



## Why Less Is More

### Are You Up to Speed with God?

When I went away to college years ago, I was quite poor. I did not receive any financial support from my parents and so whatever I had for living expenses came from a small part-time job I had on campus and the financial aid I received. Before I left for school, I met an older retired woman who asked me about my college plans and was very happy to hear I had been called into Christian ministry. A few months later as I was getting used to my college which was more than two thousand miles from home, I received a package from her with a book of promises from the Bible and a check to help with my expenses. From then until I graduated, this retired woman would send me periodically a check and it always arrived just when I needed the money. Her generosity was a source of great joy to me. I am not sure how much of a sacrifice it was for Betty Rickman to support my education but needless to say, she wasn't obligated to do so. She was an example to me of how a Christian life looks when it is applied in real time.

James the brother of Jesus does not hold back when he addressed a problem found among all people of the world. **Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.** (James 5: 1-6 NIV)

Admittedly this is a harsh assessment, and you may not feel like it applies to you. I am guessing you have not murdered anyone, let alone someone innocent and you may not consider yourself rich or currently hoarding storehouses of gold or silver. I think though you will see how this tough "word from the Lord" applies to all of us.

James may be guilty of stating the obvious, but he reiterates something we all sense but perhaps give little thought. "Loss is the common denominator of life." Or to put it another way, "You can't take it with you." He has this to say. **Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded.** (James 5: 2-3a NIV) The mindset of many, perhaps nearly all is to try to gain, gain, gain. Always upgrade if you can, make money on your investments, buy newer cars, bigger homes, better clothes. I have never had anyone tell me, "I hope I become poorer, or less financially secure." Whatever you gain though, whether it is something you buy or given to you will eventually slip through your hands. It will either wear out or you will leave it behind. This may seem a bit morbid, but it is a fundamental realization of all those who want to make the most of life. Paul wisely noted, **And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.** (1 Corinthians 13: 13 NIV) What is generally overlooked is how personal chapter 13 is. All of it is about how your life can be and what matters most in the spiritual realm for you. Certain abilities are often given celebrity status in Christian circles such as prophesying, speaking in tongues and great Biblical insight, all of which will fade in God's kingdom but what you can keep with you are faith, hope and love. The love you share, the faith you maintain and the hope you hold will stay with you for eternity, so they are worth developing, whatever the cost.

There are five axioms taught in the James passage. 1. God demands employers pay fair wages. To not do so is a crime against heaven. 2. Wealth is a treacherous companion. Very little good ever comes from acquiring wealth and it has destroyed many who gained it. 3. Less is Better. If you have to decide between getting more or keeping less, less is almost always the preferred option. 4. God cares what you do. It matters to Him how you act, the way you treat others and how you respond to what He gives you. 5. Judgment on evil will take place. Just because it seems like God has forgotten about all the bad done in this world does not mean He has given it a pass. Destruction of evil will happen. Our family has waited eight weeks for the flooring we ordered for our bathroom. If we realize that eventually the flooring will be installed despite the delay, why would we have a tough time thinking our wait for God to deliver a death blow to all evil is not forthcoming. Right will be established forever and evil will be destroyed.

There is a painful account described in Acts that poignantly illustrates the way many approach life. As Paul and Silas were walking through Philippi on the way to the place of prayer, a slave girl approached them, whom the Bible said had a “spirit”. She had a reputation for fortune-telling and her skill made her slave owners lots of money. She kept following Paul and his companions shouting, **“These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”** (Acts 16: 17b NIV) This went on for days and finally Paul had enough and cast the spirit out of the girl. It immediately left her and in her right mind, the girl could no longer tell fortunes. Her owners, rather than being overjoyed that the girl was freed of demonic possession and able finally to live a normal life, were instead furious. They, along with their buddies grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the local magistrates. What does this historical account reveal about human nature? We cannot pretend this is an isolated incident because it isn’t. Throughout time people have used others for personal gain. The wealthy exploit the poor. Politicians and advertisers manipulate people’s feelings to get them to do what they want. Family members take advantage of one another. Even in churches, power struggles occur, and love gets trampled by the desire to achieve some goal or have an agenda accomplished.

In Burma a tale is told of an ancient king who wanted to celebrate the birth of his first child, so he invited dignitaries from across the land to a great feast. All of the food was prepared in advance except for the highlight of the meal, the fish which the king wanted caught the night before the banquet so it would be its freshest. However a horrific storm hit and none of the fishing boats were able to go out to sea. It looked like the party would be ruined and the king humiliated by the loss of the most valued part of the feast. Despair filled the palace. Suddenly the gatekeeper burst in the throne room and announced a visitor. In came a bedraggled fisherman, lugging a net filled with large, scrumptious fresh fish. The king let out a shout of joy and proclaimed that the fisherman could have whatever reward he wished. “Oh”, he muttered, “I wanted to receive a hundred lashes.” “What”, the king cried. “How can that be? You deserve a great prize for risking your life for me and my family’s joy.” “Yes” the fisherman insisted. “For my reward, I want one hundred lashes of the whip!” The king could not believe his ears, but he had to do it because he promised the poor fisherman anything he wanted. But the king whispered to the servant to be gentle with the fisherman and not hurt him. After fifty lashes, the fisherman called for the servants to stop and told them that the gatekeeper was to receive the rest. Now this was most strange and so the king asked him why. “Well your honor, when I came to the gate, the gatekeeper told me that he would not let me enter unless I shared with him one half the profits I made so that is what I am doing.” The king, furious at the gate keeper for his selfishness, ordered the servants to whip him brutally and then gave the fisherman a great reward and a place of honor at the banquet. Will not Jesus reward us beyond our imagination for every act of kindness on our part and each generous deed of ours?

Jesus’ parable of the goats and the sheep is the Magna Carta of how life here is connected to life forever. Our Lord makes it clear that whatever good, kind, and generous things we do for others is seen by God as doing it for Him and will be rewarded liberally. Be generous should be the rule of thumb for those wanting to please God and be honored by Him. Give more than you should, love more than seems fair.