

The Gift of Giving

BY DAVID POSEY

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he **lavished** upon us, in all wisdom and insight.”

Ephesians 1:7-8

We'll get to Ephesians 1 in just a minute, but first I want us to think about our current socio-economic situation. I feel some of us get mixed messages from the Bible. After all, there are some statements that seem to suggest that it is dangerous — even a sin — to be rich.

For example, Jesus famously said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:24). That doesn't sound very promising. And remember that farmer, who decided to build bigger barns to hold all his stuff? Jesus said he was a fool who lost his soul in the end (Luke 12:13-21).

We could multiply those examples of Jesus and the apostles condemning rich people — at least a certain kind of rich person. James was really bold in his condemnation of those who are selfishly rich (James 5:1ff.).

Yet we know that Job was rich, and Abraham was rich and David was rich. And Solomon was super rich; in fact, he was given riches by God because he was so humble in his prayer to God (I Kings 3:12-13).

And notice what Paul says in I Timothy 6:17-18

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share...

Wait. What does Paul say about being rich again?

Look at it again. Clearly, being rich is not a sin: “as for the rich in this present age...get rid of your money and stuff before Jesus gets back”? Is that Paul's message? No. But people with a lot of money can become arrogant and haughty. They drive the best cars, live in huge houses and live at a very high level. That can lead to an “I'm-better-than-you-attitude.”

For example, a member of the church in another state was a vice president of one of the largest corporations in America. When we were there for a meeting, we went to his house for a Sunday dinner. The house was enormous; a beautiful home on beautiful grounds. He was pleasant enough and his wife was nice enough. Later, however, I

learned he left the church because the men in that church didn't bend to his every wish. He was used to getting his way. He was unyielding; he was arrogant.

It's hard to be humble when you are a rich guy or a rich girl. But Paul doesn't say that all the rich people are headed for hell. He does tell them how to be rich and still go to heaven: vv 17-19.

But that begs the question: how do you define "rich"? Go back to 6:8 — "if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." Would Paul define the "rich" as those who have *more* than food and clothing? Let's even throw in shelter — are you rich if you have food, clothing and a roof over your head? It's possible that "rich" means simply having more than you need to be content?

If that's true, who is *not* rich, in this present age? You have a house, food, some clothes, a car and a job, and you are content, right? Anything that you have more than that makes you "rich." And if you are rich in goods, you should be rich in good works.

But it's not just a law or a warning that we respond to. It goes deeper than that. That's why I started off with Ephesians 1:7-8. Christians think differently than others. They think from the top down, not bottom up.

Let me explain. Ideally, when I see someone in need, I don't first look in my bank account and see how much I can spare. I look up to God and remember what he's done for me. I remember how incredibly generous God is. This is where I want to start. If I focus on the abundant blessings that God has given me, it's easy to share those blessings with those less fortunate than me.

So the question is: what am I focusing on? How much I lack? How much I have? Or how much I need to be content? If our focus is on the latter, then we will give to our heart's content.