

The Blessing of Money

A look at some Wealthy Men and Women of God

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The New York Times recently ran an article about Paul Schervish, director of the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College. Schervish is a sociologist who studies how, why, and how much very wealthy people give. The article compared the findings of his research to the prevailing thoughts (stereotypes) held by the general public. For example, the typical response regarding the rich would be to characterize them as stingy. However, Schervish's research concluded that as incomes grew so did the percentage of income given:

On average, the 98 percent of families that earn less than \$300,000 a year contribute roughly 2.3 percent of their income to charity. Families earning more than \$300,000 a year give away about 4.4 percent of their income. Their study, based on data gathered in 2001 by the Federal Reserve, found that those who earned \$400,000 to \$499,000 a year gave 5.5 percent.¹

The author of the article asked the burning question: "Why shouldn't we conclude that rich people give more simply because they have more?"

Schervish responded by reminding the author that the rich could simply invest their money in new businesses, other assets, or trusts that would ensure that their accumulated wealth would be passed on to their heirs. However, another avenue of "investment" that has grown in popularity through the years (evidence: charitable donations in the United States rose throughout the '90s) is philanthropy. He said, "This is my basic definition of philanthropy—it's paying attention and responding to the needs of others precisely because that person is in need." He went on to comment that giving "draws people into the kind of direct caring relationships they experience in family life—and extends that caring outward."

¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/magazine/09wwlnidealab-t.html?_r=1&oref=slogin&ref=magazine&...

Oftentimes, we are quick to point out (and rightly so) the Bible's many warnings regarding the dangers associated with wealth and riches. We are very well versed in the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:15-21), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-26) and the account of the rich young Ruler (Luke 18:22-26). Regarding the rich, we remember their being compared to the camel and the eye of the needle (Matthew 19:24), along with the "flower of the grass" (James 1:9-11). But do we acknowledge the "rest of the story"?

Do we understand that throughout the Scriptures condemnation is never directed at riches themselves, but instead toward **trusting** in riches (Mark 10:24; Psalm 39:6-7)? Do we remember that it is not money that is the root of all evil; rather it's the **love of money** that's the problem (1 Timothy 6:9-10)? Do we admit that God calls money a blessing and He is the one from whence it comes (Ecclesiastes 5:18-19)? Have we (through Bible study and research) been introduced to the many wealthy men and women of God contained in Scripture?

Consider the following examples of people who both exhibited faithfulness and accumulated wealth. Conceivably, since everyone reading this article in the United States is likely very rich (in America it is really about degrees of richness versus rich or poor, see *Think*, November 2007) we must change our viewpoint and mindset and begin managing our blessings as the very blessed people we are.

Abraham, a member of "faith's hall of fame" (Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19) was called the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23) and was also "very rich in cattle, silver, and gold" (Genesis 13:2; 24:35).

Isaac is a man who Jesus Himself described as one who would be in the Kingdom of Heaven along with Abraham and Jacob (Matthew 8:11). In Genesis 26:12-14 we learn that despite a great famine, Isaac "sowed in the land and reaped in the same year a hundred-fold; and the Lord blessed him." He "began to prosper, went forward, and grew until he became very great; for he had possessions."

Likewise, **Jacob** is also said to have accumulated many possessions in Genesis 32:5.

Boaz, an ancestor of Jesus, the man who became Ruth's husband, and one who was clearly both kind and generous was described as a "man of great wealth" (Ruth 2:1).

Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, was a rare king who exhibited faithfulness by walking "in the ways of God." He also was given "riches and honor in abundance" (2 Chronicles 17:3-5).

Hezekiah, another king of Judah, "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done (2 Chronicles 29:2). He was also quite wealthy. 2 Chronicles 32:27-29 records:

And Hezekiah had very great riches and honor, and he made for himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly vessels; storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of cattle, and sheepfolds. He likewise provided cities for himself, and flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him very great possessions.

We are probably very familiar with **Job's** patience, integrity, and faithfulness to God. Job 1:3 records Job's abundant material wealth prior to Satan's grave trials and concluded that he "was the greatest of all the people of the east" (Job 1:3). After Job emerged from the testing of his faith, Job 42:10-12 notes:

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before... Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold. And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys.

Joseph of Arimathea was an interesting combination of:

- disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57)
- though secretly (John 19:38)
- a respected member of the council (Mark 15:43)
- a dissenter in the decision to have Jesus arrested (Luke 23:51)
- one waiting for the Kingdom (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:51)
- a good and righteous man (Luke 23:50)
- an owner of the garden which held the new tomb where Jesus was laid (Matthew 27:60; Luke 23:53; John 19:41)
- a rich man (Matthew 27:57)

Zacchaeus was not just “a wee little man who climbed up in a Sycamore tree” like we and our children sing. He also was a rich man who received salvation from Jesus (Luke 19:1-10). Despite Zaccheus’ position of being a rich tax collector, Jesus—who knows hearts—apparently knew he was a good candidate for the Kingdom.

Tabitha is described as one who very likely had some means about her. She was “full of good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9:36). She also was industrious—laboring with her hands to provide for the needs of others (Acts 9:39). When she died, seemingly unexpectedly, and was raised from the dead by Peter, her influence on the community was apparent as many heard about the miracle and as a result “believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).

Lydia obeyed the Gospel when Paul preached in Philippi. She was also a “seller of purple.” The color purple represented royalty and riches in that day. It is no stretch then to suggest that she had some capital to her name. Lydia, upon becoming a Christian, immediately put her wealth to work by extending hospitality to those who preached salvation to her (Acts 16:12-15).

Over and over throughout the Scriptures we are treated to examples of **both faithful and wealthy** men and women of God. It is both possible and consistent with biblical principles for people to prosper materially and maintain a relationship with the Father. He is the one who gives the gifts and abilities to earn money (Deuteronomy 8:18; James 1:17). He also wants us to

prosper (3 John 2). Faithful Christians serve an Almighty God who has provided for their needs and the needs of those less fortunate—through Christians cheerfully giving. Giving with an open heart glorifies God, meets the needs of others, spreads the Good News, and introduces people to the love of Christ. Ultimately, God does not want His people to remain poor and He does not mind if they are rich—what He wants is for Christians to be faithful in any state they find themselves.

Rather than cast dispersions on the wealthy and their economic achievements, perhaps we should instead ensure they understand the benefits of “laying up heavenly treasures.” When we do, like Schervish, we too will foresee “more wealthy people finding purpose and happiness through a ‘philanthropic vocation.’”

Some of the people of this world, who are rich with this world’s goods, have already figured out a certain feeling of accomplishment that comes from giving in a way that is helpful to others. Surely those who are rich in the knowledge of Christ, the gift He gave, the security found in Him, and the blessings promised to faithful givers, will lead the way in seeing to it that God is glorified by giving in a manner that is commensurate with whatever level of riches He’s entrusted to us. If we are to be wealthy men and women of God, we will.