

baptism. Baptism itself does not save. It merely says in symbolic language that one has been saved by grace through faith.

So Paul did not begin by asking these men, "Have ye been baptized?" He asked, "Do you have assurance of salvation?" Discovering that they did not because of an insufficient experience, he led them to know the true essence of salvation. Then when they believed in Jesus, and only then, did he baptize them. It was then that they received the Holy Spirit as an evidence of their salvation.

In conclusion, trust not in an inade-

quate knowledge of the plan of salvation. Rely not upon good works, rites, or ceremonies—no not baptism itself. But turn in repentance and faith to Jesus who alone can save. Profess your faith publicly. Symbolize it in the New Testament baptism that you may know that you have been obedient to the first command which our Lord gave to the Christian. Then go on growing in grace, knowledge, and service for Christ. Thus you shall have an abiding assurance of the joy of your salvation—not through an ordinance, but by the peace of God which passes all understanding through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

MORE THAN PROSPERITY

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"For a certain Demetrius . . . brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth"—Acts 19:24-25

Ephesus, the center of the worship of Diana or Artemis, the goddess of fertility and sex, was a city of wickedness and wealth. John in exile on Patmos may well have drawn his description of wicked Babylon from Ephesus where he lived for many years. It was a city of "the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls . . . fine linen . . . purple . . . silk . . . and scarlet . . . all manner vessels of ivory . . . wheat beasts . . . sheep . . . horses, and chariots, and slaves, and *souls of men*" (Rev. 18:12f., author's italics).

For two years Paul labored there, "so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). Toward the close of this ministry he described it as an open door of opportunity with "many adversaries" (I Cor. 16:9). From Acts 19 we learn that the open door was the

opportunity to preach the gospel in this center of wickedness. The chief adversary was entrenched wealth. Thus Ephesus stands as a cardinal example of our theme that a city needs more than prosperity. With all her wealth Ephesus was still a pagan city of sinfulness and luxury. The poet might well have had her in mind when he penned,

"Ill fares the land, and to
hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates,
and men decay."

This is true whether it be a nation, a city, or a man. No matter how poor or how rich you may be, you still need Jesus. And, like Ephesus, your wealth, whether great or small, may be your greatest obstacle on the way toward eternal life. Therefore, with Ephesus as our example, let us consider, first, the deification of wealth; second, the delusion of wealth; third, the dedication of wealth.

First, note the deification of wealth. It was in the month of May when all of Proconsular Asia gathered in Ephesus to worship the goddess Diana. Apparently Paul's evangelistic work was successful.

The sale of the silver images of Diana had fallen off. So Demetrius, the head of the craftsmen's guild, called a meeting. To them he said, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone in Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands" (19:-25-26). By Paul's preaching multitudes were being saved. But Demetrius and his fellow-craftsmen saw only a threat to their wealth. They made a god out of their money.

How modern is this situation! Faced with the choice between God and mammon, they chose gold instead of God. When the gospel threatened their business, they opposed the gospel.

Doubtless I speak to many who have done likewise. You make a god of your business, bank account, stocks and bonds, houses and lands. Maybe your source of income is illegal. More likely it is legal. Nevertheless, whether legal or not, your wealth stands between you and God. It is your god.

Remember the rich young ruler who came to Jesus seeking eternal life (Luke 18:18ff.)? He boasted of keeping the Ten Commandments. Yet Jesus showed him that in worshipping his wealth, he had broken even the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3). When Jesus told him to give his wealth to the poor, He was not decrying wealth. Rather he was warning against making it your god. Actually He was showing the young man how to dedicate his wealth in the service of God. But the youth went away "very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Lk 18:23). Of him Jesus said, "How hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mk. 10-24). Not how hard for those who *have* riches, but for those who *trust* in riches.

This is my message to you. You may be as rich as Croesus or as poor as the proverbial church mouse. That is of no consequence with God, so far as your

soul's salvation is concerned. In I Peter 1:18-19 the Bible says, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ . . ." Do not be deceived by your riches as they stand between you and God.

Second, consider the delusion of wealth. To his craftsmen Demetrius continued. "So that not only this our craft is in danger . . . but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised . . ." (19:27). Thus in the name of religion he sought to justify his means of wealth. His money deluded him into thinking he was a great religionist. It is quite clear, however, that he was more interested in his trade than in his religion.

Any business which needs to be justified either in the name of religion or of law may well question its right to existence. If a business has to be legalized, it may be legal but never moral. Narcotics, whether in a bottle or in a needle, may be legalized in a given society; but never will they be moral. In some instances men even appeal to the Bible to justify alcoholic beverages. To do so is to twist the Scriptures into meaning something they never teach. From beginning to end the Bible is one unequivocal denunciation of such.

However, for our immediate purpose, the delusion even of righteous wealth must be emphasized. Money promises so much, yet gives so little. Wealth cannot buy happiness. Solomon said, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase" (Ecc. 5:10). Nor can wealth produce health. Again Solomon speaks. "A man to whom God hath given riches . . . so that he wanteth nothing . . . yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof . . . and it is an evil disease" (Ecc. 6:2). What a message for an age of ulcers! Heart disease, largely brought on by the pressure of money-making, is one of our greatest killers. You strive day and night to acquire another dollar, but your only fame will be to become the richest man in the cemetery. Nor can wealth produce

character. It may make you noted, but not noteworthy.

But, most of all, wealth cannot purchase salvation. It may entitle you to membership in the most exclusive clubs, but it will not guarantee you one second in heaven. The Lamb's Book of Life, not Dun and Bradstreet, will declare eternal destiny.

At the instigation of Demetrius the craftsmen shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." This precipitated an uproar in the amphitheatre which ended only when the town clerk warned that this mob violence would bring down upon them the wrath of their Roman captors. Thus this greed for wealth threatened to destroy the things which they held most dear.

Oh, the destruction which is left in the path of prosperity! The highway of time is littered with the debris of men and nations so destroyed. The rich fool in Luke 12 said, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." To which God replied "Thou fool, this night these things are requiring thy soul of thee" (Lk. 12:20), authors translation).

In 1923 at a gathering in the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago were nine of the world's wealthiest men. Twenty-five years later this sordid story was related. Two had died in bankruptcy, one died in a foreign land a fugitive from justice, one had just been released from Sing Sing Penitentiary, another was pardoned from a federal prison to allow him to die at home, one went insane, and three died as suicides. Of them someone said, "All of these men learned well the art of money-making, but not one of them learned the art of how to live." We must conclude, therefore, that life is something more than material living. Animals live successfully by eating and sleeping and responding to the laws of nature. Men who follow this course of living fall. Why? Because man has

a soul. He is either moral or immoral. He cannot be neutral."

No wonder, then, that Dr. George W. Truett is reported as having said to his deacons, "A young man in our church has just inherited one million dollars. Let us pray for him. He will need it."

Solomon said, "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owner's thereof to their hurt" (Ecc. 5:13).

Third, note the dedication of wealth. In our scripture there is another story. Ephesus was a city devoted to the practice of magic. Those performing such did so by pronouncing certain magic names or sentences (Acts 19:13ff.). They possessed books, called *Ephesia Grammata* or Ephesian Letters, containing these names much like the Magic Papyri discovered in Egypt. Many magicians, being converted by Paul's preaching brought their magic books and burned them before the apostle. Luke says that these books were valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver or about ten thousand dollars. When they had to choose between money and Christ, they chose Christ.

Note the difference between these groups. Demetrius and his friends typify your attitude *before* you come to Christ. Gold is everything. The magicians symbolize your attitude *after* you have come to Christ. Gold is nothing. If you will forsake your trust in material things, then you will say with Paul in Philippians 3:7-8, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

Do not think that because you are rich you are favored of God. Nor consider that because you are poor you are in God's disfavor. Consider rather — what have you done with Jesus? There is no financial difference at the foot of the