**“BUT I’M NOT RICH!”**

**Count Your Many Blessings (Part 2)**

Johnson Oatman was one of the greatest American hymn writers of the 19th and 20th centuries. He lived from 1856 to 1922, and during those 66 years penned some of the most stirring gospel songs I have ever sung. His father had a beautiful voice and he grew up wanting to be like his dad, who was both a preacher and gospel singer. But, alas, just as I did not inherit my father’s logic and math skills, young Johnson did not inherit his dad’s vocal chords. He tried to become a preacher, but soon discovered that was not his talent either. He tried his hand selling insurance but the itch to be involved in ministry was too strong in his spirit. It was at age 35 that he found his calling. Writing gospel hymns was a natural for his heart and skill and soon he was creating over 200 hymns a year. He kept up that pace for the next 30 years, writing over 5,000 spiritual songs in his lifetime!

I will guess most of you have sung his hymns. Do you know *Higher Ground*? Or do you know *No, Not One*? How about “Sweeter Than All,” “*I’ll Be A Friend To Jesus*,” “*The Last Mile Of The Way*,” and the classic “*What Shall It Profit A Man*?”

But the one he is best known for around the world is “*Count Your Blessings*.” That song ranks beside some of the great hymns like *Amazing Grace* and *Rock of Ages* because it has been in almost every spiritual hymnal since it was written in 1896. But why? Why has it touched the hearts of millions (probably billions) over the past century?

When Jesus confronted the Rich Young Ruler (read Matthew 19:16-23, Mark 10:17-31, Luke 18:18-30), and was asked “*What must I do to inherit eternal life*?” he was told “*Go, sell all that you have, give it to the poor, and come follow Me*.” He became sorrowful at that choice because “*he had great possessions*.” His moral life was in order, for he said concerning murder, adultery, stealing, lying and honoring his parents that he had not violated those from his youth till now. He had kept all the commandments, or so he thought. Jesus exposed him by mentioning the last one, the 10th commandment, “*Thou shalt not covet*.” He did not realize that command revealed the idol in his heart. “*You cannot serve two masters, God and Mammon*” (Matthew 6:24). He was forced to make a choice. His god was wealth, and so he went away sorrowful to worship it.

If you were in this young man’s sandals, what would you do? If Jesus specifically looked you in the eye and said in order to go to heaven you must without a moment’s hesitation put all your earthly possessions on Craig’s List, take the profits and give them to charity, then live a life like Jesus (“*the foxes have holes, the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head*” – Matt. 8:20). Would you do it?

Or would you walk away sorrowful, too?

Robert Heilbroner was a famous economic philosopher in the 20th century who supported socialism. He lived to see the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Soviet communism. He came to the realization that capitalism was a better system of blessing the masses of people. His observation, after studying the economies of all the nations on earth, was eye-opening. His conclusion is that almost every American, even those who live in Section 8 government housing, and low-income shanty towns, are fabulously wealthy compared to the vast majority of the world (which we label “third-world countries”). He asked Americans to take this challenge, so I’ll ask you as well:

1. Take out all the furniture in your home but one table and two chairs, and only use blankets for your bed.
2. Remove all your clothes from all your closets except your oldest dress, shirt or pants. Leave only one pair of shoes for each family member.
3. Empty the pantry and refrigerator except for a small bag of flour, some sugar, salt and a few potatoes, and a couple of onions and a can of dried beans.
4. Shut off all running water and remove all electricity in your house.
5. Dismantle your bathroom, leaving only a hole in the ground for your toilet.
6. Place your house in shantytown.
7. Cancel all subscriptions to papers, magazines, book clubs (you are illiterate).
8. Leave only one radio – not for your family, but for the whole shantytown!
9. Dispose of your checkbook, stocks, pensions and insurance policies.
10. Leave in your will (if you have one) cash that amounts to $10 for your loved ones.
11. Move the nearest hospital 10 miles away, with a midwife in charge (not a doctor).
12. Give the head of the family a couple of acres to cultivate to make a few dollars, of which a third goes the landlord and a tenth goes to the money lender.
13. Finally, take 25 years off your life expectancy, preparing to die in your 50’s.

Does that sober you up? Please imagine Johnson Oatman’s song, especially verse 3, being sung by Christians in a third-world country. What would they think as they sang:

When you look at others with their lands and gold, think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings money cannot buy, your reward in heaven or your home on high.

I’ve been to some of these poverty-stricken countries and seen how they live. And I have sung *Count Your Blessings* with them. I have never had the courage to ask them what they think of me, this “rich” American, as they sing it. But I’ll tell you this, they can sing that hymn with more feeling and passion then I ever could. They can easily let go their possessions and sleep with Jesus on the hard ground. They already do. Is it any wonder Jesus said, “*It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven*?” But we want to shout, “But I’m not rich!” If you think that, go back and take the test again.

As we sit in our comfortable home, or drive in our car with $1.29 / gal. gas (I just filled up this morning), depressed that our nation has gone from 3% to 33% unemployment in a matter of weeks, let us remember that even in our worst of times we are far more blessed than the vast majority of the world.

My parents lived through the Great Depression of the 1930’s and survived. It is one reason they so much enjoyed singing Johnson Oatman’s famous hymn. Perhaps (just perhaps) if God is bringing another Great Depression upon us, which in turn leads to a Great Restoration back to Him, then is this a bad thing? What if it caused us who are “rich” by the world’s standards, to read Paul’s exhortation in a new light?

*17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be* ***rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share****, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”* (I Timothy 6:17-19).

Until tomorrow… Count your blessings (running water, light bulbs, three meals), then ask God to help you know you are rich … in good works… ready to give, willing to share.

I love you.

Rick