

Is It Better to Be Rich or Poor?

[James 2:1-7](#)

James, Day 11

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

- James 2:1-7, ESV

If you had a choice, would you rather be rich or poor? Honestly, all things being equal, I'd rather be rich. But, the truth is, all things are not equal, are they? Because our hearts are not neutral, wealth comes to us with complications. The very same reason why almost all of us would say that, if given the choice, we'd rather be rich than poor, is the reason why being rich is problematic for us.

Why do we want to be rich? Because it would give us the freedom to be able to live as we please, to do what we want. Doesn't that truth expose the basic selfishness of our hearts, the fact that we really just want to have our own way, no matter what? It's that basic selfishness that makes wealth a problem and a snare for us, because it does give us freedom to indulge our selfishness.

Our desire to be rich also tends to cause us to envy the wealthy and to treat them with special honor, hoping they might decide to share some of their wealth with us. In a church setting, pastors and church leaders can be tempted to give special consideration to those in the congregation who have wealth, hoping they'll be generous givers, and thinking we need to keep them satisfied in order to keep God's work well funded.

All of these ways we tend to think about wealth are illusions, of course. It's wrong to give wealthier congregants special privileges. It's wrong to treat anyone differently based on how much money they have or don't have. We know this, but it's hard to resist the temptation to act in a worldly and fleshly way, isn't it?

On the other hand, it would be just as wrong to treat someone poorly and accuse them of wrongdoing just because they had money, wouldn't it? God does bless some people with abundance because He knows they will use it generously to fund kingdom priorities. Many Christian causes have been greatly blessed by the generosity of wealthy believers. So, it would be wrong to read James's correction in today's passage as a blanket condemnation of all wealthy believers.

In the end, the best thing for us is to approach whatever God has given us with a healthy dose of thankfulness, contentment, and generosity. As we thank God for what He's given us, learn to be content with God's goodness, and share generously what we have with others, we gain the right perspective on wealth in the kingdom of God. After all, it's all His, isn't it?