

WAS JESUS AN EXAMPLE OF POVERTY?

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We've been looking at the topic of money and prosperity for a couple of months.

We started off by saying that God is a gracious being ... disposed to show favour ... He blessed Abraham with great wealth ... Job ... King David ... at times the nation of Israel ... with great prosperity. In Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28 we see promises of blessings ... prosperity and abundance if they would live right.

Those 2 chapters show us that poverty is said to be a curse.

We've spent some time showing that although money/wealth is inherently neutral ... it does have a dark side to it. Some people ... many people ... succumb to the allure of money ... develop a love for it. Whether they are rich or poor ... they crave "more" ... almost sell their souls for money.

There are many scriptures that warn about the dangers of coveting ... craving ... money or riches.

1 Timothy 6:9-10 (NKJV)

9 But those who desire to be rich (crave) fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The love of money can lead astray and destroy. We have to be careful not to covet.

Luke 12:15 (NKJV)

15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

An example of greed ... always desiring more.

Luke 12:15 (NLT)

15 Then he said, **“Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.”**

Often people long for something ... then finally get it ... and then it loses its appeal. People get bored after a day or two. Now they want something else.

In our society ... we often measure people’s success by what they own. Houses ... cars ... the abundance of their possessions.

Ephesians 5:5 (NKJV)

5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, **nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**

Covetousness is idolatry. You are putting some “thing” in place of God ... more important to you than God is. No longer serving God first. Those people won’t be in the Kingdom!

Hebrews 13:5-6 (NKJV)

5 **Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.** *(Very good advice. That doesn’t mean that we can’t aspire for something better ... but not looking at possessions as being something super important. You can’t set your heart on these things)* For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

6 So we may boldly say:

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not fear.

What can man do to me?”

Hebrews 13:5 (NASB)

5 **Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have;** for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,”

God has no problem with individuals or nations prospering. But he does have a problem ... if people put material possessions first ... if they set their heart on money ... prestige ... power ... ahead of HIM.

We should be able to be content ... at peace ... whether times are good or bad.

Paul was a good example ... not a covetous man ... always chasing more and more.

Philippians 4:10-13 (NKJV)

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for **I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:**

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. **Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.**

13 **I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**

Paul learned to be content whether abounding ... or in need.

Paul was a good example on a personal level ... but also as a minister. He was faithful ... he did not preach for financial gain ... as it seems others did. We've looked at warnings of false teachers who covet brethren's money ... who use their position to exploit others ... even widows.

2 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)

1 **But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (They are not going to escape)**

2 And **many will follow their destructive ways**, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

3 **By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

2 Peter 2:3 (WNT)

3 **Thirsting for riches, they will trade on you with their canting words.**

We must expect religious leaders somewhere to speak nice ... deceptive words to us ... TO GET MONEY!

2 Peter 2:14-15 (NKJV)

14 **They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.**

15 **They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, (they must have been on the right way some time in the past) following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;**

We've looked previously at the need to be alert to manipulation. Religion today is big business. Covetousness ... greed affects many people ... including churches and leaders. So ... BE CAREFUL!

Now. Although money itself is essentially neutral ... many religious people ... do have a negative view of prosperity. It's not so much that it has a dark side ... or our human nature ... lust ... desires ... covetousness ... affect us too easily. Some just believe ... in principle ... that poverty is more "spiritual". As they see it ... "poverty is next to Godliness". Rich people by definition MUST BE evil (I'm not sure how they look at Abraham ... Job ... etc?)

Various reasons why some people are poor ... education ... family background ... ill-health ... living in an unhelpful environment ... very often down to poor life choices ... but certainly ... if you have a wrong belief system ... that would handicap anyone. If you believe God wants you poor... that being poor makes you more Holy ... then you're unlikely to ever be otherwise.

One area where at least some people get confused is over Jesus' example. Jesus is our perfect example they say ... and He was poor. We've all seen the photos and videos of Jesus ... trudging along dirt roads ... long unkempt hair and beard ... wearing His worn-out "Jesus sandals" ... looking very pious with His hands crossed ... halo perched over His head ... little more than an itinerant beggar ... wandering from place to place. So ...the thinking is ... if Jesus was dirt-poor ... so should we be. That's the picture they hold of Jesus.

Luke 9:57-58 (NKJV)

57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

58 And **Jesus said to him**, "**Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.**"

Why? From scriptures like that ... because He was dirt-poor? Homeless vagrant? Sleeping under hedges ... or in a cardboard box?

Is that how we see Jesus? As an example of poverty.

Let's examine Jesus' life a little. Was He just like a tramp ... a wandering preacher ... begging for hand-outs ... probably sleeping rough much of the time ... smell Him coming a mile away? Is that Jesus? Some people think so.

Now obviously ... Jesus wasn't going to live an entirely normal life. He had a very specific mission ... He knew that He was going to die in His early thirties ... He wasn't going to establish a business ... marry ... have a family and become a community leader. But that doesn't mean He'd be a wild-eyed raving prophet of doom ... living a hand-to-mouth existence. That's not the alternative.

There's not a huge amount written about Jesus' personal life.

Matthew 2:1-2 (NKJV)

1 **Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea** in the days of Herod the king, behold, **wise men from the East came to Jerusalem**, 2 saying, "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.**"

Matthew 2:8-11 (NKJV)

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9 When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, **the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.**

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Not much detail .. but ... at Jesus' birth ... He's being provided for. Wise men have come a long distance and they have come to honour a King ... whose birth is foretold in the Heavens. Probably a significant amount of wealth here?

A real financial boost to Joseph and Mary. It will ensure that Jesus can grow up in a comfortable home plus provide for His 4 brothers and 2+ sisters. Not necessarily wealthy ... but ... comfortable enough.

Mark 6:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him.

2 And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!

3 **Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him.** *(They ... being the people of Nazareth)*

Matthew 13:55 (NKJV)

55 **Is this not the carpenter's son?**

A carpenter at that time is more like our "building contractor" ... builder ... sculptor ... using stone and wood. The business may have been known as "Joseph & Sons"? Equally ... if you were a building contractor ... the work would probably include domestic homes plus commercial work such as city buildings and synagogues.

The business was probably successful and well-known in the region.

It is most likely that Jesus and His brothers and sisters were reasonably well off. Of course all of that would change once He left the business ...at age 30 ... and began His short mission.

We know His own town rejected Him as a prophet ... He wasn't welcome there ... but that doesn't mean Jesus was reduced to being a homeless beggar. He was probably reasonably well-off.

So. Jesus left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum.

Matthew 4:12-13 (NKJV)

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee.

13 And leaving Nazareth, **He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea**, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, *(Capernaum was the home town of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew)*

Jesus dwelt here. His permanent residence ... His home. Possibly rented ... but maybe ... owned?

But ... He lived there. It was His permanent residence ... a house. Not a cardboard box.

Matthew 4:13 (NET)

13 While in Galilee, **he moved from Nazareth to make his home in Capernaum by the sea**

Jesus was very likely to be hospitable? Generous with His time? Keeping customs of having guests and visitors ... especially as He became better known. I suspect Jesus would have His own house and not a "tiny house". Probably a fair size. Maybe even built it Himself?

Mark 2:1 (NKJV)

1 **And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.** *(Not in a cardboard box)*

Mark 2:1 (NET)

1 Now after some days, **when he returned to Capernaum, the news spread that he was at home.**

Mark 2:1 (NIV)

1 A few days later, Jesus entered Capernaum again. **The people heard that he had come home.**

I think this is Jesus' own home.

The story continues of a large crowd who gathered ... such that the paralysed man had to be let through the roof by his friends. Probably Jesus' own home ... not Peter's home.

Although Jesus was based in Capernaum ... He often went off on missionary journeys ... to neighbouring towns and villages ... occasionally 70 or 80 miles south to Jerusalem. There was quite a big party ... Jesus ... His 12 apostles ... other disciples who weren't chosen to be apostles (70 were sent out on one occasion) plus women too. I can't imagine them all sleeping rough!

The custom in those days in Israel was to offer hospitality. Likely they were often put up in people's homes. At times they probably used commercial guest houses.

Many would have considered Jesus a special prophet ... well worth offering hospitality to Him.

Luke 8:1-3 (NKJV)

1 Now it came to pass, afterward, that **He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him,**

2 **and certain women** who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons,

3 **and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.**

Luke 8:3 (GWT)

3 ... **they provided financial support for Jesus and His disciples.**

I suspect it wouldn't just be these ladies here? Quite a number would be voluntarily supporting Jesus and His team.

Not Tithes! Jesus was not entitled to receive tithes ... because He was not a Levite.

There was sufficient income to need a treasurer to keep the accounts. Not just hand-to-mouth.

John 13:21-30 (NKJV)

21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **one of you will betray Me.**”

22 Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

25 Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”

26 Jesus answered, “**It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.**” And having dipped the bread, **He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.**

27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

28 But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him.

29 **For some thought, because Judas had the money box, (Judas was the treasurer) that Jesus had said to him, “Buy those things we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor.**

30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

Judas kept the money box. The disciples thought that Judas might be giving to the poor.

So. There was enough to meet the needs of Jesus ... his 12 apostles ... other disciples and sufficient surplus to allow extra giving to the poor from time to time.

So ... it is clear that Jesus wasn’t a dirt-poor beggar.

John 12:8 (NKJV)

8 **For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.**”

Jesus didn’t consider Himself among “the poor”.

John 12:1-8 (NKJV)

1 Then, **six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany**, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead.

2 **There they made Him a supper**; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him.

3 **Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.** (*The commentaries today suggest a figure of about \$50,000*)

4 But one of His disciples, **Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said,**

5 **“Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?”**

6 **This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.** (*Fraud ... theft ... dishonesty*)

7 But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

8 For **the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.**”

Jesus was entirely comfortable receiving a \$50,000 personal gift. He wasn't awkward or embarrassed about it. What appreciation from Mary ... \$50,000 perfume on His feet.

He was a KING.

Notice Judas' false interest in the poor. He was a complete fraud. He was hiding his greed ... covetousness ... dishonesty ... under a cloak of pretend righteousness. And if one of Jesus' own teams could be dishonest ... no surprise if other ministers prove dishonest too ... today?

Clearly Jesus' income was sufficient to meet His needs ... give to the poor ... and make up for Judas' thefts! There was enough money going around. In fact Jesus lived so well ... that on some occasions ... people accused Him of being a glutton.

Matthew 11:16-19 (NKJV)

16 “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions,

17 and saying:

'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'

19 **The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'** But wisdom is justified by her children."

Jesus was accused of being a glutton ... a party animal.

Of course He wasn't! He wasn't a glutton or a winebibber ... but He was often seen at big feasts ... banquets ... enjoying Himself ... mixing with people ... easy for His critics to exaggerate. Some people think that being righteous is like being a monk or a nun ... shunning the sensual pleasures.

Clearly ... Jesus was not a starving beggar ... making His living by dumpster-diving. That's not what the scriptures show us about Jesus.

Even Jesus' clothes were good quality.

John 19:23-24 (NKJV)

23 **Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece.**

24 They said therefore among themselves, "**Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,**" **that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:**

"They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots."

Therefore the soldiers did these things.

So ... Jesus was not an unwashed smelly tramp ... sleeping under hedges or in a cardboard box ... begging for an occasional crust to eat. That's not what you see in scripture.

He was very popular. A frequent guest at feasts and banquets. Had quality clothes. He probably owned His own house ... possibly 2 homes. He was able to give to the poor. He required a treasurer to keep his accounts.

Probably left a successful business behind for his brothers and sisters once His mission started.

So ... although many people think that poverty is next to Godliness ... think that Mother Theresa is the perfect example of a saint ... living in squalor. I think the Bible takes a different view: Prosperity is said to be a blessing ... poverty is described as a curse.

And ... Jesus' example of His personal life is consistent with that!