

The Rich get Richer

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Four MIT graduates recently formed an internet company – called *Eterni- dot -me* – An obvious play on the word, *eternity*: *eterni.me* = *eternity*. When you join Eterni.me, you upload your entire life's record: what you've written, your pictures, your videos. Eterni.me will store your information for – you guessed it – *eternity*. You don't die; you are transformed into a computer-chip.

But wait! There is more! With the information you've uploaded, *Eterni.me* creates an *avatar* of you. A virtual **you** with whom your grandkids can interact. They will be able to ask you questions, and you will answer - They will hear your voice, and see your image. As my mother-in-law used to quip about computers, *How do it know?*

But you can't live inside a computer, can you? This isn't The Matrix. Your physical self is not part of some universal machine powered by the collective energies of comatose people. Reality is reality; reality is not a computer's imagination. And life can only be experienced in the physical.

The same is true of God – Faith is not computer-generated. And God is not some figment of someone's imagination. But so few people really know God - And the only way to really know God is to experience God. As Gerhart Tersteegen wrote,

You don't need to search for God; you have only to realize Him.

...which is why the psalmist wrote that the experience of God can be physical:

...Taste and see that the Lord is Good.

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Three servants, and each one was entrusted with a quite a bit of money. Think hedge fund money, here – and the first two servants doubled theirs. No wonder the master praised them: *Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into my joy.* And so it is, perhaps even a universal truth: the rich get richer – People usually spit this aphorism out with disdain – despite its truth. *The rich get richer* – perhaps because they invest, compound their interest, double-down on their principal – and *voila*.

But think beyond money, here – there are many ways by which the rich get richer. Think of academics; they are intellectually rich. But they also study more than the rest of us, which makes them grow even more intellectually. The spiritually deep, too – they pray more and pay more attention, and in doing so, they grow even more spiritually. The generous – the more they give away, the more they want to give away. So it is: the rich become richer, which this is the point of baptism – it is about living a rich life – rich in faith, rich in good works, rich in kindness, and rich in truth. Through baptism, you experience God – taste and see – then you go to the bank.

Rich, but what of the poor? Some people are poor because they have no money. I was poor when I first finished college – poor and in debt. But I never thought I'd stay poor. I had hope – But this third servant - had no hope at all. Worse – he was afraid..Afraid of life, and afraid of God. *I was afraid*, he said.

For you reap what you do not sow, you take what is not yours.

But he was wrong – the master was not universally unfair – or tyrannical – He was very good to the first two servants - but this third man was a friend *only* of fear, and not of faith. Fear consumed him, so he buried his talent. And I wonder what might have happened had he invested the talent - but then lost it? Would the master have been angry --- or praised him for his courage? I know the answer, and you do, too. For it is not the talent that counts in this transparent parable, but faith, or in this man's case, fear. This man was rich in fear, and he became richer.

Growing-up in Florida, we lived near the Atlantic Ocean. Loggerhead turtles would come ashore at night to lay their eggs – When the eggs would hatch, the tiny turtles would look for the bare light of the nighttime horizon, to find their home, the ocean. Sometimes, artificial light – houses, streetlights, and cars - would draw the little turtles away from the ocean. The next day we'd find turtles hiding everywhere; we'd collect them and return them to the ocean.

Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor tells a similar story – she and her husband, Edgar, were visiting one of one of the South Carolina barrier islands. It was about noon, and they stumbled upon a mother loggerhead, stuck in the sand, pointing in the wrong direction. She, too, had been misled by artificial light. She, too, looked for the ocean in all the wrong places. It was high noon, and the turtle was going to die if she did not return to the ocean soon. So Barbara and Edgar called a park ranger for help, and he came in his jeep. The three of them rolled the mother turtle onto her back, strapped a chain around her, and dragged her bottoms-up behind the jeep to the ocean.

At the ocean, they turned her back over, then jimmied her into the water, where a strong wave finally broke upon them, freeing the turtle to swim. Later, Barbara pondered, ...What do you think the turtle thought of the three of them? Turning her over, chaining her and dragging her across sand?

She wrote, *"[I]t is sometimes hard to tell whether you are being killed or saved by the hands that turn your life upside down."*

How do you experience God? As a harsh taskmaster – turning your world upside down, chaining you to a jeep, and dragging you to the ocean? Or is God generous, turning your world upside down, chaining you to a jeep, and dragging you to the ocean? It is the same God who gave the men talents...And the same God who assessed fear from the one and faith and hope from the others.

But I can tell you, your baptismal promise and prayer is this simple: grow in faith, and not in fear. Become rich in faith, and eschew darkness. Taste and See, that the Lord is Good.