

“... For your sakes he became poor ...”

Proverbs chapter 13 informs us that:

“There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches.” (Prov. 13:7).

An example of those who considered themselves to be rich, yet had nothing, is the ecclesia at Laodicea, whom the Master rebuked:

“Because **thou sayest, I am rich**, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, **and poor**, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich ...” (Rev. 3:17-18).

Supposing that gain is godliness, these brethren had made a success in the things of this world. However, they were in spiritual poverty without realising it: they were “poor and blind and naked”, hence the advice to purchase “gold tried in the fire” – perfected faith (1 Pet. 1:7). There is a danger that we also can measure ‘success’ in terms of the possession of worldly goods, and physical wealth. Those who gain a particular social status in society are looked up to because of such ‘success’, yet they may be spiritually impoverished, as was the ecclesia at Laodicea.

By contrast, the Proverb continues: “there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7). In this, we have the example of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. He made himself poor for our sakes, yet was made rich – and not only so, but we can become rich through him! Of him it is said in our New Testament reading for the day:

“... 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).

RICH THROUGH POVERTY

Here is a paradox: through his poverty, we can be rich. How can this be so? A parallel idea is expressed in Philippians chapter 2:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God a matter to be grasped, **But made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Back in Genesis chapter 3, we read of how Eve grasped the forbidden fruit in a desire to be as the Elohim: yet of the Master, it is said that he did not so grasp at such equality. Rather, he emptied himself, or made himself of no reputation - and though he were in the form, or image of Deity, he became a servant, and humbled himself in obedience to Yahweh. He made himself poor.

In the humility of Christ, we have an example to follow:

“Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jno. 3:16)

Making himself poor for our sakes, the Son of the Living God provides an example of one who lovingly laid down his life in service. We also, then, ought to reciprocate that love by devoting our lives to serving the brethren and sisters, in the service of God.

GIVING - THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

The example that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ, is of a single-minded devotion to the doing of his Father’s Will. He was devoted to giving that which was right, rather than to please himself. So we read that “... even Christ ***pleased not himself***; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (Rom. 15:3). Again, at Gethsemane in his agony, Messiah said “not my will but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Even so, we must not be lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God: we must not please ourselves, but be devoted to giving faithful service to our God. Jesus gave his all in order to save us from our sins, and we ought to seek to do likewise.

Speaking of what the Lord gave, he said:

“... whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and ***to give his life*** a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:27-28).

Here is the real spirit of service, the Son of the Most High God became a servant in order to lay down his life for his friends – and we must heed that example and do likewise.

A WILLING SERVICE

The Lord was a willing servant, and therefore so must we be: “Lo I come to do thy Will, O God” (Heb. 10:7, 9) was his prayer, uttered both at the beginning and the end of his mortal ministry. His was the spirit of the prophet Isaiah: “... I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, ***Here am I; send me***” (Isa. 6:8). The Lord himself was one sent by God for the furtherance of His Purpose, and as such was a willing, obedient servant.

But the followers of Christ must do likewise:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye ***present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service***. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

In consideration of what has been done for us, it is only “reasonable” that we reciprocate that love in action, by way of likewise offering ourselves up as an antitypical burnt offering. The Apostle Paul did this: “always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor. 4:10). He said, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31) as he crucified the flesh “with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24).

In our chapter for today, we read of how the believers should willingly provide for each other. Speaking of how the Corinthian ecclesia had promised such help, the Apostle continues:

“Now therefore perform the doing of it that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:11-12).

Again, it is written of those who give:

“every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

THE POOR WIDOW

We see an example of this in the poor widow who was commended by the Master. She demonstrated a willing spirit, and so her offering was not judged by its lack of intrinsic value, but proportionately, by the fact that she was willing to give everything:

“Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That **this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury**: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mrk. 12:41-44).

Paul wrote that we should give “not grudgingly or of necessity”. Under the Law of Moses, there was a tithing system, whereby everyone had to provide a tenth of all their goods. Part of the reason for that was to sustain the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows (see Deut. 14:29, 26:12) to help alleviate their affliction and poverty. This was compulsory – “of necessity” – they had no choice but to give their tenth. But there was nothing to prevent a person from giving more, if they so chose. If they were a cheerful giver, they could have provided more to these vulnerable categories of the congregation.

We saw earlier how that the ecclesia at Laodicea were rich in material things, but were spiritually impoverished. They were counselled to buy gold tried in the fire, which speaks of a rich faith purified through the fire of affliction. James also speaks of this:

“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)

Notice this: in material poverty, there are riches – being “rich in faith”. The calling of the Gospel is not to the wise in this world, but to those regarded as being poor and weak by the world at large:

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But **God hath chosen the foolish things of the world** to confound the wise; and **God hath 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, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

True riches come through poverty. It is the poor of this world, who are rich in faith who are chosen by Yahweh. Messiah became poor, and took upon himself the form and role of a servant, that though his poverty we might become rich. So we read of the Master:

“... Worthy is the Lamb ***that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength and honour, and glory, and blessing.*** And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honour and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (Rev. 5:12-13).

It was because of his humility even unto death, that the Lamb received power and riches etc:

“... being found in fashion as a man, ***he humbled himself***, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ***Wherefore*** God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...” (Phil. 2:8-10).

Elsewhere we are told that it was for the Joy that was set before him that Jesus was able to endure the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2). He did not seek the pleasures of this life, but the riches of the Age to come. Likewise, we ought to seek first the Kingdom and Righteousness of Yahweh above everything else, so that we might be exalted with him in due time!

We began by citing Proverbs 13:7:

“there is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches” (Prov. 13:7).

In these words, therefore, we see the way in which our Lord humbled himself as a willing servant. He did not have a wealth of this world's goods, but looked forward to the riches of the kingdom to come. Even so, we must seek Wisdom as for hidden treasures, rather than to be rich in the things in this life. And then, we shall be exalted with the Master to share with him the riches of the Kingdom Age. Let us follow his example and become wise unto salvation!

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