

The Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge

Our New Testament reading for the day (Colossians chapter 2) describes how the believers: “might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto *all riches* of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Col. 2:2-3).

We find then, that by contrast to the churches which teach blind love, the basis upon which saints are united is: “the full assurance *of understanding*”. Coming together as Gentiles in the acknowledgment of the mystery revealed, we develop a deep love for those of like precious faith and an appreciation of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We stand by faith, and in the full assurance of understanding spiritual things, we come each week to focus our attention upon Christ crucified, and the Hope of Israel which will soon become reality. We stand in hope, “rooted and built up in him” (Col. 2:7), by contrast to the serpentine “philosophy and vain deceit” which is taught from pulpits all around the world. We would do well therefore to consider this aspect: the Treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge, and the part it has to play in our lives.

Ecclesiastes chapter seven describes the superiority of Wisdom over Riches:

“wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense; but the excellency of knowledge is that *wisdom giveth life* to them that have it” (Eccl. 7:12).

Despite the temporal advantages of the current capitalist society in which we sojourn, wisdom will at the last prove itself to be worth far more than anything that this world can offer. Money might be a defense against poverty, and the accruance of wealth can safeguard us against some evils - but the end of the matter is that when a man’s mortal existence comes to an end, he loses all. Again, citing Ecclesiastes:

“... riches perish by evil travail ... as he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked shall he go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand” (Eccl. 5:15- see context).

Job spake likewise:

“naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: Yahweh gave, and Yahweh hath taken away; blessed be the name of Yahweh” in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job.1:21-22)

And the Apostle brings together the two:

“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim. 6:6-7)

We find then, that the treasures of Wisdom are far more superior than the material treasures of this life, which are all lost by entry into the grave. This is a common theme in Scripture; we shall cite two instances of this teaching:

“how much better is it to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver” (Prov. 16:16).

“Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is *better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies*: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her” (Prov. 3:13-15)

The point being, that if the things pertaining to the Wisdom of God are so much greater than the natural riches of men, those are the things we should be seeking after: “if ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things *which are above*, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your mind on things *which are above*, not on things on the earth ...” (Col. 3:1-20).

There are a number of Parables that teach this, and the point that is emphasized in each, is the *effort* required to obtain the treasure. Just as the quotation from Proverbs (above) speaks of the man *finding* the wisdom, the following parables speak of a man *finding* items of great value. But what is prominent in each is not the finding, but the doing – i.e. what must be done to obtain that treasure:

“the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy therefore goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth the field” (Mat. 13:44).

In this parable, the finder is prepared to sell everything he has, in order to possess the treasure, and make it his. The Master continues in this theme, by presenting another parable, in which the metaphors are changed slightly. Whereas we are not told anything about the circumstances in which the man finds the treasure, this second parable plainly speaks of “a merchant man seeking goodly pearls”. In other words, whereas the first man might have simply stumbled across the treasure without really looking for it, the second man is looking for something. This matches human nature, and the way in which men and women come to the Truth: some are actively seeking something better than what this life can offer, others happen to chance upon it as they blunder through life – but we know that Yahweh does the calling, and trust in His Wisdom. No-one really finds the Truth by chance: it is presented to them by Yahweh’s servants. But however men may come to the pearl of great price, what matters is how they respond to it when they find it. The parable continues: “... when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Mat. 13:45-46).

Notice, that possession of the treasure, or pearl, was not so much that they had found it, it was what they did to obtain it: i.e. the giving all that they had. “Labor not to be rich” is the cry of Wisdom (Prov. 23:4). Again, the Prophet Isaiah speaks enigmatically: “Ho everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1-2 see context). Notice, the wine and milk of this chapter are not commodities that can be purchased with men’s currency. They are the nourishing influence of the Word received with joy. They are spiritual foods, which nothing that the natural man can offer can purchase, irrespective of how much money is presented.

Nevertheless, there is something that we can give to obtain these spiritual delights: our own selves. We present ourselves in service to our Master: “present *your bodies* a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

LOST IN THE HOUSE

Luke chapter 15 presents us with another parable, with the same teaching in view, but which trows light upon a different aspect:

“what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house and seek diligently until she find it?” (Luke 14:8).

Notice here, that the treasure, or silver is not lost outside, but within the house itself. Is it possible, brethren and sisters, for the treasure of the Word to become lost within the house itself? This was the case with Israel of old. 2 Kings 22 recounts how in the reform and cleansing of Yahweh’s house – the temple of old - a copy of the Word was found. Previously, it’s existence was largely unknown it would appear, but now it had been found by Hilkiah, the High Priest:

“and Hilkiah the High Priest said unto Shaphan the Scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the House of Yahweh. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it” (2 Ki. 22:8-9)

The account proceeds to narrate how the book was then read before Josiah the King, but notice how it describes Josiah’s actions upon hearing it read:

“And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the Law, that he rent his clothes” (2 Kin. 22:11)

The divine commentary on this was: “because thine heart was tender and *thou hast humbled thyself* before Yahweh ...” he repented. It is written elsewhere: “... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa. 66:2) and in Josiah, we behold such a man: one who trembled at the finding and reading of the Word, previously hidden. Interestingly, we find that the prophet Jeremiah was Hilkiah’s own son (see Jer. 1:1). This would give him access to the book the High Priest had found – and look at his response to it:- “thy words were found, and I did eat them: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy Name, O Yahweh, Elohim of Armies”(Jer. 15:16). Almost uniquely in Israel’s history, king and priest came together in the fear of Yahweh, and in the determinate resolve to cleanse the house, and re-institute the faithful worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. In our individual circumstances, we would do well to reflect upon their example. We were once ignorant Gentiles, walking after our own lusts; and do we remember the joy we had when once we recognized the Word for what it was, and embraced the saving principles of the Gospel that is Yahweh’s power to save? Do we share that same joy and zeal today? “Remember therefore *how thou hast received and heard*, and hold fast and repent” is the instruction of the Word (Rev. 3:3). Let us have Josiah’s humility and Jeremiah’s zeal to show forth the word of Life around us, ministering both to the ecclesial House, and the otherwise darkened world outside.

LABOUR NOT TO BE RICH

We already saw the cry of Wisdom “labor not to be rich”, and there is much profit in consulting the Spirit’s utterances concerning labor, in the context that we are considering. Our labors and energies ought not be to increase in worldly wealth, but to obtain wisdom. However, the practical fact remains that we do need to work in order to have those things needful to sustain our mortal existence. It is part of the Edenic curse which all are subjected to: “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ...”. But the principles of a capitalist (and godless) society, such as that in which we sojourn, is to accrue as much wealth and as much money as we can. So we find that we operate amongst men and women of that mindset – to them, to “progress in life” is equal to obtaining a job and position that pays well, and enables us to have a nice house, car, holidays, and whatever else comes from our heart’s desire. There is pressure to seek promotion, and to better oneself in possessions, and to achieve this, we must work hard, and labor in long hours to please our employer.

But working to please our employer in order to gain higher status and pay is not wise. Jesus taught that “ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24), and so we ought not try. However, to an extent, our labors are needful to obtain food and raiment – and so said the Apostle - “therewith be content” (1 Tim. 6:8). Ecclesiastes provides good advice:

“better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit” (Eccl. 4:6).

Again, the same sentiment is echoed by the Proverbs:

“better is little with the fear of Yahweh than great treasure and trouble therewith” (Prov. 15:6).

The world’s overriding philosophy is to “get riches”, and to subject ourselves to all kinds of pressures and time expense to achieve our aims. The cry of wisdom however, is to rather have less with contentment. The riches we seek are not the things of this life, but of the age to come: that is where our heart lies, trusting that if we “seek first” Yahweh’s Kingdom and Righteousness, He will grant to us all else that we need – which is not necessarily the same as what we want! (Mat. 6:33). “Give us this day our daily bread” is the petition of the children to their Father, or as expressed in the Proverbs: “remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me” (Prov. 30:8).

LAYING UP TREASURES

We have the choice set before us: do we seek the treasures of the World, or the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge? Luke chapter 12 recounts the parable of Messiah concerning one who layed up treasures for himself. His ground brought forth an abundance, “and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods” (see Lu. 12:16-21). To the natural mind, there is nothing wrong with his intentions. God had blessed him with an abundance of wealth, and what more natural then, to build bigger barns to accommodate it all? But the wisdom of God was:

“... God said unto him, Thou fool, this night, thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided” (Lu. 12:20).

What should he have done with his wealth? Surely, to help alleviate the sufferings of the poor! The case of a certain rich man comes to mind:

“...then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mrk. 10:21).

Here is the spirit of wisdom: to give everything to the Master’s service. “One thing thou lackest” – what one thing do we individually lack? Do we trust in the uncertainty of wealth? Do we seek after our own good, to the expense of others who are needy around us? This was the “one thing” that this man lacked, and rather than enjoy his accrued wealth, he sold it, and provided for the needs of others. The love of money is a root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Not that all evil comes from money, but rather that like a plant, and as a root, money can produce nothing but evil.

The Scriptures provide several examples of men who forsook the riches of this life in order to pursue righteousness and the things to do with the coming kingdom. Firstly, we have Moses:

“By faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach for Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb. 11:24-26).

Here, the word translated “had respect” literally means “to look away”. The idea here is that Moses purposefully and resolutely looked away from the riches of Egypt, towards the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, as being the Prophet like unto himself (Deut. 18:18).

The second case is that of the Apostle Paul, who excelled his equals in his fervor for the Law. In worldly terms, he was great in both status and riches – but forsook all in order to follow Messiah. So he describes:

“if any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the Law a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the *ecclesia*; touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, ***those I counted loss for Christ***. 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” (Phil. 3:4-8).

And thirdly, we have the example of “the patience of Job” (Jas 5:11). Job was a rich man who was brought low (Jas. 1:9). The trying of his faith was to develop patience (Jas. 1:3-4), and to provide an example of a wealthy man who did not trust in his riches, but rather in Yahweh to bring him through his sufferings. Job chapter 31 epitomizes his example:

“If I had made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much ... ‘this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above ...’” (Job. 31:24-28).

The book of Job reveals the innermost thoughts of a man who was being tried to the uttermost. He did not trust in his riches – and this was proved when he lost them all. Still he continued to focus upon Yahweh, and the hope that was set before him. As we cited earlier: “naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: Yahweh gave, Yahweh hath taken away: blessed be the Name of Yahweh” (Job. 1:21). Here is the true spirit of One who had his priorities right before God. Being brought low, yet continuing to trust in his Maker, Job’s desire was placed firmly in the future: “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job. 19:25-26). What a great contrast this is to those in the ecclesia whom James rebuked: “your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days” (Jas. 5:1-3).

We come to bring our thoughts to a close, as we think of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave everything in service to his Father. He had none of the riches of this life; and the money he collected with his disciples, was used for the benefit of the poor around him. He had no certain dwelling place, let alone barns to contain wealth. He trusted in the joyous vision of the future, which

was ever before his mind, and strengthened him to endure the cross, and despise the shame thereof. We must likewise set that same vision before our minds, to follow in his example. At the time when we meet together each week, we do so to remember not one who made a worldly success in accruing status and treasures in this life, but the carpenter from Nazareth who was despised and rejected of men. In him we see the pattern by which we might conform our lives to: like him, we have no continuing city in this world, but seek one to come. And then, it will be declared before all where our real priorities lie: in God or Mammon? May it be that we come to repentance before our God, and seek after the everlasting treasure of wisdom and knowledge.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet.1:3-4)

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