

CHRISTIAN MONEY \$ENSE

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Material Mirage

Christopher Rudolph, CPA

“Water...Water!” cry the desperate lips of an unquenched body as it crawls along the desert floor. As he is ready to heave another cry, he stops and squints into the distance. He shakes his head and looks again. “Water?” he whims. He looks again, and in joy, he rises to his feet and begins to run. “Water! Water!” he exclaims as he runs toward the oasis. And then, as he is about to launch a dive into the pool, he realizes it is just a mirage, an illusion.

I am sure many of us have not seen a mirage like this on the desert sands because most of us have not been in a desert for days without water, but there are mirages that we must be wary of in our lives. One of those mirages is wealth. Proverbs 10:15 states, “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty” (KJV). The rich man’s mirage is that his wealth gives him sufficiency and protection. Wealth does usually bring power on this earth by which a man can feel sufficient, but it is only for a time because he will not dwell on this earth forever. Wealth is a poor substitute for protection because once a man’s soul is entwined with his wealth, he will do anything to protect that wealth. However, the rich man is not the only one who sees a mirage on this earth regarding wealth.

The poor man also has a mirage which comes from his lack of wealth. The poor man may also focus on what he has here, the little or nothing that it is, and he sees it as his destruction, his ruin, his breaking. He sees his poverty as his undoing, and he has no grounds for sufficiency or protection. This fear and dismay can break a person. Regardless of a person’s wealth, or lack of it, he or she can allow the situation to be a mirage so that they do not see the reality of life.

James, however, gives us some perspective on this matter of mirages. He states in James 1:9-10, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” (KJV) He explains to the believers that the man of small wealth can rejoice because of his place in heaven. The poor man may not be exalted or comfortable on the earth, but he will have a place of exaltation in heaven. James also explains the rich can

rejoice when they are humbled on this earth because it helps him realize that earth is not his final destination. The Matthew Henry Commentary explains it well, “Those of low degree may rejoice, if they are exalted to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God; and the rich may rejoice in humbling providences, that lead to a humble and lowly disposition of mind. Worldly wealth is a withering thing. Then, let him that is rich rejoice in the grace of God, which makes and keeps him humble; and in the trials and exercises which teach him to seek happiness in and from God, not from perishing enjoyments.”

So what do you need to do? First, realize that what you have on this earth materially is a mirage, something that can fool you into comfort or dismay. Your wealth cannot bring you all that you need. Your poverty does not mean you are void of hope. Second, believers in Christ rejoice in what you have, the much or little, because of your place in heaven. You who are poor do not have the mirage of wealth to focus you on this earth, and your hope in heaven is sure. You who are wealthy may experience tough circumstances in order to humble you so that you do not forget your eternal focus. Third, persevere! Most of us have been fooled by the mirage, and when we end up with a face full of sand from our dive into the mirage, we can be frustrated or angry with God. Although we have caused our own demise, we may end up blaming God (Proverbs 19:3). This is when we must persevere through our sufferings by faith and do what is right the next time in order to build a character that leads us to hope in Christ (Romans 5:3-4). This is not easy, but the reward is great.

It is a comfort to know that all people, regardless of material standing, can have hope on this earth and have a reason to rejoice through Christ.

BBC Foundation has been ministering to churches and individuals regarding biblical stewardship since 1992. Send your questions on finances and stewardship to: BBC Foundation, 538 Venard Rd., Clarks Summit, PA 18411. Phone: (800) 451-8668, website: bbcfoundation.org; e-mail: info@bbcfoundation.org