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Last-Day Prophecy — Hot Comfort, Cold Faith

By Wilfred Hahn



Dairy Queen, the international ice cream chain, has as its slogan, "Hot Eats, Cool Treats." They would go out of business if they instead served cold hamburgers and hot ice cream. No wonder the Church is losing its franchisees. Increasingly, it has been serving,

"Hot Comfort, Cold Faith." Prophetically, Christ asked the question, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) This question is probably the most important prophecy for the Church Age.

With that introduction, we want to focus on a most challenging topic for Christians in the modern world — faith. It is a delicate thing, only flourishing under the most rarified of conditions. No doubt, it is a tired topic for most Christians. Therefore, we want to provoke a completely different line of inquiry.

A World View of Faith

Please look at the map of the world shown on this page. It is color keyed to show the distribution of faith in the world. The

darkest-colored countries have the lowest faith, the lighter hues more. Ponder for a moment where the least faith might be found in the world today. Which country do you live in?

Clearly, there are shown low areas of faith and higher ones. What is the source of this map? The World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland? No, though perhaps it could be. Actually, it is an authentic map from the World Bank — that transnational organization headquartered in Washington, USA, whose motto is "Our wish is a world free of poverty."

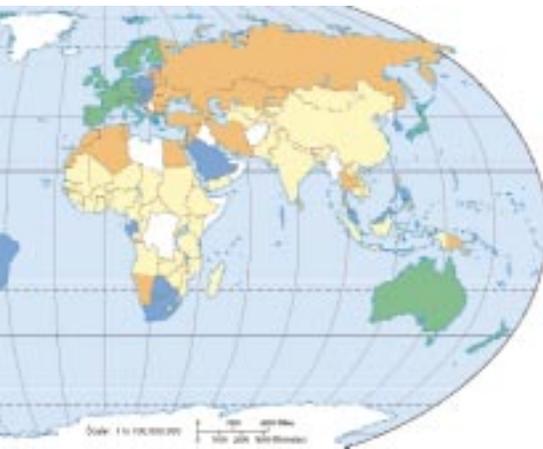
At this point, you may be puzzled, wondering what the World Bank has to do with the topic of faith. As an opposite, it points towards an important scriptural principle. The title of the chart has been tampered with. It actually portrays the distribution of wealth in the world — more specifically, the average level of income in each country. The color key has been flipped upside down. The areas





with the highest income are shown as those with the lowest faith.

Is this a reasonable way to show the distribution of faith in the world? While it may not be exact, our technique for substituting low faith for high income is defensible. Why? Because the Bible substantiates this inverse relationship numerous times. Jesus said, “Blessed are you the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort” (Luke 6: 20, 24, Sermon on the Plain).



James, Jesus’ half-brother, re-emphasized this perspective a different way, saying: “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?” (James 2: 5) Certainly, the World Bank’s survey of world income qualifies as a perspective from “the eyes of the world.”

Most assuredly, there are many exceptions to this general equation of faith versus riches. Remember we are dealing here with general correlation and population averages, not specific persons or households. And, when viewing the map, it should also be noted that it symbolizes all types of faith, not just the type of faith that the Bible requires of true Christians. Many false religions that dis-

play deep faith in their beliefs happen to be most prevalent in poor regions of the world.

There clearly is an inverse relationship with faith and wealth and comfort. We can further expand wealth to the concept of mammon. It is that spiritual realm that seeks its confidence and affections with materialism and the boastful pretensions of mankind.

Working Out Our Faith Against Opposition

Why this opposition between faith and money?

In the pleasure of God’s creation, it is a condition of the world. Jesus said: “You cannot serve both God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). This statement struck right to the heart of the cosmology of opposites — good and evil, sin and righteousness, the Kingdom of Light versus the forces of darkness. Were it any different, it would not be possible for us to choose to bring a meaningful sacrifice of faith and love to our Lord. Otherwise, to do so would simply be an automatic, programmed response of no value.

Christ made this comment to His disciples right after He told the rich young ruler to “sell his possessions and give to the poor” (Matthew 6:21) It threw the disciples into an immediate debate. They were daunted by the challenges of property and the requirements of the Kingdom of God. While on the one hand, wealth was considered a blessing of the godly — look at Abraham, for example. On the other hand, Christ admonished, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). “Who can then be saved?” they asked (Matthew 19:25). Christ replied, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (verse 26).

Here we see two completely different systems that contradict each other — the Kingdom of God versus the domain of mammon.

Many false religions that display deep faith in their beliefs happen to be most prevalent in poor regions of the world.



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These two realms have completely different wealth systems. They have two different currencies: respectively, faith and money.

Though we are ever so thankful that it is by the grace of God that we are saved, whether we are beset by the deceitfulness of riches or not, the sad reality is that most people in high-income countries are seriously blinded to the true nature and wealth potential of faith.

The Most Precious Commodity in the World

The contrast between earthly riches and true riches — or wealth, prosperity, material satisfaction, or worldly confidence — is a theme repeatedly presented throughout the entire Bible. True faith itself is considered the most valuable and real of all possessions.

Consider just a few of the Bible's perspectives on what really should be "hotly" valued — real faith: Jesus stated: "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Luke 16:11). Just what are these "true riches"? Scripture repeatedly portrays our faith and salvation as real riches and states that the price of their procurement in the first place is inestimable.

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers" (1 Peter 1:18).

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The Apostle Peter reflects these evaluations of faith in this passage:

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory

and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:6-9).

Without a question, according to Scripture, real faith is much more valuable than property and worldly wealth. They are "true riches." Peter assesses it as more valuable than gold. Why? Because without it we cannot please God or receive the "goal of our faith," the salvation of our souls.

While the world strains for the attainment of material wealth, the most precious acquisition of all, faith, today lies cold in many countries — especially wealthy countries of Christian heritage. Yet, there is nothing absolutely more worthy than faith.

At this point, we must take a brief respite from our inquiry and ask this age-old question: What is faith? After all, the word "faith" must surely be the most misused and misunderstood word in the English language. Many people think it is just a noun. We can only focus on the simplest of answers. According to the Bible, more often faith is a verb. Faith is the act of believing. But what? The Word of God, the evidence of which is faith if we do it. It is for that reason "that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the world of God" (Romans 10:17).

Current Conditions in the Church

Let's again examine the relationship between faith and wealth. The words of Christ and the apostles that we reviewed say that these two are generally oppositional in nature. Something, however, rings false. It argues with a growing church constituency that portrays itself as Christian, which presents the exact opposite perspective.

Some in this community even go so far as to say that if you have much faith, you can "get wealth." Or they say, "Just send in your



seed faith offering and you may get a ‘divine wealth transfer.’” Perhaps a large check from some mysterious source may arrive in the mail as a result. Such things may well happen to some people. But as a formula, this has nothing to do with real faith or real wealth.

Apparently, without laying one’s life down for Christ and taking up a personal cross, one can just use the principles in the Bible to become prosperous and lead a well-adjusted life in every way. This is one of the biggest and sorriest lies ever perpetrated. It is a major contributing reason why real faith is running cold today.

Yet, this fleshly notion of faith that is gaining popularity so easily appeals to our nature ... hearing and interpreting things as we would like them to be. Who has not ever made this type of complaint to the Lord when meeting trials or difficulties? “Lord, I am serving You. Don’t I deserve to be rewarded here on earth for the good things that I do?” To say this is to fall prey to a form of “prosperity teaching.” But, why on earth should I have this human flaw to so easily always fall for this idea?

Even more consternating is that this view of cheap faith is perpetrated so strongly in the richest of areas on the world map in the first place — particularly in North America. There is no caution, no fear of the dangers of wealth, which the Bible so clearly lays out. Why is the vulnerability to Balaam’s error greatest there? “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all,” wrote Paul to the Galatians (Galatians 1:6-7).

Inverting the relationship expressed in James 2:5, we can say: “Has not God chosen the rich of this world, to be poor in faith?” Viewed from this perspective, we realize just which Christians in the world will have the most trying conditions to produce fruit and



true faith. The “true faith” of Christians in Canada, the United States and other rich nations will be most under siege. These countries may indeed be blessed, but not with the conditions that naturally foster an abundance of real faith.

There are two larger forces (both related) reverberating through this last-days world — both globalization and oppression of various types. Those living in North America or Europe will be facing both cross currents — living in a seductive, richer region of the world with their biblical beliefs and trust in God being ridiculed and suppressed.

Achan and the Last-Days Church of Laodicea

What does it actually mean to be poor in faith? It is a very important question for those who are part of the Church in richer parts of the world. Laodicea, the last-days Church as mirrored by the last of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation, was convinced it needed nothing, was confident in its own riches and capabilities ... even trusting in its confidence.

This Church is actually poor, blind and naked-poor in faith, blind as to the true state of things, and naked, or vulnerable, to the loss of true faith and power. They fell for the error of Balaam by sacrificing lukewarm faith for the primacy of warm comfort. The story of Achan in the Old Testament (Joshua 10) provides a picture of the future Church that loses the “power” of God for the sake of

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“We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Can it be done in North America — a region much overtaken by “hot comfort, cold faith”? Here, it surely is a daily struggle to beat back the cooling influences upon our faith.

riches and comfortable materialism. Israel was commanded not to take any treasures from the booty of fallen Jericho.

Yet, one person fell to its lure. Said Achan, “When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them” (Joshua 7:21). He hid these items underneath his tent.

When Israel next went up to conquer the city of Ai, they were sorely defeated. The power and blessing of God was no longer with them. Why? Achan’s household brought impurity upon entire Israel by falling for the baubles of Babylon and Jericho — two cities that were renowned ancient centers of commercialism: “When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel?” (Joshua 22:20)

We have every reason to believe that this is the same reason much of the last-days Church has lost its power to effectively minister the Gospel.

Thoughts To Ponder

We return to Christ’s prophecy: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” As mentioned, it likely is the most important of all last-day prophecies for the Church. Yet, this prophecy seems almost hidden in the New Testament. It is only half a verse long, found only in one of the four Gospels, and seems entirely disjointed from the text before and after. Jesus is clearly saying that very little faith will be found on earth when He returns.

We can better understand why, using our inverse equation rule. When Christ returns, will He find “wealth” on earth? Yes. James confirms that this will be the case, saying “Now listen you rich people ... you have hoarded wealth in the last days” (James 5:1, 3). At the time Jesus uttered His statement,

He knew that the faith of His flock would face a great onslaught from worldly wealth and comforts in the last days, also revealing that “the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). While this statement was probably spoken directly to the Jew, it only follows that it also applies to Christians.

Without a doubt that cold day has arrived ... certainly so for Western Christianity and Jews alike. Without pretension, faith in Europe is largely dead. In North America, there are indeed many who profess a Christian faith, but of the type that is without power. Many use faith as nothing more than a contractual indemnity policy with God or a device to “get wealth” or warm comforts.

This state of mind is easy to fall into ... no premeditated plan is necessary to do so. Once one attitudinally becomes totally reliant upon the bank account, technology, and the pride and accomplishments of mankind, the power of God diminishes — at least as is utilized in daily life. No longer does our faith rest in the notions that God will care for us, has a purpose and a destiny and wants to lead us, not by sight, but by faith.

“We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). Can it be done in North America — a region much overtaken by “hot comfort, cold faith”? Here, it surely is a daily struggle to beat back the cooling influences upon our faith.

But every challenge also offers an opportunity. We can again remember what Peter tells us, already quoted earlier. We have reasons to rejoice, for our struggle is only for a little while and there awaits the eternal reward of real riches.

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials ... for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:6-9).

“But he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). (MC)