

- PRAY
- READ Matthew 6

Theme of Matthew: “Behold your King is coming to you” (Zech.9:9; Mt.21:4-5)

Theme of the Sermon on the Mount: Life Styles of the Rich and Famous

CHARTING THE COURSE FOR THIS EVENING:

- Review
- Alms for the poor (Matthew 6:1-4)

GIVING TO THE POOR (Matthew 6:1-4; 5:42; 10:42; 19:21; 25:31-40; cf. Deuteronomy 15:11; Job 31:19ff.; Psalm 11:7; 41:1; 50:14; 112:9; Proverbs 14:21,31; Isaiah 58:6-8; Jeremiah 22:16; Daniel 4:27; Amos 2:6,7; Luke 10:30-37; 12:33; 19:8; John 12:5-6; 13:29; Acts 2:41-45; 4:32,34; 6:1-4; 9:36,39; 10:2,4; 11:29-30; 20:35; Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 9:11-14; 2 Cor.8-9; Galatians 2:10; 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 6:10; 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18)

- A. The English word “alms” is an abridged form of the Greek word, [e]lehmosuvnh, eleēmosunē]. “The OT has no specific term for almsgiving, but several Hebrew terms and phrases are used to refer to this activity, e.g.: □^edāqâ—“righteous deeds” (Ps. 11:7; Dnl. 9:18), pā□a□ ’e□yā□—“open (your) hand” (Dt. 15:8, 11), □ānan—“be gracious” (Ps. 37:21, 26), ra□^amîn—“compassion” (Zec. 7:9), nā□an—“give” (Dt. 15:10).”¹

Did Jesus say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive?”

“Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can.”
John Wesley

- B. The foundation of our giving to the poor is redemption (Lev.19:9,10,18; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; cf. Ex.23:1-11; Lev.25:2-7).
- C. Giving is an expression of love (1 John 3:16-17).
- D. Giving is an evidence of faith (James 1:27; 2:15-17).
- E. The “Jerusalem Collection” or “Collection for the Saints”.
1. The prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:28-30).

James 1:27
Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...

What was Agabus’ prophecy? (Acts 11:28)

¹Bromiley, G. W. (1988; 2002). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised (Vol. 1, Page 98). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

- a. There are indications that during much of the reign of Claudius (Roman Emperor 41-54 AD) there were food shortages.
- b. The Nile had risen and there was record flooding which meant that there would be no crops in Egypt. This crop failure in Egypt occurred around 45-47 AD. Egypt served as a grain bowl for Rome, therefore when Egypt was suffering then Rome would be affected.
- c. Guess where food goes in times of turmoil? The same place that it goes today in places like North Korea - to the army!

What did the Church do about the prophesied famine? (Acts 11:29-30)

What kind of people made up large portion if not the majority of the Antioch Church? (Acts 11:20-21)

Who were they sending their money to? (Acts 11:29)

2. Luke does not lose sight of Agabus' prophecy but mentions Paul's bringing alms to Jerusalem later (**Acts 24:17**). In the book of Acts, Luke not only stresses the Spirit coming upon the Gentiles through visible signs, but also through visible good works.
3. The "Jerusalem Collection" was a very important part of Paul's ministry to other Christians as is evidenced in his epistles (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1,2,12).
4. Paul refers to the alms giving for the "Jerusalem Collection" in several ways:
 - a. "fellowship" (κοινωνία [*koinōnia*]) (Romans 15:26; 2 Cor.9:13)
 - b. "service" (διακονία [*diakonia*]) (Romans 15:25,31; 2 Cor.8:20; 9:1,12,13)²
 - c. "gift" (1 Cor.16:3; 2 Cor.8:6,7,19)
 - d. "generous gift" (2 Cor.9:5)
 - e. "collection" (1 Cor.6:1)
 - f. "liberal gift" (2 Cor.8:20)
 - g. "grace" (2 Cor.8:9; 9:4)
5. The "Jerusalem Collection" or "Collection for the Saints" may have incorporated the following geographical regions:
 - a. Galatia (1 Cor.16:1)
 - b. Derbe (Acts 20:4)
 - c. Lystra (Acts 20:4)
 - d. Macedonia (2 Cor.8:1-5; 9:2,4)
 - e. Berea (Acts 20:4)
 - f. Thessalonica (Acts 20:4)
 - g. Philippi (Acts 16:16; 20:6)
 - h. Corinth (Rom.15:26; 1 Cor.16:1-4)
 - i. Ephesus (Acts 20:4)
 - j. Troas (Acts 20:5-6)
 - k. Tyre (Acts 21:3-4)
 - l. Ptolemais (Acts 21:7)
 - m. Cyprus and Caesarea (Acts 21:16)
 - n. Rome (cf. Rom. 12:13; 15:26 with 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; and Rom. 1:13 with 2 Cor. 9:6-10).

² κοινωνία and διακονία go hand in hand! Almsgiving is an "incarnation" of the one body of Jesus Christ.

6. It is likely that Paul also saw the alms as a way of bringing about greater unity between Jews and Gentiles, "...For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things" (Romans 15:27).
7. Paul saw the generosity of the gentile mission churches toward the Jerusalem saints (Jewish Christians) and unconverted Jews (Acts 24:17)? as evidence of the Spirit's work among the uncircumcised (see Romans 15:16,18-19,25-27). This was evidence that by faith, Gentiles too were the seed of Abraham (Genesis 18:19).
8. Paul had collected so much money, that Felix was hoping for a bribe (Acts 24:26)!!!
9. Paul's faithfulness in collecting alms for the church in Jerusalem lasted some twenty years (Galatians 2:10)!!! "Little did the Jerusalem leaders know that their suggestion would become Paul's *obsession* for nearly two decades" (*Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* "Collection for the Saints").
10. Interestingly, neither Luke nor Paul explain what the results of the collection, although the trip to Jerusalem with the money is mentioned (Acts 21:17-26 with 24:17,26).
11. From the above survey, giving to the poor was perhaps as elemental to Paul's teaching and discipleship as was his teaching on prayer (cf. Matthew 28:18-20 with Matthew 6:1-15).

"It is remarkable that Paul, the deep thinker, is at the same time the Christian benefactor, who believes wholeheartedly in "doing good to everybody, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith," as he says in this very letter (6:10). Such is Christianity. If it is genuine, it is concerned about the poor, their health and their housing, their spiritual but also their material welfare. It does all in its power to help the underprivileged, under-educated, undernourished, the migrants and those who belong to "minority" groups. Overwhelmed by the love of God in Christ, it is *eager* to do so!"³

F. Giving in the history of reformed theology.

"I hope to grow rich in heaven by taking care of orphans on earth" (*Citation: George Whitefield, Christian History*, Issue 38 [see the fascinating article in this issue entitled, "House of Mercy, Prison of Debt"]).⁴

³Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). *Vol. 8: Exposition of Galatians* p.87).

⁴ Whitefield was serious about this obligation. He raised funds for an orphanage to be built but through a series of difficulties ended up owing about 500 pounds which in Whitefield's day was the equivalent of 20 years' wages. One of Whitefield's wealthy supporters of the orphanage died without a will and Whitefield was in near total despair declaring, "I am almost tempted to wish I had never undertaken the Orphan House." Whitefield's debt was so serious that he was in jeopardy of being jailed. In a letter to one creditor, Whitefield pleaded, "If possible I shall discharge the debt within six months, but I am afraid it will be out of my power, having met with many disappointments. As we are brethren of the same Lord, and as the debt was contracted for him, I hope you will be patient with me."

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION

Chapter 26:2

Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; (Heb. 10:24–25, Acts 2:42,46, Isa. 2:3, 1 Cor. 11:20) as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 2:44–45, 1 John 3:17, 2 Cor. 8–9, Acts 11:29–30)

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM⁵

LORD'S DAY 38

Question 103

What does God require in the fourth commandment?

First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

⁵ The Heidelberg catechism (1563) was composed at the request of Elector Frederick III (1515-1576) for the purpose of instructing the youth of the day, and guiding pastors and teachers in their teaching duties. Of the Heidelberg Catechism, the eminent Swiss historian, Philip Schaff wrote, "The Catechism is a work of religious enthusiasm, based on solid theological learning, and directed by excellent judgement.... It is the product of the heart as well as the head, full of faith and unction from above. It is fresh, lively, glowing, yet clear, sober, self-sustained. The ideas are Biblical and orthodox, and well fortified by apt Scripture proofs. The language is dignified, terse, nervous, popular, and often truly eloquent. It is the language of devotion as well as instruction. Altogether the Heidelberg Catechism is more than a book, it is an institution, and will live as long as the Reformed Church."

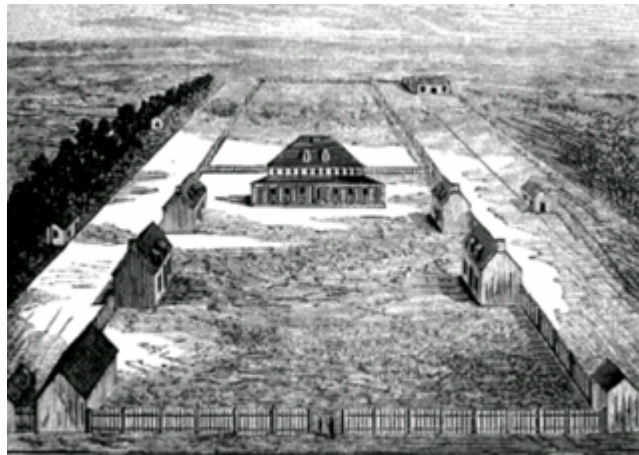
House of Mercy, Prison of Debt

Soon after he began an orphanage, Whitefield found himself chained by expenses he couldn't pay.

by GARY SANSERI

On George Whitefield's first journey to America, in 1738, he took "thirteen hundred pounds contributed for the poor of Georgia and for charity schools." Whitefield surveyed the state of Savannah's children and later wrote, "What I have most at heart is the building of an orphan-house."

Returning to America the following year, Whitefield took many gifts, which were sold in Philadelphia to finance the erection of the orphan house. Whitefield also made appeals in his sermons; as Benjamin Franklin put it, "He made large collections, for his eloquence had a wonderful power over the hearts and purses of his hearers." The donations allowed work to begin on what Whitefield called, "Bethesda," the "House of Mercy."



Bethesda. *Whitefield raised the modern equivalent of \$6,000,000 for his Georgia orphanage. It wasn't enough.*

The day after his arrival in Savannah, Whitefield inspected a 500-acre plot ten miles north of town. Soon, Whitefield, along with a carpenter and surveyor, found themselves forced to make architectural decisions. Many of the laborers came from English prisons and proved incapable. Added expenses drained the treasury. One writer openly questioned, "Where is the fund for its support: and what service can an orphan-house be in a desert and a forsaken colony?"

On March 25, 1740, Whitefield noted in his journal that "nearly forty children are under my care, and nearly a hundred mouths are daily supplied with food from our store.... The expense is great, but our great and good God, I am persuaded, will enable me to defray it." Whitefield believed assistance would come from wealthy friends in Britain and America.

Before long, though, disagreement arose between Whitefield and the trustees, who withdrew their support. Then supplies bound for the orphanage were stolen. Soon Whitefield owed about 500 pounds—20 years' wages.

Worse, William Seward, who had supported the endeavor, died without a will. A distraught Whitefield confessed: "I was embarrassed with Mr. Seward's death. He died without making any provision for me, and I was at the same time much indebted for the Orphan House." Earlier that same year, in near total despair, Whitefield declared: "I am almost tempted to wish I had never undertaken the Orphan House."

The debt against Bethesda put Whitefield in jeopardy of being jailed. In a letter to one creditor, Whitefield pleaded, "If possible I shall discharge the debt within six months, but I am afraid it will be out of my power, having met with many disappointments. As we are brethren of the same Lord, and as the debt was contracted for him, I hope you will be patient with me." Whitefield felt the debt as "lying like a dead weight upon me." To relieve his debt, Whitefield even purchased a plantation and slaves in South Carolina.

Many years later, in Scotland, in 1768, Whitefield received a legacy. "The Orphan House shall have it all," he said. Whitefield the debtor was free at last.⁶

⁶*Christian History* : George Whitefield. 1993; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996 (electronic ed.). Carol Stream IL: Christianity Today.

G. Care for the poor & the Day of Judgment (Matthew 25:34-36,40).

FOR NEXT WEEK: READ MATTHEW 6

