

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

Rich Man, Poor Man

by **Jim Rector**

MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE ARE CONFUSED AND MISINFORMED CONCERNING THE SUBJECT OF MONEY AND POSSESSIONS. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE DANGER OF TRUSTING IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD? DOES GOD LOVE THE RICH, LAVISHING HIS BLESSINGS UPON THEM, WHILE METING OUT PUNISHMENT UPON THE POOR? ARE RICHES THE YARDSTICK BY WHICH A CHRISTIAN IS SUPPOSED TO MEASURE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU SEE THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS WITH GOD'S EYESIGHT!

AS JOB SAT IN THE DUST, HIS ACHING BODY COVERED WITH RUNNING SORES, HE REFLECTED IN UTTER DISMAY UPON THE TERRIBLE CALAMITIES THAT, IN RAPID SUCCESSION, HAD LITERALLY OVERWHELMED HIM. JOB WAS NOT, HOWEVER, WITHOUT HIS COMFORTERS. HE HAD A LITTLE HELP FROM HIS FRIENDS - ELIPHAZ, BILDAD AND ZOPHAR - AND AS THEY OBSERVED THE PLIGHT OF THEIR COMPANION, EACH ASSAYED THE SITUATION AND OFFERED HIS SAGE ADVICE.

ELIPHAZ THE TEMANITE SPOKE FIRST AND SAID:

"REMEMBER I PRAY YOU, WHOEVER PERISHED, BEING INNOCENT? OR WHERE WERE THE RIGHTEOUS CUT OFF?"
(JOB 4:7).

THEN ZOPHAR UPBRAIDED JOB BY SAYING:

"THE TRIUMPHING OF THE WICKED IS SHORT,
AND JOY OF THE HYPOCRITE BUT FOR A MOMENT"
(JOB 20:5).

AND THEN BILDAD THE SHUHITE GAVE FORTH THIS ADMONITION:

"IF YOU WOULD SEEK UNTO GOD BETIMES, AND MAKE YOUR SUPPLICATIONS TO THE ALMIGHTY; IF YOU WERE PURE AND UPRIGHT, SURELY HE WOULD AWAKE FOR YOU, AND MAKE THE HABITATION OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS PROSPEROUS" (JOB 8:5-6).

FINALLY, ELIPHAZ SUMMED UP THE PROBLEM AND OFFERED HIS SURE SOLUTION TO JOB'S PROBLEMS:

"IF YOU RETURN TO THE ALMIGHTY, YOU SHALL BE BUILT UP...THEN SHALL YOU LAY UP GOLD LIKE DUST...AND YOU SHALL HAVE PLENTY OF SILVER" (JOB 22:23-25).

DO THE ATTITUDES AND REACTIONS OF JOB'S THREE FRIENDS SEEM SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR? THEY SHOULD, BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE, EVEN IN GOD'S CHURCH, TEND TO ASSOCIATE AFFLICTION, ESPECIALLY POVERTY AND DESTITUTION, WITH UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, A PENALTY PERHAPS FOR DISOBEDIENCE, WITH SOMEHOW NOT BEING QUITE RIGHT WITH GOD. PROSPERITY AND PLENTY, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS OFTEN CONSIDERED THE BLESSING OF GOD, THE REWARD FOR RIGHTEOUS BEHAVIOR, THE DESIRED STATE OF BEING.

IS THIS ASSESSMENT REALLY A GODLY CONCLUSION? DOES IT TRULY COME FROM THE SCRIPTURES? IS POVERTY A SHAME AND A STIGMA FOR GOD'S PEOPLE? JUST HOW DOES GOD VIEW THE POOR, THE WEAK, THE DESTITUTE AMONG MEN? IS MONEY AND THE INCREASE OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS THE FULL MEASURE OF GOD'S BLESSINGS? WHAT KIND OF TREASURE IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO GOD? WHY DID CHRIST SAY THAT IT WAS SO DIFFICULT FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD? THE SCRIPTURES CONTAIN A WEALTH OF INFORMATION, WARNING AND INSTRUCTION FROM THE CREATOR ON THE SUBJECT OF MONEY, POSSESSIONS AND LIFESTYLES OF COMFORT AND EASE.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

MONEY ITSELF MAY NOT NECESSARILY BE EVIL. AFTER ALL, GOD HIMSELF IS THE SINGLE RICHEST BEING IN ALL THE UNIVERSE! THERE ARE, HOWEVER, CERTAIN THINGS ATTACHED TO GETTING RICH, BEING RICH, AND STAYING RICH THAT ARE STRONGLY CONDEMNED IN GOD'S WORD. THE APOSTLE PAUL WARNED TIMOTHY:

"BUT THEY THAT WILL BE RICH FALL INTO TEMPTATION AND A SNARE, AND INTO MANY FOOLISH AND HURTFUL LUSTS, WHICH DROWN MEN IN DESTRUCTION AND PERDITION. FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL EVIL: WHICH WHILE SOME HAVE COVETED AFTER, THEY HAVE ERRED FROM THE FAITH...BUT YOU O MAN OF GOD, FLEE THESE THINGS" (I TIM. 6:9-11).

IF WE ARE HONEST WITH THE BIBLE, IT MUST BE ADMITTED THAT GOD HAS GIVEN MANY SUCH WARNINGS IN HIS WORD. THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT HUMAN NATURE WHEN IT COMES TO MONEY AND WEALTH OF ANY KIND - IT TENDS TO BECOME CORRUPT, IT TENDS TO FOCUS UPON IT, TO WORSHIP, TO PURSUE IT, TO SUCCUMB TO IT, TO BE MISLED BY IT, TO BE DOMINATED BY IT, TO TRUST IN IT. IN SUCH A STATE, IT IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO WORK WITH A PERSON. IT BECOMES EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT FOR A RICH MAN OR WOMAN TO BUILD RIGHTEOUS CHARACTER, TO COME TO UTTERLY TRUST IN AND LEAN UPON GOD. TAKE NOTE OF PSALM 49;

"HEAR THIS...ALL YOU INHABITANTS OF THE WORLD; BOTH LOW AND HIGH, RICH AND POOR TOGETHER... THEY THAT TRUST IN THEIR WEALTH, AND BOAST THEMSELVES IN THE MULTITUDE OF THEIR RICHES, NONE OF THEM CAN BY ANY MEANS REDEEM HIS BROTHER, NOR GIVE TO GOD A RANSOM FOR HIM... FOR HE SEES THAT WISE MEN DIE, LIKEWISE THE FOOL AND BRUTISH PERSON PERISH, AND LEAVE THEIR WEALTH TO OTHERS. THEIR INWARD THOUGHT IS THAT THEIR HOUSES SHALL CONTINUE FOREVER, AND THEIR DWELLING PLACES TO ALL GENERATIONS; THEY CALL THEIR LANDS BY THEIR OWN NAMES...LIKE SHEEP THEY ARE LAID IN THE GRAVE; DEATH SHALL FEED ON THEM; AND THE UPRIGHT SHALL HAVE DOMINION OVER THEM IN THE MORNING...BE YOU NOT AFRAID WHEN ONE IS MADE RICH, WHEN THE GLORY OF HIS HOUSE IS INCREASED; FOR WHEN HE DIES, HE SHALL CARRY NOTHING AWAY... THOUGH WHILE HE LIVED, HE BLESSED HIS SOUL...HE SHALL GO TO THE GENERATIONS OF HIS FATHERS; THEY SHALL NEVER SEE LIGHT."

DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART, DISPLAYED A PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING OF THIS PRINCIPLE. HE SAW THAT THE TENDENCY OF HUMAN BEINGS WHO SEEK AFTER WEALTH ALMOST ALWAYS BEGIN TO TRUST IN THEIR WEALTH. HE WISELY WROTE:

"WHY DO YOU BOAST YOURSELF IN MISCHIEF,
O MIGHTY MAN?...YOUR TONGUE DEvised
MISCHIEFS; LIKE A SHARP RAZOR, WORKING
DECIETFULLY. YOU LOVE EVIL MORE THAN
GOOD...GOD SHALL LIKEWISE DESTROY (HEB.
'BEAT DOWN') YOU FOREVER...THE RIGHTEOUS
ALSO SHALL SEE AND FEAR, AND SHALL LAUGH
AT HIM. LO, THIS IS THE MAN THAT **MADE
NOT GOD HIS STRENGTH, BUT TRUSTED IN THE
ABUNDANCE OF HIS RICHES**" (PSA. 52:1-3, 5-7).

THE MESSIAH HIMSELF EXPRESSED THIS SAME SENTIMENT IN THE
PARABLE OF THE SOWER. IN HIS PRIVATE EXPLANATION TO THE DISCIPLES
OF THE SEED THAT FELL AMONG THORNS, HE TAUGHT:

"AND THESE ARE THEY WHICH ARE SOWN AMONG
THORNS; SUCH AS HEAR THE WORD, AND THE CARES
OF THIS WORLD, AND THE **DECEITFULNESS OF
RICHES**, AND THE LUSTS OF OTHER THINGS,
ENTERING IN, CHOKe THE WORD AND IT BECOMES
UNFRUITFUL" (MARK 4:18-19).

NOTICE HOW IMPORTANT THIS PRINCIPLE WAS TO CHRIST. HE TOLD
HIS FOLLOWERS TO BE VERY CAREFUL, BECAUSE THE DECEITFULNESS OF
RICHES AND THE LUSTS FOR ACQUIRING THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD COULD
VERY WELL CAUSE SOMEONE TO MISS OUT ON THE KINGDOM, TO ALLOW THE
CALL OF GOD TO GO UNHEEDED! INDEED PAUL REVEALED TO THE CORINTHIANS:

"FOR YOU SEE YOUR CALLING, BRETHREN, HOW
THAT NOT MANY WISE MEN AFTER THE FLESH, NOT
MANY MIGHTY (RICH AND POWERFUL), NOT MANY
NOBLE ARE CALLED; BUT GOD HAS CHOSEN THE
FOOLISH THINGS OF THE WORLD TO CONFOUND
THE WISE; AND GOD HAS CHOSEN THE WEAK
THINGS OF THE WORLD TO CONFOUND THE THINGS
WHICH ARE MIGHTY; AND BASE THINGS OF THE
WORLD, AND THINGS WHICH ARE DESPISED, HAS
GOD CHOSEN, YEA, AND THINGS WHICH ARE NOT,
TO BRING TO NOUGHT THINGS THAT ARE; THAT
NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE"
(I COR. 1:26-29).

ARE WE SO SHORTSIGHTED AND BLINDED NOT TO SEE THAT THESE WORDS
APPLY TO US TODAY, TO THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE? BRETHREN, I ASK YOU,
DO YOU SEE YOUR CALLING??? WHY DO YOU THINK THAT JAMES, THE BROTHER
OF YAHSHUA, SAID:

"HEARKEN MY BELOVED BRETHREN, HAS NOT GOD CHOSEN
THE POOR OF THIS WORLD, RICH IN FAITH, AND HEIRS
OF THE KINGDOM...DO NOT RICH MEN OPPRESS YOU, AND
DRAW YOU BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEATS?" (JAMES 2:5-7).

JAMES' COMMENTARY ON THE RICH AND THE PROBLEMS OF THE WEALTHY DID NOT STOP WITH THE PRECEDING PASSAGE. HE WENT ON TO SAY:

"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 WITHERS THE GRASS, AND THE FLOWER THEREOF FALLS, AND THE GRACE OF THE FASHION OF IT PERISHES; SO ALSO SHALL THE RICH MAN FADE AWAY IN HIS WAYS" (JAMES 1:9-11).

ONCE AGAIN, HE EXCLAIMED:

"GO NOW, YOU RICH MEN, WEEP AND HOWL FOR THE MISERIES THAT SHALL COME UPON YOU. YOUR RICHES ARE CORRUPTED, AND YOUR GARMENTS ARE MOTHEATEN. YOUR GOLD AND YOUR SILVER IS CANKERED; AND THE RUST OF THEM SHALL BE A WITNESS AGAINST YOU...YOU HAVE HEAPED TOGETHER TREASURE FOR THE LAST DAYS...YOU HAVE LIVED IN PLEASURE ON THE EARTH, AND BEEN WANTON; YOU HAVE NOURISHED YOUR HEARTS IN A DAY OF SLAUGHTER" (JAMES 5:1-3, 5).

NONE OF THESE STRONG STATEMENTS INDICATES THAT BECAUSE A PERSON IS WEALTHY, HE IS SOMEHOW INHERENTLY EVIL, BUT THEY DO GIVE ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE POWERFUL WARNINGS AGAINST THE OVERWHELMING TENDENCIES OF THE RICH, AGAINST THE LIKELIHOOD OF BECOMING CONSUMED WITH THE ACQUISITION OF MATERIAL THINGS, OF FEELING SUPERIOR TO OTHERS, OF BEING OR FEELING EXALTED, ESPECIALLY RIGHTEOUS AND BLESSED, AND OF TRUSTING IN THE SECURITY OF POSSESSIONS AND COMFORT.

OUR SAVIOUR'S ESSENTIAL MESSAGE CONCERNING THE RICH AND POWERFUL OF THIS WORLD, CONCERNING THE FOCUS UPON ONE'S PHYSICAL INCREASE, MIGHT SIMPLY HAVE BEEN:

"TAKE HEED AND BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS: FOR A MAN'S LIFE CONSISTS NOT IN THE ABUNDANCE OF THINGS THAT HE POSSESSES" (LUKE 12:15).

HE ONCE TOLD A VERY STRIKING PARABLE ABOUT A CERTAIN RICH MAN, A MAN SO RICH AND INCREASED WITH MATERIAL GOODS THAT HE HAD TO CONSTRUCT NEW BARNs AND BUILDINGS JUST TO STORE IT ALL. AND THIS WEALTHY MAN THOUGHT TO HIMSELF:

"SOUL, YOU HAVE MUCH GOODS LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS; TAKE YOUR EASE, EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY. BUT GOD SAID UNTO HIM, YOU FOOL, THIS NIGHT SHALL YOUR SOUL BE REQUIRED OF YOU; THEN WHOSE

SHALL THOSE THINGS BE, WHICH YOU HAVE PROVIDED? SO IS HE THAT LAYS UP TREASURE FOR HIMSELF, AND IS NOT RICH TOWARD GOD" (LUKE 12:16-21).

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT, THE WORDS THAT THIS RICH MAN SPOKE, THE ATTITUDE HE EXPRESSED, HAS SURELY CROSSED THE MIND OF MANY A HUMAN BEING, ESPECIALLY THE POOR WHO, STARING UP OUT OF THE PIT OF POVERTY, HAVE DREAMED OF MONEY AND GOODS STORED UP - ENOUGH TO LAST FOR YEARS! I KNOW - I HAVE THOUGHT THE SAME THING AT TIMES IN MY OWN LIFE!

EVEN THE DISCIPLES THEMSELVES WERE ASTONISHED AND TAKEN ABACK BY SOME OF CHRIST'S TEACHINGS ON THIS SUBJECT. ~~ONCE~~ A RICH YOUNG MAN HAD APPROACHED YAHSHUA AND ASKED WHAT HE MUST DO TO BE SAVED. THE SAVIOUR TOLD HIM TO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, BUT THE MAN ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD DONE THAT ALL HIS LIFE. MARK RECORDS THE REST OF THIS FAMOUS EPISODE, SAYING:

"THEN JESUS (YAHSHUA), BEHOLDING HIM LOVED HIM AND SAID UNTO HIM, ONE THING YOU LACK: GOD YOUR WAY, SELL WHATSOEVER YOU HAVE, AND GIVE IT TO THE POOR, AND YOU SHALL HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN...AND HE WAS SAD AT THAT SAYING, AND WENT AWAY GRIEVED; FOR HE HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS. AND YAHSHUA SAID...HOW HARDLY SHALL THEY THAT HAVE RICHES ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD! AND THE DISCIPLES WERE ASTONISHED AT HIS WORDS, BUT YAHSHUA ANSWERED THEM AGAIN...IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE, THAN FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (MARK 10:17-25).

THESE SHARP WORDS OF CHRIST NOT ONLY ASTOUNDED THE EARLY DISCIPLES, BUT THEY HAVE TROUBLED NUMEROUS PEOPLE DOWN THROUGH MANY GENERATIONS. SOME, ESPECIALLY THEOLOGAINS WHOSE POSITION AND INCOME HAVE DEPENDED UPON THE HEFTY CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE WEALTHY, HAVE ATTEMPTED TO BLUNT THE MESSIAH'S STATEMENTS BY CLAIMING THAT THE PARABLE REALLY MEANS SOMETHING ELSE. THEY ATTEMPT TO WATER IT DOWN. I HAVE EVEN HEARD MINISTERS WHO PURPORT TO BE IN THE CHURCH OF GOD DO THIS VERY THING. BUT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO JUSTIFICATION FOR DOING SO. CHRIST WAS MAKING A VERY STRONG POINT, AND HE UTTERED A VERY HARD SAYING, BUT HE MEANT PRECISELY WHAT HE SAID!

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS HE SAID:

"SELL THAT YOU HAVE, AND GIVE ALMS, PROVIDE FOR YOURSELVES BAGS WHICH WAX NOT OLD, A TREASURE IN THE HEAVENS THAT FAILS NOT" (LUKE 8:33).

"LAY NOT UP TREASURE FOR YOURSELVES UPON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DOTH CORRUPT,

IT CERTAINLY WOULD NOT SEEM AS THOUGH ABEL GREW UP UNDER VERY PROSPEROUS CIRCUMSTANCES - AND BESIDES, HE WAS ONLY A MERE SHEPHERD, AN OCCUPATION GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE LEAST IN THE LAND. YET ABEL IS RECKONED AS THE FIRST RIGHTEOUS MAN IN ALL OF HISTORY, INDEED A TYPE OF CHRIST HIMSELF!

MOSES WAS MIRACULOUSLY RESCUED FROM DEATH AS AN INFANT AND WAS RAISED IN THE COURT OF PHARAOH. AS SUCH, HE PROBABLY WAS THE ENVY OF MANY AN EGYPTIAN. NEVERTHELESS, THERE CAME A TIME WHEN THIS MAN MOSES CAME TO HIMSELF, WHEN THE SPIRIT OF GOD BEGAN TO TRULY WORK WITH HIM. PAUL SPEAKS ELOQUENTLY OF MOSES IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS, SAYING:

"BY FAITH MOSES, WHEN HE WAS COME TO YEARS, REFUSED TO BE CALLED THE SON OF PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER; CHOOSING RATHER TO SUFFER AFFLICTION WITH THE PEOPLE OF GOD, THAN TO ENJOY THE PLEASURES OF SIN FOR A SEASON; ESTEEMING THE REPROACH OF CHRIST GREATER RICHES THAN THE TREASURES OF EGYPT" (HEB. 11:24-26).

FORTY LONG YEARS LATER, WHEN MOSES WAS 80 YEARS OF AGE, GOD CALLED THIS REMARKABLE MAN TO LEAD HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE OUT OF THE BONDAGE OF EGYPT, AND WHERE DO YOU THINK HE FOUND HIM? WHY, OUT IN THE FIELDS, TENDING THE FLOCKS OF JETHRO. YES, MOSES WAS A HUMBLE SHEPHERD TOO!

AFTER ISRAEL CROSSED OVER JORDAN, THEY HAD TO SUBDUED THE LAND OF CANAAN, ENCOUNTERING MANY ENEMY FORCES. AT A CRUCIAL TIME WHEN THE MIDIANITES WERE OPPRESSING THE ISRAELITES, YAHWEH APPEARED TO A YOUNG MAN NAMED GIDEON, CHOOSING HIM TO BE THE LEADER OF THE TROUBLED NATION. WE MIGHT CONSIDER THIS AN HONOR AND FEEL EXALTED, BUT NOT GIDEON. NOTICE HIS RESPONSE:

"O MY LORD, WHERE WITH SHALL I SAVE ISRAEL? BEHOLD, MY FAMILY IS POOR IN MANASSEH, AND I AM THE LEAST OF MY FATHER'S HOUSE" (JUDGES 1:25).

IN CHOOSING GIDEON TO LEAD ISRAEL, GOD EXPRESSED A PRINCIPLE PERHAPS BEST STATED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL. IN HIS SECOND LETTER TO CORINTH, HE DISCUSSED HIS "THORN IN THE FLESH," AND HOW HE HAD BESEECHED GOD THREE TIMES TO REMOVE IT, BUT TO NO AVAIL (II COR. 12:7-8) CHRIST'S RESPONSE TO PAUL SAYS IT ALL:

"AND HE SAID TO ME, MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU; FOR MY STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS. MOST GLADLY THEREFORE WILL I RATHER GLORY IN MY INFIRMITIES, THAT THE POWER OF CHRIST MAY REST UPON ME. THEREFORE I TAKE PLEASURE IN INFIRMITIES, IN REPROACHES, IN NECESSITIES (POVERTY), IN PERSECUTIONS, IN DISTRESSES FOR CHRIST'S SAKE: FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG" (II COR. 12:9-10).

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS IS THAT PRINCIPLE WHICH GOD HAS SO OFTEN USED WHEN WORKING THROUGH HUMAN BEINGS. IT IS WHEN WE COME TO SENSE OUR OWN HELPLESSNESS, OUR OWN UNWORTHINESS, OUR OWN INABILITY TO SAVE OURSELVES, THAT WE ARE ABLE TO TURN WHOLEHEARTEDLY TO GOD AND SUBMIT FULLY INTO HIS CAPABLE HANDS. A RICH MAN, A POWERFUL MAN, A WORLDLY WISE AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS MAN, WILL ALWAYS FIND IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO YIELD TO GOD AND TRUST HIM COMPLETELY IN ALL AREAS OF HIS LIFE. IT IS INDEED THE RAREST OF HUMAN BEINGS WHO CAN REMAIN RICH IN THIS WORLD'S GOODS AND STAY CLOSE TO GOD AND SERVE HIM FAITHFULLY AND PLEASINGLY. THERE HAVE BEEN AND ARE EXCEPTIONS.

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO BE LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN. MOST HUMANS HAVE TO BE GREATLY HUMBLED AND GO THROUGH MUCH TRIAL AND TESTING TO REACH THIS DESIRED STATE. WHEN ONE IS RICH AND POWERFUL, HE TENDS TO BECOME LIKE THE INFAMOUS CHURCH IN LAODICEA, TO WHOM CHRIST SAID:

"BECAUSE YOU SAY, I AM RICH AND INCREASED WITH GOODS, AND HAVE NEED OF NOTHING; AND DO NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE WRETCHED AND MISERABLE, AND POOR AND BLIND AND NAKED... AS MANY AS I LOVE, I REBUKE AND CHASTEN: BE ZEALOUS THEREFORE, AND REPENT" (REV. 3:17,19).

WHEN A MAN OR WOMAN STRIVES AFTER THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD AND ACQUIRES THEM, LITTLE BY LITTLE THEY BEGIN TO TRUST IN THEMSELVES, THEY BEGIN TO THINK THAT THEY HAVE NEED OF NOTHING, THEY TEND NOT TO GIVE GOD THE CREDIT IN THEIR HEARTS.

WHEN GOD CALLED GIDEON, HE KNEW THE TERRIBLE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SITUATION THE NATION WAS FACING. WE READ IN JUDGES 7:12:

"THE MIDIANITES AND THE AMALEKITES AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE EAST LAY ALONG THE VALLEY (OF JEZREEL) LIKE GRASSHOPPERS FOR MULTITUDE; AND THEIR CAMELS WERE WITHOUT NUMBER, AS THE SAND BY THE SEASIDE FOR MULTITUDE."

AGAINST THIS VAST HORDE, GIDEON BROUGHT THE ARMIES OF ISRAEL, SOME 32,000 STRONG, BUT GOD PREVENTED THEM FROM GOING INTO BATTLE, TELLING GIDEON:

"THE PEOPLE THAT ARE WITH YOU ARE TOO MANY FOR ME TO GIVE THE MIDIANITES INTO THEIR HANDS, LEST ISRAEL VAUNT THEMSELVES AGAINST ME, SAYING, MY OWN HAND HAS SAVED ME" (JUDGES 7:2).

YAHWEH EVENTUALLY REDUCED THE SIZE OF GIDEON'S ARMY TO A MERE 300 MEN, AGAINST AN COMBINED ARMY OF PERHAPS SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND TRAINED SOLDIERS. NOT UNTIL THEN DID HE PROCEED TO GRANT THEM A SPECTACULAR VICTORY OVER THE ENEMY.

THIS FAMOUS EPISODE IS RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE PRIMARILY TO TEACH US A SIGNIFICANT LESSON - THAT ALL GLORY BELONGS TO GOD, THAT MAN MUST NOT TRUST IN HIS OWN WAY, IN HIS OWN WISDOM, IN HIS OWN STRENGTH AND POWER AND POSSESSIONS. GOD WILL NOT PERMIT HIS OWN CHILDREN TO LIVE THEIR LIVES IN SUCH A FASHION THAT HE IS DENIED THE CREDIT AND PRAISE FOR WHAT THEY ACHIEVE. FOR THIS REASON, HE OFTEN REDUCES HIS SERVANTS TO A LOWLY STATE, A HUMBLE STATE, EVEN AS HE SLICED THE ARMY OF ISRAEL FROM 32,000 TO 300. HE KNEW WHAT THE ISRAELITES WOULD DO ONCE THE VICTORY WAS ACCOMPLISHED. THEY WOULD BECOME PROUD AND BEGIN TO TRUST IN THEIR OWN ABILITIES ONLY, THEY WOULD BEGIN, PERHAPS SLOWLY AT FIRST, TO EXCLUDE GOD, TO DEPEND UPON LESS AND LESS, TO BECOME A LITTLE MORE CONFIDENT IN THEMSELVES, THEIR SELF-ESTEEM WOULD RISE DRAMATICALLY.

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS - REMEMBER THIS PRINCIPLE, AS GOD WORKS IN YOUR LIFE. DESIRE THE HUMILITY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST, IN SPITE OF WHATEVER HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCES AND SITUATIONS MIGHT BE ENCOUNTERED OR INDEED REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THOSE GODLY QUALITIES.

ABEL, MOSES AND GIDEON WERE BY NO MEANS THE ONLY LOWLY PEOPLE WHOM GOD CALLED AND USED MIGHTILY IN HIS SERVICE. BY SAMUEL'S DAY, THE CLAMOR FOR A KING WAS SO GREAT THAT YAHWEH SENT HIS PROPHET TO SEARCH OUT A MAN TO RULE OVER THE NATION. THAT MAN TURNED OUT TO BE AN UNKNOWN, OBSCURE INDIVIDUAL NAMED SAUL. HIS REACTION UPON HEARING THE STARTLING NEWS THAT HE WAS TO BE ISRAEL'S FIRST REIGNING MONARCH IS RATHER INTERESTING. HE RESPONDED:

"AM I NOT A BENJAMINITE, OF THE SMALLEST OF THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL? AND MY FAMILY THE LEAST OF ALL THE FAMILIES OF BENJAMIN? WHEREFORE THEN SPEAK YOU SO TO ME?" (I SAM. 9:21).

WHEN GOD AGREED TO ALLOW HIS PEOPLE TO HAVE A KING, TO WHOM THEN DID HE TURN? TO THE RICH AND POWERFUL, THE NOBLE AND FAMOUS? HARDLY! HE CHOSE THE LEAST OF THE LEAST!! UNFORTUNATELY, SAUL DID NOT REMAIN IN THAT HUMBLE AND SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE, AND HE WAS EVENTUALLY REJECTED. WE ALL KNOW WHO SUCCEEDED SAUL AS KING OVER ISRAEL, BUT DO YOU REMEMBER THE STORY OF HOW DAVID WAS SELECTED?

AFTER SAUL PROVED TO BE UNWORTHY, YAHWEH SENT SAMUEL ONCE AGAIN TO SEARCH OUT HIS REPLACEMENT. WHEN HE CAME TO THE HOME OF JESSE, HE COMMANDED THAT ALL HIS SONS BE BROUGHT OUT BEFORE HIM. ONE BY ONE THESE SEASONED, WELL-TRAINED, MAGNIFICENT PHYSICAL SPECIMEN WERE PARADED BY THE PROPHET. EACH TIME ONE WOULD COME OUT, SAMUEL, IMPRESSED BY THEIR OUTWARD APPEARANCE, WOULD EXCLAIM THAT SURELY THAT ONE WAS THE LORD'S ANOINTED. BUT, AS YOU WELL KNOW, IT TURNED OUT THAT THE VERY ONE GOD HAD CHOSEN WAS SO INSIGNIFICANT THAT HIS OWN FATHER DIDN'T EVEN THINK TO BRING HIM OUT BEFORE SAMUEL! OF COURSE, THAT MAN WAS DAVID, A MERE SHEPHERD, A POET PLAYING TUNES ON THE LUTE AS HE WATCHED OVER HIS FATHER'S SHEEP. HE WAS THE LEAST IN HIS FAMILY. HE SEEMED TO ALL PRESENT TO BE THE MOST UNLIKELY POSSIBLE CANDIDATE FOR THE THRONE OF ISRAEL.

WE CAN DISCERN DAVID'S STATE OF MIND, FOR WHEN SAUL LATER SOUGHT TO MAKE DAVID HIS SON-IN-LAW, NOTICE HIS REACTION:

"DOES IT SEEM TO YOU TO BE A LIGHT THING TO BE A KING'S SON-IN-LAW, SEEING THAT I AM A POOR MAN AND LIGHTLY ESTEEMED?" (I SAM. 18:23).

MOST OF US SIMPLY TAKE FOR GRANTED THAT DAVID WAS A WEALTHY MAN, BUT FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE, THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL THAT HE WAS JUST THE OPPOSITE. HE CAME FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS, AND EVEN AFTER HIS ANOINTING BY SAMUEL AND LATER ASSOCIATION WITH THE COURT OF SAUL, HE STILL REMAINED SMALL IN HIS OWN EYES - "POOR AND LIGHTLY ESTEEMED." ONCE IT BECAME EVIDENT THAT SAUL HAD BEEN REJECTED, DAVID WAS FORCED TO LIVE FOR YEARS IN CONSTANT FEAR FOR HIS LIFE. HE WAS ON THE RUN, HIDING OUT, SURVIVING BY HIS OWN WITS, OFTEN DESTITUTE AND EVEN NEAR DEATH. HE ONCE WROTE:

"BUT I AM POOR AND SORROWFUL: LET YOUR SALVATION O GOD SET ME UPON HIGH...THE HUMBLE SHALL SEE THIS AND BE GLAD...FOR THE LORD HEARS THE POOR AND DESPISES NOT HIS PRISONERS" (PSA. 69:29, 32-33).

SOME OF DAVID'S MOST PROFOUND PRAYERS EXPRESS HIS DEEP FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY IN THE FACE OF SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEMS - WITH ENEMY FORCES, INTRIGUE WITHIN HIS OWN ARMY, CONSTANT TROUBLE WITHIN HIS FAMILY (HE WAS EVEN FORCED TO FLEE THE THRONE AND SEEK REFUGE FROM HIS OWN SON ABSOLOM!), WITH TIMES OF HUNGER, SICKNESS, AFFLICTION, SEVERE TRIAL AND DESTITUTE. DAVID CLEARLY HAD TO LEARN THE HARD, BUT ENDURING LESSONS OF THIS LIFE AND CALLING - JUST THE WAY ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE MUST DO. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT DAVID WAS AN OFTEN POOR AND GREATLY AFFLICTED MAN IN THE FLESH WHO SUBMITTED TO GOD AND BECAME RICH IN THE THINGS OF GOD, WHEREAS HIS SON SOLOMON WAS WEALTHY AND PRIVILEGED BEYOND ALL HUMAN IMAGINATION, YET SUBMITTED TO THE FLESH AND BECAME POOR AND NEEDY AND AFFLICTED SPIRITUALLY! QUITE AN AMAZING CONTRAST.

ALMIGHTY GOD ATTACHES NO SHAME TO THE POOR OF HIS PEOPLE. THE PROPHET AMOS ADMITTED TO AMAZIAH:

"I WAS NO PROPHET, NEITHER WAS I A PROPHET'S SON; BUT I WAS A HERDMAN, AND A GATHERER OF SYCAMORE FRUIT; AND YAHWEH TOOK ME AS I FOLLOWED THE FLOCK, AND...SAID TO ME, 'GO, PROPHECY UNTO MY PEOPLE ISRAEL'" (AMOS 7:14-15).

WAS AMOS RICH AND FAMOUS? OBVIOUSLY NOT! NEITHER, FOR THAT MATTER, WAS ELISHA WHO, WHEN GOD CALLED HIM, WAS PLOWING A FIELD BEHIND TWELVE YOKE OF OXEN; NOR WAS EZEKIEL, A POOR AND AFFLICTED VICTIM OF THE CRUEL BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY; NOR WAS JEREMIAH, WHO SUFFERED GREATLY AND WAS IN DESTITUTE IN GOD'S SERVICE. THE SAME COULD CERTAINLY BE SAID FOR OTHERS WHOM GOD USED IN TIMES PAST.

THE PSALMISTS AND PROPHETS OF OLD PROVIDE ELOQUENT TESTIMONY TO GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE POOR OF HIS PEOPLE. WE READ IN PSALMS 74:

"FORGET NOT THE CONGREGATION OF YOUR POOR FOREVER... LET NOT THE OPPRESSED RETURN ASHAMED; LET THE POOR AND NEEDY PRAISE YOUR NAME" (Psa. 74:14, 21).

IN THE COMING KINGDOM TO WHICH ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE LOOK FORWARD IN EAGER ANTICIPATION AND DESIRE, THE PROPHETS HAVE SPOKEN OF THE POOR AND NEEDY. ISAIAH PROPHESED:

"FOR YAHWEH (THE LORD) SHALL HAVE MERCY ON JACOB, AND WILL YET CHOOSE ISRAEL...YAHWEH HAS FOUNDED ZION, AND THE POOR OF HIS PEOPLE SHALL TRUST IN IT" (Isa. 14:1,32).

WRITING ABOUT THE CITY OF JERUSALEM IN THAT GREAT FUTURE TIME OF DELIVERANCE, ZEPHANIAH QUOTES GOD AS SAYING:

"I WILL ALSO LEAVE IN THE MIDST OF YOU AN AFFLICTED AND POOR PEOPLE, AND THEY SHALL TRUST IN THE NAME OF YAHWEH" (ZEPH. 3:12).

AND PERHAPS A FINAL QUOTE IN THIS REGARD, AGAIN FROM ISAIAH:

"AND IN THAT DAY SHALL THE DEAF HEAR THE WORDS OF THE BOOK, AND THE EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL SEE OUT OF OBSCURITY...AND THE POOR AMONG MEN SHALL REJOICE IN THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL" (Isa. 29:18-19).

CHRIST - RICH OR POOR?

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OUR SAVIOUR WAS WELL-TO-DO OR CAME FROM MEAGER ORIGINS HAS BEEN DEBATED FOR CENTURIES, WITH ASSUMPTIONS MADE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ISSUE. GIVEN ISAIAH'S GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE COMING MESSIAH, WE ADMITTEDLY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE HIM AS A PART OF THE RICH AND POWERFUL OF THE WORLD. NOTICE THE FAMILIAR WORDS OF ISAIAH 53:

"HE SHALL GROW UP BEFORE HIM AS A TENDER PLANT AND AS A ROOT OUT OF A DRY GROUND: HE HAS NOT FORM OR COMELINESS (GLORY, HONOR, MAJESTY, MAGNIFICENCE, EXCELLENCY): AND WHEN WE SEE HIM THERE NO BEAUTY THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM. HE IS DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN; A MAN OF SORROWS, AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF; AND WE HID OUR FACES

FROM HIM; HE WAS DESPISED AND WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT" (ISA. 53:2-3).

THIS PASSAGE ALONE WOULD SEEM TO PRECLUDE CHRISIT'S HAVING BEEN AMONG THE WEALTHY AND PRIVILEGED CLASS OF HIS DAY - BUT THERE IS MORE EVIDENCE. THERE CAN REALLY BE NO DOUBT THAT HE CAME FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS. HE WAS BORN AMID CATTLE AND SHEEP IN A STABLE. LUKE'S NARRATIVE OF THE NATIVITY IS CLEARLY INTENDED TO FOCUS ON THIS FACT.

FURTHERMORE, WHEN THE DAYS OF MARY'S PURIFICATION WERE COMPLETED, SHE WENT UP TO OFFER A SACRIFICE ACCORDING TO COMMAND IN LEVITICUS 12:4-8. THAT LAW REQUIRED THAT A LAMB OF THE FIRST YEAR BE PRESENTED AT THE ALTAR. THERE WAS, HOWEVER, A SPECIAL PROVISION MADE FOR THOSE WHO WERE TOO POOR TO AFFORD A LAMB. NOTICE THIS EXCEPTION TO THE LAW:

"THESE ARE THE REGULATIONS FOR THE WOMAN WHO GIVES BIRTH TO A BOY OR A GIRL. IF SHE CANNOT AFFORD A LAMB, SHE IS TO BRING TWO DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS; ONE FOR A BURNT OFFERING AND ONE FOR A SIN OFFERING" (LEV. 12:7-8).

NOW TAKE A LOOK AT LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF WHAT TRANSPIRED WHEN MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS (YAHSHUA) WENT TO THE TEMPLE TO BRING HER OFFERING:

"WHEN THE TIME OF THEIR PURIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF MOSES HAD BEEN COMPLETED, JOSEPH AND MARY TOOK HIM TO JERUSALEM TO PRESENT HIM TO THE LORD (AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE LAW OF THE LORD, 'EVERY FIRSTBORN MALE IS TO BE CONSECRATED TO THE LORD'), AND TO OFFER A SACRIFICE IN KEEP-ING WITH WHAT IS SAID IN THE LAW OF THE LORD, A PAIR OF DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS" (LUKE 2:22-24).

IT SHOULD BE ABUNDANTLY CLEAR THAT JOSEPH AND MARY, AT LEAST AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME, COULD NOT AFFORD TO PURCHASE A LAMB. THIS INCIDENT IS REALLY QUITE REVEALING AND IT IS AMAZING THAT GOD SAW FIT TO INCLUDE IT IN THE STORY. THE LIKELIHOOD THAT CHRIST GREW UP IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF WEALTH IS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE.

WE KNOW THAT HE WAS RAISED IN A SMALL, RATHER OBSCURE VILLAGE CALLED NAZARETH, THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN LOCATED ABOUT 20-25 MILES SOUTHWEST OF THE SEA OF GALILEE. HIS FATHER WAS A CARPENTER, WHICH IMPLIES HE WAS A WORKER NOT ONLY IN WOOD, BUT ALSO VERY LIKELY IN STONE AS WELL. CARPENTERS, IN ORDER TO SURVIVE IN THAT AREA, WERE OFTEN REQUIRED TO BE PROFICIENT IN BOTH MEDIUMS. THIS WAS SURELY TRUE OF JOSEPH.

IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN AN EASY LIFE, ESPECIALLY IN THAT LOCALE AND AT THAT TIME IN HISTORY. POVERTY ABOUNDED. POLITICAL OPPRESSION

FROM BOTH THE HERODS AND FROM ROME MADE LIFE FAR LESS THAN OPTIMUM. IT APPEARS THAT JOSEPH DIED SOMETIME SHORTLY AFTER YAHSHUA'S 12TH BIRTHDAY, AS THERE IS NEVER AGAIN MENTION OF HIM IN THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS BEYOND THIS PERIOD. IF THAT BE THE CASE, THEN CHRIST, AS THE FIRSTBORN, WOULD HAVE HAD THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SUPPORTING AND HELPING RAISE HIS FOUR BROTHERS AND AT LEAST TWO SISTERS, POSSIBLY MORE. THIS SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES HARDLY SUGGESTS THE GREAT LIKELIHOOD THAT MARY'S FAMILY WAS ONE OF MUCH WEALTH!

IT IS QUITE EVIDENT FROM THE GOSPELS THAT ONCE THE SAVIOUR BEDGAN HIS MINISTRY, EVEN IF HE HAD BEEN A MAN OF MEANS, HE CERTAINLY GAVE IT UP AND BECAME A PAUPER FOR THE SAKE OF THE TRUTH OF GOD. IT IS CLEAR THAT HE LIVED A VERY SIMPLE, DISCIPLINED, FRUGAL LIFESTYLE, WITHOUT THE FRILLS AND EXTRAVAGANCES AND TRAPPINGS OF WEALTH. ON ONE OCCASION, HE WAS CONFRONTED BY A CERTAIN SCRIBE WHO DECLARED: "MASTER, I WILL FOLLOW YOU WHEREVER YOU GO" (MATT. 8:19). CHRIST LOOKED AT THIS EAGER, ZEALOUS MAN AND WAS MOVED TO WARN HIM ABOUT WHAT HE WAS ASKING FOR, WHAT HE WAS REALLY GETTING HIMSELF INTO, BY SAYING:

"THE FOXES HAVE HOLES AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE THEIR NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS **NOT TO WHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD**" (MATT. 8:20).

YAHSHUA, HAD HE BEEN WEALTHY, A MAN OF MEANS, WOULD HAVE NEVER RESPONDED IN THIS MANNER. COMMON SENSE TELLS US SO. HE ESSENTIALLY TOLD THIS MAN, "IF YOU WANT TO FOLLOW ME, YOU HAD BETTER REALIZE SOMETHING. IT'S NO BED OF ROSES. IT WILL BE HARD, IT WILL BE A LIFE OF SACRIFICE AND DEPRIVATION. LOOK, EVEN THE ANIMALS HAVE HOMES IN WHICH TO LIVE AND REST, BUT I DO NOT AS MUCH AS A PLACE TO LAY MY HEAD AT NIGHT!" THAT PROFOUND STATEMENT OUGHT TO TELL US SOMETHING NOT ONLY ABOUT CHRIST'S LIFE AND LIFESTYLE, BUT ALSO ABOUT WHAT OUR OWN SHOULD BE IN HIS SERVICE.

I HAVE KNOWN CERTAIN MINISTERS AND CHURCH LEADERS WHO HAVE ATTEMPTED TO PORTRAY THE MESSIAH AS A RICH MAN, A WEALTHY LANDOWNER, A MAN OF GREAT MATERIAL MEANS, A WEARER OF EXPENSIVE GARMENTS, ETC. THEIR REASONS FOR MAKING SUCH FALSE ASSERTIONS, HOWEVER, WAS QUITE TRANSPARENT. THEY DID IT TO DEFEND AND EXCUSE THEMSELVES FOR THEIR OWN OPULENT AND EXTRAVAGANT WAY OF LIFE. THEY WERE GUILTY OF "MAKING MERCHANDISE" OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (II PET. 2:3), AND THEN LAVISHING UPON THEMSELVES ALL THAT MONEY COULD BUY. ARE SOME OF GOD'S OTHER PEOPLE GUILTY OF A SIMILAR STATE OF MIND? DO YOU EQUATE YOUR CALLING AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD BY THE SIZE OF YOUR WALLET OR THE NUMBER OF YOUR PHYSICAL POSSESSIONS. IS THAT YOUR YARDSTICK? IF SO, YOU HAD BETTER BE WARNED BY THE EXAMPLE OF YOUR SAVIOUR AND THOSE FAITHFUL SERVANTS WHO HAVE SUFFERED THE DISPOSSESSION, BEREAVEMENT AND POVERTY THAT OFTEN ACCOMPANIES A LIFE OF SELFLESS SACRIFICE FOR GOD. IF YOU ARE GUILTY OF FALLING INTO THAT SUBTLE TRAP OF SATAN, YOU NEED TO CONFESS IT AND REPENT OF IT **NOW!!**

PAUL GIVES US SEVERAL PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE WHICH ARE HIGHLY INSTRUCTIVE OF CHRIST'S MATERIAL OR PHYSICAL CONDITION DURING HIS EARTHLY MISSION. HE WROTE THE PHILIPPIANS THESE MOVING WORDS:

"LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU, WHICH WAS ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS; WHO, BEING IN THE FORM OF GOD, THOUGHT IT NOT ROBBERY TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD (DID NOT CONSIDER EQUALITY WITH GOD TO BE SOMETHING TO HOLD ON TO); BUT MADE HIMSELF OF NO REPUTATION (EMPTIED HIMSELF, ABASED HIMSELF) AND TOOK UPON HIM THE FORM OF A SERVANT" (PHIL. 2:5-7).

WE QUOTE THESE VERSES OFTEN, BUT I JUST HOPE THAT EACH OF US REALLY TAKES THEM TO HEART. THEY REVEAL SO MUCH ABOUT OUR SAVIOUR, HOW MUCH HE LOVED US, HOW WILLING HE WAS TO DO WHATEVER IT TOOK TO PROVIDE FOR OUR SALVATION, HOW HE DID NOT LOOK TO THE THINGS OF THIS FLESH NOR EVEN HOLD ON TO THE THINGS OF HIS OWN DIVINITY, BUT GAVE UP EVERYTHING FOR THE LIKES OF YOU AND ME. HIS LOVE AND HUMILITY AND SELFLESS SERVICE ARE BEYOND COMPARE. THEY ARE MATCHLESS! HE GAVE UP BEING GOD AND BECAME A NOBODY, A MERE HUMAN, A MAN OF NO REPUTATION, HUMBLING HIMSELF EVEN UNTO THE IGNOMINIOUS DEATH OF THE CROSS.

ON ANOTHER OCCASION, WHEN PAUL WAS ATTEMPTING TO SHAME THE CORINTHIANS BECAUSE OF THEIR STINGINESS IN GIVING TO HELP OUT SOME OF THEIR POORER AND LESS FORTUNATE BRETHREN, REVEALED SOMETHING ABOUT CHRIST THAT IS REALLY VERY MOVING AND TELLING: HE SAID:

"FOR YOU KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS (YAHSHUA) CHRIST, THAT THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKES, HE BECAME POOR, THAT YOU THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BE RICH" (II COR.8:9).

THE MESSIAH DID NOT COME TO THIS EARTH AS A RICH MAN, NEITHER WAS HE INTERESTED IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD, THIS FLESHLY LIFE. HIS MIND, HIS LIFE, HIS FOCUS WAS ENTIRELY UPON THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT, THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, THE SPREADING OF THE TRUTH OF GOD, THE COMPLETION OF THE WORK FOR WHICH HE CAME IN THE FIRST PLACE. HE WAS TEMPTED AND TRIED IN ALL POINTS JUST LIKE THE REST OF HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN THIS CALLING (HEB. 4:15). IN HIS GREAT HEAVENLY EXISTENCE, HE WAS RICH INDEED, BUT HE EMPTIED HIMSELF AND BECAME POOR FOR OUR SAKES, THAT THROUGH HIS PHYSICAL POVERTY, WE MIGHT HAVE THE PRICELESS OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME RICH IN THE SPIRIT! THIS IS THE LESSON OF HIS LIFE, THIS IS THE LESSON OF SCRIPTURE. TO BELIEVE OTHERWISE IS TO DENY OR PERVERT THE WORD OF GOD.

THE EARLY CHURCH

THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH IS ALL THAT WE HAVE RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. IT IS QUITE INTERESTING THAT GOD SAW FIT TO STOP THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE WITH THE CLOSE OF THAT FIRST CENTURY.

THERE WAS A PURPOSE, HOWEVER, IN HIS DOING SO. THE EARLY NEW TESTAMENT OR APOSTOLIC CHURCH IS INTENDED TO BE A PATTERN OR TYPE OF THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE, AND MOST ESPECIALLY, OF THE END-TIME CHURCH OF GOD. THIS IS WHY THE RECORD OF THE EARLY CHURCH IS SO VITALLY IMPORTANT FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO RELEGATE THAT ASPECT OF THE SCRIPTURAL RECORD TO MERE HISTORY. IT IS ALIVE WITH MEANING AND FRAUGHT WITH SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL OF US TODAY.

THE EARLY CHURCH WAS A SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH, ENERGIZED BY THE POWER OF CHRIST, A HUNGER FOR THE TRUTH AND THE QUEST FOR THE KINGDOM. THEY WERE PEOPLE OF CLEAR VISION, PEOPLE WHO SAW THEIR CALLING AND PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE FOR ITS SAKE. THE APOSTLE PAUL TAUGHT THEM THE SAME PRINCIPLES THAT CHRIST HAD SPOKEN - DENIAL OF SELF, ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY OF STANDING UP FOR THE GOSPEL, BECOMING SERVANTS OF ALL, ENDURING WHATEVER TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS CAME THEIR WAY. HE NEVER ENCOURAGED THE BRETHREN TO RELISH THE THINGS OF THIS FLESH, TO LABOR FOR THE MEAT THAT PERISHES, TO BE CONCERNED WITH ALWAYS WANTING AND GETTING MORE AND MORE IN THIS LIFE. HE HIMSELF SET THE SUPREME EXAMPLE AMONG THOSE WHO FOLLOWED IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SAVIOUR. THE RECORD OF PAUL'S SUFFERINGS IS LONG, HIS INFIRMITIES AND TRIALS ARE LEGION. DOES THE FOLLOWING REALLY SOUND LIKE PAUL WAS A LAID-BACK, EASY-GOING, COMFORTABLE CHRISTIAN, WHO REVELED IN THE THINGS OF THE GOOD LIFE?

"ARE THEY MINISTERS OF CHRIST?...I AM MORE; IN LABORS MORE ABUNDANT, IN STRIPES ABOVE MEASURE, IN PRISONS MORE FREQUENT, IN DEATHS OFTEN. OF THE JEWS FIVE TIMES RECEIVED I FORTY STRIPES SAVE ONE. THREE TIMES I WAS BEATEN WITH RODS, ONCE WAS I STONED, THREE TIMES I SUFFERED SHIPWRECK, A NIGHT AND A DAY HAVE I BEEN IN THE DEEP: IN JOURNEYINGS OFTEN, IN PERILS OF WATERS, IN PERILS OF ROBBERS, IN PERILS BY MY OWN COUNTRYMEN, IN PERIL BY THE HEATHEN, IN PERILS IN THE CITY, IN PERILS IN THE WILDERNESS, IN PERILS IN THE SEA, IN PERILS AMONG FALSE BRETHREN; IN WEARINESS AND PAINFULNESS, IN WATCHINGS OFTEN, IN HUNGER AND THIRST (YOU MEAN PAUL COULDN'T EVEN AFFORD FOOD AT TIMES?), IN FASTINGS OFTEN, IN COLD AND NAKEDNESS" (II COR. 11:23-27).

HOW DOES PAUL'S OWN DESCRIPTION OF HIS LIFE STRIKE YOU? HOW DOES YOURS COMPARE WITH IT? DON'T WE ALL SIMPLY PALE INTO INSIGNIFICANCE BESIDE THIS INCREDIBLE RECORD OF SUFFERINGS AND LABORS? IN AN EARLIER PASSAGE, HE GIVES THE FOLLOWING TESTIMONY:

"BUT IN ALL THINGS APPROVING OURSELVES AS THE MINISTERS OF GOD, IN MUCH PATIENCE, IN AFFLICTIONS, IN NECESSITIES (HARDSHIP, DEPRIVATION), IN DISTRESSES, IN STRIPES, IN IMPRISONMENTS, IN

TUMULTS, IN LABORS, IN WATCHINGS, IN FASTINGS...BY HONOR AND DISHONOR, BY EVIL REPORT AND GOOD REPORT, AS DECEIVERS AND YET TRUE; AS UNKNOWN AND YET WELL KNOWN; AS DYING, AND BEHOLD, WE LIVE; AS CHASTENED AND NOT KILLED; AS SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING; AS POOR, YET MAKING MANY RICH (SPIRITUALLY)" (II COR. 6:4-10).

THIS REMARKABLE MAN OF GOD ALMOST SEEMS SUPERHUMAN TO US TODAY, SO FAR HAVE WE DRIFTED IN THIS AGE OF MATERIALISM AND GREED. HIS SPECIAL KIND OF DEVOTION AND DEDICATION AND SELFLESS SACRIFICE, HIS BREED OF SUFFERING AND ENDURANCE, HIS KIND OF WILLINGNESS TO BE MADE UNCOMFORTABLE, PRESSURED AND PERSECUTED FOR THE WORK OF GOD SEEMS ALMOST UNREAL TO THE CHURCHGOERS OF THIS MODERN 20TH CENTURY. YET, IN GOD'S EYES, A MAN LIKE PAUL IS ONE OF THE CHIEF EXAMPLES FOR THE CHURCH TODAY. HE WAS A VITAL PART OF THAT EARLY CHURCH THAT TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN! WE DESPERATELY NEED TO LOOK TO THAT ERA FOR OUR INSPIRATION AND GUIDANCE.

WE READ IN ACTS 11 OF THE GREAT SUFFERING OF THE BRETHREN IN JUDEA DURING THE REIGN OF CLAUDIUS CAESAR AND HOW THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH SENT PAUL AND BARNABUS WITH A LARGE CONTRIBUTION DOWN TO JERUSALEM TO HELP RELIEVE SOME OF THE BURDEN OF THE CHURCH IN THAT AREA.

WHEN PAUL WANTED TO ENCOURAGE THE CORINTHIANS TO GIVE LIBERALLY TO HELP SOME OF THE POORER BRETHREN, HE CITED THE EXAMPLE OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES BY SAYING:

"AND NOW, BROTHERS, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THE GRACE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES. OUT OF THE MOST SEVERE TRIAL, THEIR OVERFLOWING JOY AND THEIR EXTREME POVERTY WELLED UP IN RICH GENEROSITY. FOR I TESTIFY THAT THEY GAVE AS MUCH AS THEY WERE ABLE, AND EVEN BEYOND THEIR ABILITY. ENTIRELY ON THEIR OWN, THEY URGENTLY PLEADED WITH US FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF SHARING IN THIS SERVICE TO THE SAINTS" (II COR. 8:1-4).

AT A LATER TIME, HE WROTE THE ROMANS OF HIS IMPENDING JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM FOR THE SAME TYPE OF SERVICE.

"BUT NOW I GO TO JERUSALEM TO MINISTER UNTO THE SAINTS. FOR IT HAS PLEASED THEM OF MACEDONIA AND ACHAIA TO MAKE A CERTAIN CONTRIBUTION FOR THE POOR SAINTS WHICH ARE AT JERUSALEM" (ROM. 15:23-26).

MANY IN THE EARLY CHURCH WERE POOR. AFTER ALL, JAMES CLEARLY STATED THAT GOD HAD CALLED THE POOR OF THE WORLD. IN MANY OTHER CASES, THOSE BRETHREN WHO MAY NOT HAVE ACTUALLY BEEN POVERTY-STRICKEN WERE STILL NEEDY, OFTEN JUST GETTING BY. IT WAS A STRUGGLE DURING MOST OF THAT FIRST CENTURY.

IN THE LETTER WRITTEN TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA, CHRIST HIMSELF REFERRED TO THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF THOSE BRETHREN IN THESE TERMS:

"AND UNTO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA WRITE: THESE THINGS SAYS THE FIRST AND THE LAST, WHICH WAS DEAD AND IS ALIVE; I KNOW YOUR WORKS, AND TRIBULATION AND POVERTY (BUT YOU ARE RICH - SPIRITUALLY)" REV. 2:8-9).

YOU MEAN ENTIRE CHURCH WERE POVERTY STRICKEN? ABSOLUTELY! MANY, MANY CHRISTIANS DURING THAT EARLY ERA WERE POOR. WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT FACT. WE LIVE IN SUCH AN AGE OF ABUNDANCE, THAT WE NOT ONLY FORGET THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS STARVING TO DEATH, BUT THAT OUR OWN BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE PAST HAVE, IN SO MANY INSTANCES, BEEN DESTITUTE AND DEPRIVED OF NOT ONLY THE LUXURIES, BUT EVEN THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE.

WHEN PAUL DESCRIBED, IN CHAPTER 11 OF HEBREWS, THAT FAMOUS LISTING OF THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD, NOTICE HOW HE PUT IT:

"AND OTHERS HAD TRIAL OF CRUEL MOCKINGS AND SCOURGINGS, YEA, MOREOVER OF BONDS AND IMPRISONMENT: THEY WERE STONED, THEY WERE SAWN ASUNDER, WERE TEMPTED, WERE SLAIN WITH THE SWORD: THEY WANDERED ABOUT IN SHEEPSKINS AND GOATSKINS; BEING DESTITUTE, AFFLICTED, TORMENTED; OF WHOM THE WORLD WAS NOT WORTHY" (HEB. 11:36-38).

THE EARLY CHURCH HAD IT TOUGH, BUT THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST WAS FORMED AND FORGED WITHIN THEM THROUGH THEIR CRUEL SUFFERING. DO WE THINK THAT IT SHOULD BE DIFFERENT WITH US TODAY? DID GOD MAKE THOSE RIGHTEOUS MEN AND WOMEN TO BE AFFLICTED AND PERMIT THIS AGE OF THE CHURCH TO JUST HAVE IT MADE, TAKE IT EASY, REVEL IN THE MATERIALISM OF THIS WORLD? WRONG AGAIN!!! IF WE DO THINK THAT WE HAVE IT MADE, IF WE ARE TAKING IT EASY, IF WE DO BASK IN THE THINGS OF THE FLESH, THEN IT IS WE WHO ARE AT FAULT! IT IS WE WHO ARE SLACKING OFF, COMPROMISING, WITH ONE FOOT IN THE CHURCH AND THE OTHER IN THE WORLD!

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

I DO NOT SAY THAT IT IS WRONG TO BE WEALTHY. WE KNOW THAT A FEW OF GOD'S TRUE SERVANTS HAVE BEEN RICH IN THEIR LIVES. OUR LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF THE PATRIARCHS, ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB, LEADS US TO BELIEVE THAT THEY WERE QUITE WELL TO DO, AND THIS IS LIKELY SO. BUT NONE OF THESE MEN WERE WITHOUT A LIFETIME OF TRIAL,

SETBACK AND TESTING. SOME, LIKE JOB, LOST EVERYTHING THEY EVERY HAD IN ORDER TO LEARN THE LESSONS OF THIS LIFE AND CALLING. SOME, LIKE HEZEKIAH, LET WEALTH GREATLY INTERFERE WITH THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH YAHWEH AND HAD TO REPENT BITTERLY. OTHERS, LIKE SOLOMON, ALLOWED THE THINGS OF THE WORLD TO TURN THEM AWAY FROM THE TRUE GOD TO PAGANISM AND PERHAPS TO HAVE CAUSED THEM TO MISS OUT ON THE KINGDOM ITSELF.

WE CERTAINLY ARE FAMILIAR WITH AT LEAST ONE RICH MAN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT - JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA. I WONDER, IF WE ONLY KNEW THE COMPLETE STORY OF JOSEPH'S LIFE, JUST HOW RICH HE REMAINED ONCE HE WAS CONVERTED. THE MANY TRADITIONS OF THE EARLY CHURCH TELL OF JOSEPH'S RELENTLESS EFFORTS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE AND EVEN GREAT BRITAIN. IT IS HIGHLY LIKELY THAT IT WAS THROUGH THE RICHNESS OF JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA THAT MUCH OF THE EARLY WORK IN EUROPE WAS ACCOMPLISHED!! THINK ABOUT IT. COULD IT BE THAT THIS RICH MAN ACTUALLY TOOK THE WORDS OF CHRIST TO HEART AND LAYED DOWN EVERYTHING IN SERVICE TO GOD, BECAME A PAUPER FOR THE GOSPEL? I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO DOUBT THAT THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT HAPPENED.

MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY ARE POOR, EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO MAY HAVE JOBS, BECAUSE OF THE SYSTEM UNDER WHICH THEY ARE FORCED TO LIVE. THEY BARELY MAKE ENDS MEET, LIVING FROM WEEK TO WEEK. IN SITUATIONS LIKE THESE, GOD USES SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES TO TEACH AND CORRECT HIS PEOPLE. HAVING GREAT WEALTH TENDS TO CAUSE A PERSON NOT TO FEEL THE REAL NEED TO LEAN UPON GOD. BEING POOR BRINGS THAT LESSON HOME. CHRIST SAID THAT IT WAS EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT FOR A RICH MAN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD. THAT IS A DIRE WARNING! A RICH PERSON FINDS IT MUCH HARDER TO LEARN HUMILITY, SUBMISSION, PATIENCE, DEPENDENCE UPON GOD.

IS IT WRONG TO BE WEALTHY? OF COURSE NOT! IF A PERSON IS RICH WHEN HE OR SHE IS CALLED INTO GOD'S TRUTH, THEN THAT IS A FACT OF LIFE. PERHAPS THEY HAVE MADE MANY SOUND FINANCIAL DECISIONS WHICH RESULTED IN BEING BLESSED. THAT IS NO CRIME. OFTEN, HOWEVER, RICHES ARE OBTAINED THROUGH DECEIT, DISHONESTY, OPPRESSION AND IMMORAL AND ILLEGAL MEANS. THOSE ARE CRIMES AND SINS AND MUST BE DEEPLY REPENTED OF BY ANY WEALTHY CONVERT. A RICH PERSON WHO IS A TRUE CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO ALLOW HIS OR HER WEALTH TO GET BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND GOD. IT MUST NEVER BECOME AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP OR DEVOTION. A RICH PERSON MUST BE VERY CAUTIOUS NOT TO PERMIT THEIR WEALTH AND POSSESSIONS TO CAUSE THEM TO BECOME SELF-CENTERED AND SELF-DEPENDENT. THE GOD WHO BLESSED THE RICH MAN CAN TAKE IT ALL AWAY IN THE WINK OF AN EYE!

PAUL INSTRUCTED TIMOTHY IN THIS MATTER AS FOLLOWS:

"COMMAND THOSE WHO ARE RICH IN THIS PRESENT WORLD NOT TO BE ARROGANT NOR TO PUT THEIR HOPE IN WEALTH, WHICH IS SO UNCERTAIN, BUT TO PUT THEIR HOPE IN GOD, WHO RICHLY PROVIDES

US WITH EVERYTHING FOR OUR ENJOYMENT. COMMAND THEM TO DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD DEEDS, AND TO BE GENEROUS AND WILLING TO SHARE. IN THIS WAY THEY WILL LAY UP TREASURE FOR THEMSELVES AS A FIRM FOUNDATION FOR THE COMING AGE, SO THAT THEY MAY TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE" (I Tim. 6:17-19).

I SAY, WITH PAUL, TO THOSE WHO ARE RICH IN THE CHURCH OF YAHWEH, TO THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE GREATLY BLESSED WITH THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD - RECOGNIZE AND CONFESS THAT YOUR BLESSINGS COME FROM HEAVEN ABOVE. MAKE ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT YOU ARE NOT ALLOWING YOUR ABILITY TO OBTAIN MATERIAL POSSESSIONS, TO PROVIDE FOR YOURSELVES GOODS AND SERVICES TO MAKE YOUR LIFE COMFORTABLE TO GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR GOD. DO ALL WITHIN YOUR POWER TO ESTABLISH A RIGHT PERSPECTIVE, THROUGH THE MIND OF CHRIST, ON WEALTH AND YOUR NEED TO STILL LOOK TO THE FATHER AND TRUST IN HIM FOR ALL THINGS. REMEMBER THAT IT IS THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT THAT COUNT IN THIS CALLING, AND THAT NO AMOUNT OF MONEY AND POSSESSIONS AND POWER WILL GET YOU ANYWHERE WITH GOD. TAKE CARE THAT YOUR LIFESTYLE IS ONE OF SIMPLICITY, HUMILITY AND ONE THAT IS NOT OSTENTATIOUS, ELABORATE OR EXTRAVAGANT. DO NOT PERMIT YOURSELVES TO CONSTANTLY LAVISH THE GOODS OF THIS WORLD UPON YOU OR YOUR FAMILY.

CONCENTRATE YOUR EFFORTS UPON HELPING OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE AMONG THE NEEDY OF YOUR BRETHREN. PERSONALLY, IF I WERE RICH, I WOULD CHOOSE TO LIVE SIMPLY AND CONSERVATIVELY, AND SEEK TO MAKE THE BEST POSSIBLE USE OF MY MONEY AND TIME IN SERVING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS, PARTICULARLY IN HELPING IN A WORK OF THE SPIRIT TO REACH OUT TO THOSE WHOM GOD IS CALLING. BY THIS I CERTAINLY DO NOT MEAN THAT A PERSON OF WEALTH SHOULD NOT PROVIDE ADEQUATELY FOR HIS OR HER FAMILY. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG ~~to~~ HAVE GOOD TRANSPORTATION, BUT I WOULD NEVER ALLOW MYSELF PERSONALLY TO DRIVE A VEHICLE THAT PUT MY BRETHREN TO SHAME OR THAT WAS MERELY A STATEMENT OF MY OWN EGO. IT IS ALL A MATTER OF THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT. I NOR ANYONE ELSE CAN LEGISLATE WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR MONEY. IT IS UP TO YOU. BUT THE WORD OF GOD WARNS THOSE THAT ARE RICH AND INCREASED WITH GOODS TO BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT THEIR ATTITUDE AND THEIR ACTIONS. LEAN UPON GOD, SEEK HUMILITY AND THE CHILD-LIKE STATE OF MIND TO BE TAUGHT SPIRITUALLY, AND ASK GOD'S COUNSEL AS TO HOW YOU SHOULD USE YOUR WEALTH. WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. EVEN A RICH MAN CAN ENTER INTO GOD'S KINGDOM, BUT IT IS NOT EASY. A RICH MAN WHO MAKES HIMSELF A PAUPER FOR THE WORK OF GOD, HOWEVER, RENDERS A SERVICE AND AN ACT OF LOVE THAT WILL NEVER GO UNREWARDED.

SHOULD A CHRISTIAN EXPECT GOD TO POUR OUT PHYSICAL BLESSING AFTER BLESSING UPON HIM, BECAUSE OF HIS OR HER RIGHTEOUSNESS? I BELIEVE THAT THE ANSWER IS NO! OUR OBJECTIVE MUST BE SPIRITUAL IN NATURE, NOT PHYSICAL. CHRIST CLEARLY TAUGHT THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE SO CONCERNED ABOUT LAYING UP TREASURE UPON THE EARTH. GOD HAS

PROMISED TO PROVIDE FOR HIS PEOPLE. IF WE ARE CALLED AND CHOSEN, IF WE ARE STRIVING TO SERVE AND OBEY, HE WILL NEVER LEAVE US NOR FORSAKE US. BUT HE WILL CHASTEN AND CORRECT US THROUGH THE TRIAL AND TESTING OF THIS LIFE. IN MANY CASES, THAT CORRECTION MAY COME THROUGH FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY, JOB PROBLEMS OR GENERALLY A LOW ESTATE AND STRUGGLING TYPE OF LIFESTYLE. FOR SOME, THIS MAY NOT BE THE CASE. REMEMBER THAT ONE OF THE VERY GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GIVING (ROM. 12:8), AND PAUL TEACHES THAT THOSE WHO ARE SO BLESSED SHOULD USE THEIR GIFT LIBERALLY! GOD HAS CALLED A FEW PEOPLE OF SUBSTANTIAL MEANS. IT IS THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP THOSE LESS FORTUNATE IN THE CHURCH. THIS IS THE WAY GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR SUCH CARE TO BE DISPENSED AND ADMINISTERED WITHIN THE BODY. I DO NOT MEAN TO IMPLY THAT THE FEW RICH SHOULD TOTALLY SUPPORT THE POOR, BUT THEY SHOULD THERE TO HELP AND TO GIVE, CHEERFULLY, WILLINGLY AND ABUNDANTLY, AS GOD HAS BLESSED THEM.

MY EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN THAT GOD MAY INDEED TEST A PERSON THROUGH A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF POVERTY AND HARD TIMES, BUT THAT HE WILL PROVIDE A WAY OF ESCAPE AND HELP IN DUE TIME. NO MATTER WHAT YOUR STATE OR STATUS IN LIFE MIGHT HAPPEN TO BE, LET GOD TAKE CHARGE AND TEACH YOU AND PREPARE YOU. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUR PHYSICAL BEING ARE NOT NEARLY SO IMPORTANT AS THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND THE FORMING AND SHAPING OF GODLY CHARACTER. FOLLOW AFTER THOSE THINGS AND LET GOD WORK WITH YOU AND CORRECT YOU AND PUT YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO BE. IF YOU CAN SEE CLEARLY THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO IMPROVE YOUR LOT IN LIFE, THEN PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER ALL THE RAMIFICATIONS, WEIGHING WHAT YOU MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO GIVE UP IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE BETTER SITUATION. SOMETIMES THE GRASS IS REALLY NOT GREENER ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE! LET YAHWEH HELP YOU MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION IN ALL MATTERS.

DAVID WROTE A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE WHICH SOME MAY HAVE TWISTED OR MISAPPLIED. HE SAID:

"THE KING SHALL JOY IN YOUR STRENGTH, O YAHWEH; AND IN THY SALVATION HOW GREATLY SHALL HE REJOICE! YOU HAVE GIVEN HIM HIS HEART'S DESIRE, AND HAVE NOT WITHHELD THE REQUEST OF HIS LIPS" (PSA. 21:1-2).

IN ANOTHER PLACE, DAVID SAID:

"HE WILL FULFIL THE DESIRE OF THEM THAT FEAR HIM; HE ALSO WILL HEAR THEIR CRY, AND WILL SAVE HIM" (PSA. 145:19).

SOME HAVE TAKEN VERSES LIKE THESE AND CLAIMED THAT GOD OWED THEM PHYSICAL ABUNDANCE. IS THAT WHAT THESE PASSAGES REALLY MEAN? HARDLY! WHAT IS OR SHOULD BE THE DESIRE OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN'S HEART? MATERIAL WEALTH, PHYSICAL GOODS, THE THINGS OF THIS PRESENT WORLD? IS IT NOT GOD THE FATHER AND HIS HOLY SON, IS IT NOT THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND WISDOM OF THE SCRIPTURES, IS IT NOT THE CHANCE TO GROW SPIRITUALLY, TO

BECOME LIKE CHRIST AND FOLLOW IN HIS FOOTSTEPS, IS IT NOT TO LEARN TO GIVE, TO HUMBLE ONESELF, TO YIELD INTO GOD'S CAPABLE HANDS AND BECOME SERVANT OF ALL, IS IT NOT THE GREAT COMING KINGDOM OF GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE IN HIS DIVINE FAMILY? ARE THESE NOT THE TRUE DESIRES OF A CHRISTIAN'S HEART? ABSOLUTELY - AND THESE ARE THE VERY THINGS THAT A LOVING GOD WILL INDEED GUARANTEE TO PROVIDE FOR HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE. YOU MAY SUFFER IN THIS LIFE. MANY OF GOD'S GREATEST SERVANTS HAVE DONE SO. YOU MAY BE DEPRIVED OF MUCH OF THIS WORLD'S GOODS. YOU ARE IN GOOD COMPANY FOR SO WAS YOUR SAVIOUR AND THE APOSTLE PAUL! BUT YOU NEED NEVER BE LACKING IN SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. THEY ABOUND IN THE LIFE OF A TRUE SERVANT OF YAHWEH. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT TO BE FOUND IN AN EASY LIFESTYLE, BUT IN THE STRUGGLE OF THIS LIFE, THE CRUCIBLE IN WHICH A CHRISTIAN IS TRIED AND TESTED. IT IS, REMEMBER, THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION THAT YOU WILL EVER ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD (ACTS 14:22)!

YOUR HEART AND THE DESIRES THEREOF MUST BE RIGHT BEFORE YOU CAN EXPECT GOD TO GRANT THEM. GOD CAUSES THE BLESSINGS OF THE FLESH TO FALL ON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST. PLEASE DO NOT MAKE THE CLASSIC MISTAKE OF JUDGING SOMEONE ON THE BASIS OF THE SIZE OF THEIR POCKET-BOOK, ASSUMING THAT BECAUSE THEY ARE LACKING THAT THEY MUST BE SINNERS. IT MUST MAY BE THAT THEY ARE LEARNING THE PRECIOUS LESSONS OF THIS CALLING AND YOU ARE BLINDLY STUMBLING AND DON'T EVEN KNOW IT! I URGE YOU TO PLEASE REMEMBER PAUL'S ADMONITION TO TIMOTHY:

"IF ANYONE TEACHES FALSE DOCTRINES AND DOES NOT AGREE WITH THE SOUND INSTRUCTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AND TO GODLY TEACHING, HE IS CONCEITED AND UNDERSTANDS NOTHING. HE HAS AN UNHEALTHY INTEREST IN CONTROVERSIES AND QUARRELS ABOUT WORDS THAT RESULT IN ENVY, STRIFE, MALICIOUS TALK, EVIL SUSPICIONS, AND CONSTANT FRICTION BETWEEN MEN OF CORRUPT MIND, WHO HAVE BEEN ROBBED OF THE TRUTH AND WHO THINK THAT GODLINESS IS A MEANS TO FINANCIAL GAIN!

BUT GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN. FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD, AND WE CAN TAKE NOTHING OUT OF IT. BUT IF WE HAVE FOOD AND CLOTHING, WE WILL BE CONTENT WITH THAT. PEOPLE WHO WANT TO GET RICH FALL INTO TEMPTATION AND A TRAP AND INTO MANY FOOLISH AND HARMFUL DESIRES THAT PLUNGE MEN INTO RUIN AND DESTRUCTION. ...SOME PEOPLE, EAGER FOR MONEY, HAVE WANDERED FROM THE FAITH AND PIERCED THEMSELVES WITH MANY GRIEFS" (I TIM. 6:3-10).

PLEASE BRETHEN, I IMPLORE YOU, TO SEARCH YOUR OWN HEARTS IN THIS MATTER. GOD DOES BLESS, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. IF YOU COME INTO THIS CALLING, HOWEVER, WITH THE NOTION THAT IT IS A MEANS TO FINANCIAL GAIN, YOU ARE BEING SADLY AND TRAGICALLY DECEIVED. YOU MAY IN FACT BECOME WEALTHY, BUT YOU WILL BE BLINDLY MISSING OUT

ON THE CHANCE OF A LIFETIME - THE GLORIOUS KINGDOM OF GOD! WHEN YOU ARE PONDERING THIS ISSUE AND EXAMINING YOURSELF BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, RECALL, IF YOU WILL, THE PROFOUND WORDS OF YOUR SAVIOUR WHEN HE SAID:

"IF ANY MAN COME TO ME, AND HATE NOT (LOVE LESS) HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND WIFE AND CHILDREN, AND BROTHERS AND SISTERS, YES, AND HIS OWN LIFE ALSO, HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.

AND WHOSOEVER DOES NOT BEAR HIS CROSS AND COME AFTER ME, CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE...

SO LIKEWISE, WHOSOEVER HE BE OF YOU THAT FORSAKES NOT ALL THAT HE HAS, HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE"
(LUKE 14:26-27, 33).

IS THIS YOUR REAL ATTITUDE, IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS? YOU ALONE MUST HONESTLY DETERMINE AND DISCERN YOUR OWN MOTIVES AND THE DIRECTION AND THRUST OF YOUR OWN LIFE. ARE YOU TRULY ALLOWING GOD TO HAVE FULL SWAY AND CHARGE IN ALL SITUATIONS? IS HE REALLY TEACHING YOU, NOT JUST KNOWLEDGE OF FACTS, BUT HOW TO LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE, OF REACHING OUT, OF HUMBLE SERVICE? WHAT IS UPPERMOST YOUR MIND RIGHT NOW? IS IT SOMETHING OF THE SPIRIT OR A FLESHLY DESIRE OR NEED? IS A DISTRACTION OF THIS WORLD, A TIME ROBBER, A DECEITFUL LUST OF SOME DESCRIPTION? ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ALWAYS ACQUIRING MORE AND MORE OF THIS WORLDS GOODS, THE GADGETS AND GIMMICKRY OF THIS AGE? OR IS YOUR HEART SQUARELY FIXED ON BEING INVOLVED AND COMMITTED TO THE WORK OF GOD AND THE SERVICE AND SACRIFICE ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH - YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST?

WE ALL MUST ASSESS OUR OWN LIVES BEFORE GOD. WE CANNOT POSSIBLY FOOL HIM. WE ONLY FOOL OURSELVES. LET US BECOME OF A PURE, SPIRITUAL MIND, UNIFIED IN PURPOSE, SPEAKING THE SAME THINGS, BELIEVING THE SAME THINGS, PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER AND REACHING OUT WILLINGLY TO HELP, ENCOURAGE AND BUILD UP EACH OTHER. THIS IS THE MIND OF CHRIST AT WORK.

THE GREAT KINGDOM OF GOD IS COMING VERY SOON. PHYSICAL WEALTH WILL MEAN NOTHING IN THAT DAY. YOUR PERSONAL STATUS IN THIS FLESH WILL AMOUNT TO ZERO. THE RICH OF THIS WORLD WILL THROW THEIR GOLD AND SILVER INTO THE STREETS IN THE DREADFUL DAY OF YAHWEH. IT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SAVE THEM. NEITHER WILL YOUR WEALTH SAVE YOU OR IMPROVE YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE ONE IOTA. BUT YOUR ATTITUDE OF HUMILITY AND SHARING AND TRUSTING GOD IMPLICITLY AND SUBMITTING FULLY AND ALLOWING GOD TO FORM AND SHAPE YOUR LIFE - THESE WILL ALWAYS STAND YOU IN GOOD STEAD - FOR ALL ETERNITY!

BRETHREN, DON'T LABOR FOR THE MEAT THAT PERISHES. DON'T LAY UP TREASURE FOR YOURSELVES ON THE EARTH. RATHER, USE EVERYTHING YOU HAVE, WHETHER OF THE FLESH OR OF THE SPIRIT, TO HELP AND SERVE OTHERS, ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE GOD HAS BLESSED YOU AND EQUIPPED YOU - AND GREAT WILL BE YOUR REWARD WHEN CHRIST COMES AND CALLS YOU BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT IN THE DAY OF HIS RETURN!