

THE NEEDY-GREEDY

Understanding the Two Competing Narratives of the World and Jesus' Kingdom

"Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."—Mahatma Gandhi

Pyramid Structures

Acts 17.6—When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also . . .

Scarcity
Anxiety
Accumulation
Territorialism
Violence

Abundance
Gratitude
Sharing
Generosity
Peace Making

Luke 6.20-24—"Blessed are you **who are poor**, for yours is the kingdom of God . . . But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Mark 10.21—Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money **to the poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

Luke 14.13-14—But when you give a banquet, invite **the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind**. And you will be blessed . . .

Luke 11.39-41—Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what is inside you—be generous **to the poor**, and everything will be clean for you.

Luke 12.13-34—Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'" Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with those who store up things for themselves but are NOT rich toward God." Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even **Solomon** in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which

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is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his **kingdom**, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you **the kingdom**. Sell your possessions and **give to the poor**. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 18.22-24—When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and **give to the poor**, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was **very wealthy**. Jesus looked at him and said, “**How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!** Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

Acts 2.41-47—Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and **held everything in common**. They **sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need**. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Matthew 19.29—And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Mark 10.29-30—“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

2 Corinthians 8.13-15—Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

“And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who [helps] the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want . . . in a word takes care of all who are in need.” (Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter LXVII.—Weekly worship of the Christians.)

“. . . only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety’s deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people . . .” (Tertullian, Apology, Chapter XXXIX.)

Writing about AD 125, the Christian philosopher, Aristides, noted that, “if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed, all of them provide for his needs. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast for three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.” (Hengel, Property & Riches in the Early Church, pp. 42-43)

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Zedakah - Righteousness and almsgiving [giving to the poor] were synonymous.

2 Thessalonians 3.11-12—We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

2 Corinthians 9.6-9—Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And **God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good deed.** As it is written: “They have scattered abroad their gifts **to the poor**; their **righteousness** endures forever.” Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your **generosity** will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is **not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people** but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience that accompanies **your confession of the gospel of Christ**, and for your **generosity in sharing** with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing **grace** God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

1 Timothy 6.17—Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly **provides us with everything for our enjoyment.**

Mark 8.14-21—The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your **hearts hardened?** Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

Luke 16.1-13—Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. So he called him in and asked him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.’ The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I’m not strong enough to dig, and I’m ashamed to beg, I know what I’ll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.’ So he called in each one of his master’s debtors. He asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ‘Nine hundred gallons of olive

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Ezekiel 16.49-50—Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.

Amos 5.21-24—I hate, I despise your religious festivals; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

James 1.27—Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

40,000 people die each day of illnesses related to malnutrition and extreme poverty

75% of Middle and Lower Class in North America live at a higher historical standard than most Kings have through history.

“My children, when you give food to the poor, I counted it as though you had given it to me.” (Midrash Tanmuma on Deut. 15:9)

“Almsgiving is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.” (Tobit 4:11 N.R.S.V)

“The one who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering.” (Sirach 35:4 N.R.S.V.)

oil,’ he replied. “The manager told him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred and fifty.’ Then he asked the second, ‘And how much do you owe?’ ‘A thousand bushels of wheat,’ he replied. “He told him, ‘Take your bill and make it eight hundred.’ The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Luke 16.14—The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

Matthew 25.31-46—When the **Son of Man** comes in his glory, and **all the angels** with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. **All the nations** will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For **I was hungry** and you gave me something to eat, **I was thirsty** and you gave me something to drink, **I was a stranger** and you invited me in, **I needed clothes** and you clothed me, **I was sick** and you looked after me, **I was in prison** and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see **you hungry** and feed **you**, or **thirsty** and give **you** something to drink? When did we see **you a stranger** and invite **you** in, or **needing clothes** and clothe **you**? When did we see **you sick** or in **prison** and go to visit **you**?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, **you did to me.**’

The Two Great Apologetics of the Early Church