

What Is True Wealth?

Many people consider the acquisition of wealth to be the measure of success. They believe wealth means having vast possessions and money. In reality the definition of wealth is in the eye of the beholder. Most middle-class or upper middle-class citizens in the United States would be considered wealthy by those who live in third-world nations. Even the poor in the United States view upper-middle class and middle-class as wealthy. Liberal-minded activists, who push for a world taxing system, believe this is the way to more equally distribute the world's wealth. They feel that Americans should be compelled to pay a tax that would be shared with the poorer nations. While it is true that many in third-world countries barely subsist, and help should be given them, who is at fault for this condition? Certainly not the American taxpayer! The causes of conditions in third-world nations result from disease, drought and famine, wars, tyrannical rulers, and misguided religious ideas. It is certainly a privilege to live in the United States, the wealthiest of nations.

Wealth Can Have Disadvantages

What is not realized is that many who are wealthy have a tendency to neglect God. They feel little need for God. But again, this attitude of self-sufficiency is found in the eyes of the beholder. Even many middle-class and upper middle-class achievers feel they have no need for God, and this does not even include the view of the truly wealthy.

What did God warn ancient Israel?

For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. (Deut. 8:7-14)

So wealth can be a blessing or a curse, depending on one's attitude about it. The Apostle Paul spoke plainly on the subject. He said: "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). The book of Proverbs indicates that a balance in the accumulation of wealth is the safest course to follow. "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8-9). The Apostle John wrote to the brethren: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). But being prosperous, and setting one's heart on the accumulation of wealth are two different things. The accumulation of wealth can lead to much unhappiness. How many people are in prison today because they used unlawful means to accumulate wealth?

The Apostle Paul admonished:

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Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

The Bible tells us that there is a tendency among those who are wealthy to become dissatisfied with their wealth. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" (Eccl. 5:10). In the end riches will prove to be futile, of no real lasting value. The Apostle James warned the rich: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten" (Jas. 5:1-2). "Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you" (vv. 5-6). "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (Jas. 1:9-11).

It is true that many wealthy people have oppressed the poor and used their wealth to get ahead of others. "Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth" (Jas. 5:3-4). The Bible warns: "He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (Prov. 28:8, 20). These texts tell us that there is a decided tendency to misuse wealth for one's own advantage, and that this is often accomplished by means of dishonesty. The fact is: There is a serious responsibility involved in handling the blessings God gives us, and if one seeks these blessings unlawfully, he will suffer the consequences.

The Advantage of Wealth

On the other hand, wealth used properly can have a tremendous advantage. For one thing, one who is wealthy will not lack friends. "Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour" (Prov. 19:4). "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends" (Prov. 14:20). However, one should be aware that these friends can be, and often are, friends for what they might gain. Another consideration is this: "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (Prov. 18:16). The poor are not in a position to take advantage of this status. Often, those who are able to gain access to "great men" secure benefits for themselves or for others. Such a pursuit, therefore, can be for a useful purpose.

Unless they have misused or wasted their wealth, those who are wealthy are generally not stressed to make ends meet as are the poor. "A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things" (Eccl. 10:19). Unless wisdom is employed in the use of money, it can rapidly fly away. We are aware of anecdotes about those who have won huge sums of money by means of the lottery or power ball, yet within a few years they are in debt. This is why the Bible admonishes: "For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it" (Eccl. 7:12).

A good use of money is to help the poor. This principle is emphasized many times in the Scriptures. A description of a wicked man is given in Job 20: "Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not; Surely he shall not feel quietness in his belly, he shall not save of that which he desired" (vv. 19-20). Many who are well off contribute to

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various charities and organizations that help the poor. But a word of caution is in order here. Many charitable organizations that raise funds to help the poor have such a demand for salaries and operational expenses that the amount going to the poor is minor. This is why contributors should contact an agency that evaluates charitable organizations to find out if a particular organization meets the requirement of a charity-that being a sizeable amount of the funds collected are given to the poor. The advantage of wealth is that it can be used to help those who are truly in need.

The Futility of Wealth

In the final analysis wealth, no matter how great, is futile-that is, of little lasting value. Wealth may be temporarily beneficial or detrimental in this life, but in terms of eternity it is meaningless. A day of judgment is coming. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 11:4). Again, the Bible warns: "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:4-5).

To trust in one's riches can be one of the serious mistakes in life. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility" (Prov. 18:11-12). Such misguided trust and arrogance can lead to much unrighteousness. "Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually . . . Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness" (Psa. 52:1, 7). Some called of God have failed because they set their hearts on the riches of this world. Jesus warned: "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22).

The rich young man is such an example:

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (Matt. 19:16-22)

What was Jesus' answer? ". . . Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23). This young man was, no doubt, held in honor. Yet the Bible states: "Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:20). How true.

The opposite of the rich young man was the tax collector. When Christ spoke to him, He realized that he was being addressed by the Son of God. He did not hesitate to respond to do what he knew was the right thing.

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with

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a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. (Luke 19:2-9)

The accumulation of wealth can be futile. Why? The day is coming when: "They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity" (Ezek. 7:19). "But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation" (Luke 6:24). The clear Bible warning is this: ". . . Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

What Is True Wealth

The lack of knowledge regarding true wealth has led to innumerable sorrows. The goal in life for countless numbers of people has been the acquisition of wealth, while having no idea why they were born and what the future can really mean. They have lost sight of the meaning of life. Although God wants us to prosper, the acquisition of riches is not what God purposes for us. The real joy in life comes from a proper relationship with God. Paul wrote: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Yes, indeed, "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked" (Ps. 37:16).

This is why the prophet Jeremiah wrote of those men who look to themselves in self-confidence, and have no regard for God:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD. (Jer. 9:23-24)

"Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (Jas. 2:5). How do we love God? The answer is made clear in the Scriptures: "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome . . ." (1 John 5:3 NIV). The Apostle Paul described the true riches when he spoke of himself "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10). The fact is: Wealth does not guarantee happiness, nor will it lead to the ultimate goal in life-eternal life in the Kingdom of God. What makes a man rich? "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22). Sorrow is what often accompanies the rich.

The responsibility of proper handling what God gives us in this life is an awesome responsibility. This is why Jesus said: "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:11). The true riches-true wealth-is having a proper relationship with God and attaining to the Kingdom of God.