

# TRUE RICHES: THE POOR WOMAN AND THE RICH WOMAN

WEEK 7  
04.15.18

## FOCUS VERSE

### Luke 12:15

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

## LESSON TEXT

### II Kings 4:1-17

1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

2 And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

3 Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few.

4 And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

5 So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her; and she poured out.

6 And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed.

7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

8 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

9 And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

10 Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

11 And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

12 And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

13 And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

14 And he said, What then is to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

15 And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

17 And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

The true wealth of peace, joy, security, and hope is found in our relationship with God.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## Assessing Assets

**W**hat makes Susan Klatten, Christy Walton, Charlotte Weber, and Lillian Bettencourt different from most women? Billions of things called dollars. The average net worth of the billions of women in this world may be only a few dollars. If they thought about it, many women might envy the rare few who have achieved the remarkable title of billionaire.

Out of the billions of women in this world, however, some have an even greater worth—mansions and streets of gold for their retirement plan. While this investment will not show up on a ledger or in anyone's financial portfolio, a life lived to the glory of God is much more valuable than any earthly assets. While gender inequality in pay continues to

be discussed and perhaps may be an issue never fully resolved on earth, God rewards all His children regardless of race, gender, social class, or net worth.

While in this life on earth, a believer is much richer as well. Money cannot buy the peace, joy, and hope God gives. While North Americans have more gadgets and luxuries today than ever before, they also take more medication for emotional disorders and seek counseling for more social and inferiority issues than did previous generations. God's people who live in His presence enjoy a life without limit and the riches of love for others. Money cannot buy the happiness of knowing the Lord, and no economic downturn can take that away.

## OUTLINE

### I. TWO NAMELESS, BUT REAL, WOMEN

- A. The Poor Woman
- B. The Rich Woman

### II. THEIR CONNECTION TO ELISHA

- A. The Poor Woman's Husband Was among the Sons of the Prophets
- B. The Rich Woman Became Acquainted with Elisha

### III. THE TWO MIRACLES

- A. Miracle of the Oil
- B. Miracle of a Son

### IV. THE SOURCE OF TRUE RICHES

- A. People of Spiritual Influence
- B. God's Provision

## CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

It was not the best of times; it was not the worst of times. Joram, son of Ahab, was reigning over Israel. He continued in the sins of Jeroboam by worshiping golden calves and not honoring the Lord. If the people wanted a good and godly country, they would not have it by looking to their governmental leaders.

Things have not changed so much in that respect.

A "Bible school" appears to have been alive and well even in the midst of a godless administration. The school of prophets, apparently started by Elijah, seems to have continued under the leadership of Elisha. Men and women of God were learning and sharing the goodness of the Lord. In this community of those who loved the things of God contrasted against the backdrop of wickedness in high places, one could observe powerful miracles and see the hand of God in an undeniable way.

The power of the Holy One is not limited by cultural, political, or economic times. In the best of times and worst of times, God still will show Himself powerful to those who believe. An individual's financial assets are no indication of morality or faith. Neither do personal limitations put restraints on God's ability to work. God's people must be careful not to become caught up in the times in which they live and get distracted from the glory of the eternal God.

Two homes in Israel, and in particular, two women, show us the radiance of the Lord no

matter how dim or bright one's personal situation in life. Too many things in our world today are focused on money—it seems at times that everything is about money. A person could easily develop a personal view of self-worth based on net worth. Nothing could be further from the truth. These two women (unnamed in the biblical text) show us that eternal things are untouched by present financial matters. One woman had nothing; yet, through her, God revealed His abundance. Another woman seemed to have everything, yet God revealed what she lacked. As the Lord himself taught, these two women teach us that life does not consist in the ownership of things (Luke 12:15).

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Imagine two brothers in the church who are birth brothers. The older one had the management of the family business so that when their father passed away, the finances and assets were totally in the older brother's control. The younger brother should have gotten at least half the money after all funeral expenses and court costs were paid. However, the older brother realized he had total control of their father's assets through the business and so directed the funds toward himself alone and gave his brother none of the money.

While grieved that they had lost their father, the younger son was also perplexed now that he would not be receiving what he thought should have been rightfully his share. So he went to the pastor of the church both men attended and approached him about this frustration. Imagine his pastor turning to him and saying, "Man, who appointed me to divvy out your father's wealth? I'm not your judge or your lawyer. Watch yourself, brother," the pastor continued, "and hold yourself back from covetousness! A person's life is not in the abundance of the things he owns."

That younger brother might be quite upset at his pastor for not stepping in to help him in this situation. However, this is quite the same scenario that happened with Jesus and one of the people of God. (See Luke 12:13–15). While much is unknown about the particulars of this man's situation, Jesus clearly stated that money and things are not a measure of

personal worth. In fact, He went on to tell of a man who had high net worth—so many assets he did not know what to do with them. Sadly, this man had nothing of value after all.

The man in Jesus' story was what we would call a success—he was living the "American Dream." His fields produced so well, he ran out of room to store the harvest. He decided to tear down his barns and build more room for storage so he would have security to last many years. However, the Lord pointed out that what we call security is often a symptom of insecurity. Rather than taking rest, eating, drinking and being glad about our temporal advances, we need to take stock in something much greater. The man had satisfied his fears by preparing for the future—a future he soon discovered was not to be his after all. That night his life ended and all he had worked for was lost (See Luke 12:16–20). What good are earthly treasures when most of us will spend less than a century on this earth?

Rather than pursuing self-serving treasures, the child of God must see the importance of selfless treasures—those that are invested in eternal things. Modern people would look at the wealthy man and say, "He's wise with money." God looked at him and said, "Thou fool!" Even Robert Ingersoll, a noted atheist, said, "Few rich men own their own property. Their property owns them." Jesus explained that individuals who live like this are fools for not being rich toward God (Luke 12:21). One must take stock of life to see that eternal investments outweigh the earthly ones.

### I. TWO NAMELESS, BUT REAL, WOMEN

These two women help the reader understand what is truly valuable. While the Bible does not record their names, their stories fit in every society throughout history.



**A humble country fellow watched as a neighboring piece of property became home to a wealthy man. The lavish home was built over several months until finally the day came when the wealthy family moved in. The country fellow watched as truckload after truckload arrived with the**



**most exquisite furniture, appliances, technology, and decorations.**

**When he went over to be neighborly and welcome the new family to the neighborhood, he was invited for a tour of the home. When the jaw-dropping tour had ended, the country man fumbled as to what to say. Finally, he managed to say something neighborly enough: “Well, if you all find yourselves to be needing anything, don’t hesitate to come talk to me . . . and I will show you how to get along without it.**

Within the kingdom of God, there are those who have much and those who may presently have little in earthly goods.

### **A. The Poor Woman**

This woman in II Kings 4 did not just lack earthly goods; she was in debt! Her husband has passed away, leaving her with unpaid debts and no income. While a husband and father should take more care to provide for his family even in his death, sometimes life hands down an overwhelming situation. This woman risked the loss of her two sons if she could not come up with the money. They would be taken away to work off the debt of their father.

She had something valuable, however—her faith in God. Rather than surrender to the blunt edge of the economics of her time, she turned to a power greater than wealth. She knew the true source that meets every need came from above. Although she did not know how her needs would be met, she knew she should take her troubles to the Lord.

### **B. The Rich Woman**

Another woman in II Kings 4 came from a different stratum in life. Her husband was a good provider. She dwelt safely and had all her needs met. Instead of looking for more in life, she had learned the lesson the rich man in Jesus’ parable had not: she invested in things beyond this life. Using her financial means (and the willingness of her hardworking husband), she prioritized the things of God.

Some people can have prosperity and not let it distract them from serving the Lord. Such

people have mastered the art of contentment. Individuals who seem to demand more, while complaining of flaws or deficiencies in the luxuries and privileges they already have, live sad lives indeed. Godliness with contentment is the richest life (I Timothy 6:6–8).

## **II. THEIR CONNECTION TO ELISHA**

Elisha was a key person in many stories of II Kings. Carrying the anointing of Elijah and doing the work of ministry, Elisha helped link people to the power of the Lord. In both stories of God’s miracle provision, neither the women nor their husbands are named. The only named character in these two narratives is Elisha. Those who have faith in God and work with Him are significant and memorable. A child of God should be a catalyst to help others get what they need from the Lord.

### **A. The Poor Woman’s Husband Was among the Sons of the Prophets**

The poor woman in Israel knew Elisha because her late husband had been a preacher, so to speak. As one of the prophets, he would have been a student of Elisha. Perhaps Elisha knew not only this prophet but his wife and children quite well. As mentor or leader to the woman’s husband, he probably felt some sense of responsibility for the family. Traveling as he did, he most likely did not have many resources of his own to pay her bills. But that would not keep him from taking care of a widow. True religion cares for the fatherless and widows.

When she approached the man of God, she referred to her husband as servant to Elisha. Just as Elisha had poured water on the hands of Elijah, this man had served God’s man too. She reminded Elisha that the deceased was loyal to the Lord and honored Him with his life. Likely this was an untimely death, for the man surely would not have wanted to leave his wife with a burden of debt. The crisis of the moment was the woman’s fear of losing her two sons to the creditors. It would destroy this woman to lose her husband and sons within a short time of each other.

Clearly the man of God did not have financial means to help her for he asked, “What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house?” (II Kings 4:2). Similar to Peter’s

“Silver and gold have I none,” Elijah followed his statement with hope for what God would do. Peter’s “such as I have give I thee” echoes in a small way Elisha’s “What hast thou in the house?” Such as she had, God was going to use.

Unfortunately, she did not have much available. “I do not have anything in the house,” she said, “except for a pot of oil.” God works even with little. Just a boy’s lunch fed thousands of people.

Elisha told her to go gather as many empty vessels from her neighbors as possible. “Don’t borrow just a few,” he said. Faith does not limit God’s working but gives Him ample room to work. The more emptiness, the more God can fill. Once she had filled her house with empty vessels, she was to close the door and watch God go to work.

## **B. The Rich Woman Became Acquainted with Elisha**

A rich woman who lived in Shunem noticed that Elisha frequently passed by that way. One day as he traveled through the area, she invited him to eat with her and her husband. Apparently, after they had eaten, the couple invited Elisha to stop at their home for a meal whenever he came through town. After that first meal, Elisha stopped to eat with them frequently.

Eventually, the thought came to the woman that it would be nice to provide Elisha a place to stay as well, so he could have a rest stop. She asked her husband to make him a room on the wall with a bed, a desk, and a chair. They furnished it with a bed, a table, a stool and a candlestick.

In a time when Joram, the godless descendant of Omri, led the country in worshiping false gods, this family had staked a claim for the one true God and His servant. Elisha made good use of the room, and that home became a frequent stopping point. One day, his musings led him to ask what might be done for the woman. When asked, she said, “I dwell in safety with my own people,” as if to say, “I have need of nothing. I have everything I could want.” What a contrast to the poor woman who was in desperate need for her family. Yet, even in this home there was room for God to work a miracle.

## **III. THE TWO MIRACLES**

Only one treasure—besides God—is necessary for a miracle: faith. God does not do impossible things only for those with money. Since God does not need our money or material goods, He is not impressed no matter how much or how little we have. God works miracles because it is His nature to do so.

### **A. Miracle of the Oil**

The indebted widow did not have much left of value, but God was able to use the little she did have to do a lot. Following the prophet’s instructions, she collected all sorts and sizes of empty containers from her neighbors. Then she and her sons shut the door and went to work.

God multiplied the oil she had as she poured it out in faith. Once it started pouring, the flow of oil would not stop. The Hebrew grammar indicates this was like a constant fountain of oil flowing from that little container much like the water from Horeb. Her sons grabbed vessel after vessel to catch the spurting product. Soon every container was brimming with the miracle oil. The oil stopped flowing when she stopped pouring.

Running to the man of God, she told him how God had abundantly supplied. He instructed her to go sell this Grade A, cold-pressed, extra-virgin olive oil for top money. This would give her more than enough to pay off her husband’s debts and to amply provide for her and the children.

God wants to pour into believers’ lives today. His blessings will be in accordance to our faith. His provision will exceed our needs.

### **B. Miracle of a Son**

The rich woman was not in need—at least so it seemed. She had all a woman could want: a strong man who provided for her, a nice home, a safe city, and a peaceful life among her kinfolk. However, the prophet probed until he found that even this well-to-do woman was in need. She had no son and her husband was old.

The prophet spoke hope into her life, “You will have a son about this time next year.”

The Shunamite was not ready to hear that. “No, sir, man of God! Do not deceive me!” (See II Kings 4:16.)

However, God's promise did come true. She conceived and bore a son just as promised. God provides not only necessities but also needs on a different level. Strong friendships, wisdom, and many other things are within the realm of what God likes to do for His people. He even likes giving us our wants—especially for those who serve Him with no ulterior motive.

While a child might not be considered a need in some contexts, children are truly riches from God.



**Many years ago, missionaries in China faced being deported from the country during the war. Soldiers told them they could take only two hundred pounds with them on their way out of the country. Parents and children argued about what they would take. Many valuable items had to be left behind because they were too heavy. Finally, after many heated discussions, the family agreed on which of this world's goods they would take with them.**

**The day came to be deported, and the soldiers examined their belongings to see if they had complied by packing only two hundred pounds. Then the military men looked at the missionaries and asked, "The children, how much do they weigh?" When choosing between stuff and family members, the balances tipped drastically. Belonging to family is a wealth far greater than any replaceable belongings.**

#### IV. THE SOURCE OF TRUE RICHES

While it is beneficial to look at how one's life parallels the experiences of either or both of these women in Israel, one should also seek to find oneself in the role of Elisha. Elisha both received care from the well-to-do woman when he was in need and administered care when the widow was in need. Paul said, "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" (Philippians 4:12). Of course none of us want to suffer,

but we must be ready to live as did the great apostle, learning to be content in whatever state we find ourselves.

#### A. People of Spiritual Influence

Elisha was a positive—even a transformational—influence on others spiritually. All of God's children are called to be positive influences in some way. To those who have stumbled, we should reach out in love with hearts of restoration. To those who are grieving, we should be the shoulder upon which they can weep. To those facing challenges, we should be the prayer support they need. Those who are ill should have those they can call upon who will anoint them with oil and pray the prayer of faith.

Members of the body of Christ minister to one another physically as well as spiritually. The Book of Acts church manifested the Spirit not only in speaking with tongues but also in giving to one another. Sharing and caring should characterize the family of faith. The church can provide the encouragement and strength needed for elderly folks who cannot make repairs or meet their own needs as they used to. While children are directly responsible for their aging parents, the church can take up this responsibility for those who have no one. Single mothers and widows also should find the church to be a place that offsets the imbalances caused by their precarious situation.

While looking at the people and events surrounding these two stories, it is also important to notice the larger picture. The widow's miracle came because she was connected with someone who walked with God. The well-to-do woman's need was met because she was connected with someone who walked with God. The prophet's needs were met because he was connected with someone who loved the Lord and put Him first. Relationships are a greater wealth than money. Knowing the right people and having right relationships with the people you know is worth far more than any bank can hold.

As Elisha ministered to the two women, people of God can minister to those in need, both spiritually and materially. Life is made up of relationships with God and people, not things. Those with family and friends are the wealthiest of all people.

If the greatest wealth is relationships, then the greatest poverty is a lack thereof. First a person needs a relationship—a living interaction—with the Lord. Second, one must develop meaningful relationships with those people who can best influence them for righteousness. Third, saints of God must reach out toward those whom they can influence in matters of the faith.

## B. God's Provision

The people of God do not only balance their ledger sheets from a materialistic perspective, but they also learn the value of true riches. A relationship with the Lord is necessary to obtain true riches. More than getting out of debt or having family, we must put Jesus first. He is the answer to the brokenness and the emptiness that plagues a hopeless world.

There can be no relationship without revelation. To say an individual has a relationship with someone is to say the individual knows things about the other person that others may not know. Fans do not have a relationship with celebrities; what they know is public knowledge. A wife has a relationship with her husband that others do not have. When it comes to having a relationship with Lord, we must know Him deeply.

A deep relationship with the Lord comes as He reveals Himself through the study of Scripture. He opens our eyes during times of prayer in the Spirit. To be truly wealthy, we must have a wealth of intimacy with the Lord. Prayer, fasting, and giving are avenues of self-abasement. If we want treasures in Heaven, we must give ourselves wholly to the Lord and also give of ourselves to others.

Often, God gives to others through those who are rich in relationship with Him. The core of Jesus' discipleship training was the concept of generosity—giving away what you have. One cannot claim to be in right relationship with the Lord and not willingly give to Him by way of His church and to others who are in need.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Poverty cannot take away true riches. Economic collapses do not affect true riches. True wealth cannot be destroyed by rust or by

moths. Thieves cannot take away what really matters. Many Christians swear allegiance to those sentiments but live quite the opposite. Their hopes and emotions are tied up in their retirement accounts or the condition of their many possessions.

Jesus condemned the man who hoarded his treasures while not giving to others or helping those in need. All the sinful man did was pile up wealth for himself to create a sense of security. An accountant might approve of how well he kept his books. The ironic part of the story was that when the Lord came to call his soul, all his "wise" preparation became useless.

Can the rich be saved? Jesus pointed out that it is difficult for the wealthy to make it into the kingdom, but not impossible (Mark 10:17–27). The key ingredient is that a rich person learn contentment—just as the poor must (1 Timothy 6:6–11). Contentment is what both the poor and the rich must learn, for it is the character of God.



**Leo Tolstoy told of a man who hurriedly agreed to a deal to pay one price to own as much land as he could cover in one day. The man agreed to the landowner's deal and took off in quick strides. Soon he realized that if he ran the whole way, he could get more land than if he just walked. Then he figured if he ran a little farther, he could even get more land. By midday, he realized he had covered many miles which he would have to encircle to get back to his starting point by nightfall.**

**Greed drove him to square off as many acres as his aching legs would carry him. The sun approached the horizon, and he still had a long way to go. Giving all he had, he ran desperately—not having taken food or drink all day. Just as the last rays of light faded from view, he stumbled back to the starting place where the seller waited for him. He stumbled and sprawled on the ground, dead as a stone. The seller measured where he fell: six feet by two feet was all the ground he could cover. That was all the real estate needed to bury him.**

Jesus warns us, His disciples, not to be worried about life—not about food, clothes, or other necessities. Life is much more than even what we call the basics. We should instead be ever seeking the kingdom of God (Luke 12:22–32). The way to lay up treasure that will be tax sheltered and safe from deflation, recession, or army invasion is to give it away (Luke 12:33). Then it will become an eternal investment. Richard Foster said, “Giving with a glad and generous heart has a way of routing out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they can give. Just

the very act of letting go of money or some other treasure does something within us. That something it destroys is the demon greed.”

The eternal God has invested Himself in a relationship with His people. When we invest in others (the church, widows, orphans, and so forth), we store up eternal treasure within the safe-keeping of our God. Many financial planners will not advise people to put Heaven in their portfolios, but it is the best—if not the only—financial advice Jesus gave. “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:34). ■

## REFLECTIONS

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- What are some ways you have learned to invest in what lasts forever?
- If you had your younger years to live over again, how would you handle money differently?
- How have you seen a desire for things destroy a family?
- What are some strong friendships you have forged with people who love the Lord?
- How is your relationship with the Lord more valuable to you than any amount of money or anything you could own?