

Can the rich be saved? (Christos Karadimos)

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Riches and the Teaching of Saint John Chrysostom

According to Saint John Chrysostom, wealth is an 'illusion', a 'fantasy' and concern over it 'will create tension and darkening', leading to the delights which make us soft. Opulence is an 'unfaithful' and 'ungrateful deserter', since it often leaves naked those who have cared so much for it and changes masters. It's a ruthless 'murderer', a 'traitor' a 'tyrant which gives harsh orders', an 'unrelenting enemy', a 'sea tossed by innumerable winds'.

'Rich people are poor', because 'the more wealth they acquire, the poorer they become'. 'In the present life, poverty and riches are no more than masks'. According to Chrysostom, true wealth isn't becoming rich, but not even wanting to. In reality, the rich are never wealthy, because they always need possessions and money. So the rich aren't those who have a lot, but those who don't need much. These are the 'real philosophers'. Real wealth is having no need of wealth. 'Get rid of the desire for opulence and you'll have become rich'.



True wealth is piety and the fear of God, the inexpressible and secret good things to come. He asks: 'Do you want to become rich? Have God as your friend and you'll be richer than anybody else'.

Wealth that's true serves poverty. Those who become rich by collecting goods sow the ground, but those who share their goods cultivate heaven. Those who give generously to meet the needs of the poor will reap in the Kingdom of God. Saint John makes the point that it's not those who have a lot who are rich, but those who give a lot.

Riches are the source of much wickedness: worries, constant cares, distractions, sleepless nights and acts of treachery. Nobody's envied, blamed and hated as much as the rich. Wealth not only fails to make us virtuous but sows passions in

our soul such as unrestrained debauchery, unjustified anger, pride and contempt, foolishness, vanity, and harshness.

Wealth doesn't favour piety, nor honest work, nor virtue and is the greatest impediment to reaching the Kingdom of Heaven, as Christ Himself confirmed.

Nothing's more uncertain than wealth, since it's garnered in human treasures, which many other people envy and would rob, given half a chance. But goods that are shared through charity are placed in God's hands, and so are in no danger. Wealth is perishable and short-lived since it dies with the person concerned, or even before in some cases. And the worst thing is that sometimes it drags its owner down into its own destruction. It's a dangerous enemy that's at home in your house.

If we can take our eyes off the externals and look into the soul of the wealthy, we'll see that they're bound by constraints which are worse and harsher than iron chains... The more they dress well and wear expensive jewellery, the more they're held fast. Their obligations and never-ending needs drive them.

In itself, wealth is neither good nor bad. It can become an instrument of virtue. There are, indeed, virtuous rich people who use their wealth well. But misuse makes wealth bad. 'Opulent people aren't bad, but greed and avarice are'.

'Can the rich be saved? Of course. Job was rich, Abraham was rich. You've seen how rich they were, but not that they were greedy'. God hasn't forbidden riches, but our enslavement to them. The wealthy can be saved, provided that they separate their soul from greedy desires, provided they don't go beyond what's necessary and provided they share their goods with those who are in need.