

## THY GOOD THINGS

In the Year of Our Lord Nineteen-hundred and twenty-two, British archaeologist and Egyptologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun, a pharaoh who ruled Egypt in the fourteenth century before Christ. Inside the tomb were not only the mummified body of the pharaoh, but also over five-thousand artifacts, including statues, a chariot, weapons, food and wine, jewelry, and clothing. The ancient Egyptians did not believe that death is the end of existence, but rather the beginning of a new existence, and they believed that they needed these things in their new lives. This practice of burying grave goods with the deceased was not unique to ancient Egypt; other ancient peoples practiced the same. In modern times, some people do not believe in an afterlife, and so they are not buried with goods. They do in their lives gather many possessions, because they believe that this life is all there is, there is no life after. Christians are different from both these. They do believe in a life after this one. Yet, they do not believe that they need any goods in the next life, or that they are able to take them. They confess with Job, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) Because they believe in an afterlife, they do not live for goods in this world, but for rewards in the next.

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people were in rebellion against the Lord. They lived as though this life is all there is, and that there is no life after this. They sought wealth and comfort with no regard for those who were poor and miserable. Worse than this, they increased their wealth by cheating people. The prophet Amos said to them:

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name: And they lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god. (Amos 2:6–8)

Bad men were, in their pursuit of luxury, willing to ruin good men. Concerning judging righteously, the law states:

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous. Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:6–9)

Concerning justice to the poor, the law states:

If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious. (Exodus 22:26, 27)

In the evil days of Israel, civil authorities, whom the Lord ordained to minister justice, themselves acted unjustly. They took bribes to pervert justice. They lay with prostitutes, and did so on the cloaks they took as pledge from the poor, cloaks that they were at night bound to return to the owner. They consumed wine that they took as fines, and they did so as offerings to their gods. They with evil hearts observed the holy days as God commanded, but they were always eager for those days to end so that they might return to defrauding their neighbors. The prophet said:

Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat? The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. (Amos 8:4–7)

The people lived, not for the next life, but for this one. They had as their god money, and not the Lord. They did not love the Lord their god with all their heart, with all their mind, and with all their strength, and they did not love their neighbors as themselves. They loved only themselves. The Lord called the people to repent, but they would not. So, the Lord would bring judgment upon them. Through Amos the prophet, He said:

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came! Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border? Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed. (Amos 6:1–7)

The Lord would send a wicked, heathen nation to conquer them, and carry them away into exile. The Israelites wished to have wealth and comfort at any cost, but the Lord would strip them of all their possessions, and give them lives of hardship. He said, “And I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.” (Amos 3:15) It happened as the prophet said. In the Second Book of Kings are recorded these words: “In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.” (2 Kings 17:6)

In the days of Jesus’s earthly ministry, there were in Israel, as there at all times in every nation, rich and poor, and some got their riches by cheating others. The Pharisees loved money and honor, fame and fortune. Jesus rebuked them for their lust for money, and for their hypocrisy. He said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.” (Matthew 23:14: Jesus tried to teach them with the Parable of the Guests, the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and the Parable of the Lost Coin. In the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward, He taught His disciples to use their wealth to help the poor and needy. By doing so, they would prove themselves

righteous, and so, when they died, they would enter heaven where those they had helped would gladly receive them.

To the covetous Pharisees, Jesus told another parable, the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. There was a rich man who dressed in fine clothes of the color purple, and who every day feasted on fine food. There was at the same time a man named Lazarus, a beggar, who was covered with sores which dogs licked, and who lay outside the gate of the rich man's estate, desiring to earth the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. When Lazarus died, angels carried him away to Abraham's bosom, where he joined the righteous dead. The rich man also died, and went to Hades. There he was in torment, and could at a distance see Lazarus, and Abraham himself, whom he begged for mercy. He said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." Abraham said to him, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." Then the rich man said, "I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." The rich man appealed to Abraham, saying, "Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Abraham denied his appeal, saying, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:19–31)

In life, the rich man wore expensive clothes and ate expensive food, and, although such living is not wrong in itself, a man who lives this way is a great sinner if he neglects to care for a man in need. In life, Lazarus was poor and wretched, diseased and hungry, but the rich man regularly passed him by, showing him no mercy. When the two died, their fortunes were reversed. Lazarus went to paradise where he was in comfort, and the rich man went to Hades where he was in torment. In life, Lazarus would have been content to eat scraps from the rich man's table, in death, the rich man would have been glad for a few drops of water. The rich man recognized Lazarus, and, even in his humbled condition, had the presumption to call for Lazarus to serve him. Nothing could be done for the rich man, however. His state was fixed. So, resigning himself to his judgment, he asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to testify to the truth, so that they might change their ways, and not receive the same judgment he had received. Abraham told the rich man that his brothers had no need of Lazarus's testimony, because they already had the testimony of the Scriptures. The rich man was insistent, however, thinking that, if someone rose from the dead to testify to his brothers, then they would surely believe. Abraham knew better, however. The Scriptures are the word of God; they are His testimony, and, if a man will not believe God's own testimony, then he will not believe the testimony even of someone risen from the dead. The rich man believed that his sinful ways, and the sinful ways of his brothers, were a matter of simple ignorance, but they were not; they were a matter of sinful unbelief. Jesus had in mind, of course, the Pharisees, but not only them. He had in mind all the ruling class of Israel, ecclesiastical and civil. On another occasion, Jesus said, "Behold, they which are gorgeously appavelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts." (Luke 7:25) His parable applied equally to the King Herod, and to the Herodians, those who supported the king. Later, when Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, sent Jesus to Herod for examination, Herod was glad to receive Jesus, because he had heard stories of Him, and he hoped to see Jesus perform some miracle. Jesus did no miracle, however, and said nothing, knowing that Herod would never believe.

When the devil tempted Jesus, he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world on condition that Jesus worship him. Jesus answered him, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Luke 4:8) Jesus later taught His disciples:

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? (Luke 9:22–25)

The rulers of Israel loved this world. They loved riches, and they would not part with them. They loved neither God nor man, and they enriched themselves at the expense of the people. They were selfish and hard of heart, and would not repent and believe in Jesus. They would give up nothing to follow Him. So, having had their good things in this life, they would receive bad things in the next. Living richly in this life, they would live miserably in the next. They gained the whole world, yet forfeited their souls.

Saint Paul wrote to Saint Timothy to warn him of the “perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness.” Saint Paul advised, “From such withdraw thyself.” (1 Timothy 6:5) Some men regard the Christian faith as a means to wealth. They see ministry as something to be marketed, and the church as a marketplace. Saint Paul counsels the Christian to shun such wicked people. He explains:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:–10)

No one ought to think of godliness as a means to wealth. Yet, the Christian religion is a means of gain in this sense, that a man is content with whatever God is pleased to give him. The Christian understands, as Job did, that he brings nothing into this world, and he takes nothing out. He is content with food and clothing, the necessities of life. So Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:–13)

The man that above all seeks riches, however, will fall into temptation and a trap; he will give in to many foolish and harmful desires, the kinds of desires that bring a man to ruin. Money is not the root of all evil, but the love of money surely is. Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and Mammon.” (Luke 16:13) Those who desire riches wander away from the Christian faith, and cause themselves much sorrow, and in the end bring upon themselves the righteous judgment of God.

Saint Paul told Timothy what he ought to seek after:

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the

sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: (1 Timothy 6:–14)

Timothy must flee the desire for earthly riches, and rather seek after heavenly virtues. Life is a struggle, a struggle against poverty, yes, but more, importantly, a struggle against sin. The Christian must fight against all temptation, including the temptation of riches. Jesus, when He was before Pontius Pilate, confessed that He is the Christ, the ruler of this world. (Luke 23:3; John 18:36) The baptized Christian has confessed the same, and so he is, until Christ returns, bound to fight the good fight of faith. (compare 1 Timothy 1:18) He is bound to have “charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. (1 Timothy 1:5)

Saint Paul told Saint Timothy what he should say to Christians with earthly wealth:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:17–19)

The Christian who has wealth ought not to think of himself as better than those who do not. He ought not to trust in his riches, which are uncertain, but rather trust in the Lord who prospers. He ought to do good with his wealth, to do an abundance of good works, to be generous and always ready to share with those that have need. If he is this way with his wealth, then he has faith in God and in His Son, Jesus; He trusts in God and not in himself, or in his riches. He has heard the words of Jesus and put them into practice. So he will have a solid foundation for his spiritual house. He will have treasure in heaven, which is eternal life.

Let us love God with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves. Let us lay up for ourselves treasure, not on earth, but in heaven. Let us freely give to those in need.

Now unto the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.