

# 3 : Riches: A Life of Plenty

*'Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power  
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.'*  
(1 Chronicles 29:11)

## A starter...

Do you ever reach a point where you really have accumulated too much 'stuff' in the house, and if so, what happens then?

A standard dictionary definition of a rich person is 'Someone who has a large amount of money, property, or valuable possessions' (Collins English Dictionary). We can expand the theme slightly by looking at 'wealth', defined as 'the abundance of valuable financial assets or physical possessions which can be converted into a form used for transactions' (Wikipedia). Of course, these are relative terms, and considering a person to be rich, or wealthy, depends on where you are looking from, and how you view your own situation!

To put things in perspective, the population of the world in early 2023 was around 8 billion, and of those, only just over 3,300 were billionaires, with a high percentage of the world's population owning less than 10,000 U.S. dollars, and around half the world's wealth owned or controlled by the richest 1.4%, who, in 2021 were 87% male.

However, rather than getting depressed or angry at the current situation in the world, there's a different way of looking at this, and that's asking ourselves, 'What does it mean to live a rich life?' It's a question that shifts our viewpoint away from money toward lifestyle. There's a Greek word, 'eudaimonia', promoted by the ancient philosophers which embraces well-being, happiness and flourishing in daily life. To the philosopher Aristotle, this meant 'doing and living well'. And here perhaps we can see how Scripture might help our understanding.

## The nature of this world's riches...

(Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, Deuteronomy 26:7-10, Luke 12:13-21)

Monetary wealth often comes to us through business endeavours, employment, or inheritance, but the Bible points to its ultimate source, as in King David's worship, where he concludes 'everything in heaven and earth is yours (God's).'

David is coming to the end of his life and  
issuing his last instructions. He has designed



Edgar Degas, At The Stock Exchange, 1878

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to him as a blessing from God, now to be returned as a thanks-offering in the building of what will be a glorious temple to be used by future generations.

Deuteronomy brings instruction as to an offering of the 'firstfruits of the soil', which was to be an act of remembrance of God leading the people to 'a land flowing with milk and honey.' God has led them to a place where, by their ability and hard work, wealth can be created and harvested from this fertile soil.

In Jesus' parable, we touch on some of these themes, with a man wanting his share of an inheritance controlled by his brother, and Jesus reminding the surrounding crowd that how we view our wealth is important. Simply accumulating it so that we might enjoy every penny or cent ourselves, and not being open to sharing is not God's way, and this echoes the message in the previous passages.

Are we hoarders or givers of that which ultimately has its source in God?



William Powell Frith, *Poverty and Wealth* (1888)

## Discussion...

- Q) How easy is it to have a balanced view of wealth as expressed in these readings, bearing in mind that in the U.S. and UK, both historically wealthy countries, somewhere around 10-13% of the adult population have no savings at all?
- Q) How do the two Old Testament readings speak into your own life and experience?
- Q) When you look at the world at large, how would you describe the prevailing attitude to wealth?

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## A few stumbling blocks...

(Read James 5:1-6, Luke 18:18-30, Deuteronomy 8:10-18)

Wealth can create issues both in our own lives and our behaviour toward others and God. The Bible gives us many examples to consider. James is writing with the end times and judgement in mind, with his anger centred on the rich who abuse their positions to increase their wealth through hoarding, unpaid wages, self-indulgence and even murder.

He might not be directing these particular words to believers, as there's no appeal to repent and change their ways, only to 'weep

and wail', but the message is plain for all to understand, that wealth can affect our outlook on life.

We see this in the reading from Luke where a rich man, eager to do everything he can to gain eternal life and tick all the relevant boxes, when faced with a challenge to let go of his personal wealth to find 'treasure in heaven', finds himself unable to contemplate such a sacrifice, the barrier is too great. It reminds us perhaps of Jesus' disciples leaving all they had

to follow Jesus, to which his response is that those whose decision to follow him was in any way sacrificial would find a blessing both in this world and that to come.

Another stumbling block is that wealth and contentment can divert attention away from God, the temptation being for a person to see their wealth as purely the result of their own efforts, leaving no need of God.

When the Israelites had settled in the land and eaten well, they were to thank God

for his goodness, the food they ate, the flocks of sheep, houses they built, and their comfortable lives.

‘But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.’

(Deuteronomy 8:18)

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## Discussion...

Q) How relevant are James’ words today when you look at the economy of your own country, and if the answer is even in part ‘very’, why has this not changed over the centuries?

Q) Can you empathise at all with the rich man’s reaction to Jesus’ challenge to let go of his wealth and follow him? Why might it be as hard for the rich as Jesus suggests?

Q) What can we say to the person who tells us they have, through their own efforts, created for themselves a very comfortable life, and therefore have no need of God?

## A better way to wealth...

(Read Ecclesiastes 5:10,18-20, 1 Timothy 6:17-19, Acts 4:32-37, Luke 12:27-31)

The writer of Ecclesiastes has observed life at all levels of society and concludes that ‘whoever loves money never has enough’, which to him makes the constant drive for more meaningless. He has described those who aim for money and lose not that, but real life, and poses the question, ‘Can we have life first and worry about money later?’ His answer is that we can if we take life day by day as a gift from God, seeking to follow his plan and possessing a willingness to work.



George Elgar Hicks, *The Parish Soup Kitchen*, 1851

In the writer’s day, a working life would differ from the one most of us are used to, being linked to the land, or creatively in making things, much like Jesus’ early years in the family carpentry business. Today, many jobs can be monotonous or stressful. There is also a need for constructive use of whatever leisure time we have – that well-known cycle of work, rest, and play is important!

Timothy reminds us of the need not to focus our hope on wealth, which is ‘so uncertain’, but to make sure that we are rich in good deeds, generous in our attitude to others, willing to share not

only from our savings but from our time, skills, and hearts. This pleases God and brings a double blessing, on giver and receiver. It is an attitude of mind that flourished in the early church, as the passage from Acts tells us – the generosity of the givers ensuring that those without were no longer in need.

Finally, we have Jesus' words, contrasting the grandeur of Solomon with the common flowers of the field, so fleeting in their lifecycle and yet so beautifully created. Don't be like the world in its desires, he says, but simply trust that God, who so beautifully clothes the wildflowers, will also provide for your needs.

## Discussion...

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Q) How relevant is the wisdom of Ecclesiastes today, and would you add anything to it based on your own experiences of life?

Q) How easy is to maintain a good work/life balance in today's world, and do you have any advice to share?

Q) We live in a world many consider a very unequal world, thinking purely in monetary terms. How easy is it to embrace Jesus' words from Luke about the importance of not setting our hearts on the physical, but on our spiritual needs?

## Pray...

Consider prayerfully those words from Ecclesiastes, Can we have 'life first and worry about money later?' and how it might speak into your own experience.

## Quotes...

'What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.' - Saint Augustine

'Ordinary riches can be stolen; real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you.' - Oscar Wilde

'Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community.' - Andrew Carnegie