

#115 A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM.....

I am sitting at a table with two or three persons seated with me. I begin to tell them of a dream that occurred shortly before as I was sleeping with my head resting on the table. In that dream I heard a rhyme. It is very difficult to remember, but finally the words come to me. I write them down and read what I have written:

*“Life”
Those who live in this life well
Must be faithful or they’ll find hell!*

Why a dream within a dream? It is a symbol of double or deeper meaning. Two dreams, yet one within the other---two to confirm, two to go to another level. I appeared to be teaching those at the table and, even though I read the poem to them, I did not tell them to whom it was directed. God may do likewise with us. He may tell us a matter but conceal part of it. We may not be ready to hear it then or to understand it. Those on milk can not understand meat; those on meat can understand milk.

The telling of the dream to those at the table caused me to think of this portion of the Bible from Jeremiah 23:28:

“The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.”

If it is from the Lord it must be given, whether a true prophetic word, dream, message or sermon. Now preachers and teachers (evangelists and exhorters included) usually enjoy giving words and sermons that cause their hearers to be lifted up and pacified---no fault with that in itself. When that same minister, however, is called to deliver a negative word---a word of warning, reproof or rebuke---he must be just as faithful to that task, for he is ever to proclaim God’s truths and not his own. The messenger’s main duty is to be faithful to deliver the message he or she is given---not to do so reveals a rebellious and sinful heart. The fear of man or the desire to be liked has no place in the messenger’s heart.

The poem was entitled “Life.” Its simple meaning concerns our earthly life. The first verse, “They that live in this life well,” speaks of the well-to-do or those who have an abundance of riches or wealth in this present earthly life. The first portion of the second verse, “Must be faithful”, means what it implies---faithfulness as a steward of those riches. We are stewards of all we have and are, and Christ is Lord of all we are and have. If we do not understand this from the outset we are in trouble.

Concerning earthly prosperity or riches---in almost every case in the New Testament riches are spoken of in a warning manner. Jesus tells us how difficult it is for the rich to make it into heaven. The apostles Paul, Peter and James (among others) also have strong words on the subject of being rich. To be fair to those who are rich, the Bible also puts the wise and the mighty together with them. Paul tells us to look at our calling (the call to salvation), that not many rich, wise or mighty are called. I must assume that among Christians this will be true, yet the Bible did not say, none of these is called.

I will not alter or water down what Christ said about few of the rich making it into heaven. Rich believers need to realize that all they possess is a trust from the Lord to whom they are accountable. If wealthy Christians live in luxury and spend much on self-gratification they already reveal that they are not good stewards. If God allows them to keep their abundance, they must submit those riches to His lordship.

Let me bring up another point that may offend some rich people. Many professing Christians tithe and give much, but they squander the rest of their money as if it belongs to them. Scripture states

that God gives us all things to enjoy---yet not to abuse. Moderation is the key. You could give ninety-nine percent of your income to the Lord's work, but still be greedy and covetous with the one. Is God then pleased? The Lord always searches the motive and intent of why we act a certain way. We may pacify ourselves or others---we will not fool Him.

Let us examine two rich men mentioned in the Bible. The first is the rich young ruler who was very moral and a keeper of most of the basic law as far as we can ascertain. When he told the Lord he had kept the commandments from his youth, Christ did not reprove him. I am sure he was generous and full of good deeds. Christ then asked the ruler to sell all he had and follow Him. God's words have a remarkable way of piercing to the heart of a matter. The Lord does not stop at the branches, but goes all the way to the roots. Sorrowfully, the young man went away rejecting Christ's command.

Jesus then said how hard it was for the rich to inherit heaven. Now that young man could have said, "Well, Lord, if I give away ninety-nine percent, can I keep the one percent for myself?" "No", our Lord would have responded. Riches were an idol (coveting is idolatry) to this young man and Christ knew it well. Christ always attacks the idols in our life for these will keep us from Him.

Now let us look at the second rich man, Zacchaeus, a tax collector hated by all Jews. Jesus spotted this short fellow up in a tree desiring to see Him, so the Lord invited Himself to supper with Zacchaeus. The tax collector was delighted for he could well afford to entertain Christ and His disciples. He comes down from the tree and, without the Lord's prompting, makes a very interesting statement, "...Behold, Lord, the half of my goods, I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Why, my friends, I like to believe Zacchaeus was that rare tax collector who was not a crook, because he says "if I have taken any thing." Now he knew what people thought of him, yet Christ never mentioned money. Zacchaeus does do two wonderful things---he gives away half his riches and offers fourfold to those who can prove he has stolen from them (the law required a fourfold payment from thieves). He gives half of all he possesses---what a wonderful fulfilling of the second of the two greater commandments, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus then calls Zacchaeus a son of Abraham or a true Jew (today we would say a real Christian). The Lord states that salvation came to him that day. Jesus never told him to sell all. Why? Because He knew the heart of that man and that money had no hold on him---Zacchaeus was trustworthy as far as riches were concerned.

So my friends, there will be some---a few wealthy Christians---that God will be able to trust with the stewardship of riches. I have heard some with wealth say, "God does not care if you are rich if you are willing to give it up," yet most of these prove by their lifestyles and selfish accumulations they are mere talkers. Denial is often at the root of many sins. The drunkard (a term I prefer to "alcoholic") refuses to see he is just that---a drunk. The covetous does not see himself as greedy and materialistic. Yes, most sinners do not see themselves as sinners! Sin is a deceiver. Truth will open the eyes of those in darkness, if they will allow it and not flee from it.

In conclusion, let us remember that one can be covetous and poor as well as covetous and rich. Likewise, one can be poor and proud and as well as rich and proud. Most of the poor of this world are envious of the rich. They themselves would love to be rich, yet are not. God deals with our hearts and attitudes. Let us ask for grace to be faithful in the station or lot where we are placed, for we all shall one day give an account before God.