
Words of Truth

Does Financial Status Say Anything About Spiritual Status?

By: Brian A. Yeager

The question of our study is not a simple question to answer. There is not one answer that is always right concerning evaluating one's spiritual life based upon their physical well-being. It has become a popular trend among false teachers to teach what is sometimes referred to as the "Prosperity Gospel". These false teachers have brought the ignorant into their assemblies by promising them better lives on earth through being part of that particular false religious body. This is not a new tactic for false teachers to use (II Peter 2:1-3; 17-19).

It is also common for people to think that they are suffering hardships as punishment from God. If you listen to someone going through tough times you will sometimes hear questions like this: "What have I done to deserve this? Why is God angry with me?" Job was tempted by Satan (Job 1-2), but thought that his sufferings were at the hand of God (Job 19:21). An entire Psalm is written with this mindset as well (Psalms 74:1-23).

Just from the thoughts we've already begun to address, you should be able to see that this can be a compound question. Many people think that God has scripted everyone's life. Such is apparent when said people say, "everything happens for a reason". Folks, that statement is not true. Notice: "*I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all*" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Thus, as we press forward in our study, let's remember that God does not script our lives. With that in mind, we'll start off by asking if poverty is a statement about one's faith.

Does Poverty Reveal Something About Someone's Faith?

You cannot read the following Scriptures and come to the conclusion that someone being in poverty means that they are lost spiritually: "*Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool... And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God... Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him... And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Proverbs 19:1, Luke 6:20, James 2:5, and Revelation 2:8-10).

Now there is a balance here on this point. Some people will read the Scriptures we've just looked at and will conclude that all poor people are saved. That is not true. Poverty is not a sign that someone is doing something right. In fact, some people are in poverty because they are lazy bums (Proverbs 13:4, Proverbs 20:4, and Proverbs 24:30-34) who have sinned in refusing to work (Proverbs 21:25, Romans 12:11, and II Thessalonians 3:7-13).

Therefore, considering both sides of this question, you cannot say that one's poverty says they are faithful or unfaithful. The fact is; faithful people may experience times of poverty and abundance that has nothing to do with their faithfulness to God (Philippians 4:10-12). This brings us to another question, what does wealth say about a person's faithfulness?

Does A Person's Wealth Reveal Their Spiritual Status?

When considering this question, people are often quick to quote Jesus when He said this: *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:23-24). What those people do not do is include what Jesus said next: *"When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:25-26).

Yes, wealth can make salvation difficult. More times than not in the Scriptures, wealth has become a stumbling block for God's people. The temptation that wealth presents carries more challenges than we'll be able to list. That being said, one of the problems wealth presents people with is the temptation to trust in that wealth more than God (Psalms 52:7, Proverbs 11:28, and Revelation 3:17-19). Another problem is that earthly treasures can root people in this world. The person who is invested more in this life than in Christ will have a heart problem (Matthew 6:19-21; cf. Mark 12:29-30). Simply put, you cannot fall in love with anything of this world (I John 2:15-17).

Therefore, wealth does not mean someone is faithful (Proverbs 13:7). Nor does wealth mean that someone is lost (I Timothy 6:17-19). If a person realizes that earthly wealth is temporary (Psalms 49:10) and they enjoy it as a gift within its proper perspective, earthly wealth is not a bad thing (Ecclesiastes 5:19). While it may be difficult, a person can love the Lord and enjoy earthly wealth at the same time (Psalms 112:1-3).

Conclusion

The very evident point of this lesson and all lessons like it is that one cannot conclude a person's faithfulness or lack thereof based on physical appearances (John 7:24). Rich people are not always bad people (Genesis 13:2 and Matthew 27:57). The same is true in regard to one being poor. Just because someone lacks physical belongings that does not mean they are spiritually lost (Luke 16:19-31). If we are going to discern the spiritual character of any individual we'd better look at more than what they have or do not have in regard to physical belongings (Matthew 7:20). Let's be cautious not to create a standard of judgment based upon wealth or the lack thereof. The words of our Savior are the standard of judgment (John 12:48). That standard says that the rich and poor can be saved.