matthew 6:31-33). To those who seek God’s kingdom and righteousness, He promises that all things shall be added (John 6:27, Matthew 6:8). Since all things are God’s, nothing will be lacking to him who possesses God, if God Himself is not lacking to him. Thus a meal was divinely provided for Daniel, when he was shut up in the lions’ den. In the midst of wild beasts that were hungry, and yet spared him, the man of God was fed<sup>12</sup>. Thus Elijah in his flight was nourished by ravens serving him in his solitude” (1 Kings 17:1-6).

Also using the words of the Lord’s Prayer, Leo the Great, Pope of Rome, encouraged<sup>13</sup> his people to enter into the life of the Church, which included the fasts on Wednesday and Friday, and the vigil at Great Vespers on Saturday. Part of the life of the Church includes almsgiving with cheerfulness and showing love for our neighbor in order that death doesn’t come upon us unawares and we end up as the rich fool.

“In the Lord’s Prayer we say, ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven, so also on earth’ (Matthew 6:10). For what else do we ask for in these words but that God may subdue those whom He has not yet subdued; and as in

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<sup>12</sup> Lancelot C. L. Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA 01961, 1990, p. 138. Bel and the Dragon 1:30-39.

<sup>13</sup> Leo the Great, Sermons, XC, 3-4.

heaven He makes the angels servants of His will, so also on earth He may make men? And in seeking this we love God; we love also our neighbor. The love within us has but one Object, since we desire the bond-servant to serve and the Lord to have rule.”

“The habit of well-doing strengthens this state of mind, because the conscience needs to be delighted at good deeds, and do willingly what it rejoices to have done. Thus fasts are kept, alms freely given, justice maintained, frequent prayer resorted to, and the desires of individuals become the common wish of all. Labor fosters patience; gentleness extinguishes anger; loving-kindness treads down hatred; unclean desires are slain by holy aspirations; avarice is cast out by liberality; and burdensome wealth becomes the means of virtuous acts. But because the snares of the devil are not at rest even in such a state of things, most rightly at certain seasons of the year the renewal of our vigor is provided for. Now in particular, one who is greedy of present good might boast due to the clemency of the weather and the fertility of the land, and having stored his crops in great barns, might say to his soul, ‘you have much goods, eat and drink’. Let him pay attention to the rebuke of the Divine voice, ‘You fool, this night they require your soul of you, and the things which you have prepared, whose shall they be?’ (Luke 12:19-20) This should be the wise man’s most anxious consideration, in order that, as the days of this life are short and its span uncertain, death may never come upon him unawares, and that knowing himself mortal he may meet his end fully prepared. And so, that this may be available both for the sanctification of our bodies and the renewal of our souls, on Wednesday and Friday let us fast, and on Saturday let us keep vigil with the most blessed Apostle Peter, whose prayers will help us to obtain fulfillment of our holy desires through Christ our Lord.”

John Chrysostom compared<sup>14</sup> this life to a temporary stay in an inn. When staying in an inn or a hotel, we don’t stick around and remodel it; we don’t move all our belongings in; we just stay there briefly and leave. Many people get very involved fighting for the things of this life and neglecting heavenly things. When they are called to depart, they are totally unprepared, because they do not have an accurate judgment of all things.

“Do you not know that the present life is a brief stay in a far country? You are not a citizen, but you are a traveler, where no one has a city; the city is above. Present life is but a journey every day, while nature is running its course. Some store up goods on the way; some bury jewelry on the road. Now when you enter an inn do you remodel the inn? No, you eat, drink and hurry to leave. The present life is an inn; we have entered it, and we bring present life to a close. Let us be eager to leave with a good hope; let us leave nothing here, that we may not lose it there.

When you enter the inn, what do you say to the clerk? ‘Take care where you put our things’, that you do not leave anything behind, that nothing may be lost, not even what is small and trifling, in order that we may carry everything back to our home. The traveler has an advantage over us. The traveler knows when he is going to the inn, and when he is leaving; for the departure as well as

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<sup>14</sup> John Chrysostom, Two Homilies on Eutropius, II, 5-6.

the arrival is in his own power. But when I enter the inn, that is to say, this present life, I don't know when I will depart. It may be that I am busy providing myself with supplies to last for a long time, when the Master suddenly summons me saying, 'You fool, for whom shall those things be which you have prepared? This night your soul is being taken from you' (Luke 12:20 loosely). The time of your departure is uncertain; the tenure of your possessions is insecure; there are many steep cliffs and roaring waves on every side of you. We ought not to desert the reality and run after shadows?"

"I say these things, and shall not cease saying them, causing continual pain, and dressing the wounds; and I say this not for the sake of the fallen, but for those who are still standing. The fallen have departed, and their career has ended, but those who are yet standing have gained a more secure position through the calamities of others. What then shall we do? Do one thing only, hate riches, and love your life; throw away your goods; not all of them, but cut off the excess. Do not be covetous of other men's goods, don't plunder the widow and orphan or seize their house. I do not address myself to persons but to facts. But if anyone's conscience attacks him, he himself is responsible for it, not my words. Why are you grasping where you bring anger upon yourself? Grasp where there is a crown to be gained. Fight to lay hold of heaven not earth! 'The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force' (Matthew 11:12). Why do you lay hold of the poor man who criticizes you? Lay hold of Christ who praises you for it. Do you see your senselessness and madness? Do you foreclose on the poor man who has little? Christ says, 'lay hold of Me; I thank you for it; lay hold of My Kingdom and take it by violence'. If you try to lay hold of an earthly kingdom, you are punished; but in the case of the heavenly kingdom, you are punished if you do not lay hold of it. Where worldly things are concerned there are hard feelings, but where spiritual things are concerned, there is love. Meditate daily on these things, and if two days from now you see another riding in a chariot, arrayed in silk clothing and elated with pride, do not be dismayed and troubled. Do not praise a rich man, but only him who lives in righteousness. Do not revile a poor man, but learn to have an upright and accurate judgment in all things."

**TABLE I**  
**CHARACTERISTICS OF FOOLS VS. THE WISE**

<b><i>THE FOOL</i></b>	<b><i>THE WISE</i></b>	<b><i>REFERENCE</i></b>
<b>Toward God</b>		
Denies existence of God	Seeks God	Psalm 14:1,2; 55:1,2
Speaks error against Lord	Fears Lord	Isaiah 32:6, Proverbs 1:7
Sacrifice of Fools	Guards steps	Ecc. 5:1, 4
<b>On Understanding</b>		
Thinks self wise, but hates knowledge, wisdom	Has wisdom	Pr. 1:22, 14:33, 1:7, 17:16 Rom. 1:22
Right in his own eyes	Listens to counsel	Pr. 10:8, 12:15, 18:2, 26:5, 12, 28:26, Ecc. 10:6
Feeds on folly	Seeks knowledge	Pr. 15:14, 16:22
Walks in darkness	Eyes in head	Ecc. 2:14
<b>Behavior</b>		
Arrogant & careless	Turns from evil	Pr. 14:16, Ecc. 7:7
Rejects father's discipline	Regards reproof	Pr 15:5, 17:21, 25
Even blows won't correct	Rebuke goes deep	Pr. 17:10, 19:29, 26:3, 27:22
Quarrelsome	Avoids strife	Pr. 20:3, 27:3
Sport = wickedness	Sport = wisdom	Pr. 7:22, 10:23, Is. 32:6, 7
Always loses temper	Holds his anger	Pr. 29:11, Ecc. 7:9
Companions suffer harm	Companions wise	Pr. 13:20, Ps. 107:17
<b>Control of Tongue</b>		
Speaks slander, deceit	Restrains lips	Pr. 10:18, Ecc. 10:12, Is. 32:7
Mocks sin	Has goodwill	Pr. 14:9
Perverse, hasty in speech	Feeds many with lips	Pr. 10:21, 17:7, 19:1, 29:20
Spouts folly	Builds bridges	Pr. 15:2, Ecc. 10:13

# *The Cross Can Be Offensive*

November 20, 2016  
22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Revision G

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### **Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18**

Peter wrote to beware of “your adversary the devil, who walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Do we ever wonder why? He’s been judged and outsmarted by the Cross and he knows his time is limited (Revelation 12:12). Is it any wonder then, that Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ”? (Philippians 3:18).

In today’s Epistle lesson, Paul addressed a situation where some Jewish Christians insisted that the Gentiles be circumcised (Galatians 6:12), even though James and the Apostles in Jerusalem had already written to all the Gentile churches that this wasn’t necessary (Acts 15:13-29). Why would they do this? Perhaps due to the strong influence worldwide of the Pharisees in Jerusalem who insisted on it. Paul said that they do this “only that they may not suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). Much of the persecution Paul experienced came at the hands of the Jewish leaders or was instigated by them. Thus these Jewish Christians Paul wrote about chose to offend God rather than men, and just to avoid taking up their cross.

### **Crucified to the World**

Paul stated that he was “crucified to the world and the world to him” (Galatians 6:14). What he means by this is that he has abandoned all benefits of the life in the flesh, and looks forward to his proper life with the saints in heaven. This is not a boast on Paul’s part; it is a simple statement of where he has placed his hope.

Moses had recorded the Lord’s word as, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’, and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself’, and Christ repeated the same thing<sup>15</sup>. The Patriarchs, who lived before Moses, knew this and followed the Lord’s direction without the need of written laws. When Christ came, He clarified what He had said to Moses and the Patriarchs. Throughout His three-year ministry, He repeatedly mentioned that the “Word of the Cross” was a way of life. For example, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

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<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). And again, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27, Mark 8:34). What does this mean?

John Chrysostom considered<sup>16</sup> what were the implications when Paul said, ‘I have been crucified to the world, and the world to me’. Simply put, Paul’s life in the flesh was an altered one, and he was hastening on to another life.

“The word ‘life’ is very significant as is the word ‘death’. There is this life of the body; there is the life of sin (Romans 6:2). On one hand, it is possible to live the life of sin. On the other hand, there is the life everlasting and immortal, ‘for our citizenship is in heaven’ (Philippians in 20). There is also the life of the body of which he speaks, ‘through Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). Paul acknowledges that he lives the natural life, but denies the life of sin, which other men live. He who does not desire the present life, who is hastening to another life, who despises death, and who desires nothing, how does he live this life? For as one made of adamant<sup>17</sup>, though he were struck a thousand blows, would never be bothered by it. It is no longer the old man; as he said, ‘Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death!’ (Romans 7:24) How does he live who does nothing for the sake of food, clothing, or for any of these present things? Such a one does not live the natural life; if he takes no thought for the things, which sustain life, he does not live it. Paul did not live it; he busied himself with none of the things of this life”.

“Paul shows that he accepts the natural life. ‘The life which I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). That is, I live a certain new life, an altered one. Think not that I shall be deprived of this life, for neither while alive did I live this life, but that which Christ willed. For tell me, he who despises money, luxury, hunger, thirst, dangers, health, safety, does he live this life? He who has nothing here, and is oftentimes willing to cast life away, if need be, and does not cling to it, does he live this life? By no means! Consider an example. Let us imagine someone with great wealth, with many servants, and much gold, but who makes no use of all these things. Is such a person rich for all his wealth? No! Let him see his children dissipating his property, strolling idly about; let him feel no concern for them. When beaten let him not even think about the pain. Shall we call him a man of wealth? By no means, even though his wealth is his own. ‘To me to live is Christ’; if you will inquire into my life, it is He. ‘And to die is gain’ (Philippians 1:21). Why? Because I shall more clearly be present with Him; so that my death is rather a coming to life! They who kill me will work on me no dreadful thing, they will only send me onward to my proper life, and free me from that which is not mine”.

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<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians*, III, v. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Adamant was a very hard legendary material, possible associated with diamond.

Chrysostom also compared<sup>18</sup> the Christian life to birds soaring too high to be trapped by fowlers. Birds are easily caught in nets when they fly low, where the devil is a fowler with nets to ensnare Christians in the things of this world.

“Often a wife, children, friend, neighbor have proved a snare to the unheeding! And why, it is asked, are there so many snares? That we may not fly low, but seek the things that are above. For just as birds, as long as they stay in the upper air, are not easily caught; so also you, as long as you look to things above, will not be easily captured, whether by a snare, or by any other device. The devil is a fowler. Soar, then, too high for his arrows. The man who has mounted aloft will no longer admire anything in the affairs of this life. But when we have ascended to the top of the mountains, the city and its walls seem to us to be small, and the men appear to us to be going along upon the earth like ants. So when you have ascended to the heights of spiritual wisdom, nothing upon the earth will be able to fascinate you. Everything, even riches, glory, honor, and whatever else there be of that kind, will appear insignificant when you regard heavenly things. According to Paul all the glories of the present life appeared trifling, and more unprofitable than dead things. Therefore his exclamation, ‘The world is crucified to me’ (Galatians 6:14). Therefore also his admonition, ‘Set your affections on things above’. That is, ‘Where Christ sits at the right hand of God’” (Colossians 3:1).

Chrysostom, referring to the saints and prophets who wandered about and of whom the world was not worthy (Hebrews 11:37-38), compared<sup>19</sup> their situation to that of people in his day. The saints were citizens of heaven but many people of his day were unwilling to be separated from the things on earth.

“The saints and prophets called themselves therefore ‘strangers’; but Paul went beyond this. Not merely did he call himself a stranger to this world, but said that he was dead to the world, and that the world was dead to him. ‘The world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). But we busy ourselves about everything here in this world as active citizens. And what righteous men were to the world, i.e. as ‘strangers’ and ‘dead’ that we are to Heaven. And what they were to Heaven, i.e. as active citizens that we are to the world. Therefore we are dead, because we have refused that which is truly life, and have chosen this, which is transitory. We have provoked God to wrath, because when the enjoyments of Heaven have been set before us, we are not willing to be separated from things on earth. Like worms, we turn about from the earth to the earth. In short, we are not willing to look up even for a little while, nor to withdraw ourselves from human affairs, but as if drowned in sleep and drunkenness, we are stupefied with imaginary things”.

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<sup>18</sup> John Chrysostom, The Homilies on the Statutes, XV, 8.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXIV, 1.

Gregory of Nyssa, speaking of Paul's words, "As many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death" (Romans 6:3), compared<sup>20</sup> our life to that of a corpse. Just as a corpse does not seek the things of this life, so should we be.

"Now if we have been conformed to His death, sin from now on in us is surely a corpse, pierced through by the javelin of Baptism, as that fornicator was thrust through by the zealous Phinehas (Numbers 25:6-8). Flee therefore from us, ill-omened one! It is a corpse you seek to destroy, one long ago joined to you, one who long since lost his senses for pleasures. A corpse is not attracted to beautiful bodies, or captivated by wealth. A corpse does not slander and lie, snatch at what is not its own, or revile those who encounter it. My way of living is regulated for another life. I have learned to despise the things that are in the world, to pass by the things of earth, to hasten to the things of heaven, even as Paul expressly testifies, that the world is crucified to him, and he to the world (Galatians 6:14). These are the words of a soul truly regenerated. These are the utterances of the newly-baptized man, who remembers his own profession, which he made to God when the sacrament was administered to him, promising for the sake of love towards Him that he would despise all torment and all pleasure alike".

Clement of Alexandria stated<sup>21</sup> that death should be a freeing of the soul to a better life with God. Many times, however, death is only a strengthening of the chains that tie a person to the body and judgment.

"'Death' is the result of fellowship of the soul, in a state of sin, with the body; and 'life' the result of separation from sin. Many are the stakes and ditches of lust, which impede us, and the pits of wrath and anger, which must be leaped over. We must avoid many machinations of those who plot against us, who would no longer see the knowledge of God 'through a mirror' (1 Corinthians 13:12). The Scripture views as slaves those 'under sin' and 'sold to sin' (Romans 6:6-20), the lovers of pleasure and of the body. They are beasts rather than men, 'those who have become like cattle and horses, neighing after their neighbors' wives' (Jeremiah 5:8). The licentious is 'the lustful ass', the covetous is the 'savage wolf', and the deceiver is 'a serpent'. The severance, therefore, of the soul from the body, made a life-long study, produces a cheerful readiness in the Christian, so that he is easily able to bear natural death, which is the dissolution of the chains, which bind the soul to the body. 'For the world is crucified to me, and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14), the Apostle says; 'and now I live, though in the flesh, as having my conversation in heaven' (Philippians 3:20).

## **Boasting or Glorifying in the Cross**

Paul also spoke of boasting in the Cross (Galatians 6:14). This can be done simply by displaying the Cross in our homes and altars, by venerating the Cross in Church and by making the sign of the Cross. Chrysostom expressed<sup>22</sup> another aspect:

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Baptism of Christ, A Sermon for the Day of the Lights", in Oratorical Works, V.

<sup>21</sup> Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, IV, 3.

<sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, chapter 6.

“And what is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me, the slave, the enemy, the ungrateful one; He even so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this! Let us then not be ashamed of His unspeakable tenderness; He was not ashamed of being crucified for our sake, and will we be ashamed to confess His infinite solicitude?”

Chrysostom also stated<sup>23</sup> that we have spectators in heaven, and we should be careful not to provoke the Master. Praise and flattery from those at enmity with God is like the taunts of children at play. The only thing worthy of glory is humility.

“It is then a sad thing, and replete with disgrace of every kind, to be in love with glory in civil matters. But when in spiritual things you are in the same plight, what excuse is there for you, when you do not give God even as much honor as you get yourself from your servants? For even the slave ‘looks to the eyes of his master’ (Psalm 123:2), and the hireling to his employer, who is to pay him wages, and the disciple to his master. But you do just the contrary. Having left the God that hired you, you look to your fellow servants; and this knowing that God remembers your well doings even after this life, but man only remembers the present. And when you have spectators assembled in Heaven, you are gathering together spectators upon earth. And where the wrestler struggles, there he wants to be honored; but while your wrestling is above, you are anxious to gain a crown below. And what can be worse than madness like this?”

“But let us look at the crowns also. For one is formed by haughtiness and a second by grudging against another, and a third by flattery, another by wealth, and another by servile obedience. Like children at their childish play put crowns of grass upon one another, and many a time laugh at him that is crowned behind his back. They that pass their praises upon you, many a time joke by themselves at their putting the grass upon us. How many would you have to praise you; ten thousand? These are no better than so many crows cawing from the sky. Taking the assembly of the angels into consideration, these will seem viler than worms and their good word no better than a cobweb”.

“Hear then how Paul, who saw through these things thoroughly, is so far from seeking after them, that he even belittles them, in the words ‘But God forbid that I should glory, except in the cross of Christ’ (Galatians 6:14). This glory let us emulate, that we may not provoke the Master, because in seeking worldly glory we are insulting God, and not our self. For if you were a painter, and had some pupil, and he were to omit showing you his practice of the art, but set forth his painting publicly just to anybody that chanced to observe it, you would not take it quietly. But if this with your fellow servants was an insult, how much more with the Master! Remember to say to your soul as Paul did, ‘Do you not know that we shall judge angels?’ (1 Corinthians 6:3) You that judge the angels, will you let yourself be judged by off scourging, and be praised by dancers, mimics, gladiators and horse-drivers?”

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<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XVII, v. 1.

Chrysostom went on<sup>24</sup> to compare the lust of unbelievers for their passions to the love of a believer for his God. Each seeks a kind of glory, one temporary the other eternal.

“Those who cherish earthly passion, which men call love, think nothing glorious or precious, but concentrate on those things which tend to gratify their lust. Their mistress is everything to them. Much more do those, who have been taken captive by this heavenly love, think nothing of the cost. For if anyone is caught with the fire of Christ’s love, he becomes like a man who dwelt alone on the earth, so utterly does he care less for glory or disgrace. As for trials, he so despises them, both scourges and imprisonments, as though the body in which he suffers these things were another’s and not his own, or as though he had a body made of adamant. As for the sweet things of this life, he so laughs them to scorn, is so insensitive to them, as we are insensitive to dead bodies, being ourselves dead. He is as far from being taken captive by any passion, as the gold refined in the fire and purified is free from alloy. For even as flies would not dart into the midst of a flame, but fly from it, so the passions dare not even to come near this man”.

“Take the Apostle Paul as an example. Observe how he felt towards the whole world. ‘The world is crucified to me and I unto the world’ (Galatians 6:14). ‘I am dead to the world, and the world is dead to me’. And again, ‘It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me’” (Philippians 2:20).

## **Enemies of the Cross**

Paul spoke of people whose allegiance was to Satan and who were “enemies of the Cross of Christ”? (Philippians 3:18). John Chrysostom endeavored to define<sup>25</sup> what Paul meant by “Enemies of the Cross”. By seeking the comforts and pleasures of this world, making a pretense of Christianity and refusing to acknowledge the Cross, people become enemies of the Cross.

“Nothing is so incongruous in a Christian, and foreign to his character, as to seek ease and rest; to be engrossed with the present life is foreign to our profession and enlistment. Your Master was crucified, and do you seek ease? Your Master was pierced with nails, and do you live delicately? Do these things become a noble soldier? Paul said, ‘Many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Philippians 3:18). There were some, who made a pretense of Christianity, yet lived in ease and luxury, and this is contrary to the Cross; therefore he thus spoke. The cross belongs to a soul at its post for the fight, seeking nothing like ease, while their conduct is of the contrary sort. So that even if they say, they are Christ’s, still they are, as it were, enemies of the Cross. If they loved the Cross, they would strive to live the crucified life. Crucify yourself, not that you may slay yourself, God forbid, for that is a wicked thing, but as Paul said, ‘The world has been crucified to me and I to the world’ (Galatians 6:14). If you love your Master, die to the things of this world like He did”.

“Learn how great is the power of the Cross; how many good things it has achieved, and does still; how it is the safety of our life; through it everything is

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<sup>24</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, LII, 25:23.

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians, XIII.

done. Baptism is through the Cross, for we must receive that seal. The laying on of hands is through the Cross. If we are on journeys, if we are at home, wherever we are, the Cross is a great good, the armor of salvation, a shield that cannot be beaten down, a weapon to oppose the devil. You bear the Cross, when you are at enmity with the devil, not simply when you seal yourself by it, but when you suffer the things belonging to the Cross. Christ thought fit to call our sufferings by the name of the Cross. As when he said, 'Except a man take up his cross and follow Me' (Matthew 16:24), i.e. except he be prepared to die".

"But these who are engrossed with the present life, and lovers of their bodies, are enemies of the Cross. And everyone, who is a friend of luxury, and of present safety, is an enemy of that Cross in which Paul makes his boast, which he embraces, with which he desires to be incorporated. As when he said, 'I am crucified to the world, and the world to me' (Galatians 6:14). But here he said, 'I now tell you weeping' (Philippians 3:18). Why? The evil was urgent, and it deserved tears. Truthfully, the luxurious are worthy of tears, who fatten the body, and take no thought of that soul which must give account. Behold you live delicately, behold you are drunken, today and tomorrow, ten years, twenty, thirty, fifty. What is the end? What is the gain? Nothing at all! Does it not then deserve tears, and lamentations, to lead such a life? God has brought us into this course, that He may crown us, and we take our departure without doing any noble action. Therefore Paul weeps, where others laugh, and live in pleasure. So sympathetic is he; he takes thought for all men. 'Whose God is the belly' (Philippians 3:19). For this they have a God! That is, 'let us eat and drink!' (1 Corinthians 15:32, Isaiah 22:13) Do you see, how great an evil luxury is? To some their wealth, and to others their belly is a God. Are not these too idolaters, and worse than the common? And their 'glory is in their shame'" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

To get a better insight into this, it is helpful to understand the reference to the "needle's eye gate" of many ancient cities. The "needle's eye gate" was a small, low door beside the main gate. Such a feature existed on at least one of the gates of Jerusalem and Damascus<sup>26</sup>. A man could fit easily through the "needle's eye gate", but a camel, being a large animal, could not fit easily. If the camel's pack (which could weight up to 1,000 pounds) were removed and the camel were made to kneel, the camel could just barely crawl through the "needle's eye gate."

Jesus stated that it is easier for a camel to go through the needle's eye gate than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. Like the camel, the rich man first needs to unload his pack or burden. The parable of the sower refers to this pack as "the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, the desire for other things" (Mark 4:19) and the pleasures of life (Luke 8:14). These are things that appeal to our flesh and which can lead us away from God. Some of the early disciples, like Barnabas, sold a large amount of property and brought the entire proceeds to the Twelve (Acts 4:34-37). Ananias and Sapphria on the other hand, were caught in the deceit of riches and held back part of the proceeds – and paid dearly (Acts 5:1-10).

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<sup>26</sup> Weiss, Insight into Bible Times and Customs, pp. 24-25.

This does not mean that no Christian can be rich. The Patriarch Job was very wealthy (Job 1:1-3, 42:12-17), yet the Lord referred to him as a blameless and upright man who had no peers in his righteousness (Job 1:8, 2:3). The key here is discerning the deceitfulness of wealth and the strength of its pull on one's heart. Job was able to let his pack be taken off without remorse. "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord" (Job 1:21; also Job 2:9-10). Many Christians throughout the ages have been unable or unwilling to continue fighting this pull and have taken oaths of poverty to thrust a sword (so to speak) into the heart of the demon of wealth.

Chrysostom marveled<sup>27</sup> and was humbled not at the miracles performed by the Apostle Paul, but by the chains and abuse he endured. Here was a man who performed incredible miracles everywhere he went, yet he was chained up like a common criminal, because of the urging of his enemies. Did these "enemies of the Cross", that he dealt with, have any idea who Paul was? When Paul is honored at the Resurrection, and their deeds are reviewed, there may be some embarrassment on their part.

"Oh! Those blessed hands, which that chain adorned! Not so worthy were Paul's hands when they lifted up and raised the lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:10), as when they were bound with those chains (Acts 28:20). Do you marvel at Paul, when the viper fastened on his hand, and did him no harm? (Acts 28:3) Don't marvel; it revered his chain. The whole sea revered it also; for then too was he bound, when he was saved from shipwreck (Acts 27:13-44). Were any one to grant me power to raise the dead at this moment, I would not choose that power, but this chain. If I were free from the cares of the Church, if my body was strong and vigorous, I would not shrink from undertaking so long a journey, only for the sake of beholding those chains, for the sake of seeing the prison where he was bound. The traces indeed of his miracles are numerous in all parts of the world, yet they are not so dear as those of his scars (Galatians 6:17). In the Scriptures, he does not delight me as much when he is working miracles, as when he is suffering evil, being scourged, and dragged about. From his body were carried away handkerchiefs or aprons to use to heal the sick (Acts 19:12). Marvelous, truly marvelous, are these things, and yet not so marvelous as 'When they had laid many stripes upon him, they cast him into prison' (Acts 16:23). And again; being in bonds, 'they were singing hymns to God' (Acts 16:25). And again, 'They stoned him, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead'" (Acts 14:19).

"Do you know how mighty a thing an iron chain is for Christ's sake, bound about His servant's body? Listen to what Christ Himself said, 'Blessed are you' (Matthew 5:11). Why? When you raise the dead? No! When you shall heal the blind? Not at all! 'When men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake' (Matthew 5:11). Now, if being spoken evil of (i.e. only words) renders men blessed, what may being treated as evil (i.e. deeds also) achieve? Listen to what Paul himself said elsewhere, 'Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness' (2 Timothy 4:8). Yet more glorious than this crown is the chain; of this, Paul said,

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<sup>27</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VIII, v. 4:1.

the Lord will count me worthy, and I am not inquisitive about those things. Enough it is for me to suffer evil for Christ's sake. Let Him but grant me to say, that 'I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ' (Colossians 1:24), and I ask nothing further".

John Chrysostom continued to say<sup>28</sup> that we are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them, even if they are enemies of the Cross. But there comes a time, after they have rejected us repeatedly, that their blood is on their own heads.

"Let us be ashamed, who though we have no preaching to occupy us, live in idleness. 'And he disputed in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks'; but 'when they opposed and blasphemed' (Acts 18:4-6), he withdrew, by this expecting to draw them more. Why, having left that house, did he come to live next door to the synagogue? (Acts 18:7) Was it not for this? For it was not that he saw any danger here. But Paul having testified to them — not teaching now, but testifying — 'having shaken his garments', to terrify them not by word only but by action, said to them, 'Your blood be upon your own heads' (Acts 18:6). He spoke more vehemently as having already persuaded many. 'I am clean'. Thus we also are accountable for the blood of those entrusted to us, if we neglect them. 'From this time forth I will go to the Gentiles'. So also when he says, 'Henceforth let no man trouble me' (Galatians 6:17), he says it to terrify. The punishment of Paul's abandoning them did not terrify them, but it did sting them".

Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44-48).

## Offense of the Cross

Paul's preaching of the Cross offended some people, and Paul was persecuted as a result (Galatians 5:11). Chrysostom also spoke<sup>29</sup> on the offense of the Cross. Jews demand a sign in the form of miracles, but the answer is the Cross; Greeks demand eloquent teaching, but the answer is again the Cross. By contraries, God has overcome, and by the things that offend people, He attracts to Himself those who are able to see beyond the first impression.

"Vast is the import of the things here spoken! For he means to say how by contraries God has overcome, and how the Gospel is not of man. What he says is something of this sort. When we say unto the Jews, 'Believe', they answer, 'Raise the dead, heal the demoniacs, show us signs.' But instead what do we say? That He was crucified, and died, who is preached. And this is enough, not

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<sup>28</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXIX, v. 18:4-7.

<sup>29</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, IV, 5.

only to fail in drawing over the unwilling, but even to drive away those who are willing. Nevertheless, it does not drive away, but attracts and holds and overcomes”.

“Again; the Greeks demand of us a rhetorical style, and the acuteness of sophistry. But we preach to these also the Cross: and that which, in the case of the Jews seemed to be weakness, this in the case of the Greeks is foolishness. We not only fail in producing what they demand, but also produce the very opposites of their demand. For the Cross is not a sign sought out by reasoning, but the opposite. It is not a proof of power, but a conviction of weakness; not a display of wisdom, but a suggestion of foolishness. They who seek for signs and wisdom not only don’t receive the things, which they ask, but hear the contrary to what they desire. And then, by means of contraries, they are persuaded; how is not the power of Him that is preached unspeakable? As if to someone tempest-tossed and longing for a haven, you were to show not a haven but another wilder portion of the sea, and so could make him follow with thankfulness? Or as if a physician could attract to himself the man that was wounded and in need of remedies, by promising to cure him not with drugs, but with burning him again! For this is a result of great power indeed. So also the Apostles prevailed, not simply without a sign, but by a thing, which seemed contrary to all the known signs. Which thing also Christ did in the case of the blind man. For when He healed him, He took away the blindness by a thing that increased it: i.e., He put on clay (John 9:6). Just as by means of clay He healed the blind man, so also by means of the Cross He brought the world to Himself. That certainly was adding an offense not taking an offense away. By means of the prophets again with a small piece of wood He raised up iron from the bottom of the river (2 Kings 6:5-7). In like manner also with the Cross He has drawn the world to Himself. You see now, it is proof of great power and wisdom, to convince by means of the things that speak directly against us. Thus the Cross seems to be matter of offense; and yet far from offending, it even attracts”.

## **Conclusion of the Word of the Cross, Part I**

We have considered the first aspect of the Word of the Cross: the lifting up of the Son of Man and several aspects of the effects of the Cross. This was a mystery: announced by the Prophets, announced by Jesus as His reason for becoming incarnate, but yet Satan considered it foolishness. At His crucifixion, all of creation groaned. As a result of His passion:

- Much grain was produced -- the Holy Spirit in us.
- The world was judged along with its ruler (Satan).
- The world was reconciled to Christ.
- The Cross was established as a new standard, clarifying the words in the Mosaic Law regarding loving God and our neighbor.

Jesus may have been humiliated in the eyes of the world, but He suffered no permanent harm and accomplished quite a lot! On the Sunday after the Exaltation, we will see how we are to do the same and how we incur no permanent harm either.

