

REWARDS AND RETRIBUTIONS AWAIT US IN THE NEXT LIFE

—by St. John Chrysostom—

Do not be surprised or upset when you witness evil and unjust people enjoying the comforts and pleasures of this present life. Realize that rewards and retribution for good and evil deeds do not take place here on the earth. Even when there is certain recompense, from time to time, it is not complete, but serves only as a small sample of the perfect payback that will take place in the next life. This occurs so that all they who do not believe in the Resurrection of the dead and in the Final Judgment may at least receive a lesson and be kept in line when they are disciplined here on the earth.

Do you see an evil person becoming rich? Do not be discouraged. Conversely, do you see a good person suffering? Do not be surprised. Rewards and punishments are in store for the next life. A bad person does not only do bad things. It is quite possible that such a person has also done some good things during his lifetime. Similarly, it is not possible for any good person to be completely flawless. Even the best person will have committed a number of sins for which he is accountable. Thus, the evil person enjoys a short-lived earthly prosperity as a reward for the few good deeds he has done; however, he will be harshly punished in the next life in totality for all his wickedness. The good person, on the other hand, suffers during this present life in order to be cleansed of his sins, and subsequently enjoy eternal bliss in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Desiring to demonstrate these very things to us, the Apostle Paul says, **“For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many pass away” (1 Cor. 11:30)**. He also wrote the following to a group of people concerning a certain Christian in Corinth who had sinned: **“Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5)**. Even in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah says the following concerning Jerusalem: **“For her sin is pardoned; for she received from the Lord’s hand double for her sins” (Isa. 40:2)**. Additionally, the prophet David prays to the Lord, **“Look upon my humiliation and my pain, and forgive all my sins” (Ps. 24:18)**. From the above, we can conclude that good people are disciplined for their sins here on the earth.

How do we know that evil people who enjoy all the earthly goods in this life are actually punished harshly in the next life? I will remind you of the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, which the Lord Himself narrated to us. There was a certain rich man, says Christ, who was living in luxury, and delighting in various pleasures. His table was filled with sumptuous meals every day. Simultaneously, there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid just outside the front door of the rich man's house. This poor man was trying to appease his hunger by eating the crumbs that would fall from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. When the beggar died, the angels carried him to Abraham's bosom, where his soul found rest and joy. When, however, the rich man died, he found himself unexpectedly being tormented in Hades. In this state he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus next to him. Then he cried out woefully to the patriarch, **"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."** But Abraham said, **"Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. Consequently, now he is comforted and you are tormented"** (cf. Lk. 16:19-25).

Therefore, let us not be distraught when we witness sinful people enjoying prosperity in this present life; rather, we should rejoice when we suffer. Because the sorrows that we experience are, in fact, paying off the sins we have committed. And when we repay our debt and settle our sins in this life, we secure our salvation. This is why the divinely-inspired Apostle Paul states, **"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"** (2 Cor. 4:17).

We as Christians, in general, should not seek comforts. Christ promised to give His disciples sorrows: **"In the world you will have tribulation"** (Jn. 16:33). **"If they persecuted Me, then they will also persecute you"** (Jn. 15:20). Furthermore, the Apostle irrevocably confirms, **"All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"** (2 Tim. 3:12).