

# **“Give Me Neither Poverty Nor Riches”**

**Introduction.** The recent economic information has all of us on edge. The future is uncertain, even fearful, but there is an answer that can calm our hearts. We are going to study the concepts in Proverbs 30:7-9 today.

This passage is the only prayer in Proverbs. God is not mentioned but He is the only one who can fulfill it. Most people belong in between the extremes of poverty and riches, and this is where Agur wishes to be. His solemn acknowledgment of the mystery of life and of God is similar to Ecclesiastes 7:16-18.

## **I. *Do Not Give Me Poverty***

- A. Poverty can lead to as much wrong as riches (Proverbs 6:30-31; Ephesians 4:28; Colossians 3:5).
- B. What leads to poverty?
  - 1. Laziness (Proverbs 10:4; cf. 22:29).
  - 2. Frivolity (Proverbs 12:11; 28:19).
  - 3. Extravagant spending (Proverbs 21:17, 20).

## **II. *Do Not Give Me Riches***

- A. Riches can be a blessing (Proverbs 3:16; 8:18; 10:22; 1 Timothy 6:17-18).
- B. However, there is a danger.
  - 1. Wealth gives a false sense of security (Proverbs 18:10-11).
  - 2. Wealth cannot deliver us from wrath (Proverbs 11:4).
  - 3. Wealth can mean trouble (Proverbs 15:16; 22:1).
  - 4. Wealth can dull our spiritual sensitivities (Hosea 13:6; Matthew 19:24).
- C. Instead of riches, our first priority should be blessing our children with the opportunities of the gospel (Deuteronomy 6:10-12; 8:10-14; 32:15).

## **III. *How Can We Resist This Temptation?***

- A. Remember that all we have is from God (1 Chronicles 29:10-18; Psalm 24:1; 50:10-11; James 1:17).
- B. Be content with less (Philippians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 6:6-11).
  - 1. If you listed necessities, what would be on your list? It probably would not be nearly as much as you think!
  - 2. C. S. Lewis said, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. If I find in myself a desire that no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

- C. Honor God with your wealth (Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:8-12).
1. One practical test of whether one is trusting the Lord or one's own judgment can be found in how we view our possessions and finances.
  2. Solomon makes it clear that honoring the Lord with our firstfruits is not simply a way to become rich. God's purpose for us is not to make us rich, but rather to develop in us godly character, and His responses are designed with that goal in mind.
- D. Give more away (Proverbs 19:17; 21:13; Luke 3:10-11).
1. Luke 16:19-31 is an extended commentary on Proverbs 21:13. Luke spoke more about material possessions than any other gospel writer (12:13-21, 22-34; 16:1-13, 19-31; 18:18-30; 19:1-10; 21:1-4). He followed up by showing sacrificial giving lived out in Acts (2:44-45; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; 19:18, 25-27; 20:35).
  2. When we give money, we are releasing a little more of our egocentric selves and a little more of our false security. It makes life with God an adventure of discovery. We are being used to help make a difference in the world, and that is worth living for and giving for.
  3. Soren Kierkegaard said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive, but then it is also more blessed to be able to do without than to have to have." John Wesley gave away his excess income. He lived on £28 per year and gave the rest away, even when he earned £6,000 per year.
  4. David Robinson, one of the best basketball players of all time, fed the homeless through his Feed My Sheep program. He also helped needy families get diapers and baby food through a charity called the Ruth Project. He thought of this work as life-enhancers rather than sacrifices. "If I'm clutching my money with both hands, how can I be free to hug my wife and kids?" he asked.
  5. We demonstrate our priority to God through what we give. But we need to be careful about the charities we support. Groups such as the Salvation Army and United Way are either religious groups in and of themselves or they use their donations to fund ungodly activities such as abortion.

**Conclusion.** The circumstance of poverty and riches endanger character. Proverbs 30:7-9 illustrates the humility of self-knowledge -- for Agur might have prayed to use poverty or riches correctly, but knew his frailty too well.

Michael Donahue, founder of InterWorld Corporation in New York City, was elated when his company's share price skyrocketed in a public stock offering in August 1999 during the dot com bubble, earning him \$448

million. So he splurged big-time. He bought a \$9.6 million second home in Palm Beach, spent \$100,000 to help sponsor his polo team in Florida, and dropped a bundle renting a private jet so he could whisk off to Palm Beach on weekend jaunts with his wife. "It was a lifestyle thing," he says. Today Donahue is a member of another club -- call it the 90% club -- of executives whose companies' stock prices have fallen that much or more from their peak. The value of Donahue's InterWorld stake plunged to \$12.6 million; the share price falling 96.8% to \$2.94 from a peak of \$93.50 on December 31, 1999. The company was officially out of business on March 4, 2001. Donahue was asked to repay part of a \$14 million loan he took out with his InterWorld stock as collateral, and he had to put his Palm Beach house on the market. "Going up was easy," Donahue says. "But when it starts going down, no one wants to talk to you. It's been the most challenging personal experience of my career." One wonders that if he could do it all over, he would choose the moderation in Proverbs 30:7-9.

I am deeply indebted to Tommy Peeler for the use of his material.