

11 August 2013

The rich man's attitude toward the poor (Money, Money, Money Pt 3)

This is our third study on the topic of money and riches. In our previous study we covered three points; (1) treasures of wickedness profiteth nothing, and (2) there is no satisfaction with money or what money can buy, and (3) desire not the treasures of the world but riches in Christ. In this study we will cover four points; (1) the rich are loved by their friends, but the poor are hated of their neighbours, and (2) the rich often mock the poor, and (3) the rich often do not want to know, or hear about the poor, and (4) the rich persecute the poor in their pride. Our first three points are established from Proverbs and our final point from Psalms. A common theme of our points is the contrast of the rich with the poor.

Let us add a little detail to our points:-

1. The rich are loved by their friends, but the poor are hated of their neighbours

Prov 14:20 *The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich [hath] many friends.*

See also Prov.19: 4

We often find that the rich are compared to the poor, especially in the book of Proverbs. Our verse is comparing those who are physically rich to those who are physically poor. Where the rich are loved of their friends, with the inference being their wealth attracts friends, compared to the poor who are hated, even of their neighbours. Prov.19: 4 confirms our point and swaps the word 'rich' for 'wealthy', and changes 'hated' to 'separated' from his neighbours. And this comparison is in the context of chapters 14- 19 where a general correlation is being made between good and evil, where in a *general* sense the poor are the good and the rich or wealthy are the wicked.

It would appear that riches are a magnet that attracts men whereas poverty repulses men, it has a similar effect to two south poles or two north poles of a magnet, they repel each other. And that is how the flesh generally responds to the rich and poor, it is attracted to the rich and repelled by the poor. And it won't surprise you, that with the Lord Jesus Christ, it was the opposite. The Lord Jesus taught:-

i) the poor are blessed (see Matt.5: 3), and

ii) the poor have the gospel preached to them (see Matt.11: 5), and

iii) the Lord told the rich man to go, sell all he had and give it to the poor (see Matt. 19: 21).

The apostle Paul encourages us to give part of our offerings to the poorer saints (see Rom.15: 26).

The book of James points out that God hath chosen the poor of this world who are rich in faith (see Jam.2: 5).

If they are so blessed why do people generally repel them, why do people generally hate them or separate themselves from them?

How do *you* treat the poor?

How do *you* treat those who beg for money on Queen street?

If you have ever been to Mexico, how did you treat the poor when they begged for money on the streets?

Or when you see the starving children on TV, do you race to the phone and pledge \$20 a month for a child?

Do you give each poor child one dollar a day? How do you work out the teaching of Scripture, to give to the poor (see Mk.10: 21), to show them compassion and mercy?

Do you look on the outward appearance of a man (see 2Cor.10: 7) and say that the poor beggar is shabby-looking so you won't go and share the gospel with him, but you will with the rich person next to him?

What about those in our community who are not on the street begging, but live hand to mouth each week, like solo mums and parents caring for their children on low incomes? Do you give them a dollar a day? Do you give your riches to the poor?

There have been folk on Queen street that have stopped and asked the preacher, why doesn't he close his mouth, stop preaching, and go sit with the poor, give them something to eat, as Jesus would have? My response at the time was, "thank you for your suggestion. The Bible talks about some having gifts of teaching, preaching and feeding the people of God and others in administration, so why don't you leave me to preach and you go sit with the poor, why don't you go and give them food"? They didn't have an answer, but walked off. But was that the *right* response? Is that how Jesus would have responded?

And how do we handle Paul's teaching that *if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*(1Tim.5: 8)?

In the past I have felt awkward around the poor man on the street, not knowing whether I am expected by the Lord to offer them a night's accommodation, but then I have my family to think about. Or am I part of the reason why the poor look at Christians and separate themselves? But then we are also asked to be *wise as serpents and harmless as doves*

(Matt.10: 16)? And what happens when you give them money and they spend it on alcohol or drugs, how does that help? I find myself seeking to “prove all things” (1Thes.5: 21). How do we apply that doctrine when asked by a poor person on the street for money? In the past I have explained to them that I have no money on me, but would be happy to go to my car, get my wallet and buy them some food and drink. When I have made that offer, they have replied with appreciation, but “just want money to buy food, thanks”.

We can only do that which we hope is pleasing to the Lord. But, when I walk past and give them a tract, is that pleasing my Saviour, or what if I walk past and give them nothing? What I can definitely say is that if I offer the rich man, dressed in rich apparel a tract and not the poor man, then that would be contrary to the Scriptures (see Jam.2: 3). As to whether we take the poor man in, feed him, or give them our jacket when they are cold, well, that is something to think about, that is something for each of us to pray about.

From this point, let each of us be more mindful of the poor, let us pray and ask God what He wants us to do for them when we see them. Let us have compassion on the poor and not hate them as the world does, and certainly not make friends with men because they are rich. Because the rich are loved by their friends, but the poor are hated of their neighbours.

2. The rich often mock the poor

Prov 17:5 *Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: [and] he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.*

See also 14: 31

Given that we are in the book of Proverbs and the writer is comparing good and evil, rich and poor, and we have already established that the good are likened to the poor of this world, and the evil to the rich, I assert from this verse, even though it does not specifically include the ‘rich’, that those who are opposite to the poor are the rich, and therefore, the wicked person who would mock the poor, is the rich man.

So what does it mean to mock a man? According to the Oxford dictionary, the word ‘mock’ means “derision, thing deserving scorn”, and what does scorn mean? It means “disdain, contempt, derision, despise, hold in contempt, consider beneath notice.” Hence when we mock the poor, we show them contempt and despise them simply because they have no money, no possessions. We look on the outward appearance of the man and judge him. And we know that the Lord God made both the poor man and the rich (1Sam.2: 7). So if we mock a man simply because of what he has or wears, we reproach God, and we judge the person by their appearance which is contrary to Scripture (see 2Cor.10: 7).

And I have seen this with my brother, who at the age of 53 is retired with his bag of riches. When I talk with him he appears to talk down about those who have nothing, as if that is what they deserve from their labours, just as he deserves his riches from all his hard work. And to a point he is correct. In some instances where a person who was a drop-out at school, smoked marijuana on the job and got sacked, and ended up with no family because of his addiction, and is now on the street. But such an example only serves to demonstrate the power of Satan and his ability to deceive man. So rather than mocking the poor man, should we not rather have compassion on him? But as an unsaved man, as my brother is, he has no capacity to show compassion, or mercy or grace, because he is subservient to his father the devil. And therefore he mocks the poor for their situation and in doing so, our verse says that he reproaches his Maker.

So when you meet a poor man on Queen street Auckland, or Lampton Quay in Wellington or Moorehouse avenue in Christchurch, or in any other major city in the world, be encouraged not to mock the poor, as the rich are encouraged to do by their father the devil, but rather have compassion on them. For when we mock the poor, we reproach our Maker, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The rich often do not want to know, or hear about the poor

Prov 21:13 *Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor; he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.*

As with our previous point the rich man is not mentioned in our verse from Proverbs, but we assert that the person who stops his ears from hearing the cries of the poor is the wicked, or the rich. So following on from our second point, we find that the rich man who, in his flesh, mocks the poor, will also stop his ears from hearing their cries, he do not want to hear the cries of the poor.

Imagine if your God took the same approach to you before you were saved, and stopped His ears to your cries for help, cries for His saving grace? If He had, then you would never be saved from hell, no one would ever receive eternal life in heaven! But that is exactly how the rich treat the poor, they ignore their cries, they turn up their radios when they walk past the beggar asking for help on the street, or they switch TV channels when there is a

commercial for the poor and starving in Africa. And even if they did do something, even if they did give a dollar, ten or twenty dollars from their thousands or millions, it would make no difference to their wealth. It would be like the rich casting in much compared to the poor widow who cast in two mites, which made up a farthing, and was all her living (see Mk.12: 42). Take for example Bill Gates, who as at March 2013, had a net worth of US\$67B, and is considered the world's most generous person and has given more than \$28billion, but that is nothing compared to his abundance. "But good on him for giving what he does," the world would say. Most rich do not want to hear the poor, they stop their ears to the cries of the poor.

But there are believers who have been millionaires and now have nothing financial to speak of, they have either given their wealth away in an effort to lessen the stranglehold that money has on them, or perhaps the Lord changed their circumstances, but whatsoever state they find themselves in, therewith they are content (see Phil.4: 11). They *know how to be abased, and they know how to abound: every where and in all things they are instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need* (see verse 12). Be ye encouraged to remember the poor (see Gal.2: 10), and not turn your ears away from their cries for help, for such is the response of the wicked and the rich.

4. The rich persecute the poor in their pride

Ps.10:2 *The wicked in [his] pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.*

So, why are the poor hated of their neighbours, why do the rich mock the poor, and not want to know them, or hear their cries? Our verse from Psalms says that it is a man's pride that causes him to persecute the poor. And we get the same answer from our earlier meaning of the word 'mock', that includes scorn, and a scorner looks at others and "consider(s) (them) beneath notice". Therefore, a rich person who is lifted up by their wealth, seeks also to widen the gap between themselves and the poor by considering the poor man to be beneath them, and hence they show themselves to be proud. So the rich persecute the poor to make *them lowly*, and to *lift themselves* up. Yet the poor person begging in the street already feels lowly, looks lowly and so when the rich don't want to know them, stop their ears to their cries, or mock them, they are only reinforcing their lowliness, whilst they lift themselves up. Which is the opposite to the example of the Lord Jesus, who made himself lowly and meek before those who mocked him, like the Pharisees. And it is the opposite to the instruction in Scripture to a believer to remember the poor (see Gal.2: 10), amongst others.

So let us remember next time we walk past a poor beggar on the streets, to not ignore them because they smell, or they have rags, or because they appear drunk, but rather let us stop and talk with them about the Lord Jesus Christ, as we would if they were a rich man in a suit. Let us hand the poor man a tract, rather than thinking they can't read, or won't want one, or they deserve to be where they are, or they should simply get a job. But rather, let us talk with them about what the Lord Jesus, who was meek and lowly, and died for the rich and the poor on the cross. He came and even when he was mocked, and scorned, he committed no sin, and He was put on the cross for our sin and theirs. Regardless of how much they smell, let us not persecute them any more than the world already does. Perhaps in doing so, one of them may, one day, thank us for taking the time to talk to them, for sharing the gospel, and may come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and get saved. What a blessing that would be! To follow Christ and go out into where the poor are, mix and associate with them, and give them just as much opportunity to hear the gospel as the rich. Let us not persecute the poor as the rich man does because of his pride.

Having said what we have said, let us say it again, in this our third study on money and riches. We have covered four points that include; (1) the rich are loved by their friends, but the poor are hated of their neighbours, and (2) the rich often mock the poor, and (3) the rich often do not want to know, or hear about the poor, and (4) the rich persecute the poor in their pride.