



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network **Spiritual Guidelines**

Teaching on the Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount (ii)

'Blessed are the poor (in spirit), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'

(Matthew 5.3-12; Luke 6:20-23)

October 2016

I have always been fascinated with the Paradoxes in Jesus' teaching and our understanding of what Jesus was saying and our practice over the years. The fact that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor is often seen as so contrary to our human understanding. But it should not be! My first full length book *'Rich Christians Poor Christians'* expanded dimensions of this particular beatitude asking the question *'who are the spiritually rich?'* and using many stories from our worldwide travels as examples. I think it may well be one of the first study resources in the Issachar Ministries Community Portal due to be launched around Christmas time.

Rich and Poor

Jesus did not measure riches as being material possessions which is often our worldly understanding. *'Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?'* (James 2.5). To be rich in faith and so many other things is so much more valuable than material riches.

But what about when God says he wants us to prosper? Of course he does, but I do not have much time for the 'prosperity gospel' which promises material wealth. We can all grow and prosper in many other ways - few, if any, of which are related to financial wealth. Joseph prospered in prison (Genesis 39.21-23). The happiest people on earth are those who have very little in terms of possessions. I remember being struck by the way the Haitians cared for and supported each other and seemed to be so happy to be alive in 2008 through what we felt was the cruellest ever hurricane when four storms -- Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike -- dumped heavy rains on the impoverished nation. And now it has happened again with Hurricane Matthew - pray that they do not give up on their desire to be part of the kingdom of heaven.

Luke's chronology of Blessings in Chapter 6 also includes a number of 'Woes'. While verse 20 says *'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'*, verse 24 says *'But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort'*. Riches may be able to bring you many things but they cannot bring happiness and can even have a distinctively negative affect on spiritual growth and growing nearer to God. In fact it is well known that material riches bring a whole new set of problems and can be a distraction. If you have been given material wealth, with it comes responsibility and a need for good stewardship *'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked'*. See more words of wisdom in the box overleaf

There is an excellent prayer reminder in Proverbs 30.8-9: *'Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily*

Warnings against the wrong use of riches

'Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.' (Proverbs 11:28)

'Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside.' (Job 36: 18)

'for riches do not endure for ever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.' (Proverbs 27:24)

In the parable of the Sower *'The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.'* (Luke 8:14)

'So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?' (Luke 16:11)

Jesus said to the young man who wanted eternal life *'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.'* (Matthew 19:22)

'Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.' (1 Timothy 6:17)

To the church in Laodicea John says *'You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'* (Revelation 3:17).

bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God'. We need to trust God to give us what we need, not necessarily what we want.

Poor - or Poor in Spirit?

What did Jesus mean by being 'poor in spirit'? The literal meaning of 'ptochos' means 'to crouch or cower as one helpless' and indicates people who seem to be weak, frail, feeble, fragile or even in affliction, and distress. The poor were people who recognized that they could do nothing themselves and that spiritually their strength was in God alone. Even David cried out *'This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles'* (Psalm 34.6).

The genuinely 'poor in spirit' are those who cast themselves on God's grace acknowledging their spiritual bankruptcy before God - like the tax collector in the temple, 'beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner"' (Luke 18:9-14). It is a recognition of the need to be filled by God's grace and that only with God at work within each one of us can we put Jesus' teachings into practice and do his will.

Then when we are taken through difficult times we often need to be reminded that these are the times when we can grow closer to God because we depend on him and not on ourselves.

The Kingdom of Heaven

As we have already noted although it is possible to emphasise differences between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, in most cases they are synonymous. In the Beatitudes it is only those who are poor or *'who are persecuted because of righteousness'* who receive this promise of receiving the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Psalmist tells us that *"The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all"* (Psalm 103:19) so every authority that exists has been established by God (Romans 13:1) and he will one day set up his physical reign in Jerusalem.

But there is an extra spiritual dimension in that those who acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and gladly surrender to God's rule in their hearts are already part of the kingdom of God. Jesus preached that repentance is necessary to be a part of the kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17) and John 3:5-7 says the kingdom of God must be entered into by being born again. So as God rules in the hearts of his children in this world, Christ has already set up the Kingdom of heaven on earth which will come into full completion in the End Times, and *'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus'* (Philippians 1:6).

Will our dependence on the Lord's goodness and care bring us the blessings he wants to shower upon us?

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