

**HOW TO BE RICH WHEN YOU'RE POOR**  
**THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA**  
**Rev. Lawrence Baldrige**  
**November 9, 2008**

**Revelation 2:8-11 (King James Version)**

<sup>8</sup>And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

<sup>9</sup>I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

<sup>10</sup>Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

<sup>11</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Jesus told about a man who was so busy, and so successful, that he looked out at his crops and said, "What am I going to do? I know, I'll pull down my barns and build bigger barns wherein to bestow my goods. And then I will say to my soul, o soul, you have much goods laid up for many years. It's time to take your ease, now, to eat, to drink, and to be merry." God looked down upon this poor rich man and said, "You fool, this night your soul will be required of you. Then whose shall these things be?"

Two men were driving by a beautiful 'bluegrass farm' in the horse country of Kentucky. They came to a southern mansion, and as they passed by the passenger said, "Wow, how much did this farm and this mansion cost the owner?" The driver, from the area and a long-time resident, answered, "Well, the man was once a church member and a faithful Christian. But his business prospered; he forgot the church; and recently he died and left this mansion and farm to his young widow. I guess it cost him his life...maybe his soul."

How many times have I heard people discussing a successful mine operator here in the mountains, and the inevitable question is, "How much do you think he's worth?" The real answer is, the true answer for all men, 'not much.' But they're trying to find out how much money he has, how much wealth he has accumulated. In the Church in Smyrna, Jesus reminds us anew that true wealth is not what you own, but Who owns you. In a word, are you a 'servant' of Jesus Christ? True riches are always spiritual riches, not how many 'toys' we have accumulated, or how large the houses that hold them, or how vast the land we have to move them on.

To the church of Smyrna Jesus says, "I know your poverty, but you are rich."

The Bible has a lot to say about both poverty and riches. Jesus had rich friends such as Nicodemus and Joseph, both who attended him in death, one bringing spices and aloes, and the other furnishing Him a new tomb. In themselves, riches are neutral to morality; but Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. If I am rich, the great temptation is to trust in my riches and not in God.

Look too what the Bible says about the poor. Jesus said in Matthew, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke quotes Him as saying, "Blessed are you poor." James said, "The poor of this world are rich in faith." In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, Paul said that his poverty would turn out to be their riches.

### **I. YOU CAN FIRST BE RICH WHEN YOU'RE POOR IF YOU OVERCOME YOUR FEARS.**

Listen: (v. 10) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

The Living Christ who was dead and is alive forevermore was saying to his Smyrna Church, "Bad things will shortly happen to you, things that you have no control over." Jesus spells them out. One commentator writes that being cast into prison meant for them certain death. The authorities didn't necessarily want them to be arrested, but the Jewish population, thinking the faith was simply a sect, pressured the Roman authorities to put the Christians in Smyrna into prison. That meant certain death for them. But their faithfulness was to be unto death. They were not to be afraid!

This beautiful city, called the 'flower of Asia,' where the West Wind kept it around 80 degrees all year long, most generally treated religions with respect. Governed by Rome, emperor worship was surely emphasized and demanded. These Christians would not bow down and worship the emperor. The Jews called that to the attention of the Romans and questioned, no doubt, why they weren't being arrested; and of course the Jews themselves would not bow down and worship the emperor either. But their influence was so great that they had a strong voice in Smyrna.

Smyrna was an old city, built in 1000 B.C. In 600 B.C. it was destroyed and left desolate until Lysimachus rebuilt it, and it soon became one of the great cities of the ancient world, crowned with mountains, and one of the earliest planned cities. The good harbor was enclosed by land comprising a large part of Smyrna. But with all that Smyrna possessed in good things, like America today, the Christian message was quenched and in danger of being silenced altogether. They were in imminent danger, were being persecuted for their faith, were being imprisoned, were being slaughtered, but Jesus said, "Don't be afraid!" Is that just some strange word from Jesus? In such straits who would not be afraid? Yet they were told to conquer, to overcome their fears.

Smyrna was totally loyal to Rome. When Rome was losing a battle in the east, Smyrna was so loyal that the people pulled off their own clothes and sent them to the front to clothe the ragged troops so that they could survive the winter and win the battle. The officials tolerated the Christians but knew that being a Christian was against the law. Reminded of that with pressure, they were forced to arrest these lawbreakers. Don't be afraid! Is that a joke? Is that normal? It is if you are willing to die for your faith, as they certainly were. Imprisonment meant certain death, and they knew it. But they had the promise of Jesus...in a short time they would Live Again!

Nothing helps us conquer fear like faith. But what is faith? "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." They stood on the Promises of God. Fear is our greatest enemy and faith is our greatest friend. We mustn't allow the trembling weak flesh that we live in, this house of bones with a skin tent stretched across it, – we mustn't allow these trembling houses blowing in the wind to make us afraid of the wind. We are made of sterner stuff than that. Franklin Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear except fear itself." He simply used the words of a least a half dozen other men who said the same thing, including Francis Bacon, Montaigne, and others. Don't be afraid.

When you put your trust in Jesus and refuse to be afraid, **EVEN IF YOU'RE POOR YOU'RE RICH.**

## **II. YOU CAN BE RICH WHEN YOU'RE POOR WHEN YOU ARE FAITHFUL TO THE LIVING CHRIST.**

Mother Theresa was answering a letter from Senator Mark Hatfield, and in that letter she remarked, "God did not call me to be a success; God called me to be Faithful." Christ told this poor church in Smyrna, "Be rich in faithfulness." In verse 10, Jesus says, "...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." I read a sermon once in which the preacher said, "Be loyal to the royal in yourself." Like Mother Theresa, God has not called any of us to be a success in the way that the world labels success; but God has called all of us to be faithful. When we are faithful, when we honor His word and follow Him, when we put the Gospel above our brief, weak human lives and glimpse eternity, when we turn our eyes upon Jesus and keep our eyes fixed upon Him, we are successful in the only sense that one can really be successful, by pleasing the Master of our Being, the Lord of our Lives, the God of our Eternal Souls. Hallelujah!

When we are loyal to the royal within, our loyalty will be to the True Royalty of Jesus Christ. That was what the letter to Smyrna means. I am reminded of an illustration James Stewart of Scotland used about Savonarola of Florence. Preaching to the faithful there the great preacher rose above the audience with his great oratory and said, "What Florence needs is a new king." The people thought Savonarola meant Savonarola, and stood to cheer him on. But Savonarola declared, "Florence needs Jesus Christ as its new king." The crowd cried out as a man over and over, "Long live Jesus, King of Florence! Long live Jesus, King of Florence!"

I was listening recently to the documentary about Elvis Presley's love for Gospel

Music. One of his band members recalled how that Elvis was singing in the auditorium at Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana. Several girls were sitting toward the middle and as he sang, they raised their large banner that said, 'Elvis is the King.' Elvis stopped singing and said, "No, no, only Jesus Christ is the King." As Christians, every member of this church ought to possess absolute loyalty to the True Royalty, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, King over all the Kings of Earth, our Everlasting King. Loyalty to Him is true faithfulness. These Smyrna Christians, we are told, had been slaves. But when they met Jesus, their status changed. Now they were sons and daughters of God, who needed not bow down to anyone but Him. Loyal to True Royalty, they were indeed 'loyal to the royal' within. This is true riches. Even when you are poor you can be rich.

### **III. YOU CAN BE RICH WHEN YOU'RE POOR IF JESUS IS THE LORD OF YOUR LIFE.**

(v. 8) And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive;

(v. 11) He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

We sometimes get it backwards don't we? We think that we are rich just because we are forgiven of every sin, and to some degree, we are. But that is not a complete life, and it cannot be a complete Gospel. Jesus says, "I Am Lord." He again reiterates what He said in chapter one, "I am Alpha and Omega." In verse 8 He says, "I am the first and the last." In Colossians, a letter distributed throughout Asia Minor, a letter they might have read, "He is before all things and by Him all things consist (cohere). John wrote in his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." He goes on to say, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His Glory as the Glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth."

It is true, Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He was a mighty Savior. It is true also that salvation is a life long process of continual surrender of our sinful wills to the Will of God in Christ.

Not only is He the First and the Last. He is the one who Died and Lives again. He is the Living Lord. Strange how nonchalantly we enter His House with barely a thought about Him and Who He Is. The Church is His House. In a word, it is the House of Him Who Lives. We carry His cross at Passover and Easter; we wear His cross upon our neckties, watches, bracelets, rings, and even have them tattooed upon our bodies. We salute the cross, we celebrate the cross, we make it the foremost symbol upon our churches (His Churches). But alas we too often forget that the cross of Jesus has its power precisely because He is Alive, He conquered death, He is the One who was dead, the One Who is Alive.

If He is our Lord we indeed are rich, despite our poverty. But this is the best part.

Because of Him, we too shall overcome death. We too shall live forever. The first death happens to us all, unless we are fortunate enough to be Living when He returns. “We shall not be hurt by the 2<sup>nd</sup> death.” This is another way of saying, “Hell cannot have us, cannot hurt us, cannot know us. We belong to Him. We are citizens of Heaven. We may be poor here, but one day we shall walk on streets of pure gold. If Jesus is our Lord, WE ARE RICH, RICH INDEED, RICH ETERNALLY.

If you will give your life to Him and follow Him as your Lord, that is how to be rich even when you are poor.