

Exegesis paper: what
does luke teach
about money and
wealth?



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Introduction

In the gospel of Luke, we can see that Luke put a lot of emphasis in talking about the money, wealthy people and the marginalized people a lot. Some of his teachings strongly emphasize love and care for the poor, the weak and the disabled who are ignored by family, friends and society. In Luke's view, "the poor" does not only refer to economic status. This term describes a group of oppressed people, including imprisoned, blind, hungry, crying, hateful, persecuted, a person who is rejected, disabled or even killed. In this exegesis paper, I will address couple questions. What are the main stories about money and wealth in the gospel of Luke? What is the theological/pastoral point of each story? How does Luke's teaching about money and wealth related to my church? Are my church members aware of what God's word says on the topic of money and wealth? Are my church members living in the light of the teachings? In what areas might these teachings be a special encouragement or offer needed correction for my church?

What does Luke teach about money and wealth?

Luke echoes and expands upon Mark and Matthew's belief in the dangers of wealth (Lk 8: 14, 14: 18-19, 19: 20-23), but it is only in Luke, in the first woe of the Sermon on the Plain, saying that the rich are threatened with punishment simply for being rich. " But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."(6: 24) The Greek word for " woe," *ouai*, does not denote a mere misfortune, but a deep and inconsolable misery."[1]And the Greek word for consolation is *paraklēsis*; it means cheer

that comes from a prosperous state of things. Thus, Luke is saying that rich people find comfort in the money instead of longing for the comfort from Messianic salvation. In the Sermon of the Plain, Luke also mentioned the poor. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (6: 20). This is not a promise of future rewards, but a statement of reality. The poor have no wealth to block the path of loving God. Those blessed are not “poor in spirit” in Matthew 5: 3. Poor in spirit refers to spiritual humility. Here, blessed are the poor in Luke 6: 20 refers to those who give everything and being poor for Christ’s sake.

This daunting assertion in Luke 6: 24 is resumed in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. At first, the rich man is told that he received eternal torment because he had already enjoyed his share of good things in his own life (Lk 16: 19-26). It is only the second half of the parable (Lk 16: 27-31) that the man’s fate is further specified to be the consequence of neglecting the Scripture, which Lazarus neglected the command to care for the poor. Thus, Luke’s damnation of the rich is reframed in terms of a punishment for the neglect of God’s law.

Luke teaches us here that a person who is wealthy tend to only focused on herself/himself and use the money for enjoyment in the world and live a comfortable life. Having good things in our lives is not sinful, but if the good things draw our attention away from God and we become disobedience to the second commandment, then the good things in our lives could create a harmful destiny. In the book “A Theology of Luke and Acts”, Darrell confirmed my view that the rich man’s self-focus reflects his lack of faith and his spiritual insensitivity toward God to whom he is responsible. Such self-

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focus produces a lack of concern for one's neighbour, which God condemns.

[2]Thus, Luke teaches us that wealth could create a temptation of being disobedience to God.

Besides, Luke teaches us that wealth is an obstacle to salvation. When Jesus told the rich ruler to sell all his possession and gave it to the poor, the rich ruler was distress. Jesus even use hyperbole, " For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Lk 18: 25), to satirize the difficulty for a wealthy person to enter God's kingdom. (Lk 18: 18-30) The rich ruler was facing a huge obstacle since he is really rich, thus, it is harder for him to give up the comfort and social status that he have already had and follow Christ. Another example is in Luke 22: 3-6, Judas betrayed Jesus in order for getting more money. Judas was one of the disciples and he had a precious opportunity to closely witness Jesus' ministry, but still, he stumbled by the money even he saw all the signs and wonders that Jesus performed and listened to all those teaching from Jesus.

Luke teaches us that Jesus is pleased with those who are generous and faithful givers, as they love God more than the money. In the story of the widow's offering, " Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins." (21: 1-2) According to the commentary, " In Israel, widows were not simply women whose husbands were deceased, but women who were thereby made vulnerable, and made to seek their protection and comfort in God." [3]Also, " it was not lawful to offer less than two lepta, which referred to the smallest coinage in circulation." [4]Hence, the widow's gift was the smallest offering ever made by anyone. However, Jesus said " she put in more than all the others" (21: <https://assignbuster.com/exegesis-paper-what-does-luke-teach-about-money-and-wealth/>)

3). The value of a gift is not the amount given, but the cost to the giver.

Other gave what they could spare, but the widow spares nothing. The teaching of this story actually echo the verses in other part of the book of Luke; “ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Lk 12: 34) and “ one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Lk 12: 21). Thus, God is pleased when we offer our tithe faithfully and generously.

Luke teaches us that we should use our money and wealth wisely for the sake of God’s kingdom without expecting in return. Luke provided some examples for those who invested in the work of Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna were named together with twelve disciples because they had financial support for the work of Jesus. These women “ provided for them out of their means” (Luke 8: 3). In Luke 10: 33-35, Jesus used the parable of Good Samaritan as a good example to teach us the God honouring way of using our money. When a man was being robbed and beaten, a Samaritan not only had compassion on him and bound up his wounds, he also took out two denarii and paid for the inn so that the man could have a place to stay. Such action honour God as the Samaritan showed mercy to his neighbour without expecting any return. We should give to those who are in need or those who are incapable of reciprocation and not expecting any return. Luke teaches us that giving our money to the needy one is actually putting our treasure in heaven. “ Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys” (Lk 12: 33).

Luke teaches us that God will provide for His workers as we serve Him.

When Jesus sent out the seventy-two evangelists, he told them not to carry any moneybag and depend on the generosity of the people among whom they serve. Jesus said “ eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages” (Lk 10: 7). “ And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.” (Lk 12: 29-31).

Luke teaches us that we cannot love both God and money at the same time. (Lk 16: 1-13)

The attitude reflected here is similar to 1 Timothy 6: 10. Paul said that the love of money is the source of all evil. In the Jewish tradition, wealth or money itself is not evil. But Luke’s view of money is that money can trigger evil, because money can create distorted values in people’s minds. In addition, the pursuit of money allows people to think selfishly, making them use others, treating others as objects, and being unfaithful to God. It often reflects excessive attachment to the world, so it is best not to pursue wealth. Also, in Lukan presentation, neither can one remain neutral in one’s relationship to both money and God. Luke clearly mentioned, “ no servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Lk 16: 13). Luke teaches us to avoid dishonest gain and be contented with what we have received. In Luke 3: 12, John the Baptist told the tax collectors to collect no more than they are authorized to do. He also told the soldiers not to extort

money from anyone by threat or false accusation and be content with their wages.

Luke teaches us that earthly wealth and possessions are a responsibility. If a person is faithful to his money, then he can trust more things (16: 10-12). “True riches”(16: 11) seems to refer to the spiritual wealth of the kingdom that the disciples will share. The way people use this money is actually a test of character, values and management. Those who are loyal to the little thing are also very loyal. Therefore, dishonesty on small things is dishonest. Loyalty to the little things of money shows how loyal we are to the great things, the true richness of our relationship with God and others. Therefore, if we are not trustworthy in dealing with our possession that produces unrighteousness, no one will trust us with true riches. The real riches in this passage are the service of the future kingdom. True wealth is faithfulness in serving God.

Moreover, in Luke 16: 1-9, when the rich man heard what the manager was doing, he praised the dishonest manager because he was very smart. The dishonest manager did not do good. But he has been carefully planning ahead, using material things to ensure a safe future. Jesus did not teach his disciples that they should be dishonest. He taught them that they should use material things to gain the spiritual benefits of the future. This is a bad example and this is a good lesson. Another example that Luke was using for the same pastoral point is the parable of the ten minas. A nobleman called his servants and gave them the ten minas and commanded them to engage in business. Some servants are faithful and the master entrusted them more.

While there was a servant who did not do anything, the master rebuked him
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and took away what he had and gave it to other faithful servant. Here, Luke is teaching us to be responsible for what God has entrusted us including wealth. Handling wealth is a preparation lesson for other responsibilities before God.

Luke teaches us that the kingdom of God should completely overshadow the concerns of this world. (Lk 9: 24-25, 17: 26-33) Luke is more convinced than other Gospel writers that end-of-life punishments and rewards depend on one's use of money (Lk 12: 13-31, 16: 1-9). Luke firmly believes that God will reward the poor and punish those who are unrighteous rich. He adopts the Jewish theme of "reversing wealth"[5], claiming that God will eventually exalt and reward the poor while degrading and punishing the rich (Lk 1: 50-53, 6: 20-26, 14: 7-24, 16: 19-31). Although the other Synoptic could justifiably be characterized as hostile to wealth, only Luke is antagonistic toward the rich as he said woe to the rich.

Luke offers the hope of eschatological reward for the rich, as long as they no longer focus on secular concerns (Lk 12: 22-23, 14: 18-20, 16: 13, 17: 26-33). Luke emphasizes that following Christ and caring for the poor require completely surrender of our possession: "Nobody is able to be my disciple who does not renounce all of his possessions"(Lk 14: 33). Lukan redaction is characterized by heightening the element of abandonment of our possessions. For example, Simon and Andrew leave behind not just their nets (Mt 4: 20, Mk 1: 18), but everything (Lk 5: 11) to follow Jesus. The rich ruler is told to sell everything, whatever you have and to give it to the poor (Lk 18: 22).

Relevance to my own church

In my church, most people are young adults and they have recently graduated from UC Berkeley. When they start working and earning money, they feel obligated and pressured to give ten percent of their salary as the offering to God. People are having the hard time to give generously because they think they may not have enough for survival or they want to spend that money for personal enjoyment instead. I think people are aware of the message of offering, but the worldly temptation and selfish desires are strong. It is important to remind them Jesus' teaching that we cannot serve both money and God at the same time. If we allow money to take over our heart, we are putting our trust and dependence on money instead of God Himself. In the worse case, we could lose our salvation. Jesus use hyperbole to satirize the difficulty for a wealthy person to enter God's kingdom. "For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Lk 18: 25).

Also, few people in my church misunderstand what Jesus said about selling all their possession and give to the needy if they want to follow Jesus. Some people think this message is only applied to the disciples. Some people take this message literally and think that they have to sell all the possession in order to please God. However, the meaning of this passage is saying that we should not to let the money and wealth to be our idol or the first priority of our life. Selling all our possession is having a mindset of putting God above all things, thus, we would be willing to give our money out to the poor or use it for expanding God's kingdom.

Even though some people may not fully willing to give generously, we should continue to encourage the church member to live in the light of Jesus' teaching and be obedience. We should also use the parable of rich man and Lazarus as a warning sign to those who love money. If we only use the money for our own enjoyment and fail to love and care our neighbours, we would possibly suffer from negative eternal consequences in the future.

Conclusion

In summary, all the materials from the Scripture are pointing out that money and wealth is not a sign of God's favour and it could potentially be a stumble block for many people. Luke clearly mentioned in the parable of rich man and Lazarus that we would suffer from negative eternal consequences if we only use the money for our own enjoyment and fail to love and care our neighbours. Even though we are saved by the grace of God, wealth could be an obstacle for us to receive salvation, as money could cause us to become independent from God. Jesus clearly said to the disciple that we cannot serve both money and God at the same time as money would take over our heart and we would despise God. Moreover, Jesus said to the disciples that they needed to renounce all of their possessions if they would like to follow Jesus. Therefore, Luke had a very strong standpoint that he stood against the rich as he said woe to the rich. Also, he warned us to be aware of the danger of money and wealth and recommended us to use it for the sake of God's kingdom.

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[1]James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015), 176.

[2]Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012), 352-357.

[3]Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 468.

[4]Ibid. 468.

[5]Green, Joel B., Prof. Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the*

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