

The Black Horse of Poverty

By Rev. J. Kortering

Poverty, the very word bites our conscience. It draws out of the dregs of our memory the horrible recollection of naked children with bloated bellies and protruding ribs. It chills the spine to hear the cries of the hungry in the still of the night. Beggars are a pitiful display of human want.

The world is full of them.

It bites the conscience because we have it so good.

Can you imagine that poverty is a blessing? Yet, this is exactly what Revelation 6:5, 6 tells us, "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

POVERTY: Since this passage is part of the vision that John received on the Isle of Patmos, it is good to remind ourselves that as a vision, it must be spiritually interpreted. The various parts that are seen have spiritual meaning. In keeping with this approach to the Book of Revelation, we have noticed that the seals which are broken are part of the book which was in the "right hand of him that sitteth upon the throne," Rev. 5:1. This is God's book and it represents His plan for all history by which he realized the completion of Christ's kingdom, see Rev.4. The opening of this book, by breaking of the seals, indicates that Christ is able to realize His kingdom, Rev. 5:6. This Christ does by releasing the four horsemen which are the contents of the first four seals. We noticed that the first horse was white, a representation of the preaching of the gospel by which Christ gathers His church. This was followed by the breaking of the second seal and the releasing of the second horse which was red, a picture of war. We saw in a previous article that war follows the preaching of the gospel and serves the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Now we come upon the third seal and it reveals a black horse which we have called poverty.

How can we be sure that this black horse is a visible representation of poverty? We can do this in two ways. First, the fact that it is presented as a horse. Now a horse was an animal particularly suited for battle, read Job 39:19-25. The horse represents a powerful force that is able to penetrate the whole fabric of human life. Secondly, because the color of this horse is black. We read in Lamentations 5:10, "Our skin is black like an oven because of the terrible famine." Similarly, "Judah mourneth and the gates thereof languish, they are black unto the ground," Jeremiah 14:2. This is confirmed by the text itself. The rider is carrying a pair of balances, "and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand." He is pictured as a merchant who deals in the distribution of material things. This merchant is instructed, "A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine." This indicates a great lack of food. Scripture tells us that a penny was a day's wages, "And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into the vineyard," Matthew 20:2. Add to that, the fact that a measure of wheat was the amount that one person would eat in one day or three measures of barley (since it was cheaper), then we can see that the merchant would take the entire wage which this man had earned and give him in return just enough for him to consume that day. He was literally living from hand to mouth. This is a picture of poverty. Still worse however, was the command that the merchant must not hurt the oil and the wine. Oil and wine represent riches and people with wealth are compared to a person who worked all day for a meager portion of barley or wheat. The poor must live in the world while the rich continue in their riches. This is what causes problems. If everyone were equally poor or rich, one can easily live along with that, but history shows us that there are both rich and poor and the relationship between them creates hostility, jealousy, and all kinds of labor and management problems.

We might well ask, why is this black horse present in the world? Why are there riches and poverty, a disproportionate distribution of the earth's resources? Even though God distributes, the blame for poverty is not His. We must need remind ourselves of the beautiful garden and the original creation. The earth brought forth all

that man needed and there was a perfect supply of all his earthly needs. The cause of riches and poverty and its attendant miseries must be laid to man's account. He sinned against God and the presence of the black horse in history is God's dealing with sinful man, God said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake, in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee and thou shalt eat up the herb of the field in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread till thou return to the dust," Genesis 3:17. We can add to this the fact that when man became sinful, he also became greedy, "The love of money is the root of all evil," I Timothy 6:10. Surely selfish man is to blame for the problem of riches and poverty. This was true in the Old Testament times, the Midianites would greedily come and steal Israel's harvest. King Ahab stole Naboth's vineyard. Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. after the city was surrounded and the people starved to death. History is replete with examples of man's cruelty, think of the feudal system in Europe and its associated miseries of the poor at the hands of the rich landowners. The French Revolution freed the human mind which allowed the little man to make headway in the world, and what did it produce - a proliferation of scientific inventions, advances in agriculture, industrialization of the world which only enhance this struggle between the rich and the poor. Today the great world powers are at variance over a difference of ideology not only, but also of economic policy. The struggle of the rich and the poor has produced wars, internal revolution, labor conflicts, turmoil, suffering, and death. To be sure, the black horse rides today.

POVERTY - CHRIST'S JUDGMENT ON THE WORLD: We should ask, where does Christ fit into the vision of the black horse? Obviously, we must be careful in answering this question, because it deals with the relationship between Christ and poverty. Is it so that Christ wants to remove all the poverty from the earth? Must the goal of the Church be equal distribution of the earth's material among all people?

If so, why does Christ send forth the black horse? The voice directed to the black horse calls, "Come!" As it appears in the vision we notice that it has a rider. The point of this in the vision is not who rides, but rather the fact that it is controlled. The black horse is directed by a rider. Poverty, famine, economic imbalance between the rich and the poor does not just happen, it is not mere luck, it is not determined by man or the forces of nature in themselves. It is controlled by Christ. Christ sends forth this horse to ride. The third beast calls, "Come", and in answer to that call Christ releases the horse. He alone is able to break the third seal and reveal its contents. He is the exalted Lord to whom all power and authority has been given. All things work for the establishment of His kingdom. Christ is the Lord of poverty.

What must we conclude from this?

First, we should notice carefully that the Bible tells us that Christ is concerned about poor people. The parable of the Good Samaritan is proof enough. When thousands of people were hungry, Christ broke bread and fed them. He tells us to labor in order that we may have something for the poor, Rom. 15:26.

Secondly, poverty is a form of judgment upon sinful man. This does not mean that everyone who is poor is being judged by Christ. The judgment of Christ is upon the wicked world. The nations as nations belong to Satan, Christ gathers His church from among the peoples of the world. Because Christ's kingdom is not of this world, the kingdom of man stands opposed to Christ's kingdom, they persecute the children of God, despise the gospel which the true church preaches. The kingdom of man culminates in anti-christ. In opposition to the kingdom of anti-christ, Christ sends forth the black horse. He sends poverty and riches upon mankind. Neither one is a blessing, both are a curse upon the wicked. They produce enmity, war, strife, all kinds of miseries. In the midst of this turmoil, Christ gathers His Church by preaching the gospel, the riding of the white horse. All through history there will be poverty, want, and filthy riches. Only at the end of the world will anti-christ be allowed to overcome this by the world-wide sharing of wealth. This will not be the kingdom of Christ, it will be the kingdom of anti-christ in which the people of God will not be able to buy nor sell, Rev. 13:17.

HOLY THROUGH POVERTY: There is another important reason why Christ sends forth the black horse, it is that the conflict between the rich and the poor makes the people of God conscious of heaven. When poverty strikes, it sanctifies God's people, it is spiritually good even though very difficult. When we become rich in the world's goods we usually become poor with God. God's promises to His people include the supply of their daily needs, Matt. 6:26.

What a contrast this makes between the people of God and those of the world. The wicked set their heart upon the earthly riches, but die as fools, Luke 12:16-21. They slave for earthly gain, but perish with all their possessions in hell, realizing that fire destroyed all they ever worked for. The children of God are usually poor in this world. They struggle along for daily bread and receive their portion from the Lord. They even deny themselves earthly success because they seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, Matt. 6:33. Since their God is not of this earth, but in heaven, when they die they receive everlasting inheritance, a new heaven and a new earth in which they worship God forever.

Evaluate your life in the light of the black horse.