

SPIRITUALLY RICH

Physical wealth vs. True Riches

Light on the Rock
by Philip Shields
August 2008

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There's been a lot of attention lately on wealth -- the stock market, retirement security and having it all, or losing it all. How rich are you? Did you know God wants us to be fabulously rich with 'true riches'? How does one become "spiritually rich"? The Eternal God, richest of all, explains how the world may think of you as being poor, but He sees you as rich, and vice versa. Are you spiritually rich? Is God against the rich and does He favor the poor? Find out in this message.
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Greetings, friends and brethren. Are you rich? Did you know -- without any doubt -- God wants you to be rich, but I am especially referring to being *spiritually* rich? How would you become "spiritually rich"? But is God necessarily against you being physically rich? (How could He possibly be against wealth, since He is the richest of all?) I hope you'll ponder these issues with me. Would God say you are rich or poor? Why does it matter?

This is Philip Shields with another sermon -- this time on "True riches" or on being "spiritually rich". One of the things which seem evident to me from scripture: God's people in the end time will be distracted, will have their priorities off base, and will need a 2x4 for Yahweh to get their attention. You are God's people. What am I referring to? In the end time, many of God's people will be focused on money, jobs, business, on home building, on physical pursuits and goals -- and will seem to be losing faith, zeal and brotherly love for one another. Several scriptures show that. One is found in Revelation 3:17-19.

Revelation 3:17-19

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' -- and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, *poor*, blind, and naked -- 18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, *that you may be rich*; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

So here's a congregation of God's people claiming to be rich—but our Beloved says they are poor. Let's read about a contrasting congregation now, the Smyrna church, in Rev. 2:8:

Revelation 2:8

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9 "I know your works, tribulation, *and poverty (but you are rich)*...."

We have two congregations of God's children -- one claiming to be rich, but God sees them as poor; the other were truly poor, but God says they were rich. There are true riches -- whether or not you are physically rich. Which way would God view you and me -- spiritually rich, or spiritually poor? Keep in mind that some of the poorest people of God were spiritually rich, and -- very importantly -- also some of the wealthiest people of God, were also spiritually rich (Abraham, Isaac, Job, etc.). Many

who looked like “the people of God” however, were poor spiritually, regardless of their wealth or poverty physically.

Proverbs 13:7

“There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing;
And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.”

Preparing this message has helped me a lot to get back to what God says about business, work, worrying about money or paying our bills or preparing for retirement. Even though I’m sure you know the scriptures I’ll use, I hope you find it useful to hear or read God’s mind on this crucial topic too.

Turn on TV, especially very late night, and what do you find? Lots of infomercials for those who can’t sleep – often about get rich-quick schemes. There are lots of “prosperity preachers” – who themselves have become prosperous as they fleece listeners. One televangelist, sermon after sermon, promises you’ll become incredibly wealthy by God, if you just would start sending your money to him. The focus seems to be on wealth. You’ll see topics like: how to buy a house – with no money down. How to become an instant millionaire by having an internet business. You catch my drift.

No doubt some people are becoming wealthy by various schemes and programs. So what’s wrong with that? Let me just say quickly, that first of all, Scripture does warn us about *focusing* on money. It warns us to avoid “get rich quick” schemes (Prov. 23:4-5; 28:20; 13:11). It warns us not to *serve* the pursuit of wealth – while claiming to be serving God. We can’t serve 2 masters. We’ll look up and read some of these verses in a few minutes. It also tells us God does want to bless us, and has in the past made many of his servants fabulously wealthy. There’s that message too! But the reasons for wealth, the purpose of wealth, and what God considers to be true riches – those are important and different issues, all of which we’ll address today.

I’m giving this message because I needed it. I prepared it to help me center my life again. At times I’ve made a ton of money, and I’ve also been dirt poor. I personally have a straight commission job. I go from near poverty to plenty and back to almost-poverty on a constant basis. That’s the nature of straight commission jobs. There’s no ceiling in income. Sometimes there’s no floor, either. It is very, very easy for me to worry about where the money’s coming from, or to go the other extreme and make having a nice, fat retirement portfolio my goal. I don’t have an 8-5 job, I don’t have a regular paycheck. Every day, I have to start over. If God blesses me, and I do well – I make a good income. If not, I can go weeks at a time spending money trying to make money, and have little or nothing to show for it. I have gone weeks without earning a penny. My point is: you can focus on money – instead of on God – whether you’re very rich, or whether you’re very poor. Think about it.

So yes, I often think about money. I have to. Bills stack up. I’m in one of those times right now. Other times, I’m phenomenally successful and have lots of awards from various companies to prove it. It’s easy to get my mind off of God, his Kingdom, what he really wants me doing, having peace and a worry-free life – and so this message was started as a personal study for me. After I finished it, I figured it could help some others, so I share it with you. Maybe you can use it too. If you find it helpful, tell others about this sermon and let’s get our feet back on the ground, on holy ground, with the Almighty’s perspective on these things.

Besides my own reasons, why do you and I need to focus on this topic of true wealth?

- because of the warning to the Laodecians. Our very eternity depends on getting this right.
- Because God tells those of us in the last days to come out of Babylon – “come out of her, my people” – and the context includes a lot of verses that deal with Babylon’s wealth and focus on riches, to the hurt of any kindness to fellow man or a relationship with the Creator. (see Rev. 18:4 and the rest of that chapter)
- because we in fact do see a trend in society to focus more and more on financial security – it’s all over the news, bookstores, office conversation, and so on. People want to feel secure by having money in the bank, rather than feeling secure because of a strong relationship with their Maker.
- Because there is a ton of misunderstanding regarding what Scripture really does say about wealth, money and riches. I want to delve in depth into that.

Christians over the centuries have often simply said wealth is of the devil. We’ll see scripture says otherwise. We’re told “money is the root of all evil”, but a careful reading of Scripture will show that Scripture doesn’t exactly say that either!

[track 2] Is God against wealth? Let’s tackle that first.

How can Elohim, or Yahweh, the Almighty Eternal God – who is wealthiest of all, for He owns all things and lives in a city that has streets of gold and gates of solid mother of pearl – how could He possibly be against wealth? See Rev. 21 and 22. Read Psalm 50:9-12. Jerusalem above is vast and incomprehensively lavish. In fact, God’s own words tell us it is He who gives us wealth, at least wealth that is gained honestly.

- 1 Sam 2:7 – “The *Eternal* makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up”
- Ps. 112:1-3 also tells us God often brings riches and wealth to His righteous saints
- In fact, God tells us when we tithe and honor Him with our wealth, He will fill our barns to overflowing (Prov. 3:9-10).

What God *is* against is the wrong *focus*. In Deut 8:18-20, God warns Israel: “It is the Eternal who gives you power to gain wealth...only don’t forget the Eternal when you’re wealthy”. We’ll see God is against making riches your goal. That is why he told the rich young ruler to “go your way and sell whatever you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven”... and then Jesus offered him a discipleship: “and then come and follow Me” (Mark 10;17-22). But the man went away sorrowful for he had great possessions.

Was Jesus asking anything He himself would not have been able to do? Hardly. Please turn with me to 2 Cor. 8:9. It’s a very telling passage in one short verse.

2 Corinthians 8:9

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that though He was rich*, yet for your sakes He *became poor*, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Christ was indescribably rich when he was still in heaven as the Word, as God Himself (John 1:1-3, 14). But he gave it all up, so that once he died on the stake for us, we might have true spiritual riches and inherit all things with him. Remember we are going to marry Him and as his wife, will inherit all things with him (Rom 8:16-18) in a universe of glory.

So Jesus was wealthy before He came to earth, is rich again now, and he gave up everything he had – just as he was asking of this rich, young ruler. It may be good to cross reference Mark 10:17 with 2 Cor. 8:9 in your Bible. Philippians 2:5-9 says about the same thing. Right from the start, Jesus was born in an animal keep – a manger. He grew up as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), building homes. He was poor enough in his ministry that there were times he had nowhere to lay his head. Certain women apparently helped support him from their means (Luke 8:3). So Jesus knew poverty. At the same time, remember he had a house in Capernaum, and he had a valuable one-piece seamless garment, and so on. So there are two sides to this story.

But certainly Jesus right now is fabulously wealthy again, since He said “All the father has is mine” (John 16:15). Myriads of angels minister to him, and he is in fabulous glory at the moment. So God is not against wealth per se, for He lives in lavishly opulent surroundings Himself.

Remember God made many of His faithful servants dizzyingly wealthy:

- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen 13:2; 24:35) * Isaac – Gen. 26:12-14
- Joseph (Gen 41:52)
- Job – Job 1:3; the greatest man of the east * Boaz, who marries Ruth (Ruth 2:1)
- David’s personal contribution to the temple gold, silver would be worth perhaps billions
- Solomon – 1 Kings 10:14-20; 2 Chron 1:11-12
- Several New Testament brethren were wealthy – such as Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, even Lydia – the seller of purple. Some were members of high government councils.

I’m not saying that God wants us all to be wealthy. Neither am I saying God wants us all to be poor. God is not against anyone having money, nice things, quality homes or fine clothing. If we put God and his way first, and are seeking God with all our heart – many of us *will* experience a life of quality and even a life of plenty, with much or all of it coming directly from God perhaps.

God loves us all, but some of his *blessings* are conditional to some extent. We shouldn’t mix God’s love for us with the bounties we each receive from His hands. Neither should we assume, on the other hand, that a poor man is poor because God is unhappy with him. Far from it. However, the poor man may be poor for many reasons. Some of those reasons may be his/her fault. I’m not saying poor people are all poor because of their fault, but I am saying, some are poor because of something in their lives:

- lack of education * making poor or crazy financial decisions
- investing in get rich quick schemes that backfire
- misuse of credit and building large credit card bills
- in some cases, laziness, or not vigorously going after opportunities

I can’t support the idea that so many conservative Christians have of being proud of their poverty, as if they somehow are more righteous because they are poor. In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church encouraged poverty to be seen as righteousness as a way of controlling the masses. That mentality has stuck. You are neither necessarily closer or farther from God because you’re poor – or because you’re rich. I certainly think when someone has a job, has some money, that they can do so much more with it. They can help the poor, and should help the poor. They can support missions abroad. They can leave an inheritance to their children and grandchildren.

Proverbs 13:22

“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, [that’s not a poor man!]”

But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”

There's a “poor mentality” that some have. It's not of God. We can be poor because we think poor, act poor, stay poor, don't spend time getting educated, don't pursue opportunities, don't hang out with a more educated crowd – and we think and breathe and act poor and stay poor as a result. I don't see *that* kind of poverty as being something God did! However, God *does* have laws that apply in all relationships, and in this case, that type of person is in tune with laws of poverty.

On the other hand, let me be quick to add, that God is not impressed with the pompous arrogance or feeling of being superior that some of the super wealthy have. But brethren, neither should we assume all wealthy people are like that. I have known many wealthy people who are very genuine, generous and friendly. There are pompous rich who belong to private Golf Clubs that require hundreds of thousands down just to be a member. At least some few in the crowd that shows up at the Royal Ascot races in the UK act pompous. Not all, but some are. I went there for a lark as a 19 year old. I certainly wasn't rich. Royalty, the super wealthy, the who's who of society were all there in their tuxedos or fancy gowns and various hats and so on -- and all were dressed to the nines – even I was that day. I found it all quite amusing. They act like they're masters of the universe, as they try to rub shoulders with royalty and the rich and famous, who were there in droves.

Brethren, the Eternal hates the pride and pompous condescending that some wealthy have. Again, not all wealthy folks are like that. I don't think we would have found any of that pompous attitude in King David, Abraham or Joseph. So when I talk about God blessing us to the point where some can be well off, I am not at all indicating that they are somehow better people, or more righteous, or more highly esteemed by God – nor am I saying the super wealthy are necessarily far from God. Not necessarily at all. Poor or rich - - our relationship with God is a separate matter.

God is not a respecter of persons. However He is a respecter of righteousness and humility – and blesses those who trust in Him, are humble, and are poor in spirit, meek, gentle, and generous. By the way, as we read scriptures about wealth, be sure to understand God sees “wealth” dually – both in the physical gold or money one has, as well as the spiritual riches we're addressing. An example is in Proverbs 10:22 “The blessing of the Lord brings wealth...” That could be spiritual wealth or physical wealth. Or both! Also Proverbs 15:6.

(track 3) WORKING

Some people are poor because they don't realize that when out of work, your full time work is to pound the pavement looking for work, spreading the word of your qualifications, making phone calls and seeing people – until you find work. Even our Creator says “My father works, and I work” (John 5:17). They don't need to work in order to pay a mortgage – but they work! We are to copy God as much as we can, including in this.

I personally feel even **pastors** should have a real job as an example, as much as possible. If a pastor has a larger church, he may only be able to work part time. Paul said he was a leather-worker (tent maker referred to more than making tents – Acts 18:2-3). He worked so he wouldn't be a burden to the brethren (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8). He would sell his products in the marketplace with Aquila, and when people would come around, he would use that opportunity to tell them about the gospel and about Jesus Christ. Of course, I'm sure there were times Paul had to live off the contributions of the Philippians and Macedonians at times (2 Cor. 11:9), when the Corinthians were not as willing to support him. There's that side of it too. Even though I'm an ordained minister, I work 50-60 hours a

week in my own company and try to keep up this website and ministry as I can, with very, very little outside support. So any ministers hearing this: get a job. And do your ministry.

Some poor people accept that it is the natural order of things to be poor, or have seasonal work. I challenge that. I'd recommend you get trained to find work that isn't seasonal. Mortgage payments and other bills – like buying food and paying utilities – are not seasonal. The responsibility to provide for our household (1 Tim. 5:8) is not a seasonal command either.

Prov 10:4 – “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent is made rich”

Here's another point: People think of **the 4th commandment** as the Sabbath command to rest. But that is only half the command. The other half of the command is to work -- for six days, and then rest on the 7th day, not just one in seven, but on a specific day in which the Creator put His presence: the 7th. But half the command is to be working 6 out of 7 days. See my sermons on the Sabbath.

One reason we work is to **provide for our families** and extended families, so they don't become a burden to the church or society. Turn to 1 Tim. 5, where Paul is talking about poor widows, and how the family of the widow should provide for her. We're about to read some strong words!

1 Timothy 5:8

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

If we have a poor relative, and have means to help them periodically with a “shot in the arm” of some cash, we should. Especially if we know they are freezing in cold temperatures at home in winter, or going without food or clothing for their children, or if they get behind in their rent.

God inspires John to write in 1 John 3:17 that if we have material goods and see our brother in need, and don't help him, we don't have the love of God in us. That's 1 John 3:17.

Another point: scripture tells us one big reason we work, is not just to support ourselves, but so we can have money to help others not as blessed as we are.

Ephesians 4:28

“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, *that he may have something to give him who has need.*”

Scripture is clear: God wants us to share, and it's equally clear that we must share from a willing mind and heart. Paul uses the Macedonians, north of Greece, as an example of that (2 Cor. 8:1-6).

2 Corinthians 8:1-6 TEV

“Our brothers, we want you to know what God's grace has accomplished in the churches in Macedonia. 2 They have been severely tested by the troubles they went through; but their joy was so great that they were extremely generous in their giving, even though they are very poor. 3 I can assure you that they gave as much as they could, and even more than they could. Of their own free will 4 they begged us and pleaded for the privilege of having a part in helping God's people in Judea. 5 It was more than we could have hoped for!”

[what follows is a HUGE key in liberality -- that applies to me and all of us]

“First they gave themselves to the Lord; and then, by God's will they gave themselves to us as well.”

That's a key to maximizing the effectiveness of our giving: we first give ourselves to God. Remember the scriptures and sermon: “I no longer live”. We become “living sacrifices” – and then we can offer more to others with whom God brings us into contact. Remember God notices everything about us, just as he noticed the poor widow who threw in her last 2 pennies.

Romans 12:10-13 TEV

“Love one another warmly as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect for one another. 11 Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. 12 Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray at all times. 13 Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers.”

SO I hope we get the point: God commands us to work, commands us to provide for our families, and expects us to do well enough at it to even have something we can share with others.

[TRACK 4] What God says about Wealth and Riches

I want to take a few minutes to show what God gives us as the balance towards wealth and riches. We'll let Yahweh Himself speak to us from His own words.

- **Life's FOCUS should not be on wealth and money and physical things.**

Luke 12:13-21 (Don't be covetous; life is not about who has the most toys)

“Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" 15 And He said to them, *"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*

He ends a parable in verse 21 to say we should be rich toward God, not just lay up treasure for ourselves.

Matthew 19:23 – “It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven”.

On the other hand, don't forget, it was a rich man from Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-61), who came and gathered the corpse of Jesus after He died, and put Him in his own tomb, fulfilling the prophecy that He would be buried with the rich (Isa. 53:9).

Matthew 16:24-26

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”

What Jesus and his apostles tell us over and over is to set our minds on things above, not on things of this earth (Col 3:1-5, etc.).

Let's notice something else: it's not just the riches themselves that we must be concerned with – but also the way we act and think when we have a lack of riches or funds. This becomes a care, a worry, something that can take our focus off of God. Cares of this life can choke God's word just as surely as the pursuit of physical riches can.

This is evidently clear in Matthew 13:22, jumping into the Parable of the Sower, in regard to the seed that fell among the thorns. Watch our Lord's words carefully:

Matthew 13:22

"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the *deceitfulness of riches choke the word*, and he becomes unfruitful."

The word for "cares" – as in "cares of this world", refers to something that causes us to be anxious about, worried about, it is about anxious care, according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words. So the parable of the sower and the seed in the thorns is both a warning to the rich as much as it is also a warning to the poor. Riches – or worry – can each cause the same result: becoming unfruitful. You know what Jesus said about the branch that becomes unfruitful, in John 15: it gets cut off and burned up.

So getting our minds off God, whether because of worry or because of self-satisfaction from our riches – can each cause us to become unfruitful and useless to God (Matt 13:22). A tree without fruit will be rooted up, or even dried up from the roots. Remember the unfruitful fig tree that Jesus cursed? That's a lesson for us. It wasn't about showing off his powers to work miracles. We are the fig tree, if we don't produce fruit. It's to Father's glory that we bear much fruit (John 15:8).

Riches and its opposite – worry caused by poverty – can each cause us to become unfruitful. Solution: look to God, keep your eyes on God at all times. Let's go there next.

[Track 5]

- ***INSTEAD, GOD WANTS US TO FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL THINGS, THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.***

Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34

"Make no store of wealth for yourselves on earth, where it may be turned to dust by worms and weather, and where thieves may come in by force and take it away. 20 But make a store for yourselves in heaven, where it will not be turned to dust and where thieves do not come in to take it away: 21 For where your wealth is, there will your heart be." – (Bible in Basic English).

Continuing now in verse 25 – notice what Jesus says:

"Therefore I say to you, *do not worry* about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. ***Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*** 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is,

and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Colossians 3:1 admonishes also to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. I know you know these Scriptures, but isn't it good to be reminded of them?

- **"Blessed" – which we often take to mean "given a lot of things" – really means "HAPPY".** Did you know that? We speak of someone being "really blessed", and WE mean how much God has given him, or how many good things have happened to him – good job, big house, etc. Rarely do people mean "how happy someone is", when we say, "he's so blessed". God is the Blessed God – the happy God. Blessed – happy – is the man whose sins are forgiven, and so on. The Beatitudes have many descriptions of the happy person, the blessed person: they're the poor in spirit, the meek, and so on. Even those who mourn spiritually are happy overall, for they know all is in God's hands. The scriptural focus of "blessed" is on "happy" – not on someone who has a lot of things.
- ***Be content with food and clothing, and leave the rest to God. If God blesses you beyond that, so be it, but share it with others. Remember Ps 23:1 – "The Eternal is my Shepherd, I shall not lack (want)". Is that the way we feel? We have God; that's all we need. Desire to be close to God, to know Him; don't make it your goal to make it rich.***

1 Timothy 6:6-10

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"

Note: it says "the *love of* money is a root of all evil..." It does not say money itself is evil. The money I have pays the bills, provides for my family and many others, and allows us to be generous. Without having money I would be a burden to others and society. Money itself is not evil. It's loving money – instead of loving God – that can be a root of evil. Have you ever caught yourself thinking, "oh, how I love money"? This passage should be a warning for us then.

There apparently were rich people in Paul's churches. He has a warning for them, which applies to us today as well. We're still in 1 Timothy 6, now verses 17-19. Notice the warning is in what we put our trust:

1 Timothy 6:17-19

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good,

that they be rich in good works, *ready to give, willing to share*, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

When my oldest daughter, now a mom herself, was about 6 or so, I bought her candy bar. She broke it in two and ate half of it. I asked her why she didn't eat all of it. She replied, “Heather (her sister) doesn't have one, so I'm going to give her the other half when I get home.”

I purposed in my heart right then and there that I would look for ways to bless Rachel further. And it dawned on me, “God is the same way.” As we share with the poor, feed the homeless, visit a prison, care for a widow, and buy something for the poor – He wants to give US more too. Prov. 11:25 – “the generous soul shall be made rich.”

Turn next to Ezekiel 7. Those of you who are feeling kinda smug because you have a half-million or more in your retirement portfolio, and its growing, beware. If you're trusting in your gold, or IRA, or 401k, or investments, beware. What good is gold – if there's no food to buy in a famine? Wealth is worthless in the day of God's wrath (Prov. 11:4).

Ezekiel 7:19

"They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse;
Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them
In the day of the wrath of the LORD;
They will not satisfy their souls, nor fill their stomachs,
Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity."

GOD is our King. Jesus is our Master. Serving Him and pleasing Him is the reason we live and the reason we get up in the morning. Going to work after that is very secondary.

Luke 6:13

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon.**"

In the book of James, chapter 4, (be turning there), we're warned not to make plans for how our business will fare, or what we "see" ourselves accomplishing by this time next year, and so on. The world teaches you to set goals, to define them, to believe in them. God says, beware of saying "tomorrow will do this and that" – but rather we should commit our lives to God and say "if God's willing....". It's all about Him, and not about us or our goal setting. That's of Babylon. Sure, it works to some extent, -- but we need to put our lives into God's hands to seek what He wants in our lives. If a big business deal doesn't come through, especially after we've prayed and prayed about it and asking God's will be done and perhaps God's blessing – then God has other plans! And we praise and thank him and move on. Now let's read it:

James 4:13-16

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. *All such boasting is evil.*"

That last passage really spoke to me. In the business world, we are taught, “If it is to be, it’s up to me”. And “what the mind can conceive, it can achieve.” And the Eternal is left out of the equation and it all becomes ego-centric. It all becomes what you are all about, how good you believe you are, and about being #1. I’ve fallen into that trap myself many times. It’s of Babylon, and is not pleasing to God. God has no problem with promoting you and giving you blessings. He elevated Joseph, Job, Daniel, David, and so many! He can do that to you and for you too – but first, seek Him and His will with all your heart.

By the way, this applies even more so to you pastors! If you want to expand your empire, build a church building, open up more ministry possibilities – watch your *heart*. Make sure it’s not about *your* ego. Make sure you’re not trusting in man to provide for you – but still trusting in God.

Psalm 37:5-6

“Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.
6 He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.”

Isaiah 26:3-4

“You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You. [not in the funds that are there]
4 Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength.”

- **Do be faithful with the money and opportunities God has given you.**

Luke 16:9-13

9 "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. **10 *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*** **11 *Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*** 12 And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?
13 "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

A couple of things here:

- * Jesus mentions “true riches”. So God says there are “true riches” – and we’ll get to that soon.
- * Jesus makes the astonishing statement that part of our spiritual reward is based on how well we are using the things God is giving us now – including the monies we have now. Probably including other things God’s given us too – our families, our homes, our jobs, our health and so on.

Remember he wants us to share.

Really share. How often when someone hears of someone’s house burning down, and so we want to share replacement items, we give them our worn out couch, because we wanted a new one anyway. How about helping them get something newer and better?

Are we that way with our funds with God, and God’s church? Do we give Him our best – or bring the *equivalent* of the blind, lame, sickly animal sacrifices?

- Seek true riches of the spiritual kind – and that will be our next section. We'll now discuss what are the things that make us rich in God's eyes, and when we have these things going on in our lives, God promises to pour the other kind of wealth in heaps to us, in the life to come. Having said that, as we concentrate now on "true riches", I hope you don't slip back into a "mentality of poverty" on the other hand, either.

[track 6] TRUE RICHES, SPIRITUAL RICHES

Now let's look at the things that GOD says HE views as making someone truly RICH in HIS eyes. It's not about the things you possess. It's not about the kind of house you live in. It's not about the kind of car you drive, the kind of job you hold, or how much money you make. It's not about any of those things.

Again, I start with reminding us about the comparison between Smyrna and Laodecia. Smyrna was truly poor – but God called them truly rich. Laodecia, on the other hand, thought they had everything they needed - but didn't realize their focus was on the physical and God said they were wretched, blind, miserable, poor and naked - - spiritually. Abba, our dear Father, sees the spiritual side of things as His priority. So we can be physically poor, but in God's eyes, have "true riches". Let's look at a few true riches now.

First of all, there are definite "riches of Christ" – and Christ in you – Col 1:27; 2:1-3. This is the true "secret" of a whole and lasting life: to be in Him, to know Him, and to give Him your innermost being, your very heart in complete surrender and adoration. A rich and meaningful life in Christ is one in total obedience to Him, fully trusting Him. If we are in our new life, we are killing off the old things we did -- pride, immorality, being rough with people, or anything unGodlike (Col. 3:4-5). Now there's a wealth and richness that comes into our lives when we really come to live "in Him", as I've been speaking about in the past few months.

Colossians 1:27 –

"God's plan is to make known his secret to his people, *this rich and glorious secret* which he has for all peoples. And the secret is that Christ is in you, which means that you will share in the glory of God. (NKJV: "make known the riches of the glory of this mystery..")

The biggest secret to wealth of a true spiritual kind is to be in relationship with Christ, who is in His Father. Because Christ is in us, and because we are in Him, we will share in all the rich glory Christ has. If only we had eyes to see how rich we are – right now – because we are in Christ Jesus. That's what the end of Col 1 and much of Col. 2 is saying. Col 1:22-23 says we are whole and holy – blameless in His sight—in Christ, if we remain steadfast in Him to the end. How rich is that?!

Colossians 2:2b-3 TEV

"....In this way they will know *God's secret, which is Christ himself*. 3 He is the key that opens all *the hidden treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge*"

NKJV: "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Jeremiah tells us that the rich man or the strong man should not glory or boast in their riches or any other source of strength, but should glory in that they know and understand God! Knowing God and being known by God – now that is a true kind of wealth! See Jer. 9:23-24.

Why am I reading verses like these? Because our brother the Apostle Paul, considered real wealth to be when you know you are intimate with our Lord, when we are one with Him, when we're sharing and experiencing His mind, His will, His thoughts, His wisdom. . . . and we can, and we do share all of that when we are "in Christ", a topic I've addressed a lot lately. If you haven't heard the "In Him" series, be sure you do. There's tremendous spiritual wealth in that topic.

It's a change of our mind set. Are you rich in God's wisdom? Are you full of the hidden treasures of our Master? Do you feel like you've been enriched when you can drink in from God's word? Do you prove it—by getting up early enough each and every day to drink from that fountain of life, to pick up and eat of the life-giving Manna from heaven in daily, fervent study of His word? (Remember manna had to be picked up before it got hot. See or hear my sermon on "Manna" given a few years ago).

Food for thought, isn't it?

Now beyond the riches in Christ, God says He sees His children as wealthy children when they are rich also in other ways. Let's review a few quickly. These are other things God says are true riches.

Rich because you ENJOY what you have; also being Rich in Good works

1 Timothy 6:17-19

"Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they ***be rich in good works***, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

There is a wealth of sorts when you can enjoy the simple things of life God has given you (v17). So many wealthy people are striving so hard for the next big deal, the next million, and the next business engagement, that they don't know the pleasure of watching their little boy pitch or field a ground ball in a Little League game. The end of a series of sayings I have on our fridge ends like this: after asking God for strength and health and so on, it ends up by saying this --

"I asked God for all things, that I may enjoy life,
I was given life, that I may enjoy all things.
 I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
 I am among all people, most richly blessed."

So there's a wealth that comes with being able to enjoy life – regardless of our health, our physical wealth, knowing all's well in Him. Can you enjoy your life? The older I get, the more I understand that the best joys of life are usually in the simple things. I thrill to watch a hummingbird hover beside my hummingbird feeder outside my office window. I praise God with a smile as I watch the antics of squirrels outsmart my efforts to keep them off the bird feeders. I love going out in our little inflatable boat with my sweetheart wife of 33 years marriage now. It's funny, fun and we have a ball—and I feel rich. Best of all, I see and feel wealthy as I watch my granddaughter delight in her first steps, or hear my grandson Greyson, 2 years old, speak of the upcoming Feast of Tabernacles. He actually could say it! I'm rich, overflowing with wealth because I can enjoy what is around me.

The fabulously wealthy J Paul Getty, had one failed marriage after another. Some years before he died, he said he would readily give up his billions, to have one, just one, truly happy marriage. So if you are physically poor, but you adore your wife, or your husband – know this: you are rich! You have something many millionaires and billionaires don't have. Indeed, one could be a billionaire and yet truly poor, unable to enjoy the simple pleasures of an exhilarating marriage, children who honor you and whom you respect and love, and... you get the idea. Conversely, one could poor, and yet enjoying the simple things in life and sleeping soundly at night.

If you are happy, I would say you have a kind of wealth others don't have. One of the keys to being happy, I'm learning, is to be **grateful** and give up being critical. Being critical impoverishes the soul. It's a terrible way of being that even I, sorry to admit, have to watch and overcome. So now every morning and every night, I step outside among my flowers and garden and God's creation, and try to think of new things to voice to Almighty that I'm so grateful for. Now I'm trying to thank God for making me so rich, so wealthy – not in money, but in my three awesome children and endearing grand children. And I thank Him for some of my friends, who are real friends, who are always there.

It is said that if you could point to even 2 or 3 close friends, whom you could absolutely trust and know is tightly knit with you and has your best interest at heart, someone you'd take a bullet for, you are rich. Many can't name one they feel that close to. You've got several? You're very rich indeed. If you could point to one person you know would take a bullet for *you*, you're rich.

The Son of God went through a crucifixion for me—and you and wants to get to know you and you to get to know Him intimately. "I call you my friends", he says (John 15:14). Now there's a friend, if we reach out and develop the closeness being offered to us. That's wealth of the Godly kind, to have the kind of friend Jesus is. Ponder how wealthy you are. Talk about knowing the right people.

The other day I took my sweetheart – my wife of 33 years – to a concert in the park. It was fun. But as we walked back to the car, I saw 2 teenage boys who were being loaded into a special vehicle, because they were both in wheelchairs. Maybe muscular dystrophy. My heart broke for them. As we proceeded up the road, I had to say to Carole: "Honey, God has so blessed us with wonderfully healthy children and grandchildren, hasn't he". And even though we lost one of our children as a baby, I still feel wonderfully rich from the good health overall that God has blessed our children with.

Do you see? Do you have eyes that work, even moderately well? You're rich. You can enjoy the sunsets, and laugh at the puppy in the park, and marvel over a bumble bee. Those are riches.

RICH IN GOOD WORKS (1 Tim. 6:18)

Then there's being rich in good works (v.18). How are we doing? What "good works" can you point to lately? What widow are you helping on a regular basis? What encouraging notes or phone calls have you recently made? What have you shared with the less fortunate lately? If you have, God may be seeing you right now as a very rich person in His eyes. Remember those things are storing up for us wondrous rewards that God will reveal when He comes. Remember true religion, pure and undefiled religion, is the one that includes helping the widow and orphan (James 1:27) in their time of trouble, and it is all about being there and feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison (Matthew 25). How are we doing?

We have a relationship with two large congregations in Kenya, in East Africa. They certainly could use some support. A friend of mine was recently there and met with the pastor and his wife for a couple days. Brethren, if you wish to help our Kenyan brethren as they come to understand and keep the Sabbath and holydays, and as they come to better know the true, living God – I know they'd appreciate your prayers and assistance. Many of them walk miles to hear God's word. Please help me get the message of God and His love, His Sabbath, the true message about Jesus' way of life and what He did for us -- to that corner of the world in the horn of Africa.

Rich in Faith

James 2:5

"Listen, my beloved brethren: has God not chosen the poor of this world to be **rich in faith** and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"

Faith – and being rich in faith - is something not often equated with wealth – but God equates having His faith with true riches. In these end times, will Christ find faith, or the faith, on the earth (Luke 18:8)? He said of his own disciples – “ye of little faith” or “no faith”. That could be said at times of each of us, including me. We're working on it and asking for God's faith, and learning more how to practice and live true faith – and to become rich in true faith. We have to get to the point where we look up to God for all things and not allow our hearts to be troubled, regardless of what's happening. I'm not there yet, but that's the ideal.

Some of the things we're working on, without launching off into a completely new sermon:

- thanking God for things we need before we see the physical answers in front of us.
 - Jesus thanked Father for the loaves and fish when there were only a handful
 - He thanked God for resurrecting Lazarus while He was still dead
- Keep your eyes and mind set on Him, not on the giant problem in front of you
- Monitoring and controlling our thoughts and words more – so we don't let any negativity enter in. Negativity feeds doubt, and doubt massacres faith.

Anyway, faith is another sermon – but the point is: a goal is to become rich in faith. 2 Cor. 8:7 also speaks of it.

2 Cor 8:7 TEV – where TEV says “rich” other translations say “abound” or “excel”.

“You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in your love for us. And so we want you to be generous also in this service of love.”

I hope you're getting the point. There are spiritual riches, and there are physical riches. God wants us to be spiritually rich for sure, and to know we are immensely wealthy already in so many ways.

Romans 11:33

“How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways?”

Well, God is sharing His riches with us. God says Christ has become wisdom and knowledge for us, as He is in us and we are in Him (1 Cor. 1:30-31). As you see more and more of God's wisdom, are you feeling those riches?

Brethren, let's open our eyes and see how rich we are – and how much richer we need to become in the riches that matter. As we do, I'm convinced, God will trust us with ever more "true riches".

For that matter, even the physical things most of us hearing this have, makes us truly wealthy physically compared to most in the world. If you've never seen the slums of Manila, or Nairobi, or parts of Haiti or Mexico – and I've seen some of these – you haven't seen poverty. Our poorest brethren in America usually at least have clean drinking water and a bed to sleep in and their kids don't have to rummage through city garbage dumps to find things to sell, or even to eat. We are rich. We must see how rich we are – in ways we often don't see. And we must start thanking God for all things.

Having said that, some of those same poor people in the slums could possibly be seen as truly rich by God, if they are rich in faith, rich in good works, rich in their knowledge and intimacy of God and Christ, and rich in being able to enjoy close friends and the simple things of life.

We're the child of the King, we're the son or daughter of the Highest. How could it get any better? God forgive me, and you, for times we've been blind to the wealth we have now – and the wealth that is coming, and the spiritual wealth that means most to the Almighty.

However Yahweh wants us to put wealth in the right perspective. So we'll walk on gold, on streets of gold. We'll have beautiful mansions in the world to come. We'll inherit all things with Christ. We'll sit on thrones, ruling and judging and helping the world. We'll have spirit beings, angels, at our beck and call. We'll have indescribable spirit abilities, and capabilities (See my sermons on "Life as a Spirit Being") – and fabulous wealth – but only if we are first truly rich in spiritual ways.

There's so much more to say, but we'll end there. I think you get the point.

Homework: Make a list of how rich you truly are. Then go over that with God and thank Him. Now make a list of where you need to grow in spiritual riches: gratitude, less complaining, good works, faith, service, joy.

So brethren, let's be like the Smyrnans of Revelation 2 – of whom Christ said, "I'm known your poverty, but you are rich...". Whether or not you have a lot of money and investments – the urgency is to be blessed: happy. The focus is to be spiritually rich toward God and His way. The purpose of wealth is to share it with the needy and to support the work of God -- as the women who followed Jesus supported Him. It is to provide for your family and extended family – and to your spiritual family in need. And frankly, God also gives us wealth to test us. Will we forget Him, or be even more thankful to Him for all He has provided for us.

If God makes you physically rich, wonderful – use it to serve and praise God and His people and don't lose your focus and gratitude. Be sure you are wealthy spiritually – in faith, in good works, in service, in humility, in the wisdom of God.

If you're poor, don't let it become a source of worry and one of the cares of life. Many of the most spiritual people of God were poor, wandering in goat skins and living in tents, as the end of Hebrews 11 says. Commit yourself to God, commit yourself to improvement and education and seeking opportunities, and perhaps God will help you out of your poverty. If you remain poor, remain faithful and seek to be incredibly wealthy in the spiritual areas of life. (See Luke 18:29-30)

Be faithful – be spiritually rich – no matter what. And God will richly bless us now – in many ways, and in the life to come. Until next time, this is your brother, Philip Shields.