

## **“What Secrets Are Hidden in Poverty and Wealth?”**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), a German poet and philosopher, said, "Do not discuss life with someone who has not eaten the bread of tears." Have you tried the bread of tears? When does man eat the bread of tears? I eat them when Euni bakes some bread, because it is so good my tears drop automatically! It's a joke.

We eat this bread in the midst of adversity, pain, and loneliness. However, it seems to be a universal truth that most people eat this bread when they suffer through poverty above all. So, to put Goethe's words in another way, "Do not discuss life with a person who has not experienced poverty."

Today let's think through the scriptures of how we should understand and deal with "wealth and poverty" in our lives and beliefs.

We know that neither the individual nor the family can sustain either riches or poverty forever. So, we should consider our situations as "when I am rich" and "when I am poor." When we think of "my poverty," it makes me uncomfortable.

But how often do we think of others' poverty? Usually it leads to us ignoring that person. It is this poverty that leads to apathy. But the experience of human encounters through poverty and wealth does not end here.

"Poverty" has always existed throughout human history. In addition, God does not promise in the Bible that he will defeat the poverty of this world. Of course, there are many promises in the Old Testament that he will give wealth to those who trust him.

But in the New Testament, Jesus promises believers to take charge of their lives instead of simply promising them wealth. He also emphasized the blessings of poverty in spirit and the power of faith to overcome material poverty.

Do you remember the events in Mark 14, when Jesus stayed home with Simon, a leprous man in Bethany? One woman brought a very valuable perfume. She broke the jar and poured perfume on Jesus' head.

At that time, some people were angry. "Why do you waste the perfume like this? This perfume could be sold for more than three hundred denarii, so that it could be given to the poor!"

Isn't the reaction of those people reasonable? I probably would have thought the same thing. But at that time, Jesus' reaction is counterintuitive to me. He said, "Stop. Why are you bothering her? She did a beautiful thing for me. The poor are always with you, and you can help them whenever you are willing. But I am not always with you."

Why did Jesus presume that the poor around them would always be around? I wondered why Jesus, as the Almighty Creator, did not say, "I will take care of the poor. Soon all the poor will be rich." It is not because Jesus is indifferent to the poor, nor because he lacks the ability to solve human poverty. There is a plan to train humans through poverty and wealth and to fulfill his good will.

God taught in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 15 how to care for the poor through the Law of Moses. "Do not think that you are wasting money when you give it to a poor family. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all that you do and in everything that you touch.

You give to your people freely and unselfishly, and the Lord will bless you in everything you do. There will always be some Israelites who are poor and in need, and I command you to be generous to them" (15:10, 11).

Let's think about what I can and should do when others are poor. We must help the poor with a sincere heart. This is a mandatory command given to us by God. We must remember the words of James, who made a clear declaration that if we treat people according to their outward appearance, we are guilty of sin (2: 9).

But God promised that when we obey His commands, He will bless all that we do. Therefore, we must know that helping the poor in the name of the Lord is like helping ourselves.

Thus, in order that we may produce God's wealth, the Creator will always have the poor by our side. That is not to say that we should help the poor just so that we can gain riches, since that would mean that we are not helping the poor with sincere hearts.

Today, Mark introduces two people who met Jesus in the gospel. When they met Jesus, they were suffering from poverty and illness. What Jesus then asked of them was their faith. Their problems were solved by becoming rich in faith. There is no mention that they became materially rich.

But by the promise of Jesus, we can fully imagine what kind of lives they would have lived after that. Jesus said this in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all things in this world will be added unto you."

Through them, as in James 2:5, "God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the kingdom which he promised to those who love him," it was done.

There were two things I wanted to eat as much as I could when I immigrated to the United States: chocolate and steak. Perhaps these two were representative of the food of a rich family in Korea at that time. Poor families in Korea could not eat those items.

However, after twenty years of living in the US, I don't eat these things often for my health unless Esther or Philip visit, which is why I try to meet them as often as I can. I ate them a lot already. My point is, everything in this world changes.

Chocolate and steak drift farther and farther away from me, but I feel richer because I have relied more and more on God, who became my lifelong friend and master of eternal salvation. I still want to call on the name of my Savior, God, with the same desire I had when I wanted to eat chocolate and steak.

No one volunteers for poverty. But there are many benefits of poverty. Poverty makes us humble. It increases patience. It makes us have plenty of gratitude. Sometimes, when we see poor people and their struggling lives, we find new vitality in our lives.

There are Christian parents from developed countries who are sending their children on short-term missions to poor underdeveloped countries in order to correct the bad habits and selfishness of their children. I think this is a commendable action, as it's crucial to expose the future generation to the pain and suffering of others.

Let us conclude with the text today. Who is the rich man who God really hates? It is not that God hates him simply because he has a lot of money. God hates the rich man who does not know that the poor are his colleagues who should share eternal life with him.

Let's look at Proverbs 22: 2. "The rich and the poor have this in common: the one who made them all is the Lord." It means that the lives of all people and their existences are equally in the dominion of God the Creator.

God has the poor to exist so that the rich can share their wealth and offer a helping hand. On the other hand, people can learn what true riches man should seek when they are poor.

People say that "need is the mother of success." When people are poor, there is always a motivation to do something to fulfill the needs of life. There is no room for pessimistic or lazy habits. Whenever the needs are met and concerns are resolved, we are able to give thanks to God abundantly.

The author of Proverbs gives us a clear guideline on how much wealth we should possess. He said in chapter 30:7-9, "I ask you, God, to let me have two things before I die: keep me from lying, and let me be neither rich nor poor. So, give me only as much food as I need.

If I have more, I might say that I do not need you. But if I am poor, I might steal and bring disgrace on my God." This prayer should be given to God by both the rich and the poor. Yet it is hard to hear from either side.

Can anyone in this world claim to have made their wealth their own? See II Corinthians 8:9, "Our Lord Jesus, rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty." By saving us through His sacrifice, He has become a Savior who fulfills all our spiritual and material needs.

We must always be able to acknowledge and confess through faith that all our possessions come from Christ Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit will help us treat the poor and the rich the same through Christ's heart. Amen.

***Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:***

1) At any time, this week, meet someone who is eating the bread of tears. And give him or her love. That act will be like eating the bread of tears yourself.

2) There is no standard of possessions that can distinguish between rich and poor. However, when you completely entrust your possessions to the Lord, you become truly rich. Decide what evidence you have that you have entrusted your possessions to the Lord.

3) This week, let us pray especially for the many people in this world who are struggling with poverty and for missionaries, churches, and pastors who are experiencing financial difficulties in their ministry that the helping hands of God and man will reach out.