



**ISSUES
IN
MISSIOLOGY**

VOLUME 1B

MISSIONS AND MONEY

ROBERT D. PATTON, M.D., D.D.

**ISSUES
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VOLUME I

PART 1B: Missions and Money

ROBERT D. PATTON, M.D., D.D.

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(Previously, Volume 1 was 2 parts: Part A, persecution and Part B, money and partnerships. Dr. Patton has split Volume I into the 2 parts. 1A Persecution and 1B Missions and Money)

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my beloved wife of over 62 years, M. Elizabeth Patton, faithful helpmeet, extraordinary soulwinner and discipler of women, co-worker in the ministry, mother of four children, grandmother of 18 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. Proverbs 31: [28] *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.*

SAMPLE PAGES

FOREWORD



Dr. Robert Patton, veteran missionary with Baptist World Mission, has spent 34 years overseas. As a small boy, he accompanied his parents for 38 months in a prisoner-of-war camp in the Philippine Islands during World War II. From 1971-1976, he was Professor of Internal Medicine developing a program of Internal Medicine in a new medical school in Monrovia, Liberia. And from 1986-2012, he spent 26 years in Suriname, South America, primarily in church planting, Bible translation, development of discipleship materials, developing two Bible Institutes, and broadcasting over radio and television.

Dr. Patton has been burdened for three groups: those who have never heard; those who are untaught, and those who are being persecuted. Those who have not heard are unreached with the gospel; those who are untaught need the Word of God in their own mother tongue; and those who suffer persecution are located primarily in Muslim or communist countries.

In Volume I of *Issues in Missiology*, Dr. Patton addresses two challenges: Persecution, and Missions and Money. Christians are suffering in the third wave of persecution in the history of the church. The missionary needs to understand the nature and cause of persecution, and the proper Christian response. The missionary must also understand the dynamics of giving and the biblical principles involved, especially with the increasing discrepancy between financial resources in the west and in many parts of the developing.

A second volume in preparation will address two additional issues: Spiritual Warfare and Translation Issues.

The Pattons have four children 18 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. Dr. Patton and his wife Elizabeth relocated

at Crown College in Powell, Tennessee, with a goal of impacting the next generation of missionaries.

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CHAPTER 1

MISSIONS AND MONEY

Introduction

One of the most challenging and difficult situations for missionaries on the field is the question of money. Missionaries in the USA are not considered wealthy. Most are considered relatively poor. But when the missionary arrives overseas, if he is in a third world (or 2/3 world) country, he often finds himself cast in the role of the wealthy American in contrast to those around him. This is a new and very difficult role to fill.

The Bible talks to the wealthy. We in our American churches do not realize frequently that the Bible is talking to us. America is richly blessed financially. Sometimes we fail, as Israel failed, to appreciate that this is a blessing from the Lord, which also has an accompanying responsibility. North America represents about 5-6% of the world population but consumes far more of the products and has many times the finances of much of the rest of the world.³² Yet we rarely consider ourselves as wealthy individuals. Often the missionary does not think that the Bible is talking to him since he considers himself a relatively poor missionary. But in his target country, he is one of the elite rich, and the Bible is speaking directly to him in his role as a wealthy individual.

I can remember well how difficult it was for us to adjust to this role when we first came to Liberia. We were not missionaries at that time. We were employees of the United States government, and furthermore, I was a specialist in Internal Medicine. However, we had always struggled financially while I was in training as a physician. As an intern, my income would have qualified me for welfare, and my pay at that time was not

really enough to support a family. My pay was a bit better when I was in the Public Health Service but this was my first “real paying” job. Some of the U.S. government employees were not happy with the housing and furniture that the government provided us in Liberia, but we were more than satisfied. However, we were just being introduced to the fact that the Liberians looked at us as wealthy Americans, and indeed we were just that compared to the average Liberian’s income.

We really struggled with the question of having household help. As soon as we arrived, people began knocking at our door looking for work. We finally realized that we were helping others by providing employment, and further that my wife Liz could do things that she would not otherwise be able to do without the help. Also, she did not have all the appliances which she would have normally had in the USA, so that her usual housework would have been much harder and time-consuming.

After five years, we returned to the USA for 10 years. Then we returned overseas, this time to Suriname, South America as bone-fide missionaries. Again, we had to readjust. Liz had envisioned a small conservative home. The mission had rented a much larger one for us, but it proved necessary to provide for a single missionary who lived under us. We did adjust and accept the home as what God wanted for us at that time even though it seemed excessive to us. However, our Suriname friends thought that it was appropriate for us.

Economic Disparity Between the Missionary and His Ministry

Thus, the missionary is confronted with a situation of gross economic inequity. Furthermore, this problem is not decreasing, but increasing. When one compares the buying power of the missionary compared to the national, in 1820, it was about 3 to 1. The situation was tolerable at that time. However, by 1950, the difference was 35 to 1, and in 1992, it had increased further to 72 to 1. Indeed, 50% of the world’s population exists on a salary of

less than \$2.00 per day.³³ This is an enormous difference. It seems at this time that the only persons who are willing to live in the slums are usually Catholic priests and nuns. They may have taken vows of poverty and celibacy and are able to adapt to the situation by adopting a very simple lifestyle similar to those around them.

Ways Missionaries Adapt to Being “Wealthy”

What is the protestant missionary, often married and with a family, going to do? The missionary usually chooses one of four types of adaptation. Some simply associate with their social and cultural equals. They isolate their contact with others. This is a big problem in the third world. Christianity has always especially impacted the poor and marginal individuals, and now the missionary isolates himself from them. Let me give you an example. A pastor visited a missionary in a poor West African country. When he arrived at his house, it was located in a gated community compound. The building was a beautiful three-story structure that would have been appropriate for a cabinet minister or even the vice-president. The missionary stated he was trying to reach the poor of the city. He held the service in his home and wondered why no one would come. But his lifestyle choices and the location of the church basically cut him off from the very people he wanted to reach.

Others will basically avoid the issue by bringing up the concept of dependency. The nationals should have no help from us or else they will become dependent. Thus, the missionary does not need to worry about helping them. We will go into detail about this further on in this discussion. At the present, I will just mention that the original discussion by such men as Henry Venn, John Nevius, and later from Roland Allen were directed not so much at financially undermining the church by gifts as the goal was to avoid expatriates dominating and controlling the national churches through their control of finances and administration.³⁴

This situation arose in the 19th century because there was

little sympathy for the poor in other countries at that time. The average missionary at that time believed that such a discrepancy was inevitable because of the superiority of the western missionary and his culture. Many felt that colonialism was God's way to spread the gospel. They considered that the difference was providential, and that it was the "white man's burden" to not only spread the gospel but also to civilize the heathen. The missionary thought that the goal was to convert them to Christianity as well as to the western cultural tradition. Apparently, this was particularly true of the British, who felt that the British Empire was a demonstration of the fact that they had the best Christianity. They felt that the power of the gospel was demonstrated by the natives adopting western ideas.

History has changed this attitude. This sense of superiority was largely rejected after World War I and II demonstrated the moral weakness of the west. There has also been the rise of nationalism, especially following World War II, and the basic collapse of colonialism. But still there is an exportation of largely secular science, education, and technology. Ironically, as we look at Britain and Europe now, we see a declining Christianity, with less than 5% of so-called Christians in church on the average Sunday. We are now sending missionaries to Europe, whereas at first the majority of Christian missionaries to other countries came from Europe.

Third, some missionaries will live a simple lifestyle, but also maintain some of their benefits for medical care, transportation, and education. These benefits are not reflected in an extravagant lifestyle but are usually unavailable to the national Christians. I suspect that this is the most common way to handle the problem by missionaries living in the developing world. In contrast, some will live an incarnational lifestyle, giving up all privileges and living as nationals. This solution rarely works successfully. The missionaries themselves may have great difficulty in maintaining such a lifestyle. Also, sometimes the nationals will reject their attempts to do so.

I remember one missionary couple living in the interior of Suriname. They decided to live just like the natives. Their children, for example, ran around naked and barefoot. Most nationals decided that either the missionaries were mocking them, or that they had nothing to teach them. I should also mention as far as health is concerned, that this is a potentially dangerous decision. Before the advent of modern medicine, the mortality of children in such areas as sub-Sahara Africa was extremely high. Those who survived past five years grew to adulthood, but they had already developed immunity to the many diseases rampant in the tropics. When a white person comes into the area without this immunity already in place, he may succumb to a variety of tropical diseases. The couple placed themselves as well as their children at risk.

None of these four solutions is really totally satisfactory, and some solutions hardly work at all. An author of a key textbook on money and missions suggests a fifth alternative, which is to live as the righteous rich individuals, such as Job and Abraham. Live and give generously to meet the needs of those who are less fortunate.³⁵ We will look more closely at this alternative as we progress in this section.

Rationales Given to Justify Missionary Affluence

A number of rationales have been brought forward to justify western missionary affluence. There is an economic argument, that the missionaries who stay the longest on the field are often the most effective. Missionaries do not usually accomplish a great deal during their first few years. They are busy learning the language and culture so that they can function. Those who stay the longest are the cheapest in terms of productivity. The argument is that they need proper food and housing to be able to remain functional. Indeed, 31% of missionaries withdraw because of ill health and 15% from death. Nevertheless, missionary mortality now compares favorably with that of pastors in the USA.³⁶

Another consideration is the necessity for education for the

children both in regular school and college. The missionary child will need to have a solid education to be able to fit into western society. It is also worth mentioning that missionary children often consider a missionary career, and thus you may obtain another generation of missionaries. If the missionary child returns to the culture where he was raised, he will usually be adjusted to the culture, and often speak the language very fluently.

Finally, I should mention the cultural expectations for the role of the missionary. The missionary is expected to fulfill a specific role in the culture, and this may have economic ramifications. For example, I was both a missionary pastor and an expatriate medical specialist. The people with whom we worked did have expectations that we would live in a certain lifestyle.

Relational Costs of Affluence

However, the missionary may pay a heavy relational cost if he is not sensitive to economic issues. Christianity is a religion of relationships - both relationships between the believer and God, and also relationships between believers. Anything that can interfere with the personal relationship between the missionary and the national believers is a problem. Missionaries are often isolated from the trials of others because of their access to resources unavailable to their people. It may be difficult for them to teach nationals to trust the Lord if they seem to have resources to cover all their trials.

There may be social isolation partially because of the USA love of independence. Further, economic disparity may lead to a sense of superiority and of assuming special privileges. I became more aware of this after I had been out of medicine for a number of years. When I had medical problems, now that I was basically unknown by other doctors, and I did not always get the special treatment that I had previously enjoyed as a doctor. In many countries such as Suriname it was the custom for a physician not to charge other physicians and fellow-physicians usually received other privileges such as being seen ahead of other patients.

Thus, affluence may cause a social gulf, especially in close relationships. Affluence may lead to distrust, envy, and hostility. This is especially apparent when the national coworkers are doing basically the same work. I remember hearing about a problem between nationals and missionaries in a radio ministry in Africa. The complaint was that the nationals wanted to get the same salary and other “perks” that the missionaries were receiving since after they were trained by the missionaries, they were doing many of the same tasks as the missionaries. The missionaries, who were from a faith mission, of course had to raise their own support before coming to the country, and also had additional expenses associated with living overseas. They often were active raising funds not only for their own support but for the salaries and equipment for the national co-workers. Their situation was different from the nationals, but with the wide disparity in income, it was difficult to handle both groups equitably.

The Problem of Expensive Technology

Another problem is that missionaries may depend on expensive technology, which is appropriate for western culture, but may not be appropriate for the culture where the missionaries work. It may be difficult for the nationals to maintain such technology in the absence of the missionary’s expertise and financial base. This discrepancy may make partnership more difficult. Thus, affluence may result in strategies which may not effectively reach the poor. This was a problem when I first started using a laptop and PowerPoint with a projector. Both the laptop and projector were very expensive when they first became available. However, the cost gradually decreased to the point that many nationals could afford this new technology. At the beginning of computer use, repair shops, updated equipment and high speed internet access were often unobtainable. Likewise, initially cell phones were limited to the city of Paramaribo and difficult to access in the interior. That is no longer true. Now some of the nationals are

more proficient than I am in technology. However, it is important to keep this truth in mind so that we do not rely on complicated or expensive technology which is common in the West but difficult to support in another culture.

Theological Questions Arising from Affluence

This inequity raises some important theological issues. Is it possible for a missionary who is secure financially to teach simplicity, generosity, contentment, and sacrifice in discipleship? Can he teach about the sin of greed? Many nationals may believe that all persons in the west, including western missionaries, are driven by greed, avarice, gluttony, envy, love of luxury, and pride.

Biblical Principles Concerning Wealth

At this point, it is appropriate to see what the Bible says about wealth. Let us remember that this will apply to the missionary, who is wealthy in the eyes of the nationals. *1 Tim. 6:[5] Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.[6] But godliness with contentment is great gain.[7] For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.[8] And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.[9] 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.[10] 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.[11] But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* We need to remember that we should be content financially and avoid the lusts for and coveting of things. This warning is for us as missionaries as well as others.

Riches can make us feel independent of God and forget our need for prayer. *Deuteronomy 6:[10] And it shall be, when the*

LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not,[11] And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;[12] Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Deut. 8:[10] When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.[11] 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:[12] Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;[13] And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;[14] 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;[15] Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drouth, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint;[16] Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end;[17] And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.

The Lord knew well the human heart. It is our tendency to attribute our wealth to our own work, our strength, our ingenuity, or even our good luck,. We are very prone to forget that it is the Lord who provides. This very attitude was shown by the king of Tyre, who was energized by Satan. *Ezekiel 28:[4] With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures:[5] By thy great wisdom and by thy traffick hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches: We*

need to recognize that everything which we have is from God. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to worship and praise Him, and to use the gifts which He gives us in the service to others.

Taking-up the Cross and Following Christ

We are called by Christ to take up our cross and follow Him. In doing so, we may be called to renounce certain “perks” - such as status, independence, and immunity to trials. A very telling quote is by Trevor Verryn: “Only the truly strong are able to lay aside their power in an act of self-emptying and assume a position of powerlessness.”³⁷ This quote summarizes nicely Paul’s statement in *Philippians 2:5ff.*[5] *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:[6] Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:[7] But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:[8] And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.[9] Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:[10] That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth:[11] And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

God works through the cross and through weakness. Jesus worked mostly among the poor and was born to a poor peasant family and lived in relative poverty throughout His life.

Problems With Missionary Affluence

Missionaries in the United States are not seen as wealthy individuals, but that is not true compared to the situation with many of the poor in other parts of the world. As we look at the problem of relative missionary affluence, we missionaries face a number of problems. It is possible to rely on a power-based status and use power-based strategy. The missionary can think: “I can do this, because I have the funds to accomplish my goals.”

Or on the other hand, the missionary can conclude that he cannot do something because he does not have all the necessary financial resources in hand. The real question is whether or not something is the will of God. I remember well the first church we built and ended up short of funds. Twice we saw the Lord provide. My wife told me that she no longer worries about whether or not we are short of funds. The real question is whether or not we are in the will of the Lord. If we are, then we can depend on God to provide the necessary resources.

It is also possible for the missionary to have a double standard of ethics, expecting different things from the nationals than from himself. Furthermore, we need to remind ourselves that missionaries are teachers, who will be judged more strictly. *James 3:[1] My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.[2] For in many things we offend all....*

It is indeed true that some of the rich are righteous, such as Job, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. It is also true that sometimes the poor are to blame for their poverty. *Proverbs 6:[9] How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?[10] Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:[11] So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.* But a man's life does **NOT** consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Solomon clearly showed in Ecclesiastes that wealth is no guarantee of happiness. Furthermore, God instituted a number of means for Israel to care for the poor. The sabbatical year cared for the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the Levites. The year of Jubilee was designed to prevent a family from accumulating money indefinitely. Loans were basically made, especially to fellow Jews, without interest, and collateral was only temporary. At harvest time, the harvest was not gleaned, but deliberately left so that the poor could glean and find food. Note that the poor did indeed work for their food. Debts were cancelled every seven

years. Employees were paid promptly.

Spiritual Dangers from Wealth

There are several spiritual dangers from wealth. We have seen above that the rich may feel that they can safely ignore God. They may have a false sense of security. *Proverbs 18:[11] The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit.[12] Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.*

Wealth is the enemy of humility. *Jeremiah 9:[23] 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:[24] 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.*

Wealth can distort our judgment. *Proverbs 28:[11] The rich man is wise in his own conceit; but the poor that hath understanding searcheth him out.* We may be ignorant of simple solutions which are possible within the culture because we are accustomed to having expensive solutions available.

Our riches can also interfere with repentance which is called for by the Lord. *Isaiah 22:[12] And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:[13] And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die.*

Wealth can also lead to over-indulgence. Eli and his sons demonstrated with gluttony and greed. They despised the provisions for the priests and the need for godly character. The wealthy may abuse their personal power against the weak and show contempt for the poor. Ahab misused his position of power as exercised through his wife Jezebel to rob and kill Naboth. Both later paid with their lives. Solomon abused his power as

king in his last years to build temples to the false gods of his many wives. His son Rehoboam was asked to treat the citizens with more concern, but he refused, rather listening to the advice of his young friends. This led to the country splitting into Israel and Judah until both countries were carried away, Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians.

The prophet Isaiah describes a similar situation in Judah. *Isaiah 5:[20] Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter![21] Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight![22] Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:[23] Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!* Yet the western world often looks at greed and covetousness as virtues rather than sins. We may admire the man who accumulates huge amounts of money and may then spend his wealth conspicuously. We may admire the sports hero who commands millions of dollars per year. We may admire the man who is eager to “get ahead” financially. Yet we may fail to admire the man who lives modestly and leads his family in a godly manner.

God led His people through the wilderness by the hand of Moses. Often, they had a relative lack of water and food. We might consider their complaints as justified if we compare their trials with those which we experience today. And yet see what God said when they complained about just having manna. He gave them enough quail for a month, but they paid a heavy price. *Numbers 11:[31] And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.[32] And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten*

homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.[33] And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.[34] And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted. They complained because they were tired of just eating manna. They wanted flesh — and God gave them quail to eat. But many died in their gluttony. I wonder how the Lord reacts when we complain because the economy dips and we don't have all the freedom to buy things that we are accustomed to buying.

Often in the Old Testament, there is brutality, disobedience, and injustice in an attempt to gain riches. The wealth of the Egyptians was built on slave labor. Canaan was extremely wealthy, but its immorality was infamous. Likewise, Sodom was immoral and corrupt though wealthy. In Psalm 37, the psalmist complained to God about the inequities he saw until he realized that the wealthy were about to be destroyed. *Psalm 37: [35] I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.[36] Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.[37] Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.[38] But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off.[39] But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble.[40] And the LORD shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.*

We find the same theme in *Psalm 73:[12] Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.[13] Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.[14] For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.[15] If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. [16] When I thought to know this, it was too painful for*

me;[17] Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.[18] Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

Some have concluded that God blesses the wealthy, and that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. However, we have seen that this is not necessarily true, either for Israel or the nations around it. Assyria and Babylon were notoriously rich, and notoriously cruel as well.

The wealthy were admonished to help the poor. Jesus gives an example in Luke 16 as he speaks of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man. In those days, there were no social services departments. The poor person could lie at the gate of a rich man, thereby requesting help. Lazarus did so, but the rich man dined sumptuously and left Lazarus for the dogs to lick his sores. Both died. The angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom - the reward of the righteous. The rich man found himself in hell.

Poverty itself is no virtue. It is possible to have either too little or too much. *Proverbs 30:[8] Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:[9] 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.*

Lot received much wealth in Egypt from his relationship with Abraham. Later he reserved the best land for himself rather than putting either God in first place or Abraham's rights above his desires. His later life ended in disaster, and he ended up losing even what he had received in Sodom including his family and goods. The two daughters who survived were both involved in incest with their own father, and their offspring's descendants were enemies of Israel. Likewise, Eli thought more of his two boys and his belly than God's honor. He ended up dying the same day both boys were killed by the enemy.

We should remind ourselves that God Himself consistently aligned Himself with the poor. He showed Himself choosing

Israel against Egypt. Jesus came **as** a poor man and ministered **to** the poor. God is against those who misuse, oppress, or neglect the poor. In Job 31, Job describes how the poor and oppressed could count on him to help them.

Thus, true righteousness is concerned with the needs of the poor. It is more than having religious rites or pious platitudes. *Matthew 23:[14] Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation.* We have a very positive example from Nehemiah, who forced the rich to return their lands and release slaves after he discovered how the poor were being oppressed. However, when the same situation arose during the siege by Nebuchadnessar, the slaves were freed temporarily until the pressure was off, and then the rich reverted back to their positions of power.

Truly Giving to God Can be Costly

When we truly give to God, we give something which we genuinely value, and not just our surplus or our discards. See the example of Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha: *John 12:[1] Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.[2] There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.[3] Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.[4] Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him,[5] Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?[6] This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.[7] Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.[8] For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.*

On the other hand, we see that the priests were actually

dishonoring God when they offered second-class offerings to Him. *Malachi 1:[6] A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?[7] Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible.[8] And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. [9] And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.[10] Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.[11] For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.[12] But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. [13] Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD.[14] But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the LORD a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.*

True economic repentance is costly. Most people, including religious people, do not repent. They would rather get rid of the prophet or preacher and find someone else who is easier on their lives. The prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel found their messages generally rejected. *Isaiah 6:[9] And he said, Go,*

and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.[10] Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Jeremiah 20:[1] Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things.[2] Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the LORD.

Ezekiel 14:[1] Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me.[2] And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,[3] Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?[4] Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols:[5] That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols.[6] Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations.[7] For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to inquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself:[8] And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

Material possessions can become an idol when we allow them to displace God in our lives. Economic repentance is costly

and requires that we remove the idols of wealth. Most persons will attack the messenger of God rather than repent.

Jesus Speaks About Wealth

Jesus shows us that goods, money and security are not top values to be prized. *Matthew 6:[19] Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:[20] But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:[21] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* When we are enamored about goods or money, our heart is focused on them, and not on the Lord.

Paul's Testimony

Paul gives us the same message: *Philippians 3:[7] But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.[8] Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,[9] And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:[10] That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;* Paul had been placing his heart in the external Jewish ceremonial law which he had kept scrupulously. When he placed his trust in Christ Jesus, he was rejected by his family and lost his position as a leader among the Jews. But he considered having a personal relationship with Christ far more valuable and was willing to discard his own righteousness by the Jewish law.

James' Testimony

On the other hand, James shows us that sharing with others is a New Testament virtue. *James 2:[14] What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?*

can faith save him?[15] If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,[16] And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?[17] Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. James decries a faith that is in word only, but which is not reflected in deeds – in this case, meeting the needs of fellow believers. True faith shows itself in action.

John's Comments

This truth is echoed by John. 1 John 3:[16] Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [17] But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?[18] My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Thus, we find that wealth is often associated with mistreatment of the poor and preoccupation with self as well as spiritual impotence. Zacchaeus was wealthy but unrighteous. Fortunately, he did repent, and gave much of his fortune to others. *Luke 19:[8] 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 anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.[9] And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.[10] For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.* Therefore, wealth and poverty are not always a sign of blessing from obeying God but can be a sign of greed. Likewise, poverty and hardship may result from obedience to God and persecution from the unrighteous, although this is of course not always true. We need to be very careful about our assessment of the cause of someone's problems, or we may be found like Job's three friends.