

110 The Wealth Problem?

The "wealth problem" is in the news again, with the recent annual gathering of - if not quite the "great and the good", certainly the "powerful and the rich" - at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. We are told that 1% of the world's population owns 50% of the world's wealth, which strikes the rest of us as being not quite right! So is wealth bad? Should every Christian aim to be a poor Christian?

On the global scale concerning the horrendous "wealth gap", we do have a tiny part to play, by our prayers, by our lobbying and by the use of our votes. But first and foremost when it comes to wealth, we need to be getting things right, under the Lord, in our own Christian lives. In this short Reflection we touch on some main points, for further study should you wish.

Scripturally, wealth and riches are not bad in themselves; Abraham, Jacob and Solomon for example stand out as men greatly blessed by the Lord in terms of worldly wealth. So for a Christian to be wealthy is not in itself wrong, but of course the possession of such wealth brings spiritual dangers.

We are to keep wealth in its true context, for we are "a pilgrim people". Our real home, our "citizenship", is in heaven (Philippians 3.20), right now. Here we have "no abiding city" (Hebrews 13.14). We are passing through, we are travelling light, so we really do not need more than we actually need. Excess wealth breaks that principle, by giving us far more than we do actually need, and by causing us perhaps to rely more on our earthly wealth than on the Lord Himself. How many seriously wealthy "camels" get through the eye of that needle?

This means that our own deliberate aiming for serious wealth, for its own sake, sits uncomfortably with Scripture. We remember the rich fool (Luke 16.13-21), the rich young man (Matthew 19.16-26), and other passages such as in Proverbs / Matthew 6.19-21 and 33 / James 1.9-11 / I Timothy 6.6 -17. The Lord is clear: we are to tread very carefully in our seeking and using wealth!

Yet under the Lord wealth, when properly gained and properly used, can indeed bring much blessing. Formal tithing is no longer a requirement of the Law for us, but its principle still holds good - we firstly give to the Lord, as we are blessed (eg., I Corinthians 16.1-3 / Ephesians 4.28); and the more we give, the more we shall be given in return (Luke 6.38 / II Corinthians 9.6) - that wonderful, worldly-foolish promise made by the Chief Cashier of the Bank of Almighty God!

Then, of course, we use our wealth to provide for the needs of ourselves and our dependants, and for suitable causes further afield. While the basic principle applies in our family budgets of short-term, trusting-for-now "daily bread", there is also a place for appropriate financial planning for times to come.

Above all, we are accountable to the Lord for our stewardship of any money entrusted to us. We can sit down as it were with the Lord at the kitchen table, and open the books, and let Him survey where that money goes. Is He satisfied with what He sees, and if not?

How true when we read: "I have learned to be content godliness with contentment is great gain" (Phil 4.11 and I Timothy 6.6)! We receive what we have; we put it to good use; we are thankful; we are content.

We see that a Christian can be seriously rich under the Lord, or even seriously poor under the Lord; how much wealth that may come our way actually matters very little. What matters far, far more is how much "godly good" we do with that wealth!

For therein lies all the difference - the difference between mere treasure on earth, and true treasure in heaven.

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