

THE BOOK OF WEALTH

*Being a Burden Against Hoarding, Tribute, and the Sacrifice of the
Future*

BY DOW

The Declaration Upon the Wall

Hear, O ye cities of the land; give ear, ye rulers, ye merchants, ye rich men, and ye pastors that sit at ease in Zion.

For thus saith the burden of this book: the wealth of this people is not clean before the Lord; for they heap unto themselves treasure in a season of wasting, and call it prudence; they withhold bread from the hungry, and call it order; they bind heavy burdens upon the poor, and call it stewardship; yea, they scatter a little unto the churches, and think thereby to cover the cry of the oppressed.

But the Lord is not mocked.

For when the little ones become too costly to be borne, when the womb is made afraid by rent and debt, when fathers despair and mothers are cornered, when houses are shut, and bread is measured, and labor is devoured, and the mighty say, We are blameless because we have given a portion unto holy things, then is the land found guilty.

For they do not offer up their children upon altars of stone only, but upon altars of price, and fear, and scarcity, and shame; and they say in their hearts, We are righteous, because our hands are not red with blood. Yet the Lord beholdeth the whole frame of the thing, and not the hand only, but the order thereof.

Therefore this word goeth forth as a warning unto all churches of Christ, and unto the rich thereof, and unto all that justify the hoard while the weak perish by inches: except ye repent, and loose your grip upon the treasure, and cease to demand thanks where justice was owed, and mercy where repair was due, your wealth shall witness against you, and your cities shall be made desolate in spirit before they are made desolate in stone.

For unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required. Therefore are the wealthy under greater scrutiny before the Lord, and their abundance is not granted them that they may sit above their brethren, nor that they may judge the poor as though they themselves were gods; but that they might lift burdens, relieve affliction, and make plain places for the weary without respect of persons, without seeking praise, and without establishing superiority by means of bread.

Let not him that is rich by comparison say within himself, I am poor, because another hath more than I. For if thou hast abundance beyond thy brother, and

power to loose a burden, and yet shuttest up thy bowels of mercy, thy comparison shall not excuse thee. The Lord shall not weigh thee against the mightiest only, but against the need that was set before thee, and the relief that lay within thy hand.

Neither let any man say, I earned this by mine own strength, and therefore may I do with it as I please. For who gave thee breath, and season, and soundness of mind, and the labor of other men, and roads, and laws, and peace, and hidden mercies without number? What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Therefore let the wealthy bow first in gratitude before God, and then open wide their hand toward man, not as though they were more worthy than the poor, but as stewards that have been trusted with more for the lifting of burdens.

For the collapse of a people beginneth not in the dust of their walls, but in the hardening of their hearts.

Yea, by the hoard they prepare also the furnace of war; for when a people can no longer live by honest labor, their sons become chaff for princes, and their daughters are driven by fear, and the desperate are pushed to and fro according to the pleasure of every agenda. The rich think themselves secure behind walls of surplus, yet they themselves have raised up the storm that shall beat upon their gates.

Neither shall their riches deliver them in the day of visitation, nor in the days of plague and famine, after the manner of Pharaoh; for they have trusted in reserve, and in preparation severed from mercy, and in storehouses kept back from the life of the people. But the earth shall be tried by fire, and no man shall fare well therein by gold alone. Yet righteous communities, walking in justice, in bread-sharing, and in covenant mercy, may yet be preserved by the hand of the Lord.

Wherefore let him that readeth understand: this book is not sent to flatter the prosperous, nor to comfort the hoard, nor to perfume the sepulchres of a dying order. It is sent to cry aloud and spare not; to show the people their sin, the churches their compromise, and the mighty the ice beneath their feet.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

PROLOGUE

The Cry Upon the Wall

Cry aloud, O watchman, and spare not; lift up thy voice above the market and above the temple court; cry against the towers of storage and against the tables of exchange; cry against the clean hands of the prosperous and against the soft speech of the men that bless them. For the city is full of abundance, yet the people are worn thin; the shelves groan, yet the womb is made afraid; the treasuries multiply, yet the child is counted a burden, the old man a weight, and the poor a nuisance unto ordered peace.

For this people have learned to commit cruelty in a polished manner. They do not always strike with a rod; many strike with a rent bill, a denial, a delay, a contract, a smile, a burden hidden in policy, and a courtesy that hath no bowels of mercy in it. And because the violence is distributed, every hand saith, It was not I. The merchant saith, I followed the market. The landlord saith, I merely charged the rate. The employer saith, I honored the numbers. The church saith, We gave what we could. The rulers say, We kept the order. Yet the weak are still devoured, and the children are still made expensive unto the land.

Therefore this burden is not written against one man only, nor against one house, nor against one denomination, but against the order of the city itself. For when a people build safety upon scarcity, and call the hoard prudence, and call tribute charity, and call delay wisdom, and call the sacrifice of the vulnerable necessity, then their peace is a lie. Their songs are pleasant, but their foundation groaneth. Their sanctuaries glitter, but their gates are stained with the dust of Lazarus.

Think not that the Lord beholdeth only what is done in the instant of visible blood. He beholdeth also the frame of the machine, the shape of the burden, the lanes by which despair is routed, the fear laid upon mothers, the exhaustion laid upon fathers, the price laid upon shelter, bread, care, and time. He counteth not only the hand that thrusteth, but the order that cornereth. He counteth not only the knife, but the system that rendereth life unbearable and then boasteth of charity afterward.

Wherefore let no church say within itself, We are safe because we preach Christ; neither let the rich say, We are clean because we have given of our increase. For if Christ be preached while the poor are pressed flatter against the wall, and if offerings are brought while children become unaffordable in the midst of stored abundance, then the sermon itself standeth under indictment. The smoke of public piety shall not sweeten the smell of hidden neglect.

Consider also how the hoard feedeth the war-cycle of the nations. For when the poor are made rootless, houseless, and desperate, they become easy spoil for recruiters, for demagogues, and for every ruler that would spend flesh to preserve a system already rotten. Thus do the mighty first create the chaff, and afterward complain of the whirlwind. And when the desperate are driven into the service of power, the rich still say, We are innocent, for we sent them not personally. But the Lord counteth the whole frame.

This then is the cry upon the wall: repent, O city, before thy wealth witness against thee; repent, O church, before thy blessing of the hoard be found a partnership with devouring; repent, O rich man, before thy gold become a testimony, and thy reserve a curse unto thy seed. For collapse is not a stranger from without only; it is born within, when a people love storage more than mercy, image more than truth, and insulation more than their children.

CHAPTER 1

Woe Unto the Rich That Heap Up Treasure

Woe unto the rich that heap up treasure in a season of wasting; for they say, We are wise, and know not that their wisdom is cruelty arranged in ledgers. Their barns grow broader and their portfolios more subtle, but the families of the land grow brittle. Their reserves deepen while the young delay marriage, while the mother trembleth at the thought of another mouth, while the laborer counteth medicine against rent, and bread against rest, and children against the fear of ruin.

For wealth under fallen heavens is not innocent merely because it is stored. It taketh on the shape of the world that guardeth it. If the land be righteous, abundance floweth outward and strengtheneth the weak; but if the land be corrupt, the hoard gathereth unto itself the fear, the withheld wages, the delayed

repairs, the shortened mercy, the anxious womb, the postponed child, the exhausted parent, and the despair of the poor. Thus doth treasure become testimony. The coin itself crieth not, yet the conditions that gathered it do cry.

There are rich men that say within themselves, We have stolen from no man, therefore are we blameless. But the Lord trieth not only the hand of theft; He trieth also the frame of withholding. If thou mayest loose a burden and wilt not; if thou mayest repair and delayest; if thou mayest open the hand and instead askest the weak to be patient under a load thou thyself wouldst not bear for one hour; then art thou not clean because thou hast abstained from robbery in the narrow sense. Thou hast participated in a wider devouring.

For the sin of the rich is not only that they possess, but that they make possession their wall. They dwell behind surplus while calling their neighbors unstable. They build policy, price, respectability, and legal order into a gate so common that they no longer see the man lying before it. So was it with the rich man of old, who asked not for Lazarus to be beaten, but merely lived as though the gulf were natural. Thus do many perish now, not always because the mighty decree their death, but because the mighty have made peace with a structure in which the weak may be quietly wasted.

And some among the wealthy, being pricked in conscience, scatter a little abroad, and straightway ask for honor, gratitude, access, deference, or the silence of the relieved. They would turn gifts into incense before their own name. They would buy softness of judgment and exemption from rebuke. Yet saith the Lord, gratitude demanded is tribute, not mercy; and tribute seeketh a throne. Better is the gift that looseth the burden and departeth quietly than the benefaction that keepeth the poor forever beneath the eyes of the giver.

Woe also unto the rich that comfort themselves with offerings while the order that enriched them still grindeth the poor. For a portion cast into the holy place doth not cleanse the larger withholding outside. The tithe cannot sanctify neglect. The donation cannot redeem a civilization of price and pressure. If thou payest unto the altar, yet upholdest the machinery whereby the vulnerable are cornered into fear, delay, humiliation, and death-bearing choices, then thy gift ascendeth with a witness against thee.

Therefore hear the first woe of this book: the rich are not judged only because they have much, but because they keep much in a world where life is being made unaffordable. They call the hoard prudence, yet it is often tribute withheld from the future. They call it stewardship, yet it is often a refusal of mercy until the weak have been pared thin enough to seem manageable. They call it order, yet it is a peace purchased by the constant sacrifice of those who cannot afford the gate.

Moreover the hoard soweth the seeds of later tumult. For surplus withheld from community returneth as despair, and despair as a people easy to move by fear and promise. The fuller unfolding of this thing shall appear hereafter.

Let not the wealthy say, We shall escape because our barns are full, and our shelves are deep, and our plans are many. Riches shall not deliver in the day when the Lord visiteth a proud order.

And if the earth be tried, only that which was joined unto mercy shall prove itself sound. Therefore let the rich repent before their storehouses become testimony against them.

Repent therefore, ye rich of the land. Loose the hoard before it loosen thee from thy place. Release more swiftly than ye have gathered. Restore more plainly than ye have branded. Cease from demanding thanks where justice was due, and from calling isolation wisdom. Bind yourselves again unto community, lest your riches rise as witness against you in the day of scarcity, plague, and fire.

CHAPTER 2

Of the Hoard, and How Men Call It Prudence

Hear now the second charge of this burden: men have learned to baptize the hoard with fair names. They call it prudence, and reserve, and wisdom for the morrow; yet often it is but fear enthroned, mercy delayed, and judgment pushed downward upon the weak. For there is a preparation that serveth charity, and there is a preparation that boweth unto Mammon. The one storeth in order to release; the other storeth in order to rule. The one gathereth that the household and the neighbor may live; the other gathereth that the owner may feel himself a god in a season of shaking.

They say, Is it not wise to prepare? And verily wisdom is better than folly. Yet what wisdom is this, that a man should fill his chambers while the womb of the poor is made afraid? What prudence is this, that a people should fortify their private peace while the common table is broken, the laborer is consumed, and the family is told there is no room for its increase? This is not the prudence of Joseph, who stored against famine for the life of a people. It is rather the prudence of Pharaoh, who gathered unto central power, and made the hungry bow, and turned bread into dominion over the land.

For Pharaoh also was prepared. His granaries were not empty, his officers were not few, and his counsel was not without craft. Yet his preparation did not save him from the plagues, neither did his hardness preserve his firstborn. So shall it be with the hoarders of the latter days, if they repent not. Their stores shall not deliver them in the day of visitation, for the Lord can make the river blood, and the sky brass, and the storehouse a witness against the soul that trusted therein. Riches shall not hide a people from the trembling of creation when their confidence was built against mercy and not within it.

Therefore let no man say, I am safe because my shelves are full, and my lands are fenced, and my securities are many. If his safety be purchased at the expense of community, if his plenty require that many remain desperate, if his reserve be guarded while children are priced out of life and mothers are driven into fear, then his preparation is an idol and his prudence a lie. For he hath bowed himself before stored power, and hath believed that abundance severed from love can redeem him in the evil day.

And behold another evil under the sun: the hoard feedeth the war-cycle. For when the mighty compress the people by rent, debt, scarcity, and tribute, they beget a class that cannot stand upright in peace. Such men become chaff for war, eager for pay, desperate for belonging, easy to inflame, easy to draft, easy to turn with a slogan and a flag. Thus the hoard of the few prepareth not only famine among the poor, but also armies for the princes. The children of deprivation become the fuel of empire, and the broken are marched according to the agenda of those that never meant to bleed.

And this thing is called necessity by the rulers, and patriotism by the flatterers, and opportunity by the merchants of blood. But the Lord seeth that much of it springeth from a social order that first maketh men disposable, and afterward

spendeth them. Yea, the same order that rendereth marriage brittle, childhood costly, and shelter uncertain, afterward seeketh glory in sacrifice, as though the nation were noble because the poor die well. This also is Molech in another garment.

Think not therefore that the fire appointed for the earth shall spare the worshippers of accumulation. For the world shall not be healed by the cleverness of private hoards, nor by bunkers of fear, nor by reserves piled high while neighborhoods perish. The earth is reserved unto fire, and every false refuge shall be tried. In that day, gold shall not cool the flame, nor silver command the wind, nor stored delicacies bargain with the judgment of the Almighty. Only that which was built in righteousness, mercy, and truth shall endure the proving.

Yet there is a better preparation, and it is not hidden from men. Blessed is the community that prepareth together, that looseth bread before panic, that ordereth reserves under mercy, that bindeth the strong to the weak, and refuseth to buy one family's peace with another family's despair. Such a people build not merely stockpiles, but covenant. Their safety is not the loneliness of the rich, but the preservation of neighbors. Their wisdom is not the idolatry of control, but the fear of the Lord working itself out in shared burden-bearing.

Wherefore this chapter standeth as a rebuke against the false gospel of prudent hoarding. Preparation severed from community is no ark, but a private tower. Reserve without mercy is no shield, but a confession of unbelief. Let the rich repent of the prudence that hardeneth the heart. Let the churches repent of blessing the idol of the storehouse. And let the people learn again that no treasure shall save a nation that sacrificeth its future, but righteous communities may yet be preserved if they turn quickly, loose the hoard, and repair the breaches before the fire pass through the land.

CHAPTER 3

Of Tribute Disguised as Charity

Hear now the third charge of this burden: there is a giving that is not mercy, but tribute disguised as charity. For some distribute of their substance, yet not to make the bowed down stand upright, but to keep them beneath; and by their gifts they purchase deference, silence, access, and the sweet savor of innocence before men.

For the rich are not judged as the poor are judged. Unto them is committed greater stewardship, and from them shall a stricter account be required. If they possess abundance while many are crushed beneath rent, debt, sickness, and the burden of children in an evil age, they are not free to ask first whether the poor be sufficiently pleasing unto them. Their first duty is to ask how the burden may be lifted most fully, most swiftly, and with least shame unto the afflicted.

Wherefore let no wealthy man say, I was wise in distribution because I trusted not the unworthy. For wisdom in this matter was not given thee to sharpen thy contempt, nor to sift the poor as wheat for thy satisfaction, nor to make thyself a judge of souls because thou holdest the purse. Wisdom was given thee as a stewardship of relief, that mercy might run farther, bread might reach more houses, and burdens might be broken with diligence and truth.

And there must indeed be wisdom, for a steward that casteth abroad blindly may nourish wolves as well as lambs. Yet even this wisdom must remain a servant unto mercy, and not a weapon of dominion. It is one thing to discern how relief may best be ordered; it is another to turn discernment into a throne from which the wealthy pronounce who is worthy to live in peace. The former is stewardship; the latter is idolatry.

Neither are the rich permitted to seek thanks as a hidden wage for their giving. Let them not crave praise, nor memorial stones, nor honored seats, nor the trembling gratitude of them that receive. For when thanks is demanded, the gift is corrupted; and when superiority is tasted, the heart hath already taken its reward. True mercy seeketh not to be adored, but to make the load lighter; not to be seen as high, but to see the lowly rise.

Yea, the commandment unto them that have much is plain: lift burdens without prejudice; relieve distress without partiality; distribute with wisdom, yet never with contempt; hide not behind the word stewardship when judgment of the poor is in thine heart; and use not thy abundance to magnify thyself over the afflicted. For the wealth was entrusted unto thee to serve life, and not to enthrone thy person.

Let not those also that have some substance, yet deem themselves poor because they walk not with princes, justify the withholding of mercy by comparison. For many measure themselves only against greater hoards, and thereby harden their hearts against the cry beneath them. Yet if a man hath enough to ease distress, and useth that ability not, he is found wanting, though he dwell not in palaces.

And if any wealthy man say, This is mine own, for I have earned it, and I owe no man save whom I choose, let him be rebuked. For no man becometh rich alone. He buildeth upon a field prepared by many hands, upon inheritances seen and unseen, upon the forbearance of communities, upon mercies he did not plant, and upon providences he could not command. Therefore is he not entitled unto pride, but constrained unto gratitude; and his wisdom in distribution must serve not the proving of the poor, but the multiplying of relief.

Use wisdom therefore, ye stewards of abundance, not as a rod to search out worthiness according to your vanity, but as a lamp to find where the burden is heaviest, where the widow is most pressed, where the child is most endangered, where the laborer is most crushed, and where relief may most swiftly restore life. For discernment that exalteth the giver is corruption; but discernment that magnifieth mercy is faithful stewardship.

If therefore the rich give and remain above, if they scatter and still demand reverence, if they relieve yet preserve the ladder whereby others remain beneath them, their charity is found wanting before God. For He requireth not the theater of benevolence, but the fruits of mercy. He looketh not first upon the size of the gift, but upon whether the burden was truly lifted, whether the weak were strengthened, and whether the giver refused to make a god of himself in the hour of another man's need.

CHAPTER 4

The Hoard Is Not Made Holy by Tithes

Hear now the fourth charge of this burden: many there be that imagine the hoard is made clean by tithes, and that a portion cast into the treasury shall sanctify the mountain that remaineth withheld. But the Lord delighteth not in such reckonings; for He is not bribed by percentages, neither is He soothed by offerings that leave injustice standing.

They say within themselves, Have we not given unto holy things? Have we not built houses of worship, and adorned the work, and sustained the ministry? Therefore are we blameless. Yet the cry of the poor ascendeth still. The widow is yet cornered, the laborer is yet pressed, the child is yet made costly, and the family is yet weakened. Shall the Lord call that cleanness which still leaveth the burden upon the neck of the little ones?

For what is an offering, if it be laid upon the altar while mercy is denied in the street? Is it not as when men wash the vessel without and leave the poison within? For the holy use of some portion cannot absolve the unholy ordering of the whole. Yea, a man may endow the sanctuary and still harden his heart against his brother; and the sanctuary itself shall bear witness against him, if it consume his gift and refuse his repentance.

Let not the churches therefore flatter the hoard because some stream thereof runneth through their courts. Let them not say, We are blessed because the wealthy remember us. For if the church eat of offerings and dare not rebuke the order that maketh such offerings necessary, then hath the gift become a muzzle, and the treasury a veil over judgment.

Neither let the rich comfort themselves that they have bought innocence with visible piety. The Lord requireth not only that men give, but that they cease to devour. He requireth not only alms, but repair; not only donation, but release; not only support of sacred speech, but obedience unto sacred mercy. For what availeth it to fund the sermon, if the manner of thy wealth denieth the sermon's commandment?

Understand ye this also: the tithe was never given that men might enthrone themselves as righteous while keeping their neighbors beneath them. It was not

appointed that the storehouse should become a laundering place for fear, or a perfume for the sepulchre of withheld justice. If a man giveth and remaineth proud, if he offereth and yet demandeth honor, if he sustaineth the church and still loveth the ladder whereby the poor are made to bow, then his gift riseth not as a sweet savour, but as a witness.

Therefore this chapter declareth: the hoard is not made holy by tithes. The gift doth not cleanse the idol from which it was clipped. For if thy abundance is gathered through a world thou refuseth to heal, and if thy offering leaveth that world intact, then thou hast not sanctified thy wealth; thou hast merely partitioned thy rebellion.

The hoard is not clean because it titheth.

Repent therefore, ye wealthy of the land, and ye churches that fear to offend them. Break not bread with one hand while tightening the yoke with the other. Call no reserve holy that is fattened upon delayed relief. Let your giving become part of release, and your stewardship part of restoration; otherwise your tithes shall stand beside your hoard in the day of visitation, and neither shall speak peace unto you.

CHAPTER 5

Of Children Offered Upon the Altar of Price

Hear now the fifth charge of this burden: when a people maketh the child too costly to welcome, too fearful to conceive, and too dangerous to carry in a land of abundance, that people is not innocent before God. For though they build no brazen image in the valley, yet have they fashioned an altar of price, and upon that altar do they lay the future of the land.

For the Lord seeth not only the open hand that striketh, but also the order that cornereth. He beholdeth the rents that devour, the debts that multiply, the wages that fail, the houses that are shut, the medicines that are priced above reach, and the shame that is laid upon the weak. And when these things gather themselves about the womb and about the hearth until fathers despair and mothers tremble, then doth the whole city bear witness against itself.

Some therefore say, We forced no one; our hands are clean. Yet the Lord answereth, Ye prepared the field wherein fear did the work for you. Ye made life heavy and called it normal. Ye made children perilous and named it prudence. Ye hedged the path with scarcity, and afterward washed your hands because another chose beneath the rod. But He that trieth the reins regardeth the structure also, and He counteth the cost laid upon the little ones before they draw breath.

Yea, many are pushed toward barrenness not by calling, but by terror; many are pressed toward the ending of life because the city hath no mercy; many more forbear marriage, or delay children until strength is spent, because the gatekeepers of wealth have made family itself a hazard. Shall the Lord not visit for these things? Shall He not inquire who made bread so dear, shelter so uncertain, labor so brittle, and community so thin, that the child became to many a sentence of ruin?

This is the modern sacrifice: not merely that some die, but that the whole order is arranged so the child appeareth as hazard, the mother as risk-bearer, the father as failing provider, and the future as an unaffordable luxury. Thus do the mighty preserve their portion, their reserves, their asset values, and their rank by making fruitfulness itself feel reckless. What is this but the offering of the next generation to the comfort of the present?

Let none say, We gave unto the church, therefore are we absolved. For the offering that leaveth the child still unaffordable is a thin covering. Nor let any church bless the order that cornereth mothers and then boast of compassion over the wounded. For if ye preach life, yet defend the hoard that maketh life unbearable, your speech is divided against itself, and your holiness is found double.

Understand ye therefore: wealth is under stricter account because it hath power either to ease the path of life or to harden it. The steward of abundance is commanded to lift burdens without prejudice, to widen the gate for the family, to lighten the fear upon the poor, and to use wisdom not as a weapon of worthiness, but as an instrument of relief. If he useth discernment to preserve superiority, he hath turned stewardship into judgment and bread into a rod.

Wherefore this chapter crieth aloud that children offered upon the altar of price are not hidden from Heaven. The city that devoureth its young by fear, delay, and structural despair shall not endure. Repent therefore, ye wealthy, and ye rulers, and ye churches that flatter them: loose the burden, break the hoard, make room for life, and cease from every order that teacheth the people to sacrifice their seed that the prosperous might sleep in peace.

CHAPTER 6

Of the Womb Made Afraid

Hear now the sixth charge of this burden: when the womb is made afraid by the order of a people, the sin thereof riseth up before the Lord. For He that formed life in secret doth also behold the gates, the prices, the debts, the wages, and the terrors that stand before life as armed men. And when mothers tremble, and fathers stagger, and households draw back from fruitfulness because the land hath been arranged for fear rather than mercy, the city is found wanting.

For some there be that speak proudly and say, It is not our doing if the people fear to marry, or fear to bear, or fear to keep the child whom they have received. But the Lord trieth the reins of the commonwealth. He seeth when rent devoureth hope, when labor consumeth strength, when healing is sold dearly, when children are counted as liabilities, and when every gate unto life is taxed by the comfort of the mighty. Such men are not clean because they issued no direct command; for they helped to build the order that made fear seem wisdom.

Yea, the womb is made afraid not only by want, but by the preaching of want; not only by debt, but by the normalization of debt; not only by unstable houses, but by the doctrine that every family must earn the right to be secure before it is permitted to flourish. Thus do the wealthy instruct the poor to delay life until the market smileth upon them, though the market was never appointed lord over fruitfulness. And many, hearing these things continually, bow before scarcity as before an idol, and call that bowing maturity.

Hear this also: the hoarders of the land do not wound the womb by silver alone, but by atmosphere. They make the age feel unsafe for children, unsafe for tenderness, unsafe for dependence, unsafe for weakness, and unsafe for households that require room to breathe. They praise productivity above nurture, mobility above rootedness, and private insulation above communal relief; and when the people become hesitant to bring forth life into such a frame, the rich wash their hands and speak of personal choice. Yet Heaven recordeth the frame itself.

Therefore let none among the wealthy imagine that their duty is fulfilled by judging the poor from afar, as though stewardship were given them to sift the worthy from the unworthy according to pride. Nay, their stewardship is under

greater condemnation, because much is placed in their hand that burdens might be lifted swiftly and without respect of persons. Wisdom in distribution was not given that men might enthrone themselves as examiners of the desperate, but that relief might be ordered well, multiplied rightly, and sent where the weight is greatest. The rich are not appointed as lords over the poor, but as servants under stricter account.

And if they distribute with prejudice, or with the demand of thanks, or with hidden desire for praise, or that superiority might be preserved between giver and receiver, then have they already corrupted the gift. For the bread that seeketh worship is leavened; the alms that require abasement are polluted; and the hand that giveth in order to remain above is a hand that still withholdeth, though it scatter for a season. The Lord requireth that wealth be used to maximize relief, not to maximize control; to ease the path of life, not to test how low the poor can stoop.

Mark it well: a people that maketh the womb afraid shall in due season become a people that lacketh sons and daughters, households and heirs, courage and continuity. Then shall the same rich men who trained the land unto barrenness cry out for laborers, soldiers, taxpayers, and caretakers; and they shall gather the vulnerable as chaff for war and for the agenda of princes, because they did not nourish them as children of the covenant when there was yet time. Thus doth hoarding devour the future twice: first by fear, and afterward by conscription.

Wherefore this chapter testifieth that the womb made afraid is no small sign, but a witness against the whole city. Repent therefore, ye wealthy and ye churches that flatter them. Break the price laid upon life. Loosen the yoke from families. Use abundance as stewardship for relief, and not as a weapon of rank. For if ye will not, then your riches shall not save you in the day of visitation, and the children whom ye discouraged shall rise as a testimony against you before the Judge of all the earth.

CHAPTER 7

Molech in Fine Clothing

Hear now the seventh charge of this burden: the idol of old hath not departed from the earth, but hath changed his garments. No more doth he stand openly in the valley with drums and flame only; now he sitteth in boardrooms, in endowments, in gated streets, in polished sanctuaries, and in the speech of prudent men. He is called Stability, and Excellence, and Sound Finance, and Preparedness, and Responsible Order; yet the smoke that ascendeth from his altar is still the smoke of the little ones.

For when a people keepeth abundance in heaps while the price of life is made grievous; when children are counted a threat unto comfort; when mothers are cornered, and fathers are spent, and the poor are sifted like dust before the wind; when the vulnerable are offered up unto shame, barrenness, despair, abortion, neglect, trafficking, violence, and the machinery of war; then the form is changed, but the sacrifice remaineth. The name of the idol is modern, yet the appetite thereof is ancient.

And some shall answer and say, We never desired the death of children, neither did we command the knife. But the Lord of Hosts shall say unto them, Ye built the field wherein death was made reasonable, and fear was made normal, and mercy was fenced round about with price. Ye did not need to hold the blade, for ye sanctified the order that sharpened it. Ye called the altar an economy, and the furnace a market, and the cry of the families ye translated into statistics, until your conscience lay down and slept.

Yea, this Molech of the latter days delighteth in fine clothing. He loveth the respectable tongue, the tax-deducted gift, the strategic reserve, the donor banquet, the campaign of righteousness, the patriotic summons, and the polished lie that sacrifice is necessary for the nation. Thus are the poor made chaff for war, and the sons of the desperate gathered into the engines of empire, and the daughters of the fearful pushed and pulled according to the needs of rulers, parties, and merchants. The hoard at the top and the famine beneath do together prepare a harvest for blood.

They have modernized Molech.

Think not therefore, O wealthy men, that thy silver shall hide thee in the day of visitation. For riches shall not deliver from the plagues of Pharaoh, neither shall thy barns purchase thee peace when the land is smitten. If thou hast built thy safety by severing thyself from thy neighbor, by hoarding against the congregation, by preparing thy household while leaving the city to rot, then thy preparation hath become idolatry, and thy refuge shall prove a snare. For no man fareth well when the whole order is judged, save communities bound together in righteousness, mercy, truth, and shared bread.

Wherefore understand the accusation: it is not wisdom that is condemned, but wisdom severed from love; not preparation that is rebuked, but preparation enthroned above covenant; not stewardship that is cursed, but stewardship turned into a weapon of distinction, whereby the wealthy say in their hearts, We shall endure because we have more. Such men know not the fire that trieth all things. For the earth itself shall be cleansed, and the proud hoard shall burn with the vain confidence that built it.

Let the churches therefore cease from flattering the rich as though their reserves were proof of foresight. Let them rather say unto them, Thou art under stricter account, because much hath been placed in thy hand. Use it without prejudice, without delay, without demanding thanks, and without buying unto thyself superiority. Distribute with wisdom, not to enthrone thy judgment over the poor, but to maximize relief, preserve life, strengthen households, and make the community hard to break in the evil day.

For if the wealthy repent not, their fine clothing shall not save them; if the cities repent not, their walls shall not keep out sorrow; if the churches repent not, their hymns shall not silence the witness against them. But if a people loose the hoard, relieve the burden, strengthen the family, and build righteous communities in humility, the Lord may yet preserve a remnant through the fire. Therefore this chapter crieth, Behold Molech in fine clothing, and bow not before him.

CHAPTER 8

Of Lazarus Before the Modern Gate

Hear now the eighth charge of this burden: Lazarus lieth yet at the gate, though the gate be builded now of cleaner stone, and though the poor be clothed in plainer garments, and though their need be hidden beneath phones, cars with payments, rented walls, and faces trained to appear composed.

For many in this latter age do err, because they judge poverty by spectacle. If the coat be whole, they say, Thou art not poor. If the face be quiet, they say, Thou art not crushed. If the speech be orderly, they say, Thou canst endure. But the Lord rebuketh this blindness; for many are drowning in plain clothes, and many carry the weight of the world beneath an outward frame that still standeth. Therefore judge not the burden by appearance, for hidden wounds do bleed also.

Behold, the poor of this age are oft poor by invisible ledger. They may have wages and yet be devoured by rent; they may have work and yet be broken by debt; they may possess a car and yet be one repair away from collapse; they may smile in public and yet be carrying invisible sickness, caregiving load, legal fear, or the loss of local refuge. Therefore the eye alone is a false judge in the day of modern scarcity.

Wherefore I set forth a mechanism for the churches, the wealthy, and all who would give without building a throne. Let it be called the Two-Ledger Mercy Rule.

First ledger: the visible ledger. This counteth the things easily seen—wage, bank balance, house-payment, rent, groceries, bills already due, bodies in the house, and the plain cost of remaining alive.

Second ledger: the invisible ledger. This counteth the things the proud forget—rent burden as a share of breath, debt service, childcare and elder care, medical uncertainty, hidden illness, transportation fragility, legal pressure, time poverty, social isolation, interrupted work, recent shocks, and the loss of local witness that cometh when a family moveth or is reset before a new chair. Many are judged by the first ledger only, and thus are condemned while still bleeding in the second.

Therefore this shall be the rule: when a plea for bread, rent, medicine, or safety ariseth, let mercy move first, and suspicion second. Stabilize first where the danger is near; then inquire with dignity, and not as one hunting for contradiction. For to

demand performance of misery before relief is given is Devil's Charity, and to require visible wounds before compassion is unlocked is a form of theft.

Likewise, let no giver test worth by posture. Require not the afflicted to smile, nor to weep on command, nor to recount their trauma unto exhaustion, nor to prove holiness by appearing joyless. Poverty theater is an abomination. The wealthy and the churches are commanded to use wisdom in distribution, yet wisdom is given to maximize relief and preserve safety, not to enthrone the giver above the receiver. Witness may be used, but let witness protect and not leash; let it shorten steps and not multiply them.

And if verification be needed, let it be light, finite, and representative. One clear proof is better than ten humiliations. One advocate is better than a circle of doubting eyes. One written standard is better than the mood of a single chair. Let there be a plain appeal path, and let history matter at the moment of crisis, that a family be not made socially invisible because it hath crossed a ward line, a county line, or a season of collapse.

For the faithful err greatly when they say, I earned this; therefore I may judge where mercy goeth. Nay, thou hast received abundance through conditions seen and unseen, through roads thou didst not build, through social peace thou didst not author, through inheritance, timing, health, instruction, and providence. Therefore default unto generosity and gratitude, not superiority. Thy wealth doth not prove thy greater worth; it proveth only thy greater stewardship and thy stricter account before God.

Behold also the rich man of the parable. His sin was not only that he possessed abundance, but that Lazarus became ordinary unto him. So it is now. The gate of the rich is formed of assumptions: If thou canst stand, thou art safe. If thou canst speak well, thou art stable. If thou hast a device, thou art not poor. If thou drove hither, thou art not desperate. Thus the eye of the prosperous learneth to erase the afflicted while believing itself wise.

Wherefore let every church and every wealthy household adopt this saying as commandment: Thou shalt not deny by appearance. And let them add this witness unto it: Believe the poor, believe the sick, believe the weary; let the default be mercy; and let all inquiry be made as a servant of relief and not as a gate unto it. Then may Lazarus be seen before he dieth at the threshold, and the city may yet be spared some portion of its judgment.

CHAPTER 9

Woe Unto the Churches That Flatter the Wealthy

Hear now the ninth charge of this burden: woe unto the churches that flatter the wealthy, that soften the word for the sake of the purse, and that rebuke the poor for murmuring while they bow gently before the hoarders of the land.

For there are assemblies that will speak boldly against the sins of the flesh, yet whisper concerning the sins of silver. They will preach sacrifice unto the widow, patience unto the laborer, gratitude unto the struggling household, and submission unto the afflicted; but when the rich sit before them in costly apparel, they choose smoother sayings, lest the treasury be troubled and the giver be offended.

Is not this the old evil dressed anew? For the seat of honor is still reserved for him that bringeth the large gift; the builder is praised above the burdened; the donor is called faithful while the hidden cries of the people are measured and delayed. Thus the church becometh respecter of persons while still speaking the language of heaven.

Some will answer and say, We do not worship the rich; we merely thank them for their support. But I say unto such: if thy thanks become silence before injustice, if thy gratitude become fear of naming the hoard, if thy honor become exemption from rebuke, then hast thou turned support into dominion, and the sanctuary into a court of influence.

For the church is not made clean because it hath received a tithe from unloosed abundance. Neither is the pulpit sanctified because the roof was paid for by hands that left the poor in terror outside the wall. The Lord requireth not merely offerings, but righteousness; not merely brick and board and program, but bread, release, and mercy without respect of persons.

Therefore let the churches hear this rule and tremble: the wealthy are under stricter account, not lighter. They who possess more are not to be praised for possessing more, but examined more sharply whether they lift burdens thereby. Their wisdom in distribution is not given them that they may sit as judges of the poor man's worth, but that they may find where the burden is heaviest and maximize relief with clean hands and lowliness of heart.

If a church therefore teacheth the rich that they may do with their wealth whatsoever pleaseth them because they earned it, that church hath lied. For no man buildeth his store by himself alone. Roads, laws, laborers, peace, inheritance, timing, health, breath, and providence stand beneath every fortune. Let the rich therefore be grateful, and let them distribute with mercy, not as lords over the needy, but as stewards who must soon give account.

And if a church teacheth the poor to abase themselves for aid, while teaching the wealthy to expect thanks, praise, naming rights, favored seats, and moral fragrance, that church hath entered into covenant with the gratitude tax. She hath called domination discipleship and hath perfumed a throne with religious oil.

Wherefore I say unto the churches: flatter not the wealthy, neither fear them. Receive their gifts if they be clean, but receive not their persons above the persons of the afflicted. Let no donor purchase silence. Let no reserve excuse delay. Let no campaign hide Lazarus. For the church that blesseth the hoard while the little ones are priced out of life standeth upon thin ice before the Lord of hosts.

Repent ye therefore, O churches of Christ. Speak evenly unto the rich and unto the poor. Command the mighty to loosen their grip without demanding thanks. Teach stewardship as burden-lifting, not status-preserving. Break covenant with the halo of wealth. For if the church refuse this word, her songs shall not shield her, her buildings shall not save her, and her offerings shall witness against her in the day when the hidden ledgers are opened.

CHAPTER 10

Of Offerings That Purchase Halo

Hear now the tenth charge of this burden: offerings that are given to purchase halo are not clean before the Lord. For there be gifts that go not forth as mercy, but as incense before the face of men; and the giver seeketh not chiefly to loose burdens, but to preserve his name, his standing, his seat, and the sweet smell of innocence about him.

Some heap up by hardness, and afterward scatter a little before the congregation, saying within themselves, Surely this shall cover me. Others build systems that crush the weak by rent, wage, price, or delay, and then fund relief enough to quiet the conscience and polish the story. Thus they return a fragment of what was withheld, and would have it counted unto them as righteousness.

But the Lord of hosts is not deceived by holy packaging. He seeth when the coin is laid upon the altar to purchase exemption from rebuke. He seeth when the gift is joined unto expectation: that the preacher speak softly, that the board defer, that the afflicted be patient, that the donor's name be honored, that his sins be mentioned lightly, and that his power remain undisturbed. Such an offering is not freewill, but influence made fragrant.

For what is a halo purchased by silver? It is a false light round about an unchanged throne. It is the attempt to appear generous without becoming just. It is the wish to be seen as merciful while one still profiteth from fear. It is the laundering of reputation by means of religious giving, that the hoard may keep its dignity though the poor still groan beneath it.

Therefore let no rich man say, I have given much unto sacred things; therefore my reserve is sanctified. Nay, if thy giving be small beside thy withheld release, if thy public gift exceed thy private mercy only in visibility, if thou supportest hymns and buildings yet leavest households in terror, thy offering riseth not as a sweet savor, but as witness against thee.

Neither let the churches imagine themselves innocent when they receive such gifts without judgment. For if they love the halo more than the hidden ledger, if they prize the benefactor's smile above the widow's rent, if they preserve the patron's

honor while Lazarus yet hungereth at the gate, then have they turned the sanctuary into a market of fragrance, where image is traded for absolution.

Let this matter therefore be judged by a plain rule: a gift is clean when it seeketh relief more than remembrance, mercy more than naming, repair more than prestige, and truth more than access. A gift is corrupted when it demandeth praise, insulation, preferred hearing, softened discipline, special memory, or a cloak over structural harm. For wisdom in distribution is not given to enlarge the giver's shadow, but to shorten the path of suffering.

And if a man would know whether his offering be pure, let him ask not first, How shall I be seen? but rather, What burden shall be lifted? Let him ask not, Who shall thank me? but, Who shall sleep in safety because this was released? Let him ask not, Shall my name endure? but, Shall the little ones endure? For he that loveth halo more than relief hath already chosen himself as the object of his giving.

Wherefore I say unto the wealthy: repent of thy staged generosity. Give quietly where the burden is heaviest. Use stewardship as a servant of relief and not as a stage of superiority. Seek not to be flattered for returning what justice already required. And unto the churches I say: receive not gifts as bribes of atmosphere. Measure all offerings by what they loose, not by what they display. For the Lord shall try every treasure by fire, and in that day no halo bought by silver shall survive the flame.

CHAPTER 11

Of the Storehouse Become an Idol

Hear now the eleventh charge of this burden: that the storehouse, which was given to serve bread, hath in many places become an idol; and the treasury, which should have flowed forth in season, hath been made a shrine, and men bow before it while the poor wait without.

For there is a storing that is righteous, even that the hungry perish not in winter, and that the widow be not forgotten in the day of drought, and that the household be steadied in time of storm. But there is also a storing that is full of fear and swollen with pride, which gathereth much, releaseth little, and calleth this bondage wisdom. This latter storehouse the Lord hateth.

For when men say continually, We must preserve the reserve, and We must protect the principal, and We must keep the treasure whole, though the burdens of the people multiply, then hath the reserve risen up against the very end for which it was first entrusted. The treasure was given to relieve life, not to become a life of its own.

Some will answer and say, Are we not commanded to be wise? Yea, ye are commanded to be wise. Yet the wisdom of God seeketh first how the burden may be lightened, how the child may be fed, how the mother may endure, how the laborer may stand, and how the community may be preserved together. But the wisdom of the hoard asketh first how the account may remain untouched, how the image of strength may be maintained, and how the owners of the storehouse may continue to sit above the need they were appointed to relieve.

Wherefore understand this distinction: stewardship is not the worship of stored abundance; stewardship is the faithful circulation of abundance toward mercy. The storehouse becometh an idol when men defend it more fiercely than they defend their neighbor, and when they speak more tenderly of reserves than of the crushed in spirit.

And if a church or family or city say, We are safe, for our barns are full, our accounts are many, and our preparations are great, while the people round about them grow lean, childbearing groweth fearful, and the poor are made cheap in the

councils of the land, then are they not safe but deceived. For safety severed from mercy is but gilded fear; and fear enthroned ripeneth into judgment.

Remember Pharaoh, who gathered into storehouses and centralized bread under his own hand, so that a famine became not only a natural affliction but a throne of control. He saved grain, yet he also gathered the people into servitude. Thus doth the storehouse become an idol when it ceaseth to be a table and becometh a chain.

And remember likewise that the idol of reserve cannot make a people alive. It can neither teach neighbors to trust one another, nor restore households already thinned, nor turn a brittle order into a merciful one. A dumb store cannot answer the cry that was refused when answer might yet have healed the land.

Therefore let them that have treasure hear and repent. Let them loose the false holiness of accumulation. Let them cease to boast in prudent withholding. Let them ask not merely, How long may we preserve what is ours? but rather, How quickly and how wisely may we turn this abundance into bread, rest, shelter, and relief for many?

For the Lord requireth not spectacle but faithful mercy. He requireth not that the storehouse be emptied foolishly, but that it no more be worshipped. Let wisdom in distribution be used to maximize relief, not to enthrone the distributors; to discern where the burden is heaviest, not to invent excuses to keep the burden where it already lieth.

Thus saith the burden of this chapter: a storehouse is righteous only while it remaineth servant to mercy. But when mercy is made servant unto the storehouse, the order is inverted, and Mammon sitteth where stewardship ought to stand.

Repent therefore, O ye keepers of reserve. Break covenant with the idol. Open the hand before the fire find thee clutching ashes. For the Lord preserveth not the hoarders as hoarders, but may yet preserve communities that bind themselves together in truth, bread, shared burden, and merciful release.

CHAPTER 12

Why the Poor Must Perform Humility

Hear now the twelfth charge of this burden: that in a land ruled by hoarders the poor are seldom permitted merely to suffer, but are commanded also to perform humility before those who possess abundance; yea, they must bow, and explain, and soften their speech, and make their pain legible in a form pleasing unto the gatekeepers, or else their need is counted false.

For the keepers of surplus have not been content to hold bread in their hands; they have desired also to sit in judgment over the manner wherein want may appear. Therefore have they loved a poverty that looketh poor, and a grief that soundeth meek, and a petitioner that knoweth how to abase himself before the chair. But the Lord requireth not that the crushed become actors in the theater of their own affliction.

Wherefore let this be understood among the churches and among all that distribute relief: thou shalt not deny by appearance. For many drown in plain clothes, and many bear the weight of the world without the costume of ruin. One household stilleth its children and selleth its hours that rent may yet be paid; another keepeth a working carriage though its cupboards grow thin; another answereth with a steady voice though panic sitteth already at the table. The hidden wound still bleedeth, though the coat be brushed and the shoes be whole.

Therefore mercy must learn to read by two ledgers: the visible ledger and the invisible. The visible ledger showeth wages, bills, bodies in the house, bread in the cupboard, and money due. But the invisible ledger showeth debt, fear, time-poverty, hidden illness, care of the old, care of the young, sudden shocks, fragile transport, and the slow wearing down of a family that hath had no room to breathe for many days. He that judgeth only by the first ledger is half blind; and he that denieth relief because the second is not written upon the face committeth cruelty under the name of prudence.

Yet the burden of this chapter falleth not upon the poor only, but chiefly upon the rich. For they are under stricter account before God, and may not say, They looked not poor enough unto me. Neither may they say, I earned this, therefore I may open and shut my hand at pleasure. For no man buildeth abundance by his strength alone. Roads, peace, timing, inheritance, neighbors, law, health, hidden

mercies, and the labor of many beneath him have all stood under his feet. Therefore let him be grateful and afraid, and let him use what he hath to lighten burdens without respect of persons.

And if wisdom be used in distribution, let it be used as a servant of mercy and not as a weapon of worthiness. Let it ask, Where is the burden heaviest? Where shall relief multiply? How may this house be steadied? How may children be preserved? How may rest be restored? But let it not ask in the spirit of dominion, Hath this sufferer knelt low enough? Hath she explained herself sweetly enough? Hath he worn his trouble plainly enough to satisfy my suspicion?

For many of the poor have learned that if they speak too strongly, they shall be called proud; if they appear too whole, they shall be called deceptive; if they still possess one small comfort, they shall be called undeserving; if they weep not, they shall be judged untouched; and if they do weep, they shall be despised for weakness. Thus is abasement turned into an entrance fee, and humiliation into a currency whereby bread may sometimes be bought.

This thing ought not so to be. The poor are not commanded to perform ruin to prove need, nor to surrender all sign of dignity before relief may be given. Mercy that demandeth theater is already corrupted. Charity that requireth the receiver to shrink that the giver may feel righteous is but tribute in a sanctified garment.

Therefore let every steward, giver, elder, church, and household adopt this plain rule: stabilize first where danger is near; inquire with dignity after; preserve truth without demanding poverty theater; and judge no house by shine alone. For Lazarus may stand in clean clothing at thy gate and yet be nearer collapse than the beggar thou findest easier to recognize.

Repent therefore, O ye judges by appearance. Cease from weighing souls by surface, and from mistaking visible composure for hidden plenty. Loose the poor from the ritual of abasement. Let the wealthy remember that abundance is a stewardship under stricter scrutiny, not a throne of discernment. And let mercy go swiftly where the burden is greatest, that the little ones be not made to starve while their parents learn how to look poor enough for help.

CHAPTER 13

Of the Rich Who Demand Thanks Where Justice Was Owed

The Gratitude Tax

Hear now the thirteenth charge of this burden: there is a theft more subtle than open robbery, and a cruelty more perfumed than the closed fist; for some withhold that which should have been loosed in due season, and afterward return a morsel with ceremony, requiring thanks where justice was already owed.

For when wages are pressed downward, and rents are lifted upward, and houses are made scarce, and mercy is delayed until the weak are faint, then whatsoever relief cometh afterward is oft but a fragment of the repair that was due from the beginning. Yet the rich would be called generous because they returned a little of that which their order had first withheld.

Therefore thus saith the burden of this chapter: when the mighty create the wound and then bind it partly for praise, they are not saviours but debtors still. For justice that was delayed doth not become charity merely because it is offered with a smile. Neither doth repair become a crown for the giver because the receiver was driven low enough to weep at crumbs.

And ye that are wealthy, say not in your hearts, I earned this by mine own arm, therefore I may do with it whatsoever pleaseth me. For who gave thee breath, and mind, and timing, and roads, and peace, and markets, and teachers, and laws, and inheritance, and the labor of thousands unseen? What hast thou that thou didst not receive? And if thou didst receive it, why gloriest thou as though thou hadst not received it?

Thy abundance therefore is not proof that thou art more worthy than thy brother. It is proof only that more hath come under thy hand, and with the increase cometh stricter account. Thou art commanded not to enthrone thyself above the poor, but to become more ready to loose burdens, more quick to relieve, and more fearful of the judgment prepared for those who had much and loved little.

Wherefore the rich must learn gratitude before they speak of generosity. Let them first give thanks that they were spared many weights borne by others: the hidden debt, the broken body, the absent father, the unaffordable child, the sickness without cushion, the sudden move, the ruined credit, the silence after disaster. Let

them cease from imagining that their standing was self-authored, and let them bow before the Giver of all increase.

And when they distribute, let wisdom indeed be used; yet let it be used as a steward of mercy and not as a magistrate of worthiness. Let wisdom ask, Where lieth the burden heaviest? Where shall this gift loose the greatest weight? Where is the danger nearest? But let it not ask, Who hath abased himself enough to please me? Who hath flattered me sufficiently? Who looketh poor enough for my comfort? Such wisdom is but pride with a ledger.

For he that giveth in order to be praised hath already taken his reward. And he that requireth thanks before he looseth the hand hath polluted the gift. Better a small mercy given in secret to lighten a true burden than a great offering sounded abroad to enlarge the shadow of the giver. For the Lord loveth cheerful mercy, but despiseth tribute dressed as kindness.

Therefore let no church teach the poor to sing for bread while the rich sit waiting to be thanked. Let no family require reverence in exchange for rescue. Let no patron make dependence into proof of loyalty. For wherever thanks is demanded to cover withheld justice, there the gift hath become a chain, and the chain shall witness against the keeper in the day when all accounts are opened.

Repent therefore, O ye rich who love gratitude more than equality, and honor more than repair. Restore quietly. Relieve swiftly. Judge yourselves more sternly than ye judge the poor. Count your abundance as stewardship only, and your wisdom as a tool to maximize relief. Seek not praise, nor superiority, nor remembrance in the mouths of the needy. For whatsoever ye have received above another was entrusted unto you for burden-lifting, not for self-exaltation; and if ye will not hear, your very riches shall rise up and testify that thanks was demanded where justice was owed.

CHAPTER 14

Of Employers, Landlords, Patrons, and Lords of Soft Violence

Hear now the fourteenth charge of this burden: the violence of the wealthy is not always the violence of the sword, nor the shout, nor the striking of the hand. Oftentimes it is soft, mannerly, papered over, and clothed in procedure. It smileth while it squeezeth; it blesseth with the lips while it narroweth the path beneath the feet; it woundeth by schedule, by invoice, by late fee, by policy, by scarcity, by legal form, and by the cold delay whereby the weak are made to bleed in silence.

For there are employers that underpay and call it discipline; landlords that press and call it market wisdom; patrons that bind and call it opportunity; investors that devour and call it efficiency; and benefactors that hold the leash while speaking softly of stewardship. Yet the Lord, who trieth the reins and the heart, is not deceived by the softness of the glove, for He seeth the iron beneath it.

And ye that sit in places of advantage, deceive not yourselves by saying, We have broken no bone, therefore are we innocent. For there is a crushing that leaveth no bruise upon the skin, yet boweth the back and shorteneth the breath. There is a pressure that driveth men from rest, and women from safety, and children from peace, though no magistrate write the charge plainly upon the wall. The violence is real, though it walk in polished shoes.

Consider the employer who knoweth that wages are too small for the rent, yet requireth endless gratitude for the job; the landlord who knoweth that families live one payment from the street, yet raiseth the price because he can; the patron who openeth a door only to demand silence thereafter; the household elder who keepeth wealth in the name of prudence while the young are burdened with impossible beginnings. These are not clean merely because they have acted within the custom of the age. For the customs of a corrupt city do not acquit the soul.

Wherefore let no man say, I have earned my station; therefore the burdens beneath me are none of my concern. For no man buildeth alone. His gain resteth upon roads he did not lay, peace he did not purchase, laws he did not author, labor he did not wholly repay, and providences he did not command. If therefore abundance hath come into a man's hand, let him bow himself in gratitude and remember that he is a steward under stricter account, not a lord released unto pleasure.

And if he be wise, let him use wisdom not to justify hardness, but to maximize relief. Let the employer ask, How may burdens be lightened? Let the landlord ask, How may households be kept whole? Let the patron ask, How may help be given without ownership? Let every keeper of advantage ask not, How far may I press and remain lawful? but rather, How much weight may I remove and remain faithful? For wisdom that seeketh only legal cover is but cunning in a clerical robe.

Moreover these soft violences feed the war-cycle of the nations. For when the young are priced out of rooted life, and families are made unstable, and labor bringeth no secure dwelling, then a chaff people ariseth: restless, cornered, severed from inheritance, and easily driven by slogans, uniforms, debts, and flags. Thus the hoarders prepare the field where war reapeth, and afterward lament the harvest as though they had not sown the seed.

Therefore the church must learn to name these things plainly. Let it not praise the donor while excusing the pressure by which he grew rich. Let it not bless the landlord merely because his rent is common, nor the employer merely because his practices are widespread. For broad custom cannot make oppression holy, nor can polished speech transform domination into mercy. The poor do not cease to be crushed because the crushing is respectable.

Repent therefore, O ye employers, landlords, patrons, and lords of soft violence. Loose the burden before the burden answer against you. Cease from using delay, price, gratitude, dependence, and fear as instruments of hidden rule. For the Lord of hosts shall strip the velvet from the rod, and reveal the violence that was done in whispers. Better that ye humble yourselves now, and become stewards of relief, than that your polished houses testify against you in the day when riches shall not deliver.

CHAPTER 15

Of the Church That Blesseth Structural Death

Hear now the fifteenth charge of this burden: there is a sin that cleaveth unto the churches of the land, and it is this, that they behold the wounds of the people, yet bless the order that made them; they preach kindness in fragments, yet will not condemn the frame that grindeth the poor; they receive the offerings of the wealthy, yet fear to speak of the burdens by which those offerings are made possible.

For many assemblies have learned to mourn the visible ruin of a soul, but not the hidden mechanism that ruineth ten thousand souls before the eye can count them. They will weep over the cast-out, yet flatter the landlord that presseth the rent, the employer that keepeth wages low, the patron that demandeth thanks, and the hoarder that withholdeth abundance while calling the same prudence. Thus do they bless structural death while speaking often of life.

And this death is called structural because no one hand alone seemeth bloody, yet the whole order consumeth flesh. The child is priced out before he is conceived; the mother is made afraid; the father is wearied and ashamed; the laborer is broken by degrees; the sick are measured by cost; the stranger is left rootless; and every gatekeeper saith, It is not I, for I have only done my part. But the Lord judgeth not the hand only, but the order thereof.

Wherefore the church sinneth grievously when it preacheth submission downward and accountability not upward; when it asketh the poor to be humble, patient, and thankful, yet asketh not the rich to loose their grip, lower their price, open their houses, forgive their debts, and relieve the weight that lieth upon the people. For if the burden be left untouched, the soft word is but oil upon a bruise that still spreadeth death beneath the skin.

Yea, some churches are become chaplains unto the hoard. They dedicate the storehouse, honor the donor, praise the prudent, enlarge the seat of the wealthy, and call such men blessed because they sustain the institution. Yet the Lord requireth a stricter account of them that have abundance. The rich are not given lighter law, but heavier. They are not crowned because they possess more, but summoned because they are trusted with more. Therefore the church that flattereth them strengtheneth rebellion against heaven.

And let not any pastor or bishop say, We speak gently because the times are hard, or because the treasury must be preserved, or because the people are not ready. For this is how fear putteth on the garment of wisdom. If the house of God may not rebuke the mighty lest gifts be withdrawn, then the purse hath already entered the pulpit, and the sanctuary hath begun to bow before another god.

Know ye not how thin the ice is beneath such churches? For they fear new doctrines, yet bless the old cruelties of the age. They tremble lest strange words enter the pulpit, yet suffer Mammon to sit quietly in the pew of honor. They test teachers for heresy, yet test not the order that maketh children costly, labor cheap, and mercy conditional. Thus are they in peril, not only because error may come from without, but because judgment ripeneth from within.

The church blesseth death when it flattereth the hoard.

Repent therefore, O churches of Christ. Break covenant with the worship of wealth. Refuse the muzzle of the donor. Teach the rich gratitude before honor, release before praise, and burden-lifting before visibility. Deny not by appearance. Protect not structural death because it weareth clean garments and speaketh with a mild tongue. For the church that blesseth a deathly order standeth upon thin ice before the Lord.

CHAPTER 16

Of the Masks of Wealth

Hear now the sixteenth charge of this burden: wealth seldom cometh forth naked in the midst of the congregation, but putteth on garments fair to behold, that the simple may bow before it and the wounded may mistrust their own cry. For the hoard loveth a holy name, and oppression seeketh a respectable cloak, and dominion desireth to be called virtue.

For this cause must the masks of wealth be named openly before the people. One saith, Prudence, and meaneth delay of mercy. Another saith, Stewardship, and meaneth custody without release. Another saith, Excellence, and meaneth the adorning of the house while the laborer fainteth at the gate. Another saith, Safety, and meaneth insulation from the cry of the poor. Another saith, Stability, and meaneth the freezing of a false peace that spareth the strong and grindeth the weak. Another saith, Order, and meaneth that every burden shall remain where profit hath placed it. Another saith, Charity, and meaneth a measured alms whereby the giver may still remain above his brother.

Wherefore understand ye this: the devil careth not by what fair title cruelty is commended, so long as mercy be stayed and truth be put far off. For if he can make hardness appear wise, and delay appear sober, and distance appear holy, then shall many praise the very chain that holdeth them. Yea, he is well pleased when men defend the hoard with scriptures half-remembered and sayings severed from the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith.

And let not any man trust his own tongue too quickly in this matter, saying, Surely my prudence is pure, or my stewardship undefiled. Nay, but let him ask of every store, every reserve, every policy, every gate, and every rule, Doth this loose the burden, or doth it preserve my comfort? Doth this enlarge bread, housing, rest, and rooted life for the afflicted, or doth it chiefly protect my standing? Doth this maximize relief, or doth it justify delay? For the test of a righteous use of abundance is not the beauty of its language, but the weight removed from the backs of the people.

Moreover the masks of wealth are especially dangerous because they train the poor to accuse themselves. For when the hoard is called prudence, then the afflicted think themselves foolish for needing bread. When domination is called

order, then the pressed think themselves rebellious for naming the press. When selective giving is called charity, then those still burdened think themselves ungrateful for crying out. Thus do masks not only hide the face of the oppressor, but cover the eyes of the oppressed.

And the churches also are tempted by these masks. For a donor that speaketh of stewardship, safety, and order is easier to honor than a widow that speaketh of rent, fear, and hidden wounds. The prudent rich man seemeth composed; the burdened family seemeth unstable. Therefore if the assembly discern not by truth, but by polish and appearance, it shall bow before the mask and turn away from Lazarus at the gate. But thou shalt not deny by appearance; neither shalt thou judge the weight of a life by the smoothness of a countenance.

Know ye therefore that the Lord shall tear the masks in the day of visitation. He shall show whether prudence was mercy, or only delay; whether stewardship was service, or only idolatry; whether safety was community, or merely stored insulation; whether charity loosed burdens, or only purchased halo. And when the coverings are stripped away, many that were praised as wise shall be found hard, and many that were called disorderly shall be found only wounded and overborne.

Repent therefore, O ye wealthy, and O ye churches that flatter them. Cast away the masks, and speak plainly. Call not the hoard wisdom if thy brother starveth beside it. Call not insulation holiness if the people be made rootless beneath it. Call not tribute charity if thanks be demanded where justice was owed. Let every abundance be brought again under the law of mercy, and let every fair word be tried by its fruit. For the Lord is near unto the day when names shall fail, coverings shall burn, and only truth shall stand.

CHAPTER 17

Of Murder by Committee

Hear now the seventeenth charge of this burden: there is a manner of killing whereby no one man alone seemeth a murderer, and yet the people perish thereby. This thing is done not with one knife, nor with one altar only, but by many offices, many signatures, many delays, many prices, many denials, and many fair speeches; and because each hand toucheth but a little, every hand saith, It was not I.

For one removeth the wage from the laborer and calleth it adjustment; another raiseth the rent and calleth it market; another delayeth the healing and calleth it policy; another refuseth mercy and calleth it prudence; another bendeth the law against the weak and calleth it order; another beholdeth the whole thing and speaketh no word, because his own peace is not yet troubled. Thus is blood dried upon paper, and the cry of the poor is broken into little pieces, so that no piece alone seemeth worthy of alarm.

And this is the committee of death, that each man keepeth his own conscience by shrinking his portion of the deed. The landlord saith, I did but collect what was due. The employer saith, I did but follow the numbers. The insurer saith, I did but apply the rule. The judge saith, I did but honor the process. The pastor saith, I did but keep unity. The donor saith, I did but give what seemed wise. And the politician saith, I did but answer my base. Yet the child is still afraid, the mother is still cornered, the father is still ground down, and Lazarus is still laid at the gate.

Say not therefore, We touched not the knife, neither signed we the order alone, therefore are we innocent. For ye may fund the altar, and price the field, and delay the mercy, and normalize the cruelty, and yet keep your own hands washed before men; but the Lord counteth you not clean, for ye helped build the frame wherein the weak were spent.

Think not that the Lord cannot read a divided ledger. For He that seeth the sparrow falleth also seeth the whole frame of the thing. He counteth not only the blow, but the system that prepareth the blow; not only the decree, but the habit that maketh the decree seem normal; not only the hand that shutteth the door, but the order that taught the hand to shut it without trembling. Wherefore the Lord

shall gather the fragments of the deed together, and the men who hid themselves in process shall not be hidden in the day of reckoning.

Yea, this murder by committee prepareth also the war-cycle of the nations. For when a people are made rootless, burdened, desperate, and cheap in their own eyes, they are easily gathered as chaff for war, for agitation, for faction, and for every banner of ambitious men. The hoard at the top and the pressure at the bottom together beget a class that cannot rest, cannot build, cannot keep house in peace, and therefore can be spent by princes as though they were stubble before the wind.

And let not any wealthy man, nor any church that flattereth him, imagine that distance from the wound shall make him innocent. For to benefit by a deathly order, and then to excuse it because one did not design every part thereof, is still sin before God. If thy abundance standeth upon a field of hidden sorrow, then art thou called not first to self-justification, but to gratitude, fear, repentance, and the lifting of burdens. For unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required.

Therefore the commandment in this matter is plain: break the committee of death by becoming a people of visible mercy. Refuse the lie that what is lawful is therefore righteous. Refuse the lie that what is common is therefore clean. Refuse the lie that what is diffused is therefore nobody's fault. Bind wealth again to relief, power again to accountability, process again to truth, and the church again to the cry of the oppressed.

Repent therefore, O ye cities, and O ye churches, and O ye men of policy, purse, title, and seat. Cease to scatter the deed until no man feeleth its weight. Gather judgment back unto yourselves, and ask not only, What may we do and still remain respectable? but rather, Whom are we crushing, and how shall the burden be removed? For if ye will not repent, the committee shall not save you in the day of visitation; neither shall your paperwork quench the fire, nor your shared blame keep back the sword.

CHAPTER 18

Of the Poor Made Chaff for War

Hear now the eighteenth charge of this burden: when a land hoardeth abundance in the hands of the few, and leaveth the many rootless, burdened, and afraid, it prepareth not peace, but chaff for war. For the poor that are denied rooted life are easily driven by trumpet, by faction, by hunger, and by promise; and the sons and daughters whom mercy might have established in the gate are scattered into the fields of other men's ambition.

For chaff is that which hath little weight of its own, and is therefore carried by the wind. Even so a people become chaff when they are stripped of house, inheritance, local witness, and hope of stable bread. They are carried by fear, by spectacle, by party, by outrage, and by the loud command of rulers. They are spent quickly, buried cheaply, and remembered only in speeches, while the rich who profited from the thinning of the people speak of sacrifice as though they themselves had borne the blade.

Wherefore understand ye this: hoarding doth not only oppress the poor in the hour of want, but prepareth them for later use. The same order that maketh marriage heavy, childbearing fearful, rent grievous, and labor uncertain, maketh also a class of men and women easy to conscript, easy to manipulate, and easy to divide one against another. For desperation is the recruiter of empires, and instability is the schoolmaster of faction.

And let not the wealthy deceive themselves by saying, We sought only our own safety, and the wars were the work of princes. Nay, for when ye build a civilization wherein the many cannot endure except by debt, dependence, enlistment, or submission to agenda, ye have already fed the furnace from which wars are kindled. Ye have made the people brittle, and brittleness is beloved of every power that seeketh bodies for its quarrels.

Moreover the poor are made chaff for war not by sword only, but by politics also. For parties gather the wounded and the frightened, not always to heal them, but to spend them. The anxious are driven into tribes; the uprooted are herded by slogans; the burdened are taught to hate the burdened near unto them, while the high places remain fortified. Thus the hoard standeth back, and the people are

poured out for banners, markets, elections, and causes that promise dignity yet return another yoke.

But riches shall not deliver their keepers when the visitation is full. For the plague entereth the palace as well as the alley; famine respecteth not the polished gate forever; fire trieth both cedar and straw. He that prepared only for himself hath prepared foolishly, for his hoard shall become witness against him in the day when private store cannot buy back a wasted people. Only communities knit together in truth, shared bread, mercy, and mutual defense may hope to abide when the shaking cometh.

Therefore the commandment unto the wealthy is plain: use abundance to make a people unfit for manipulation. Loose debt where ye can. Make room for households. Strengthen fathers, mothers, children, neighbors, and local witness. Spend wisdom not to judge worthiness, but to thicken the roots of the people, that they be not carried away by every wind of fear and every summons unto slaughter.

The poor are made chaff for war.

Repent therefore, O ye hoarders, and O ye rulers, and O ye churches that have blessed a brittle order. Cease to manufacture chaff and then mourn the whirlwind. Build righteous communities while there is yet time. For if ye will not establish the people in mercy, ye shall behold them afterward consumed in fire, plague, faction, and war; and your silver shall not ransom you from the harvest ye have sown.

For the war ye prepared in secret shall return unto your gates in the open day.

CHAPTER 19

Of Riches That Cannot Deliver in the Day of Plagues

Hear now the nineteenth charge of this burden: riches cannot deliver in the day of plagues, nor silver in the day of famine, nor hidden provision in the hour when the Lord visiteth a proud people. For men say within themselves, We have prepared much; we have stored deep; we shall escape the trouble that consumeth the common sort. But they understand not that judgment doth not ask leave of the wealthy before it entereth the gate.

For did not Pharaoh possess granaries, armies, treasures, horses, scribes, and storehouses without number? Yet his wealth saved him not when the plagues were poured out, neither did the river obey his abundance, nor the locust spare his fields because he was great. Even so shall it be with all that trust in accumulation while they harden their hearts against mercy. Their barns shall not command the pestilence, nor their securities rebuke the devourer, nor their gated preparations persuade the fire to pass them by.

Think not therefore, O ye keepers of abundance, that private readiness shall sanctify a public cruelty. For if a man heap unto himself reserves while his brethren are made brittle, and if he storeth food while the laborer is crushed, and if he locketh away shelter while families are broken, and then saith, I have acted wisely for mine own house, the Lord shall answer him, Thou hast made thy house a shrine unto fear. Thou hast called thy hoard thy savior, and thy reserve thy deliverer. This is idolatry, though it be clothed in spreadsheets, vaults, policy, and prudent speech.

For the plague loveth no class, and the famine flattereth no title. Disease passeth through rank, and scarcity mocketh the pride of gated men. Yea, the very social order which the wealthy have made brittle by withholding mercy becometh the instrument of their own terror. For when trust is gone, none know how to stand together; when bread is dear, none know how to share; when calamity spreadeth, none know how to love their neighbor without price. Thus the hoard doth not prepare a people to endure visitation, but prepareth them to collapse beneath it.

Wherefore understand ye this mystery: righteous communities may yet be preserved where rich enclaves perish. For preservation belongeth not first unto those with the deepest reserve, but unto those bound together in truth, shared

bread, burdens borne, and mercy without respect of persons. A people knit in covenantal care may endure much though they be not wealthy; but a people trained in private escape and selective concern are already half-destroyed before the fire is kindled.

And this burden also reacheth unto the churches. For many have taught the prosperous to prepare much for themselves, and to scatter only the fragment that remaineth, as though survival were chiefly a private possession rather than a communal righteousness. They have blessed the stockpiled pantry, the investment fortress, and the insulated homestead, yet have not taught with equal force the duty to make neighbors harder to devour. Thus they have preached a gospel of managed fear rather than a gospel of shared mercy.

The commandment therefore is plain: let him that hath abundance use it first to lessen the terror of the many. Let him strengthen households, forgive weights, increase bread, widen shelter, and bind up the weak before he magnify his own hedge. Let preparation be communal before it is private, and merciful before it is luxurious; for wisdom that doth not maximize relief is but polished selfishness, and prudence that seeketh only the survival of the holder shall stand as witness against him.

Riches shall not deliver in the day of plagues.

Repent therefore, O ye wealthy, before plague and famine reveal what your ledgers cannot save. Repent, O ye churches, before your doctrine of private safety is found to have been a doctrine of idolatry. Cease to trust in that which moth, rust, theft, pestilence, flame, and social unraveling can all consume. Build instead a people that can endure visitation together. For riches shall not deliver in the day of plagues; but mercy, truth, bread shared in righteousness, and burdens lifted in season may yet become a hiding place unto the humble.

And after plague, if ye harden still, the earth itself shall rise in witness against your hoards.

CHAPTER 20

Of the Earth Reserved Unto Fire

Hear now the twentieth charge of this burden: the earth is reserved unto fire, and no private hoard shall purchase deliverance in that day. For the Lord shall try the works of men, and the coverings of pride shall be burnt away, and the towers of false safety shall be made as stubble before the flame.

For many say within themselves, If we gather enough, and hide enough, and fortify enough, then shall we endure though the neighbor perish. But this is the speech of idolatry, and not of faith. For he that prepareth himself against his brother prepareth a grave of loneliness, and he that buildeth his safety upon the abandonment of the weak buildeth upon tinder.

Remember ye not how Noah was preserved, not by treasure, but by obedience? And Lot was delivered, not by accumulation, but by warning and departure? And Israel in Egypt was not saved by private abundance, but by covenant signs, shared bread, and the Lord's own mercy? Therefore let no man say, My reserves shall redeem me; for redemption is of the Lord, and preservation is joined unto righteousness, truth, and mercy within a people.

For the fire that cometh shall reveal not only what men possessed, but what manner of society they built. If they built a land wherein children were made costly, mothers were made afraid, laborers were devoured, and the poor were taught to kneel for crumbs, then their wealth shall rise up as witness against them. And the abundance they trusted shall testify that they saw the cry and hardened their heart.

Yet this burden is not spoken that the people should cast away wisdom. For a storehouse may serve mercy, and readiness may strengthen community, and prudence may protect the little ones, if all these remain servants and not idols. But when preparation is severed from shared bread, shared shelter, shared truth, and shared burden-bearing, then wisdom curdleth into worship of self, and foresight becometh rebellion against charity.

Wherefore I say unto the rich, Prepare ye not as Pharaoh prepared, gathering unto yourselves while the land groweth brittle. Prepare rather as a righteous remnant should prepare: secure dwellings before enlarging leisure; fund childbirth and

care before ornament; forgive debts where ye can; keep common stores answerable to common need; teach neighbors one another's names; defend the sick, the old, the child, and the stranger; and refuse to let any household become socially invisible. For righteous communities may yet abide where proud storehouses fall.

And let the churches also hear: preach not survival severed from consecration. Teach not a gospel wherein every family seeketh only its own hiding place, while Zion remaineth unbuilt. Train the people in shared bread, open records, light burdens, mutual aid, truthful warning, and local faithfulness. Let the widow know where to go; let the laborer know who will stand; let the frightened mother know she shall not carry alone. For the fire trieth cities and systems as well as souls, and a people fragmented by fear shall not stand long in the day of shaking. But a people knit together in mercy may yet be preserved through judgment, and emerge chastened rather than consumed.

Repent therefore, O ye wealthy, and O ye pastors that soothe the hoard, and O ye people that call private insulation wisdom while the poor perish alone. The earth is reserved unto fire; therefore build not your hope upon silver, nor your peace upon stored excess, nor your children's future upon the sacrifice of another man's child. Build upon mercy, community, and truth. For only that which is joined unto charity shall endure the flame with joy.

And after the fire hath tried the work of every man, the full shall be sent empty away unless they repent.

CHAPTER 21

The Rich Sent Empty Away

Hear now the one and twentieth charge of this burden: the rich shall be sent empty away, except they repent. For this is the song of the Lord from of old, that He filleth the hungry with good things, and the rich He sendeth empty away. Not because abundance is evil in itself, but because abundance hardened into pride, distance, tribute, and withheld mercy becometh witness against the holder thereof.

For the rich of the earth say within themselves, We are blessed because we are better ordered; we are full because we were wiser; we may do with our own as seemeth good unto us. But they know not the frame of the thing. They know not how much of their bread resteth upon roads they did not pave, peace they did not purchase, inheritance they did not author, bodies they did not sustain, and providences they did not command. Therefore let no man call his abundance the proof of his worth, but rather the sign of his stricter account.

And if any say, I am not as the great hoarders are; therefore I am clean, though I hold fast that which might relieve my brother, let him be rebuked. For many compare themselves upward to escape judgment, and by looking upon a greater idol excuse the smaller one in their own bosom. Yet the widow's portion is weighed, and the laborer's table is weighed, and the extra room, and the second store, and the guarded account, and the fragment withheld in the hour when mercy was due. The Lord judgeth not by the size of the hoard only, but by the hardness joined unto it.

Neither shall the rich be justified because they gave something back after they had first made the people bow. For when justice is delayed, and then a fragment is returned as charity, and thanks is demanded where relief ought already to have been flowing, the gift is polluted. Such men enlarge their own shadow, and call it benevolence. They purchase halo, and call it stewardship. They preserve superiority, and call it wisdom. But the Lord desireth mercy without tribute, and burden-lifting without respect of persons.

Yea, Christ Himself warned the wealthy, not because He envied them, but because riches are subtle masters. The rich young ruler went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions; Lazarus lay at the gate while the rich man fared sumptuously; and the apostle cried, Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Wherefore let the prosperous tremble, not because they possess more, but because they are ever tempted to trust more, excuse more, insulate more, and hear less.

And let the churches tremble also. For if they give the chief seats unto the full, and soft words unto the donor, and require humility chiefly of the burdened, they become partakers of the same lie. They teach the rich to feel generous without becoming just, and the poor to feel shame without receiving relief. Thus the

assembly becometh a mirror of the world, and not a rebuke unto it; and the song of Mary is silenced where it ought to be feared.

The commandment therefore is plain. Let him that hath abundance humble himself first. Let him give thanks that more hath been entrusted unto him, not because he was found worthier than his brother, but because he was set under heavier law. Let him use discernment, not to sift the poor by appearance, nor to reward the smooth and articulate, but to seek where the burden is heaviest and the relief may be greatest. Let him distribute without contempt, without favoritism, without demand for praise, and without desire to remain above the receiver.

Repent therefore, O ye rich, before ye be sent empty away. Release the hoard. Cease from tribute-charity. Break fellowship with the worship of store and halo. Learn to count yourselves blessed, not superior; entrusted, not entitled; accountable, not crowned. For the hungry shall yet be filled, and the proud shall yet be brought low, and the rich who would not become a blessing shall depart with empty hands, though once their barns were full unto bursting.

CHAPTER 22

Repent, Release, Restore

Hear now the two and twentieth and final charge of this burden: repent, release, and restore. For the Lord delighteth not in warning only, but also in turning; neither doth He uncover the sin of a people that He might mock their fall, but that they might yet break covenant with death and learn mercy before the day overtake them.

Therefore let the rich repent first. Let them cease to call the hoard wisdom while their neighbours are crushed beneath price and fear. Let them cease to say, I earned this, therefore I may do as I please; for no man buildeth alone, neither doth any woman prosper apart from providence, peace, roads, labourers, hidden mercies, and generations gone before. Abundance is not the seal of greater worth, but the sign of stricter account.

Release therefore that which ye hold too tightly. Release not crumbs that still preserve your superiority, but substance that looseth burdens indeed. Release without demanding abasement. Release without requiring thanks as rent. Release without the judging of faces. Use wisdom, yea; but let wisdom seek where relief is greatest, and not where praise is sweetest. For stewardship was given to maximize mercy, and not to enthrone the keeper above his brother.

Restore also that which hath been broken by your delay. If ye have profited by rent that devoured the family, restore. If ye have profited by wages that left the labourer faint, restore. If ye have bought halo with offerings while justice lay bound in the street, restore. If ye have hidden behind structure, and said, It was not I, though ye fed the whole frame of the thing, restore. For repentance that costeth nothing is but speech, and the Lord weigheth deeds.

And let the churches repent also. Let them cast down the fear of the donor. Let them give no chief seats to the full while the burdened are taught to bow. Let them preach upward accountability and downward mercy. Let them keep storehouses as servants of relief, and not as idols of delay. Let them deny none by appearance, remembering that many drown in plain clothes, and that hidden wounds yet bleed. Let the house of God become a house of burden-lifting again.

Build therefore communities of shared bread, shared truth, shared readiness, and shared defence. For private hoards shall not save in the day of plague, neither shall proud enclaves endure the fire. But righteous communities, knit together in mercy and in truth, may yet be preserved, even as old deliverances were granted unto the obedient and not unto the self-insulated. Prepare therefore, yet prepare as brethren, and not as Pharaoh. Gather, yet gather for life, and not for dominion.

If ye will not hear, then the witness of this book remaineth against you: that ye were warned that the earth is reserved unto fire; that riches cannot deliver in the day of visitation; that the poor made chaff for war shall cry against you; that the children priced out of life shall witness against you; that your offerings did not cleanse the hoard, nor your polished speech cover the smoke. And your collapse shall not be called strange, for ye sowed it in your order long before ye tasted it in your walls.

Yet if ye will hear, there is still mercy. Release, and be lighter. Restore, and be healed. Break the gratitude tax, and ye shall know fellowship again. Loose the burden from the poor, and your own souls shall come up from the pit of fear. Cast

down the idol of private safety, and learn the strength of consecrated community. For the Lord is able to preserve a people that turn, though He overthrow the pride of the age. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

A Last Word Unto the Cities

O city, if thou wilt yet hear, know this: the warning of this book is not against abundance rightly ordered, but against abundance severed from mercy. The Lord contendeth not with bread shared, but with bread fenced; not with store made ready for many, but with store worshipped by the few; not with wisdom, but with wisdom that hardeneth into excuse. Therefore choose quickly what manner of people ye shall be.

For the age of polished cruelty draweth toward its reckoning. If ye cling to the hoard, ye shall be found alone. If ye loose the burden, ye may yet become a shelter one unto another. For the fire shall try every hoard, and only mercy shall stand.

He that hath treasure, let him become bread.

Appendix — A Brief Witness from the Scriptures

Touching the woe against the rich and the vanity of stored treasure

James 5:1–6; Luke 6:24–25; Proverbs 11:4; Ezekiel 7:19; Zephaniah 1:18.

Touching the rich man, the gate, and the danger of abundance without mercy

Luke 16:19–31; Mark 10:17–25; Luke 12:16–21; Luke 1:52–53.

Touching the duty of the wealthy and the order of the church

Acts 2:44–45; Acts 4:32–35; 1 Timothy 6:17–19; James 2:1–6.

Touching false worship, oppressed labour, and the fast the Lord hath chosen

Isaiah 58:6–10; Amos 5:11–24; Malachi 3:5.

Touching the day of plagues, the testing by fire, and the end of proud confidence

Exodus 7–12; 2 Peter 3:10–13; 1 Corinthians 3:13.