



March 2009—*Relying on Riches*

Last month, we looked at how God sometimes gives the gift of pain to draw people to himself. In light of the widespread anxiety, fear, and financial pain in America today, we continue to explore C.S. Lewis's thoughts on this troublesome reality as it pertains to money and all the things it can supply. Lewis notes that when we achieve a certain level of affluence, comfort, and contentment, it is easy to become independent of God and assume that our good fortune will continue indefinitely:

Christ said it was difficult for “the rich” to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, referring, no doubt, to “riches” in the ordinary sense. But I think it really covers riches in every sense—good fortune, health, popularity and all the things one wants to have. All these things tend—just as money tends—to make you feel independent of God, because if you have them you are happy already and contented in this life. You don't want to turn away to anything more, and so you try to rest in a shadowy happiness as if it could last for ever.

But God wants to give you a real and eternal happiness. Consequently He may have to take all these “riches” away from you: if He doesn't, you will go on relying on them. It sounds cruel, doesn't it? But I am beginning to find out that what people call the cruel doctrines are really the kindest ones in the long run. I used to think it was a “cruel” doctrine to say that troubles and sorrows were “punishments.” But I find in practice that when you are in trouble, the moment you regard it as a “punishment,” it becomes easier to bear. If you think of this world as a place intended simply for our happiness, you find it quite intolerable: think of it as a place of training and correction and it's not so bad.

Imagine a set of people all living in the same building. Half of them think it is a hotel, the other half think it is a prison. Those who think it a hotel might regard it as quite intolerable, and those who thought it was a prison might decide that it was really surprisingly comfortable. So that what seems the ugly doctrine is one that comforts and strengthens you in the end. The people who try to hold an optimistic view of this world would become pessimists: the people who hold a pretty stern view of it become optimistic.

Whether we personally are being delivered from illusions about life and about reliance on money and easy living that have caused us to grow independent and distant from God, or are among those who avoided these snares yet are suffering collateral damage from the crimes, folly, and errors of others, it is important to remind ourselves that this fallen, unpredictable world is not our home. We are only passing through it on our way to a world of love and certainty, in which we will live with God and he will “wipe away every tear from our eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:3–4).

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C.S. Lewis, “The Christian View of Suffering,” *C.S. Lewis: Readings for Meditation and Reflection* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), pp. 103–104.