

# Who is Rich and Who is Poor?

July 8, 2008

For the next couple of weeks I will be recounting events from the two week mission trip I led to Kenya. There were some amazing things that occurred and I wish to process them in a devotional/journal like style as much for me as for anyone else who will (hopefully) be blessed by my thoughts on the matter.

Who is rich and who is poor?

If you have ever travelled to a 3rd world and/or developing country (and didn't just stay in the sanitized tourist areas), you were probably struck with the disparity between your wealth and possessions and the poverty of most of the world. For me, it was 10 years ago when I stood in a one room, card board lined hut on the Himalyan slopes in North India speaking to a young father while the mother boiled tea while cradling her baby. It was going to be cold that night and I was happy to get back to my hotel room, until I realized that all those people in those card-board homes were going to go through that night in conditions I don't even have to deal with when I go camping (because I take lots of good stuff with me when I camp). It was then I realized I was filthy rich-maybe not by American standards, but by world standards.

Yet what is wealth?

Every person on our mission team to Africa was deeply affected by the sights, sounds, and situations of poverty and life struggle surrounding us in western Kenya. Many wept after they worked with homeless street boys. Yet after two weeks of working with African Christians each person on the team voiced deep regret at how poor we are in America. Just what is going on here? Did they just get used to seeing the poverty and ignore it, or were they beginning to see life through a different perspective?

Jesus, in a revelation to His disciple John, spoke words to seven different Christian churches in the area now known as Turkey. These seven letters, written almost 2,000 years ago, speak just as clearly to churches today as they did so many years ago.

To a 'poor' church Jesus said, " I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)." To a 'rich' church Jesus said, "Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,"

What is going on here? Jesus is not equating wealth with material things. He is speaking of spiritual things. The poor church was rich in faith, the rich church depended on their things and not on God and were thus declared wretched and miserable by Jesus. The poor church's wealth would last forever, the rich church's wealth would disappear. It is not the way most Americans view the world, but it is the way Jesus described the situation in Revelation 2 and 3. (I do not mean to say that poverty isn't a major problem, but that there are even greater things to consider than material wealth).

What is a rich church, like the vast majority are in America, to do? Hear the words of Jesus to that ancient materially wealthy church, " I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

The things described above can't be bought with the money in your wallet, but only purchased by the power of the Holy Spirit through the faith given you when you trust in the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength. May Jesus, your forgiver and leader, give you the faith to be wealthy in his sight.