



The Beggar and the Coin

or, *Faith and Its Alternative*

by Joel H. Eastman

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (Proverbs 1:6)

Once upon a time, there was a beggar by the Merchants Square Bridge, in the center of London. From sun up to sun down, he sat begging coins from the myriads of faceless people who passed by. There was nothing odd to be seen about this beggar, for his worn appearance was much like that of the other hundreds of poor and homeless souls in the city. But what happened to him should not be thought common place. For the providence that was to touch his life, could not have happened but for the mercy of God. "For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

At the end of one cold November day, the sun was setting on the horizon and the beggar got up to go home (if you could call two wooden crates a home). While crossing the bridge, he saw a gentleman staring at the sunset with his arms resting on the stone rail of the bridge. As he walked, he felt his coat pocket. Four pence was all he had gotten that day. His thoughts flew forward to tomorrow. He knew of a job at a local shop where he had seen, just the day before, a sign in the window, and though he could read very little, it said:

"Help wanted. Requirements-- strong back, decent clothes."

Ah, but there lay the difficulty, as he only had the tattered clothes on his back and they could hardly be called decent. New clothes would cost him 2 sovereigns, at least, and all he had in his pocket was four pence, plus the one sovereign and nine pence he had managed to save. What hope had he to get another sovereign by tomorrow, when it had taken him over a year to save the one he had? But what choice had he? He would never get out of the slums if he did not get a job, but how was he to get a job without two sovereigns, which he could not get without a job. This vicious cycle left him dizzy.

"Lord," thought he, "I know not how ya are going to provide the way, but there are no doors open to me. Jesus said we are to 'have faith in God.' (Mark 11:22). I need a job, Lord, and I know ya know all things. Therefore, I must conclude ya are but waiting for me to ask. Jesus said, 'All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive' (Matthew 21:22). Have ya not promised to provide my needs. I claim this in Jesus' name. Amen." "Ask, and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7).

As his thoughts continued along this line, the gentleman on the bridge caught his attention, and coming up to where he stood on the bridge, he thought he might be able to beg a coin. Very politely, he tipped his tattered hat and said, "I say guv'ner, can ya spare a coin or two?" The man started slightly, as though his thoughts had been interrupted.

"Here," replied the man with a low voice, dropping a coin into his hat. He then turned back to the sunset, which had by now dipped below the horizon. The beggar stared for a moment at the gentleman. There was a sadness to the man that seemed familiar to the beggar, but that he couldn't quite place. Turning from the man, he plucked the coin out of his hat and started down the bridge, when in the failing light, he saw that the coin was a sovereign piece!

Abruptly, he stopped in amazement, staring at what was to him an answer to his prayer. But surely the man had made a mistake, for who would give a beggar a sovereign?

"Guv'ner," asked the beggar, turning back to the man, "Are ya sure ya gave me the right coin? This is ah sovereign piece."

"Yes," was his slightly irritated reply.

"Thank ya ever so much, guv'ner!" The beggar had a tremble in his voice and a thrill in his expression. "It's an answer to my prayer. Tomorrow I can get the job in the shop, thanks to the Lord's mercy and yar kind generosity."

The man turned to face him and seemed to be half angry, and yet ready to cry.

"God's mercy? How could God's mercy have anything to do with it? How can God have mercy, when He allows one of his children to be destroyed by this world? I trusted Him and..."

"Stop right there!" interrupted the beggar, who was taken off guard by this assault on God. "I'm grateful for the money, but I'll not stand by while ya slander God! If ya had really trusted him, I know he would have helped ya. I know, even as this money shows, that it was God that gave it to me-- not yarself." "**Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds**" (Psalm 36:5).

The gentleman was silent for a moment, but then spoke more. "You think you know the mercy of God? I thought I did too, but no thanks to God's mercy, I could very well be begging on this bridge next week. I trusted God that he would give me the money to pay off Solomon Collier, but instead, He let him foreclose on my business and now it's to be my house next. Yes, and my wife and children too, I doubt not. He'll never stop until I'm dead! And why you ask, is he so set on ruining me? I'll tell you. Like a fool, I believed God would protect me when I rebuked Collier for his greed in front of our pastor. And now he's set his lawyers on me, and the magistrate, and the tax collector, and anyone else, including my own pastor, who I thought would help me, but instead cares more for Collier's purse than God's Word. And now you stand here telling me of the mercy of God!"

The man ended with a flush of anger and a downcast head. The beggar stood there for a moment, thinking what God would have him say to this man.

"Yes, mercy," said the beggar in a stern voice. "Mercy that He's has tried to make it easier for ya to trust him." At this, the gentleman looked back at him with incredulous disbelief.

"This isn't about Solomon Collier. **'The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe'** (Proverbs 29:25). This is about yar unwillingness to trust God. When this all started," continued the beggar with an air of confident authority, quite in contrast to his former role as a beggar, "When this all started, if ya had trusted God, it would not have gotten to this point. **'Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'** (Hebrews 11:1). But because ya refused to put yarself in His hands and insisted to put trust in man, He has been forced to bring this upon ya. And yet, all the while, even in wrath he has remembered mercy-- mercy, that even still He's trying to make it easier for ya to trust him." **"Without faith it is impossible to please Him"** (Hebrews 11:6).

Suddenly the other man broke in, "How? How is taking away my business going to help? How is allowing a man like Solomon Collier to pick my bones clean going to make me trust God more?" This he said with an air of justification, and it was all the beggar needed to close the man's trap on himself.

"Don't ya know?" asked the beggar with a degree of simplicity. "God, will remove whatever ya trust in, that gets in the way of ya trusting Him! **This** is his mercy!"

The gentleman's face was still and then his head sank down to his arms.

The beggar continued, "A year ago I had neither money nor hope. I was sleeping my nights, in a box in an alley. Finally, there came a night I lay there at the end of my strength. I didn't expect to wake up in the morning. Despite how tired I was, I was afraid to go to sleep for I had no peace with God. I was afraid to die and so I read some pages of the Scripture that I kept in my pocket. They had belonged to my mother and it was all she had to give me when she died. I read them, and at first, they made me more afraid, for I saw the truth that I had neglected all these years."

Reaching into his pocket, the beggar pulled out a small tin with some folded up pages of Scripture inside. "As I read these few pages that night, I came to this verse. **'Now, behold, thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt, on which if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt unto all that trust on him'** (2 Kings 18:21). This verse pierced me to my heart, for in all the years I had spent coming to this end, I had continually relied on man for my needs. Just as the Bible had said, I now found myself impaled at the end of the staff I had been leaning on. It takes a lot of faith to believe the Lord can get ya out of the position I was in that night. But actually, it wasn't as hard for me, for God had gone before me and removed all obstacles. **"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding"** (Proverbs 3:5). I had no choice, no option, no obstacles, believe or die, was all I had left! The Lord had to bring me to the point of death, alone on that street in a box, in order to give me a chance to repent."

At first, the man's face seemed stone-like and unaffected. Then, ever so slowly, a tear began to creep down his cheek. His eyes began to glisten in the low light, as the tears flowed down in an ever-increasing stream. For he saw, that what this plain beggar had said, was truth. The power of the Holy Ghost's conviction came down on his hardened heart and broke it, working true repentance. "You are right. I have brought this on myself and my family. May God have mercy on me!"

The beggar laid his hand on the man's shoulder. "He has." Was his simple reply.

With that, the man smiled through his tears and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his mercy in all things, and in bringing him this beggar who had nothing-- but possessed all, by faith. "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:8-9).

And so, let us learn also from what the beggar has said. That the mercy of God abounds to all, is evident, for the beggar got his job at the shop, and subsequently quit for a better job at the gentleman's store, which was returned to him on a legal technicality. And as for Solomon Collier, well, he never bothered anyone again, for he died the very next day. "Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: He is their help and their shield" (Psalm 115:11).

"Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

The End