

The New Poor

“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you...Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” James 5:1,4

James' prophecy weighs heavily on the minds of many Bible-believing Christians today. Like gathering clouds signaling an impending storm, a darkly somber mood is growing among the workforce today. The mood is further chaffed by headlines telling of executive bonuses in millions of dollars—given for laying off tens of thousands of workers. Modern day “reapers” laboring in their “fields” are increasingly despondent about the future. Bible prophecy shows their despondency will lead to world wide conflict. This will usher in the Golden Age of Messiah.

But the public's mood stands in seeming contradiction to the rosy statistics oft quoted by political leaders—the net gain of 27 million jobs in the United States since 1979, the low national unemployment rate. Yet these facts belie the impact present day layoffs are having on middle class workers.

The Way Things Are Today

Today's job market is quite different than it was when many in the current workforce entered it. The differences are significant.

Twenty five years ago almost everyone laid-off was able to find employment that paid as well as their old job. United States Labor Department statistics now show that only about 35 percent of people laid off are able to find jobs that pay as well as their former one. The majority must submit to “retraining” or lower pay and fewer—if any—benefits.

Headlines trumpet the disparity of a constantly widening gulf between rich and poor in distribution of wealth. After adjusting for inflation, the US... median wage is 3 percent below what it was in the late 1970s. From that same time, average household income has climbed by 10 percent. However, of that 10 percent gain, *97 percent of it went to the richest 20 percent.*

Ironically, many workers today have financial interest in mutual funds. These force Wall Street to pressure large corporations for worker layoffs to drive stock values up. Comfortably middle class workers may actually lose their jobs to benefit their “retirement package” and, simultaneously, force them down a few rungs on the economic ladder. Could this be part of the fraud James speaks of? We believe so. “Reapers” are being defrauded of their rightful wages. James' prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes.

Withholding wages by the above means has made the rich richer while adding to the ranks of the poor. What of these newly poor (and potentially poorer) middle class masses? Eric Hoffer, the noted “longshoreman philosopher” masterfully summed up the dynamics of mass movements. In his signature work *The True Believer* he noted that the masses of earth's poor who had never known wealth were usually content. Their lot in life seemed normal to them. The most volatile and revolution minded mass of poor is the *newly* poor. When middle-class masses are impoverished, Hoffer noted, revolution will follow.

Reaping the corners

Consider a very interesting feature of the Jewish Law. (While we in Christ are no longer under the dominion of the law, the Law was of God and it “is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” Romans 7:1, 4, 12 “We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully.” 1 Timothy 1:8-9 It is good food for the New Creature to ponder in the quest to know God better.) God is full of mercy and compassion. He does not forget the little ones, the widows or the poor. Consider the wonderful provision he made for these in the Mosaic Law.

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; *thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.*” Leviticus 19:9, 10

The Lord made provision in the Israelites' business dealings to provide for the poor and the stranger. The owner of grain fields or vineyards would be blessed far more by obeying the Divine commandment than lust for profit. In leaving fruit for the less fortunate, they would practice mercy and receive Divine favor.

The opposite spirit seems to rule today. The “bottom line” governs business. The corporate world seems constantly straining to be leaner and meaner. The goal today is to glean every cent of profitability from every aspect (corner) of business. This is often at the expense of the poor “reaper” who was laid off, took a pay cut or lost benefits.

While such intense gleaning benefits investors and corporate leaders (the rich), it has a very negative impact on society. Corporate shake-ups force community leaders, civic minded volunteers and youth program helpers to cut back their time, service and financial support. Local merchants may lose business or close their doors as customers dwindle. Relocation causes a real estate market glut and property values go down.

“Gleaning the corners” sets off a chain reaction of corporate shake-ups leading to societal shake-ups. The scriptures symbolically refer to social shake-ups as earthquakes (see for example Revelation 11:13, a prophetic description of the French Revolution).

Shaking the earth

All the world is being gathered together by economics. Economists now speak in terms of The Global Economy. The interweaving of world-wide economy has fueled feelings of despair in the West. No longer are Western nations self-assured leaders of the world's economy. No longer is the factory worker or corporate middle manager secure in their job. With the increase of travel and instantaneous worldwide communication, a worker in the United States may be competing with someone in Asia, Africa or South America for a job. This rigorous competition drives down wages for today's "reapers." Job security is almost nonexistent.

Notes David Donald Herbert, a social historian at Harvard, "It's important to recall that throughout American history, discontent has always had less to do with material well-being than with expectations and anxiety. You read that 40,000 people are laid off at AT&T and a shiver goes down your back that says, 'That could be me,' even if the fear is exaggerated. What we are reacting against is the end of a predictable life...."

As the masses in the workforce tremble at the prospects of the future, Jesus' words reach our hearts with special force. Regarding his coming again he said, "And there shall be . . . upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity [Greek "no way out"]; the sea [masses of humanity] and the waves [special interest groups] roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken." Luke 21:25, 26

Help for God's people

The Apostle Paul links the shaking of the heavens with a simultaneous shaking of the earth. "And His voice shook the earth then, but now he has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' And this expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things [this present evil world and its sin stained social arrangement], in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain [the Kingdom of God and its righteous rulership]. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe." Hebrews 12:25-27 NAS

Those who cling to the cross and look with faith to their Lord will be strengthened in the troublous times prevailing today and coming in the future. Realize the impact of the Apostle's teaching. In the midst of all the shaking going on in the world now, there are elements of the kingdom of God present. These elements are unshakable and will remain beyond the troublous times to become a foundation for God's kingdom on earth. As the

prophet Daniel foretold, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Daniel 2:44 Let us lift up our heads and rejoice for our deliverance draws nigh!

Help for the groaning masses

God's plans have provided great deliverance for those who are Christ's. But he has also provided for the deliverance of the groaning creation, the masses. See Romans chapter 8 verses 19-21.

In Hebrews 12 Paul was quoting the prophet Haggai. "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations will come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:6, 7 After shaking every aspect of present society and bringing about the end of this present evil world (Galatians 1:4) God will bring to pass the desire of all nations. What do they desire? The deep desire of nearly all people is peace, respect, equity, economic security and especially love. These desires will all be secured when the Lord establishes his Kingdom on earth.

He will fill his house with glory. That is, Christ's followers, the church will receive their spiritual glory as the temple of God. 1 Corinthians 3:16 Then will be brought to pass the scripture, "Behold the tabernacle of God [Christ's church ruling as priests and kings] is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall their be any more pain: for the former things [the present society] will be past away." Revelation 21:3,4

If the economic pressures of our time are weighing you down; if the shaking up of society is troubling your heart, think on all these things which we have noted. "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth [Christ's disciples], and hath long patience for it...Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." It is "even at the door." James 5:7, 8 Revelation 3:20