

## **“How to Get Rich in a Poor Economy”**

**By Klaudia Smucker**

**Based on Ephesians 1:15-23 and Matthew 25:31-46**

*Whenever my daughter wanted to go to the mall, I'd jump at the chance. It was a 45 minute drive, and I knew that 90 minutes in the car with a 17 year old was an opportunity too good to miss. Most of the time, she would sit with her ipod, or text on her cell phone, but one day she said, “Mom. You've got to hear this song.” She pulled out a CD and soon Joan Osborne began to sing, “What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus, tryin' to make His way home, back up to Heaven all alone, nobody callin' on the phone, 'cept for the Pope maybe in Rome...” You might not think that this is the song to begin a sermon with on “The Reign of Christ Sunday,” when we celebrate the awesome power of Jesus who sits at the right hand of our Father in heaven. Next week we will begin Advent, anticipating the Christ child coming to live among us in order to be one of us. And yet, Paul's words in Ephesians remind us that Jesus is not only our personal Lord and Savior, he is Lord and Savior of the Cosmos.*

*Paul proclaims in Ephesians, “I pray that you may know the riches of Christ's glorious inheritance, what is the immeasurable greatness of his power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*

*My daughter said that day, after we listened to the song, “It's more comforting to think about God being one of us than God as the Big Boss in the*

*sky.” I said, “I think that God being one of us tells us more about God and how God views power, than it does about being the Big Boss in the sky. Sure there is the awesomeness of creating a world out of chaos and putting it in order, but even with all of that, God cares about humanity. God doesn’t tell us what to do, but shows us who He is and we can choose to follow. There’s no forcing.” Since the beginning, the church has tried to grasp this very odd way that God views and uses power. Humanity has puzzled over how God, with all the power at his disposal, chooses not to blow the world up at a whim with all the special effects of a Stephen Spielberg movie.*

*The One who is Lord of all, who was present at the Creation of the world, is also the One who came to us in a manger. God is the One who came to serve us, to love us, and to sacrifice for us. What was God thinking, to give up all the riches of heaven to come to us in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in a tiny occupied land? How do we hold the two realities, Christ son of Mary and Christ the King, together? What is Christ’s glorious inheritance for us?*

*In a time when the economies of great nations are collapsing and the riches of this world grow strangely dim, we find ourselves in a culture of anxiety. I heard someone say on the news, “I worry about what I can leave for my children. My parents left me with money, and I watch our nest egg dwindling. I fear that I won’t be able to give them the American dream.” If you read the stories of Evander Holyfield and Lenny Dykstra, you know that even when you live the American dream it can be gone in an instant. Evander Holyfield earned several hundred million dollars in a career that spanned over two decades. But he’s broke. His 109-room mansion in Atlanta went into foreclosure in 2008. Lenny Dykstra, former Mets and Phillies star, filed for bankruptcy in 2009 claiming he*

*owes more than 30 million dollars. The things we attach to in this world can be gone in an instant.*

*God's plan has never been to give anyone the American Dream. Paul is not supporting the prosperity gospel. He would have agreed with Jesus that you cannot serve both God and money. He knows this as he writes from jail, a poor, unimportant prisoner to the Roman world. The riches we inherit are God's inexhaustible supply of love, hope, grace, mercy. In Ephesians we are promised hope and Holy Spirit power. The riches we inherit are wisdom and to have the eyes of our hearts opened. We the church are Christ's body, his hands, and we are to bring to this earth the fullness of God's Kingdom. What Jesus said in Matthew 25 was an attempt to open the eyes of our hearts. When we look around, we can choose to see, or choose to ignore, the needs of others in the world. We can choose how we use the power that God has given us.*

*“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When was I a stranger and welcomed you, or naked or in prison and take care of you?” “Truly, I tell you,” he said, “Just as you did it to one of these, you did it to me.”*

*Carl Jung said, “That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ—all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least amongst us all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea, the very fiend himself, that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the arms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved?” Asking God to open the eyes of our hearts makes it possible to do the work of the church that God called all of us to do. It's not just about your or*

*my personal salvation, it's also about responding to needs wherever they are in the world. You can't separate the two.*

*When Bob and I left for Jamaica in 1989 to work with MCC, we had good goals. We wanted to make a difference in the lives of the people we worked alongside. That was a good thing. But we learned more from the people we got to know as friends and co-workers than what we brought to them. We discovered that we weren't as adaptive as we thought we were; adapting came over time. We learned that our ways weren't necessarily better. We learned that great job skills and higher education didn't matter when equipment wasn't available. We had to watch and learn from the people around us. We learned to be more patient in long lines. We learned that tin cans, plastic peanut butter jars, and any food never got thrown out, and that you could use every part of a chicken, goat, or pig. We learned to slow down. We learned that when the electricity didn't work, or the pump that brought water up the mountain failed, we could still give God thanks. We learned that in spite of the material poverty of many of our Jamaican friends, they were spiritually rich.*

*Money gives you power and things, but it does not give you love, kindness, and spiritual wisdom. Money and things can be lost in an instant. What we get from God, the one who raised Jesus from the dead, no one can take away from us, no matter what our circumstances. The inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus will not dwindle, no matter what the economy. The more you put into knowing God, the more you plug in to the divine power of the Lord of the Cosmos, who really does care about the world and the people in it.*

*Barbara Brown Taylor tells of the time when she was in the Karchka Mountains in Turkey, where beautiful cathedrals had been built by the Byzantine*

*Empire. She wrote, "What remains are the walls and the arches, and, in some places, the hints of an old fresco of an image, half a face, with one wide eye looking right at you—one raised arm, the fingers curled in that distinct constellation: it is Christ the Lord, still giving his blessing to a ruined church."*

*God has chosen this ruined church to be the instrument for the reconciliation of the world. Even though Paul's circumstances were awful as he sat in prison, he still had confidence that God would do what God said. Even though the global church has more often gotten it wrong and made a mess of things, Paul is confident because he reminds us that we are not in charge. God is in charge. Paul's vision of God's resurrection power is global and cosmic, more than personal or individualistic. It is redemptive and restorative, not divisive and destructive. In a culture of fear, anxiety, and greed, we need more than ever to be the church that God intended us to be. We need the "immeasurable greatness of God's power" more than ever, as we participate in God's transformation of the world.*

*Whether we are in a rich or a poor economy, as participants of God's Kingdom, we are rich beyond measure through Christ Jesus. We are to share these riches with our hearts, our hands, our feet as we continue the work that Jesus began. Let us read #711 in the BH together, then sing our song of response.*