

## **Salt Without Prescribing How Much**

### **Ezra 7:22**

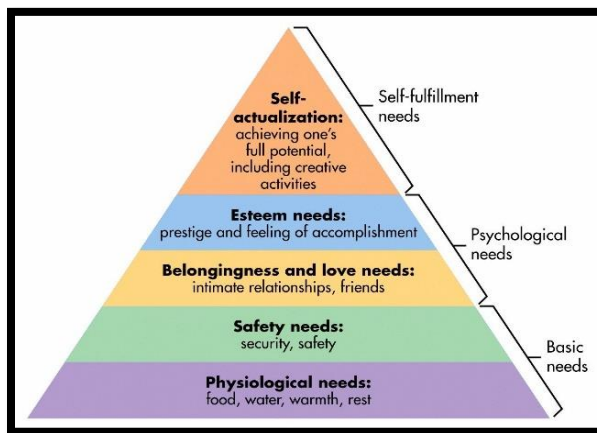
Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

Knowing that there is limited amount resources tends to motivate us to seek to obtain and protect not only what we need but also what we think will be the greatest source of joy in our lives. Once we receive the necessities of life such as food, water and shelter; these items will not be as motivating for us to obtain but instead to hoard and covet. Since the fear of loosing the necessities of life never really leaves our minds, we tend to hoard what we can as an insurance policy in case times might become difficult! Fear is not the only factor driving us to hoard stuff for we often covet those things that we believe can bring us joy. The world is constantly advertising the stuff that is “good” for us, as if they had a license on what can bring human joy. We believe these advertisements and often do not stop and ask whether these things, activities, friendships or moments of fame are beneficial to us! Too often our focus is to keep up with the “Jones” in the hope of getting more worldly things that might in turn alleviate the loneliness and pain that comes from living in a fallen world.

There must be a better way to live our lives for no matter how much one obtains one never seems to receive the joy promised by this world but instead are left with the “gut wrenching” fear that one day we one might lose everything! The more we acquire the more we covet and the more fearful we are of loosing what we have. How ironic it is that those who taunt their wisdom like a badge of honor that they have gotten more than their fair share of this world’s limited resources are the very ones whose sorrow, not joy, is increased the most! What then are we as human beings missing? To feel unspeakable joy what must we do? To answer this question, I am going to first review the motivation to obtain scarce resources and in doing so prove that this kind of human wisdom does not lead to joy but instead further perpetuates fear, coveting, and increased sorrow. I am then going to review the historic background of Ezra 7:22. From this passage I am going outline my passionate belief that true joy comes not from coveting what we do not have but by celebrating what we have been given ... an immeasurable supply of salt, a fountain of inexhaustible grace!

## MOTIVATION TO OBTAIN LIMITED RESOURCES AND LUXURIES

While what motivates our behaviour day in and day out is incredibly complex, it can be simplified by looking at both our deficiency and growth needs. Deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and the longer they are unmet the more they will motivate a person to have them fulfilled. According to Abraham Maslow these are the basic physiological needs such as food, water, warmth rest, safety, along with the psychological needs of belongingness through intimate



relationships, friends and esteem needs of prestige and sense of accomplishment. It is only when these needs are met that a person will be motivated by the need of self-fulfillment, to achieve one's full potential in life.<sup>1</sup> Since roughly 9% of Canadians and 15% of Americans are below the poverty line does this mean that most of their citizens are no longer motivated to obtain the necessities of food, water and shelter?<sup>2</sup>

While in Maslow's day, more than a half century ago, it would have been correct to say that once a person had enough food, water and shelter to physically survive these basic needs no longer motivated them; in today's culture physical survival is never far from our minds!



Living in a fallen, electronically mediated world means that day in and day out we are constantly being bombarded by images of tragedies that have left many destitute and without their basic needs being met. For the 47% of Canadian workers who believe they would not be able to meet their current financial obligations for a single month if they were laid off work, most of us are

unlikely to ever forget the importance of the necessities of life.<sup>3</sup> Every time we hear of a story about debilitating diseases, natural disasters or accidents reducing people from comfortable livings to rags it reaffirms our fear that we one day might suffer the same fate.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the following Website: <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from the following Website: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2046.html>

<sup>3</sup> Taken from the following Website: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/payroll-salary-survey-1.4276782>

To protect ourselves from the unknown future that is ever before us we hoard and buy insurance. Who of us does not have a house and garage full of stuff that we have kept just in case a “rainy” day comes, and we are in need? Not only do we hoard for an unknown future but



we also buy life, wedding, travel, health, burial, mortgage, home, auto, liability and yes even pet insurance. For just about any tragedy there is an insurance out there that promises to mitigate some of the costs of bad things happening to us! For example, for approximately \$650 US dollars a year a 25 year old person can buy a 30-year term life term insurance policy that will pay out one million dollars in the event of death!<sup>4</sup> Even though the average Canadian family pays upwards to \$11,0000 a year in health care insurance,<sup>5</sup> there is comfort in knowing that this mitigates the costs of some diseases one

might get such as pancreatic cancer in which a single drug costs about \$8,000 a month!<sup>6</sup> For about \$840 a year Canadians purchase home insurance to mitigate the costs of the destruction of their homes<sup>7</sup> and for approximately \$1,000 per year one can purchase automobile insurance to help cover the costs involved in having an accident.<sup>8</sup> While most Canadians live above the poverty line, they are still motivated to financial protect themselves from any tragedy that would threaten their ability to meet their basic needs.

While fear of an unknown future motivates us to protect the necessities of life, coveting motivates us to obtain the luxuries of the world. Anything obtained beyond food, clothing, water and shelter enters the area of want and not need. Satan knows the best way to motivate us to covet is to advertise the “joy” others experience by possessing all the “cool” stuff. For example, knowing that many covet sex and popularity, beer commercials show a person with a beer as having the best-looking mate and the most friends. Knowing that people covet financial

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://www.goodfinancialcents.com/how-much-does-a-million-dollar-term-life-insurance-policy-cost/>

<sup>5</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/price-of-public-health-care-insurance-2015-rev.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://globalnews.ca/news/1656699/the-cost-of-cancer-how-much-do-cancer-drugs-cost-canadians/>

<sup>7</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://insureye.com/average-home-insurance-premiums-canadians-pay-840-average-annually/>

<sup>8</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://insureye.com/average-car-insurance-rates-in-ontario-1920-per-year/>



freedom, commercials show a couple upon retirement at a beach resort with no cares in the world. Knowing that people covet success, commercials show people enjoying expensive homes, cars and yachts. Using the internet, radio, magazines, television and newspapers, companies spend an enormous amount of money trying to foster desire and coveting for their products and services. For example, in 2017 Canadian and American businesses spent approximately 13 and 191 billion respectively trying to convince us to spend and borrow money on lots and lots of worldly stuff.<sup>9</sup>

### **FEAR AND COVETING DO NOT LEAD TO TRUE JOY**

Is the fountain of joy to be found in acquiring worldly goods and services? To answer this question, I want to first examine the lives of some of the richest and most popular people of this world. While the famous recording artist, actress and producer Whitney Houston was worth approximately 20 million dollars<sup>10</sup> she was found dead in a bathtub, most likely from her cocaine overdose.<sup>11</sup> While the American actor and comedian Robin Williams was worth approximately 130 million dollars, his depression



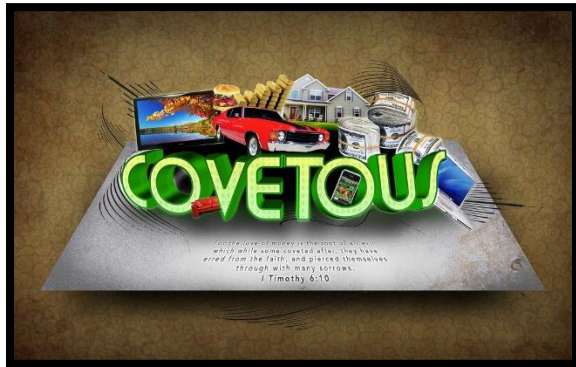
<sup>9</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1837/advertising-in-canada/>

<sup>10</sup> Taken from the following website: <https://www.therichest.com/celebnetworth/celeb/singer/whitney-houston-net-worth/>

<sup>11</sup> Taken from the following website: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/whitney-houston-death-cocaine-contributed-heart-disease/story?id=15984196>

overwhelmed him and he committed suicide.<sup>12</sup> How ironic it is that those who tote to be the richest and most successful, the envy of the common person of this world, end up being the most miserable! When Satan told them that they would be happy if they just got more money, fame and power than the rest of us commoners, he lied!

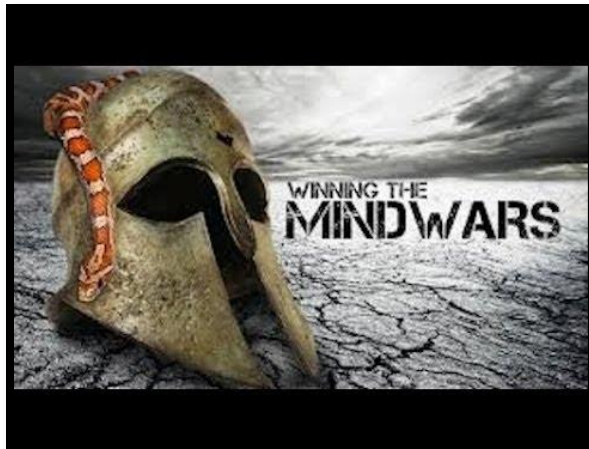
Money, fame and power only provides temporary happiness because love of this world is a sin against God! In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told the crowd to not worry about food, water, shelter or clothing for those who seek God and His righteousness will receive the



necessities of life (Matthew 6:25-34). This does not mean that Jesus taught we are not to buy insurance, for we are to be good stewards after all (1 Peter 4:10), but instead that we should not be consumed with worry about securing these things. Furthermore, our focus is to be on serving the kingdom of God, not on coveting what He has not given us! In the Old Testament we are told that it is a sin to covet what our neighbour has (Exodus 20:17). So, concerned is God about coveting that in the

New Testament He tells us if we love the world then the love of the Father is not in us (1 John 2:15). Chasing after more money, fame and power will not make us feel joy but instead great sorrow (1 Timothy 6:10) because our sin is driving a wedge between us and God!

This brings us to the heart of today's sermon: how does one give up trying to control the unknown future to feel the unspeakable joy of serving in His kingdom? There is a battle going



in our minds for our allegiance. Through our own efforts we cannot stop loving this world! No matter how many self-help books one reads, Satan will always be more powerful than our best efforts to change. To break the stronghold of fear and coveting of worldly stuff one must rely on the divine power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 10:3). Since greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4), then why aren't more Christians freed from fear and coveting? The answer is that we have not surrendered our will to the Holy Spirit. We simply love the things of this

world more obeying God! In the remainder of this sermon I am going to explain how "salt without measure" is the fountain of this unspeakable joy we so desperately seek (1 Peter 1:8-9).

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from the following website: <http://www.getnetworth.com/tag/how-much-robin-williams-worth/>

## KNOWING SALT WITHOUT MEASURE IS THE KEY TO HAVING JOY

**22 up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit. Ezra 7:22**

In 538 BC Cyrus the Great of Persia defeated Babylon and allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> After having lived in exile for approximately 70 years one can only imagine the joy they felt when they were told that they were to return to their homeland!



By Cyrus' own decree upon their return they had his blessing to rebuild the city walls and the temple.<sup>14</sup> To help with the financial costs the king sent Ezra with a letter addressed to the treasury officials of the Trans-Euphrates satrapy to fund their endeavors within limits.<sup>15</sup> They were to be given approximately 7,500 pounds of silver, 22,000 pounds of wheat, 2,000 liters of wine, 2,000 liters of olive oil and salt without limit!<sup>16</sup> While salt was a relatively cheap commodity at that time it was indispensable for the returning exiles for it was used in every offering made by

fire unto the Lord. Adding salt to offerings made to God was a symbol of the permanent covenant God had made with His people.<sup>17</sup> Even though Israel broke the covenant and were subsequently exiled, God not only heard their cries of repentance but forgave, returned them to their lands and enabled them to flourish. Salt in this passage truly is an “emblem of also divine grace for the soul.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ralph W. Klein, [“Ezra-Nehemiah, Books of,”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 739.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Leslie C. Allen, [“Ezra,”](#) in *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, Robert L. Hubbard, and Robert K. Johnston, *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 58.

<sup>16</sup> Philip A. Noss and Kenneth J. Thomas, [A Handbook on Ezra and Nehemiah](#), ed. Paul Clarke et al., *United Bible Societies' Handbooks* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2005), 172.

<sup>17</sup> René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, [A Handbook on Leviticus](#), *UBS Handbook Series* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 33–34.

<sup>18</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, [Morning and Evening: Daily Readings](#) (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1896).

It is precisely through remembering the grace of God that fear, and coveting can be driven out of our minds. Jesus emptied Himself of His divine reputation (Philippians 2:7), lived amongst us (John 1:14), atoned for our sins (1 John 2:2) by dying on the cross (Luke 23:44-46)

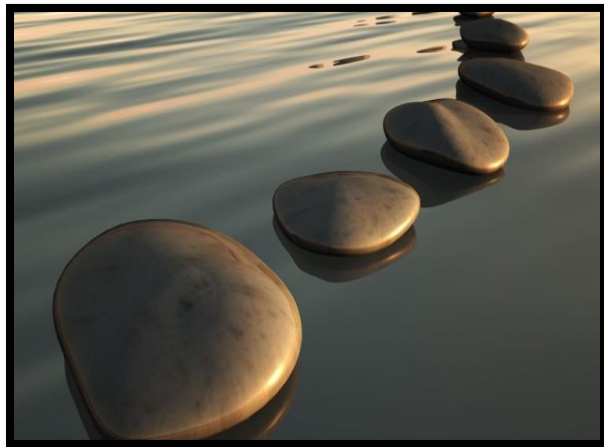


and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:4) so that our faith in Him (John 7:38) might grant us adoption (John 1:12) and eternal life (John 3:16)! In counting these blessings how could one possibly be afraid of loosing the necessities of life, after all would Jesus who died for us in turn give us stones when we ask Him for water, food or shelter (Matthew 7:9)? And who amongst us truly believes the hole in our souls can be filled and satisfied with worldly possessions? Since Jesus is our portion and our cup (Psalms 16:5), whom amongst us would trade this pearl and treasure (Matthew

13:44-45) for stuff that will be destroyed or stolen (Matthew 6:19)? In remembering the grace and the glorious riches we have already received is the key to no longer having a mind of fear and coveting but one of surrender to He who is the only source of unspeakable joy!

### **Grace in Action**

I want to finish this sermon by outlining a way to put what we have learned into action. After having read this sermon you will most likely continue living your life without giving much thought as to how to apply this message. After all, a change in mindset from worldly to



heavenly is not an easy task! Without lots of effort and an abundance of help from the Holy Spirit; the strongholds of fear and coveting will not be torn down. So how does one demolish these strongholds? I believe fear and coveting can only be driven out in the presence of God and with a thankful heart. So, I give you this challenge: for the next seven days spend at least ten minutes a day in prayer thanking God for the grace that He has already given you. Think about what your life would be like if Jesus never died, rose again and forgave all your sins. Think

about all the ways the Jesus has helped you over your life. Take just ten minutes a day in prayer to count your blessings and name them one by one and at the end of the week reflect on how much the Lord has done!