

Wealth & Poverty

Several years ago I heard a televangelist say that because *Abraham* was very rich, it means God wants all his children to be rich on earth. Quite a few Christian preachers and teachers believe the Lord wants all his children to be wealthy – *here and now*.

This is a relatively recent interpretation, at least on a global scale. Throughout the history of The Church, not many believers (universally speaking) were rich, even though they knew what the Bible taught about wealth and poverty. And most of us will go through life relatively poor, no matter how rich we are in faith.

God's *Gospel Age* emphasizes spiritual, not material, wealth. "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the New." – *Francis Bacon*

God *does* want all his children to be rich, *but only in heaven*, if for no other reason than that we will be able to handle wealth much better there than we do here. It is especially hard for the *rich* to enter the *Kingdom of Heaven*, probably because many of them put more faith in gold than in God. Most Christians are not flagrantly driven to possess power, recognition and influence. But we may be captivated by the siren song of comfort, even though the Bible tells us to be uneasy about it. *Comfortable living on earth is inconsistent with the biblical Christian profile, characterized by self-denial, self-sacrifice, transitoriness, urgency and otherworldliness*. Sometimes, we are called upon to give away (Mark 10:21) or leave behind (Luke 5:11) or sell all of our earthly possessions (Luke 12:33) in order to follow Jesus. Furthermore, wealth is more appropriate for Christians in the future *Kingdom of Heaven* than in the present *Realm of Satan*.

I am not saying God is against wealth, per se. He's against *avarice*, (covetousness, greed). Even he needs money to accomplish his earthly mission of mercy. (That's where *we* come in.) Money itself is neither good nor bad; it's all a matter of what *people* do with it.

Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the poor." He said, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" In other words, you might be poor – materially and spiritually – on earth, but you are now locked into the richest sovereignty in the universe. The poor are blessed because, thanks to the Lord, they will not be poor much longer – neither materially nor spiritually.

Jesus never said poverty was good. On the contrary, he appeals to you and me to alleviate the needs of the poor. He said, "*...give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*" Jesus pitied the poor and went out of his way to preach the gospel to them. "*Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*" says James.

Still, the Lord Jesus Christ wasn't against the rich for being rich; he was critical of them because many of them were exploiting instead of helping the poor. Human sin brought poverty into this world. In both Testaments, the rich are censured only when they are greedy or get their wealth wrongfully or are stingy. But, also in both Testaments, wealth is admired, appreciated and approved when it is used for the good of mankind and for the glory of God.

Yes, Jesus was poor, but only for 33 earth years -- *and by choice!* Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though*

he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus wants you to accumulate treasures for yourself in heaven. If you are poor in good deeds on earth, you will be poor in heaven. But if you are rich in good deeds on earth, you will be rich in heaven. ◇◇