

WEALTH THAT REALLY COUNTS

ON MARCH 7, 2007, A DALTON GEORGIA MAN WON 116 MILLION DOLLARS PLAYING THE LOTTERY... NBC TODAY SHOW INTERVIEWED THE GENTLEMAN AND WERE VERY COMPLIMENTARY OF HIS DEMEANOR, A DEVOTED FAMILY MAN AND AN ALL AROUND NICE GUY. DURING THE INTERVIEW HE WAS QUESTIONED ABOUT WHAT HIS PLANS WERE FOR THE MONEY. HE STATED A COUPLE OF THINGS, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT HE DIDN'T PLAN TO LET THE MONEY CHANGE HIS ATTITUDE ABOUT LIFE. THEY ALSO SHOWCASED SEVERAL PAST WINNERS OF STATE LOTTERIES. SEVERAL PEOPLE HAD SEVERE FAMILY ISSUES RELATED TO THE MONEY, WITH MANY FAMILY MEMBERS WANTING A SHARE OF THE WINNING TRYING TO GET "A PIECE OF THE PIE." TWO MEN THEY SHOWED WERE BROKE AND NOW ON WELFARE... AS I WAS SITTING IN CHURCH A FEW DAYS LATER, BEFORE THE START OF SERVICE, THE LORD LAID ON MY HEART TO TALK TO YOU TONIGHT FROM THE SUBJECT "WEALTH THAT REALLY COUNTS."

THERE IS A STORY TOLD IN MARK 10:17-31, ABOUT A MAN WHO ALMOST HAD IT ALL. NOW AS I RELATE THIS STORY TO YOU I WANT YOU TO REFLECT ON YOUR OWN LIFE AND THE VALUE YOU PLACE ON WEALTH. THIS YOUNG MAN WAS WELL MANNERED, WELL EDUCATED, AND WELL-OFF. HE WAS SINCERE, HONEST AND ABOVE REPROACH. MAYBE HE HAD AN ENGAGING PERSONALITY AND A WINSOME SMILE. CERTAINLY JESUS FOUND HIM LIKEABLE; HE EVEN TRIED TO RECRUIT HIM. HE WAS THE MAN THAT HAD EVERYTHING - EXCEPT ETERNAL LIFE. AND HE COULD HAVE HAD THAT TOO. ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS TO GET RID OF HIS MONEY AND FOLLOW JESUS.

BUT IT WASN'T TO BE. ELSEWHERE JESUS HAD SAID THAT NO ONE CAN SERVE BOTH GOD AND MONEY (MATT. 6:24). HERE WAS LIVING PROOF OF THAT PRINCIPLE. IN COMING TO JESUS, THE RICH YOUNG MAN CAME TO A FORK IN THE ROAD. HE HAD TO CHOOSE WHICH HE WOULD SERVE - MONEY OR JESUS. APPARENTLY HE CHOSE MONEY.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU UNDERSTAND JESUS NEVER CONDEMNED PEOPLE FOR BEING RICH. NOR DOES SCRIPTURE CONDEMN THE POSSESSION OR THE ACCUMULATION OF MONEY. BUT JESUS DID WARN PEOPLE ABOUT WHAT HE CALLED THE "DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES" (MARK 4:19). HE UNDERSTOOD THE POWERFUL BUT ULTIMATELY FATAL ATTRACTION OF MONEY AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR GOD.

BACK TO THE STORY. JESUS PERCEIVED THAT TENDENCY IN THE RICH YOUNG RULER. THE MAN WAS PLACING FAR TOO MUCH VALUE ON HIS WEALTH. SO JESUS TOLD HIM TO GIVE IT AWAY, TO FREE HIMSELF FROM ITS ENTANGLEMENTS. IT'S WORTH NOTING THAT JESUS DID NOT GIVE THAT SAME ADVICE TO EVERY OTHER RICH PERSON HE ENCOUNTERED. BUT IT WAS A REQUIREMENT FOR THIS YOUNG MAN.

SEATED BEFORE ME TONIGHT ARE BROTHERS WITH VARYING DEGREES OF ASSETS. SOME OF YOU ARE CHRISTIANS AND SOME OF YOU ARE NOT. BUT SOONER OR LATER YOU NEED TO ASK THE QUESTION THAT THIS YOUNG MAN ASKED JESUS: "WHAT SHALL I DO THAT I MAY INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?" JESUS' RESPONSE IS STILL THE SAME: THERE IS NOTHING YOU CAN DO; ONLY GOD CAN GIVE ETERNAL LIFE (MARK 10:27). BUT HE GIVES IT FREELY AND GRACIOUSLY TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM (MARK 10:29-30). HOWEVER, THAT CAN BE ESPECIALLY HARD FOR THOSE WHO HAVE ACCUMULATING WEALTH AS THEIR NUMBER ONE GOAL IN LIFE. THEY HAVE A COMPETING OFFER, AND IT'S VERY ATTRACTIVE.

IT IS EASY TO FORGET THAT ULTIMATELY WE WILL STAND NAKED BEFORE GOD (JOB 1:20-21; 26:6). WE CAN SURROUND OURSELVES WITH CLOTHING, HOUSES, CARS, AND OTHER POSSESSIONS THAT HIDE OUR TRUE CONDITION. YET IN THE END ALL OF THAT WILL SLIP AWAY, AND THEN WE MUST CONSIDER: WHAT WILL WE HAVE LEFT?

THE AUTHOR OF ECCLESIASTES (SOLOMON) FACED THAT ISSUE. LIKE JOB, HE WAS ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST AND WISEST MEN WHO EVER LIVED. YET, AFTER TAKING HIS KINGDOM TO THE HEIGHT OF ITS PROSPERITY, HE WROTE IN ECCLES. 5:10, "WHOEVER LOVES MONEY NEVER HAS MONEY ENOUGH; WHOEVER LOVES WEALTH IS NEVER SATISFIED WITH HIS INCOME." IN ECCLES 5:15, "NAKED A MAN COMES FROM HIS MOTHER'S WOMB, AND AS HE COMES, SO HE DEPARTS." AN ARAB PROVERB OFFERS A SIMILAR PERSPECTIVE: "THERE ARE NO POCKETS IN A BURIAL SHROUD."

SO IF WE CANNOT RELY ON OUR POSSESSIONS WHEN WE STAND BEFORE GOD, WHAT WILL BE PRESENT? AT LEAST JOB HAD HIS INTEGRITY AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (JOB 27:2-6). HOW MUCH OF THAT WILL YOU HAVE WHEN YOU STAND BEFORE GOD? ULTIMATELY, OUR STANDING MUST BE DETERMINED BY CHRIST'S WORK ON OUR BEHALF (PHIL. 3:9). NEVERTHELESS, GOD WILL EVALUATE OUR CHARACTER AND HOW WE HAVE LIVED OUR LIVES - EITHER TO HIS GLORY OR TO OUR SHAME (1 COR. 3:9-15; 2 COR. 5:1-11). WHICH WILL IT BE FOR YOU?

IN THE BOOK OF JAMES 2:5-6, JAMES NOTES THE TENSION BETWEEN WEALTH AND FAITH. NONE OF US ARE EXEMPT FROM THE DISTRACTING AND DISTORTING EFFECT OF GROWING INFLUENCE. GOD DOES NOT CONDEMN WEALTH, BUT HE CLEARLY WARNS US THAT WE CAN'T PURSUE WEALTH OR TRUST IN IT AND ALSO PURSUE GOD AND TRUST IN HIS FAITHFULNESS (MATT. 6:24-34).

BROTHERS, IF YOU WANT TO BECOME RICH I KNOW A WAY THAT THE ODDS WILL BE IN YOUR FAVOR. ACCEPT JESUS CHRIST AS YOUR LORD AND SAVIOR AND YOU WILL INSTANTLY BECOME ONE OF THE WEALTHIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH. EPHESIANS 1:3, TELLS US "GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST." THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THIS WEALTH IS THAT IT CANNOT BE TAKEN AWAY.

IN CLOSING, I APPLAUD EVERY BROTHER HERE TONIGHT FOR WHAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED. YOU ARE REAL ACHIEVERS. ONLY YOU AND GOD KNOWS WHETHER THE WEALTH YOU HAVE ACCUMULATED HERE ON EARTH WILL COUNT IN ETERNITY.

KEY SCRIPTURES ON WEALTH:

SOURCE: 1 SAM. 2:7 – "THE LORD SENDS POVERTY AND WEALTH."

DESCRIBED AS: LUKE 12:15 – "... A MAN'S LIFE DOES NOT CONSIST IN THE ABUNDANCE OF HIS POSSESSIONS."

THOSE WHO POSSESS, SHOULD NOT SET THEIR HEART ON THEM: PSALM 62:10 – "... THOUGH YOUR RICHES INCREASE, DO NOT SET YOUR HEART ON THEM." KEEP YOUR RICHES IN YOUR HAND AND NOT YOUR HEART.

TEMPORARY: PROV. 27:24 – "FOR RICHES DO NOT ENDURE FOREVER."

UNSATISFYING: ECCLES. 5:10 - "WHOEVER LOVES MONEY NEVER HAS MONEY ENOUGH: WHOEVER LOVES WEALTH IS NEVER SATISFIED WITH HIS INCOME."

HEAVENLY TREASURE IS MORE SUPERIOR: MATT. 6:19-20 – "DO NOT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES ON EARTH, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DESTROY. BUT STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN, WHERE MOTH AND RUST DO NOT DESTROY, AND WHERE THIEVES DO NOT BREAK IN AND STEAL."