

***“God of the Poor”***

June 3, 2012

Text: James 2:5-7

**Lehman Strauss was a Baptist pastor in Bristol, Pennsylvania**

**when he wrote this, in 1956=>**

Recently a woman...told me of a man & wife whose furniture and clothing were to be sold at a sheriff's sale.... The husband had passed through a prolonged illness prohibiting his going to work. During his illness his wife had no income. Gradually their meager savings were spent on food, rent, and doctor's bills. Then the woman purchased food on credit and became in arrears in rent payments. After awhile, her landlord and the store owner got together, went to a sheriff, and swore out a warrant for her arrest. Both of her creditors were wealthy men, the landlord being vice-president of our town's largest bank, owner of several properties, and an **elder in a Protestant church**.

It was to prevent situations like this that God commanded Israel

in Lev 19=>

*“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. / Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall **leave** them for the **needy** and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:9-10).*

No large government welfare program would be needed,

if individual farmers would obey this command, leaving a small portion of their crop unharvested for the poor/needy to gather, so they'd have food enough for themselves/their-families.

Boaz's obedience in this matter enabled the poor widow

Ruth to gather the gleanings from his field, & provide food for both herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi.

In Lev 25, God also commanded=> *“Now in case a countryman of yours becomes **poor** and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. / Do not take usurious interest from him [any interest would be usurious for a poor man], but **revere your God**, that your countryman may live with you”* (25:35-36).

This refraining from taking interest on loans to poor people was to be done out of one's reverence for God.

It was to honor God, knowing that He Himself has a special concern for the welfare of the poor.

**God is the God of the poor/needy, who responds to their cry.**

In Psa 12, He says=> *“‘Because of the devastation of the afflicted, because of the groaning of the **needy**, Now I will arise,’ says the LORD; ‘I will set him in the safety for which he longs’”* (12:5).

God expects His people also to intervene on behalf of the poor.

Prov 21=> *“He who shuts his ear to the cry of the **poor** Will also cry himself and not be answered”* (21:13).

Anyone who ignores the pleas of the poor, can expect God to ignore his prayer in times of trouble.

God even warns those who would harm/exploit the poor that He will personally intervene to punish them.

Prov 22=> *“Do not rob the **poor** because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate; / For the LORD will plead their case, And **take the life** of those who rob them”* (22:22-23).

God so identifies with the poor that He considers any attack against them, to be an attack on Him personally.

Prov 17:5=> “*He who mocks the **poor** reproaches his **Maker**; He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished.*”

**God’s special regard for the poor goes beyond sympathy for their plight=> He knows they’re more likely than the rich to be humble—an important spiritual advantage.**

The poor have less room for proud self-confidence.

Unlike the rich, they can’t find security in their material possessions, & they are also less likely to be hardened by greed.

Their lives are often lived on the edge of financial disaster, so they find it more natural to cry out to God for help.

Today’s text will refer to them as “*rich in faith.*”

Oftentimes, they’re also more sympathetic (than the wealthy) with others who are poor.

E.g. when Paul was seeking help for the poor Xns in Jerusalem, some of the most generous donations he received came from Macedonian Xns who were poor themselves.

In II Cor 8 he writes that=> “*In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy & **their deep poverty** overflowed in the wealth of their **liberality***” (8:2).

**Rich people tend to be less spiritually-open to God’s truth than the poor.**

The wealthy feel no need to “walk by faith” because they think that walking by sight is working well for them.

They don't realize that they are blind to their own spiritual poverty, and that the worldliness all around them is deepening that blindness.

Like the church at Laodicea, they think=> *"I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing."*

They never hear Jesus' message to them=> *"You do not know that you are wretched & miserable & poor & blind & naked"* (Rev 3:17).

This is why X said=> *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"* (Mt 19:24).

Today most of us would view ourselves as being midway between poverty and real wealth.

But a visit to a third world country would persuade us that we are rich.

However, if we come on hard times and the sheriff shows up at our door to hold a garage sale with our clothes/furniture, we can suddenly feel very poor.

**In last week's text, James described an incident in which both a rich-man/poor-man visited a church, to which James was writing.**

The rich man received an enthusiastic welcome, in which church members flattered him out of insincere/selfish motives;

But the poor man was rudely told=> *"You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool"* (Jms 2:3).

James is now going to build on this illustration to point out why Xns should honor the poor, and why they should not flatter the rich simply because of their wealth.

I.e., why they should not respond the way the church in last week's text responded.

**\* A Reason for Honoring the Poor => God has chosen them to receive the eternal riches of His Kingdom.**

So they deserve to be congratulated.

**[James 2:5]=> “Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”**

**James says “Listen,” wanting the reader to pay close attention to something about which he is very passionate.**

And yet he wants his readers to understand that he's saying it out of love for them, as his “*beloved brethren*.”

He isn't going to pound on them with a lot of direct accusations.

Instead, he's going to ask them 3 questions that will make them think through their own worldly reactions to the-rich/the-poor.

His 1<sup>st</sup> question asks them to rethink their rude treatment of the poor, who are precious to God.

**God has chosen people who are poor to become heirs of His Kingdom, as they place their faith in His Son, Jesus X.**

And in that sense, the Lord has made these humble people (whom James' original readers had disdained/dishonored) spiritually rich.

God even gives them the faith to believe in Jesus, in order to become joint-heirs with Him, of His Father's Kingdom.

James isn't saying that poor Xns' riches consist in their faith.

Rather, that their faith is the open-hand that has received God's riches, the faith that results in salvation/eternal-life, in which the riches of the Kingdom become theirs in abundance.

They come to love God thru a faith-relationship w/ Jesus X. God adopts them for His own, & gives them the promise that they will inherit His Kingdom.

In spite of their current poverty, they hold the title deed to everything, & are well described by 2 Cor 6:10 as=>

*"having nothing, yet possessing all things."*

They enjoy the eternal blessings that every Xn enjoys.

Eph 1 says they are=> *"Blessed...with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,"* (1:3).

II Pet 1 says=> *"His divine power has granted to [them] everything pertaining to life and godliness"* (1:3).

Rom 10 says=> *"The same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in **riches** for **all** who call upon Him"* (10:12).

In eternity, when the last has become 1<sup>st</sup>, these poor Xns will enjoy the riches of eternal life in all its fullness, beyond their fondest dreams.

**James' readers had treated these poor people with contempt, but the majority of those whom God has chosen & predestined to eternal life—are poor (not rich).**

Both a poor-man/rich-man had visited their church, but of the 2,  
the poor man was a better prospect for the gospel.

If we don't view the poor in that light, as people w/ that kind of  
God-given advantage, either we don't understand James'  
words in our text, or we just don't believe them.

**It's not that there is any virtue in poverty, or that every poor  
man is automatically chosen by God for His Kingdom.**

It's that most of the chosen come from among the ranks of the  
poor (i.e., those who aren't rich).

Because God hates pride, that's the way it has always been in the  
Church, & that's the way it still is today, among the less  
privileged/honored in any society.

Paul wrote words that are true even now, *"Consider your calling,  
brethren, that there were not many wise according to the  
flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; / but God has  
chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, &  
God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the  
things which are strong, / & the base things of the world &  
the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that  
He might nullify the things that are, / that no man should  
boast before God"* (I Cor 1:26-29).

Church history shows that more poor people have always  
responded to the gospel, than rich people.

Poverty helps a person to better understand/accept God's  
purpose for his life, & to seek His face more  
urgently/humbly.

In the OT, poverty/humility are almost synonymous.

Nor is James saying that rich people cannot be saved.

But he is saying that it's less likely.

It's harder for the rich to enter the Kingdom, than for a camel to go thru the eye of a needle, because pride makes it too difficult for them to surrender to X.

**Ultimately, financial poverty is not the real issue—  
recognition of one's *spiritual* poverty is.**

The only benefit of the 1<sup>st</sup>, is that it can lead to the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The true blessing is found in being what X called "*poor in spirit*"

(Mt 5:3), "*for,*" He said, *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

These are the folks "*who **hunger**/thirst for righteousness,*"  
and X promises "*They shall be satisfied*" (Mt 5:6).

Most of us are not financially poor, but if we're born again, we have known what is to become "poor in spirit," & that has led to our salvation, through faith in X.

**Hunger is the worst kind of poverty/emptiness, because a  
person cannot put off hunger's internal cravings.**

Jesus said that those who experience spiritual cravings like that are blessed, because they're the ones who will be satisfied.

They long for peace with God, and for assurance that He has extended His mercy to them.

They would love to hear His voice assure them, "Your sins, which are many, are all forgiven. Go in peace."

These folks hunger for the bread of life—Jesus X—and they won't be satisfied w/ the world's spiritual cotton candy=>



Its superficial-distractions and emotional anesthetizers,  
designed by Satan to take man's mind off the  
condition of his soul.

If their spiritual desires were mere whims, they'd prob. still  
settle for some useless worldly substitute.

But somehow (possibly through financial poverty, possibly  
by some other means) God has gotten through to  
them and has created w/i them a voracious spiritual  
appetite, that won't be satisfied by anything less than  
the true Bread of Life.

When such a person develops a real fear of Hell, or a real sense  
of grief/guilt over his sin, or a real understanding of the  
eternal lostness his soul due to his sin, he will persistently  
seek/beg/cry-out to God for the Bread of Life, that can  
save/nourish his soul.

He will relentlessly pound on Mercy's door day/night until  
the H.S. answers & opens the door, drawing him into  
a personal relationship w/ X whereby he'll be  
forgiven/cleansed.

He'll pray like the old hymn that says=>

"Lord, deny me what You will,  
Only ease me of my guilt!  
A suppliant at Your feet I lie,  
Give me Christ, or else I die!"

And when he finds peace/salvation/satisfaction for his soul  
through faith in Jesus (God's Bread of Life), he will

rejoice, & he'll feel like dancing, just as David did before the Ark of God.

**The really Good News is that, for those who sense their spiritual poverty like that, & trust in X alone to forgive & cleanse them, He promises “*they shall be satisfied.*”**

To quote the Magnificate of Mary (Jesus' mother)=>

*“HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; AND SENT AWAY THE RICH EMPTY-HANDED”* (Lk 1:53).

That's the key=> God fills those who are spiritually poor/hungry.

I hope that every one of us has experienced such hunger that can lead to filling/life.

But those who consider themselves rich—content, complacent, and needing nothing—either with the things of this world, or with their unsaved spiritual condition, God sends them away, empty-handed.

**James' point is, that his readers should honor the poor because poverty-of-spirit can lead to faith in X, and eternal life;**

So all the riches of God's Kingdom are going to be theirs.

Unfortunately, James must tell his readers in=>

**[Verse 6]=> “*But you have dishonored the poor man.*”**

God often uses literal poverty as the tool w/ which to draw man into a realization of his spiritual poverty, so he'll cry out to X, for the filling/satisfaction, which only He can give.

If the Lord is drawing a poor person like that, he's one of the

*“poor of this world”* whom God has chosen to become

*“rich in faith and an heir of the Kingdom.”*

God loves him & is honoring him, & we should too.

But sadly, the shameful Xns to whom James was writing, were

dishonoring such people, out of their contempt for them.

*“You”* is emphasized in the original language to underscore

the contrast between their dishonoring the poor, and

God's honoring them.

### **\* Two Reasons for Not Flattering the Rich**

Again James is going to gently indict his readers, by asking

rhetorical questions.

Each question will point to their sinful favoritism,

encouraging James' readers to evaluate their own

partiality toward the rich.

It will also demonstrate how senseless/illogical/hypocritical

their response to the rich has been, due to their

attitude of favoritism.

Reason #1—It is the rich who are oppressing you.

[Verse 6b]=> *“Is it not the rich who **oppress** you and personally **drag** you into court?”*

**The wealthy were continually “*oppressing*” the young**

**Church, exploiting believers in a variety of ways.**

One of those, was to drag them into court, where Xns had little

chance of winning their case;

- \* Either because they were poor, & couldn't afford a lawyer;
- \* Or because the whole legal process was rigged to work against them.

Still today, the rich are using the courts (even in the U.S.) to restrict the religious freedoms of Xns.

Until A.D. 66, when the Jewish Wars began, the Roman government permitted Jews to handle many of their legal affairs in their own courts, according to their own laws. E.g. in Acts 9:2, we read that Paul (while still an unsaved Pharisee persecuting the Church) had received letters from the H.P. authorizing him to arrest Xns in Damascus and bring them back in chains to Jerusalem, to stand trial.

In Acts 26:10, Paul even says=> *“And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received **authority from the chief priests**, but also when they were being **put to death** I cast my vote against them.”*

They even had the power to imprison/execute Xns. Many of the courts into which Xns were dragged were just local synagogues, where prejudice against them was so strong, they had no chance of ever receiving real justice.

“*Drag*” means to forcibly-drag, implying hatred/hostility/brutality.

“*Personally*” is added for emphasis, suggesting rich men were using the corrupt court system to exploit poor Xns, thru the power of their influence over it.

**But James’ statement in verse 6, about the rich oppressing the poor, seems to go beyond their ruthless tactics in court.**

The rich who were selfish/greedy had always oppressed & tyrannized others, taking advantage of them financially.

So James is saying, Why would you side with the rich who exploit you too, rather than the poor who can’t/don’t because they’re harmless?

Amos 8:4 pointed out how unscrupulous some rich Jewish business men were, enslaving others financially, 1 shekel at a time=>

*“Hear this, you who trample the needy, to do away with the humble of the land, / saying, ‘When will the new moon be over, So that we may sell grain, And the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market, To **make the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger** [cheating people], And to cheat with dishonest scales, / So as to **buy the helpless for money** And the **needy** for a pair of sandals, And that we may sell the refuse of the wheat?’” (8:4-6).*

With heartless people like that around, Xns should be defending the poor against them—not honoring the rich for all their ill-gotten wealth.

**There’s nothing inherently wrong with being rich.**

Rich people who truly love/serve God rather than mammon,  
can/do become channels of tremendous blessing for the  
Kingdom.

So Paul tells Pastor Timothy=> *“Instruct those who are  
rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix  
their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God,  
who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. /  
Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to  
be generous and ready to share, / storing up for  
themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the  
future, so that they may take hold of that which is life  
indeed”* (I Tim 6:17-19).

The problem that rich people face, is that wealth is so seductive.

The temptation to become conceited & to fix one's hope on  
uncertain riches, is extremely difficult to resist.

That's why James 1 said=> *“Let the rich man glory in his  
humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass  
away. / For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and  
withers the grass; & its flower falls off, & the beauty  
of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in  
the midst of his pursuits will fade away”* (1:10-11).

When God allows the flower of wealth to fall off a rich  
man, it's an act of love, bringing him back to  
spiritual/eternal reality;

Keeping him from becoming one of the ruthless  
exploiters, like those Amos wrote about, who  
would buy the needy for a pair of sandals.

Reason #2 (for not showing favoritism to the rich)—The rich  
blaspheme the fair name of your Savior.

[Verse 7]=> “Do they not **blaspheme** the fair name by which you have been called?” (called by God unto salvation).

“Oppress”/“drag” (vs 6) & “blaspheme” here are all pres. tense verbs, indicating the ongoing opposition of the rich to X/Xns.

**They may have blasphemed Jesus’ name in court, to intensify a judge’s hostility toward X, & those called by His name.**

Or they may have done it elsewhere, simply out of their bitter hatred for Him.

Jesus’ name is “*fair*” (*kalos*) means good/beautiful/noble or excellent) to a true Xn believer, because it expresses the most important truth in his life=> Jesus has become his Savior.

In the early church, the words “the Name” were synonymous/interchangeable with “Jesus.”

\* E.g. after the Apostles were dragged before the Sanhedrin & threatened, for preaching about Jesus, Acts 5 says:

*“They went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for **His name**” (5:41).*

The true/lit. reading is “to suffer [shame] for **the name**.”

\* III Jn 7 describes Xn evangelists who=> “Went out for the sake of **the Name**.”

They went out & proclaimed the gospel for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus' name refers to all the wonderful theological truths we know about Him as our Savior, our Lord, & our Messiah. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow someday, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God, that  
*"Jesus Christ is **Lord**."*

This is why we sing *All Hail the Power of Jesus' **Name**,  
His **Name** is Wonderful, Praise the **Name** of Jesus.  
Jesus is the Sweetest **Name** I Know, &  
Blessed Be the **Name**.*

James reminds his readers & us, that we are called by X's name. That's an OT idiom meaning we bear His name, calling ourselves "Xns" because we belong to Jesus, the X. His wonderful name is fair to us, so its being blasphemed grieves us deeply.

Once again, wealthy people who control the media today, are using it to make a mockery of that name, and the whole Xn faith based on Jesus' name.

I don't know how a true Xn can hear Jesus' name being used as a curse word on TV, & keep on watching it. His love for X should create such indignation that he reputdiates/rejects that sort of blasphemy.

When James asks his readers, *"Do they [the rich] not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?"* the expected answer should be, "Yes they



do, & we won't put up w/ this name we love being treated like that, for even a moment!"

True believers can't/won't politely ignore/accept such blasphemy against our dear Savior.

We are to revere Jesus' name, above every other name.

In this epistle, James is adding to rich men's guilt for blaspheming X's name, the additional charge that they oppress the poor.

Their doing all that, is an indirect attack on the X Himself, who said, "*To the extent that you did not do it [provide help] to one of the **least** of these, you did not do it to **Me***" (Mt 25:45).

Prov 14=> "*He who oppresses the **poor** reproaches his **Maker**, But he who is gracious to the **needy** honors **Him***" (14:31).

I.e., these men who dishonored the poor were in serious trouble w/ their Maker/God.

James is saying, Why are you buttering such people up w/ flattery, knowing how wicked they really are?

Their unloving treatment of the poor is made even worse, by their blaspheming the name of the poor man's God, Jesus X.

Someone who truly believes in Jesus, loves Him, and reveres His name, will love the poor as He does, and will seek to graciously help them.

He will be charitable toward all, engaging in favoritism  
toward none.

He will seek to live just as lovingly as Jesus lived (his poor  
but beloved Savior, who died to make him rich).

## ***“God of the Poor”***

June 3, 2012

Text: James 2:5-7

1. God is the God of the [10 poor] and needy, who responds to their cry.  
Lev 19:9-10; 25:35-36; Psa 12:5; Prov 21:13; 22:22-23; 17:5
2. God’s special regard for the poor goes beyond sympathy for their plight; He knows they are more likely than the rich to be [14 humble] (an important spiritual advantage).  
II Cor 8:2; Rev 3:17; Mt 19:24; Jms 2:3
3. **James is going to point out why Christians should honor the poor, and why they should not [16 flatter] the rich...**  
**\* A Reason for Honoring the Poor**  
**[James 2:5]**
4. God has chosen people who are poor to become [12 heirs] of His Kingdom as they place their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.  
II Cor 6:10; Eph 1:3; II Pet 1:3; Rom 10:12
5. It’s not that there is any virtue in poverty, or that every poor man is automatically chosen by God; it’s that [10 most] of the chosen come from the ranks of the poor.  
I Cor 1:26-29
6. Ultimately, financial poverty is not the real issue—recognition of one’s [22 spiritual] poverty is.  
Mt 5:3, 6
7. When such a person develops a real fear of Hell, or a real sense of grief and guilt over his sin, a real understanding of the eternal lostness his soul due to his sin, he will persistently seek and beg and cry out to [8 God] for the Bread of Life.
8. For those who sense their spiritual poverty like that, and trust in Christ alone to forgive and cleanse them, He promises “*they shall be* [20 *satisfied*].”  
Lk 1:53

**[Verse 6]**

**\* Two Reasons for Not Flattering the Rich**

Reason #1—It is the rich who are oppressing you.

**[Verse 6b]**

9. The wealthy were continually oppressing believers in a variety of ways; one of those was to [10 drag] them into court.

Acts 9:2; 26:10

10. The rich who were selfish and greedy had always oppressed and tyrannized others taking advantage of them [22 financially].

Amos 8:4-6; I Tim 6:17-19

11. The problem that rich people face is that wealth is so [22 seductive].

Jms 1:10-11

Reason #2—The rich blaspheme the fair name of your Savior.

**[Verse 7]**

Acts 5:41; III Jn 7

12. Jesus' name refers to all the wonderful theological [14 truths] we know about Him as our Savior, our Lord, and our Messiah.

Mt 25:45; Prov 14:31

13. Someone who truly believes in Jesus, loves Him, and reveres His name will love the poor as He does and will seek to graciously [10 help] them.