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In An Age of Affluence Luke 12:13-21

My colleague, Dr. Ravi Zacharias, when I was with him a few weeks ago, shared an email that had been sent to him. The email went something like this:

I'm writing to you to share something that happened in my life just a few days ago that's been truly life-changing. A few days ago I received a request from my pastor to come and play the bagpipes (because I play the bagpipes), at a graveyard service for a homeless man who died in the community. Nobody knew him, he had no family, he had no relatives, there would be nobody there... and the pastor thought it would be a fitting gesture to provide some kind of musical accompaniment to the service.

As it was I arrived over an hour late due to traffic. Everyone had gone. There was no hearse, there was no pastor. All that were left by the side of the road were the gravediggers who were now taking a rest and eating their lunch, and the lid on the grave site was already in place.

I felt bad that I had missed the service and thought I would do what I had come to do in the first place. I got out of my car, walked up to the side of the hole and I started to play. I played like I had never played before. I played my heart out. Slowly, one by one, the men who had been sitting by the roadside left their shovels and came and also stood by the hole with me. As I played, they began to cry. They cried, I cried, we all cried together. Finally, I ended with a rousing rendition of Amazing Grace. It was one of the most amazing and spiritual experiences I've ever had.

As I walked away with my head low but my heart full, I thought to myself that I'll never again repeat this experience. As I was a few steps away from the car I heard one of the other men say, "That was amazing! I've never seen anything like that before and I've been putting in septic tanks for over twenty years!"

It is very easy to misread situations. At times we all think that we know what we're doing and we know why we're in a particular place. But then we later discover that what we actually thought was taking place was very, very different. Now, at a more serious level, that becomes more of a challenge given the fact that we live in an age of such rampant affluence. All of us want to be successful. We all pursue and we look for success. But as G. K. Chesterson said, "The word success is a meaningless word."

To say that something is successful is literally to say that *it is*. A millionaire is successful at being a millionaire. A donkey is successful at being a donkey. To say that something is successful is simply to say that *it is*. And if you think that I'm being a little pedantic on this point, it's fascinating that in the King James Version of the Bible the only instances of the occasion of the word "success" as we have it in the English translation, are both translations of the primitive form of the Hebrew "to be."

To say that something is successful is simply to say that *it is*. But it's telling, isn't it? Given the culture in which we live, if I were to describe to you someone as being a successful individual we would automatically assume that meant economic success. So even though the word itself only has meaning when placed in a context, the very fact that we can use the word with an assumed context tells you how much our culture is driven by this pursuit, and by our indulgence in affluence.

Now, the passage that we've had read to us this morning raises some very interesting questions and challenges for us. The young man in this question who comes to Jesus asks Him a question. He starts off with what appears to be a cry for justice, a cry for economic justice. He says, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide his inheritance with me." The man asking the question is clearly a younger brother. His older brother has inherited the vast amount of the estate, maybe all of it, or certainly the large lion's share of it; the big proportion of it. That falls to him. The younger brother is unhappy. In his desire he comes to Jesus and he asks for what appears to be a straightforward request for justice: "Look, tell him to give us all our equal share." The guy asking the question, we can safely assume, is not happy. If fulfillment is required, if this request he is making is granted, if what he is asking for is given to him, then surely he will be okay. He will be happy.

It's interesting how often in life we sometimes get angry with God or disappointed with Him when we ask things which we are convinced in our own hearts are pure, and simple, and untainted. They are just simple black-and-white issues and we don't understand why God doesn't take our side. And yet so often behind that question there are very dangerous motivations and this question as raised in this particular context (and it's interesting given what else is going on today. I suggested this particular passage and this message and had no idea that everything else that's been happening this past week ere in Gig Harbor; this wonderful bringing together of Palestinians and Israelis; I had no idea this was taking place until after we'd already settled on the subject matter.)

If this cry for justice is not tempered and if the motive behind the question is not dealt with, it never brings peace or prosperity. It always brings pain and disappointment. Indeed, the entire region of the Middle East where I grew up as a child... I can remember living in Saudi trying to understand Middle Eastern politics. An Arab said to me, "It's very, very simple. It works like this: it is me against my brother, my brother and I against my cousin, me, my brother, and my cousin against the world." How you define who your brothers are, and who your cousins are, and who the world is will then determine, basically, how you live.

In the context in which Jesus is now speaking, these cries for justice can be utterly divisive and they can wreak havoc on the society. So Jesus has to deal with the motive behind the question. But interestingly, even before He goes to the motive behind the question, He immediately drives the questioner back to a point of authority. He says, "Who has given me this authority? Who appointed me a judge or arbiter between you?" The question, then, can only be answered one of two ways. "Have you given me this authority, in which case will you listen to what I have to say? Or has God given me this authority, in which case will you listen to what I have to say?"

The point of the question is not so much to raise an answer; the answer to the question, the result to the question will always be the same. What Jesus is asking this guy is, will you listen to what I am about to tell you? Then He immediately comes in and picks up on the motive. Now, in the NIV (New International Version) it's translated *greed*; take heed of greed. In the more prosaic versions like the King James Version it's *beware of covetousness*. It's a compound word. It means that desires that cannot be easily be satisfied. "Be careful," Jesus says to this young man, "about desires you have in your heart which are not easily satisfied. Don't trust yourself to them; be very, very careful."

It's very, very interesting how often we are so naïve about our own motives and desires. I don't know if it was as big in America as it was in England, but do any of you remember a woman called Susan Boyle singing a song *I Dreamed a Dream*? Let me just read to you some of the lyrics on that song, because that song was widely popular before Susan Boyle came along. The last time I checked on YouTube, over a quarter of a billion people had actually watched this song being sung on the 3 or 4 main websites that carried it. But these are the lyrics:

There was a time when men were kind

*Their voices soft, their words inviting
There was a time when love was blind
The world a song and the song inviting*

There was a time, and then it all went wrong

*I dreamed a dream in time gone by
When hope was high and life worth living
I dreamed that love would never die
I dreamed that God would be forgiving
Then I was young and unafraid
And dreams were made and used and wasted
There was no ransom to be paid
No song unsung no wine un-tasted*

*But the tigers come at night
With their voices soft as thunder
And as their tear your hope apart
They turn your dream to shame*

And then she sings of love won and of love lost and the emptiness that came, and ends with these words:

*And still I dream he'll come to me
That we will live the years together
But there are dreams that cannot be
There are storms we cannot weather
I had a dream my life would be
So different from the hell I'm living
So different now from what it seemed
Now life has killed the dream I dreamed*

They are powerful and deep words because they call into question: what is it we're actually living for?

Because so many of us were living in the light of the unrealized and we hope that one day, when we finally get what we actually deserve, and it all falls into place, at that point we'll be fulfilled. We'll be whole. We'll be complete. And yet, it is utterly disappointing both to be ruined by pursuing something that we thought would be good for us and has ended up harming us. Or even worse, something that seems to be good in and of itself. We actually achieve it and *still* find that even though we've achieved everything that's set for us, life still hasn't come together. The danger of living in the western world in such an age of affluence, where we have so much and we take so much for granted, is that we're all infected by desires that cannot be satisfied no matter how much we have. And indeed can ultimately end up being destructive.

There's been a lot of research done recently in the field of economics, especially since the 1960's. When I studied economics in the 1980's we were all told the whole premise was built on the rational consumer; that consumers act rationally and they'll always make the best choices. But the trouble with this is that it's very hard to achieve. Milton Friedman said that in order for the free market to survive the consumer must engage in activity that is bilaterally voluntary and informed. In this particular context, bilaterally voluntary means that the consumer knows her own mind, knows her own good, and knows the options available to her.

Voluntary in this context means that they're also aware of all of the consequences of the choices they will make. The question is, is that ever true for any of us?

We all crave freedom. But even in the most radically free societies we happily admit the fact that unfettered freedom is a bad idea. There are choices that we will not allow people to make. We introduce a police force to act by repression, a legal system to act by coercion, and also a taxation system to act by inducement to dissuade people from engaging in certain types of activities. Take the consumption of hard drugs like cocaine. We have in place a system of rules which are enforced to limit peoples' choices and even in some cases deny choices to some people. Not because we don't care for them, but because we do; because we recognize the fact that our choices and our desires are often fallible. We can make self-defeating choices and engage in self-defeating behavior. We end up victimizing ourselves and then we have to live with the pain and the brokenness that follows.

This is a very, very hard thing to learn. We often struggle with it in two main areas of life (though that may be a gross under-simplification). We often wrestle with it during our teenage years when we wonder whether all these rules put around us which everyone keeps telling us are for our own good are actually there to punish us and make us unhappy. Then maybe once when we come into our own and are suddenly free economically to engage in whatever behavior we want to, again, we feel the constraint of that and we wonder is it actually any good? We even raise that question to God, asking whether He has our best intention at heart in the fact that He seems to deny certain courses of action to us and encourage us in others when we don't want to do it and we're not interested in it.

But God loves us and He has a deep desire for us. The rules and system of moral framework that He has given us isn't something that denies our freedom but ultimately helps us to fulfill it. And here we see a man who is now living in the absence in an age of affluence; he's got everything he wants and he doesn't know how to live. Jesus, having given him the warning, says "Okay, let me tell you a story. There was a rich man. He was already wealthy. He's a farmer. His crop brings forth abundantly – euphrato. Now "euphrate", the first part of the verb, means to bring forth a harvest, to bring forth fruit. The prefix, the little Greek word added to the beginning of it enlarges it; expands it; makes it very, very big. It means that this guys' land brought forth a bumper amount of produce. So much so that he doesn't know what to do with it. He can't even imagine consuming it. It's going to take him years to get through it. So now he sees his opportunity. Here's the golden chance. He's going to tear down his barns and build even bigger ones. He'll be able to spill them and stock them to the rafters. At that point he'll be able to take life easy, to eat, drink and be merry.

However here we have a problem because for many of us in the Protestant church, we're not sure whether we're allowed to enjoy ourselves or not. So whenever we see this word *merry* we automatically equate it with sin and therefore conclude that merriment is wrong. But that would be inaccurate. It's not even accurate to the text and the word itself because exactly the same phrase, "We have to make merry", is given in Luke 15 when the Prodigal Son returns and the older brother is angry. The father pleads with the older brother saying "We have to rejoice and be glad (literally, it's the same word, be merry), for this son of mine was lost and is found, was dead and is alive again." There, we see, is a very appropriate sense of merriment. The word translated merry here, *euphroon*, comes from the *phroon* which is the diaphragm. To *Euphroon* is like *euphrata* which expands it; it makes it bigger. How do you expand the diaphragm? The answer is you *breathe in*.

So the phrase here, "Let me eat, drink and be merry," is not just a simple idea of "Hey, I'm gonna get drunk and have some laughs tonight." It goes deeper than that. It is "Now I finally have everything that I need" for that deep moment in life when you can go (*breathe*), "Everything's going to be okay. Everything's fine. Everything's alright." And here we see this false belief that if we have more than enough that life itself is going to be okay. But again it never holds true.

Let me quote to you from modern day economist Avner Offner, Chichele Professor of Economic History at Oxford University. This is what he says:

In affluence, rewards flow quickly. The flow of new rewards undermines our capacity to enjoy them. We look for novelty, but novelty by definition depreciates very rapidly. Psychological drives are swamped by excessive reward. Under affluence, the basic drives are easy to swamp cheaply with short-term rewards. Food and alcohol get cheaper in the conditions of plenty. The problem is not to maximize the flow of rewards but to keep them under control. Not to maximize consumption but to pace it because scarcity itself becomes scarce.

In other words, what he's saying is that many of our lives are regulated by the fact that there is scarcity amongst us. We're forced to make choices. We can't do everything that we want. At times we're going to have to bear the pinch and simply find a way to go the extra mile. That forces a discipline on our lives.

My wife and I, about six weeks before we came out to the states, engaged in a simple building project on our home. Eight years ago we had an extension built to our house. The main part of our house in Oxford was built in 1880. One day, about four or five months ago, I was walking on the floor and the floor to the extension didn't feel quite stable. So I said to my wife that we needed to get someone in to look at this. We got in an architect, we got in a builder and they came and said here's what happens: "They lay a concrete floor and then put on top what's called a scree; a thin surface on the top to flatten it and make it smooth. Then they lay the wooden floor on top of that. They probably didn't get the mixture for the scree level right. It's breaking up. So when you walk around that squishiness you feel is that. So what we can do is lift up the floor, we'll remove the scree, lay a new scree, and put the new wooden floor on top."

Well, the day they started building work a volcano went off. That day I was meant to be flying to Turkey to give a talk at the first publicly advertised evangelistic address in Istanbul in about over 80 years. It was on the third anniversary of a group of people who were martyred for their faith three years ago. You may have read about it in the press. The volcano went off and I never got to Turkey. So, I was there when they started the building project.

They lifted up the wooden floor and underneath we did not find scree. As a matter of fact we didn't find concrete. What we found is polyester sheets. You know those white sheets of polystyrene you can break up into little balls. You've seen those? Our floor was built out of that. Can you imagine? When they lifted up all the sheets of polystyrene underneath there were old paint tins, empty boxes, it was just building rubbish from their previous job. They just dumped it under there, covered it in polystyrene, and then boarded it out on the top. That's why the floor felt unstable. What started out as a simple building project has turned into something that cost five to six times what we originally estimated.

When you find yourself in that situation the scarcity that's all of a sudden imposed on you forces discipline. But the challenge is when you have reached a certain level of affluence scarcity itself becomes scarce. You never find yourself in that position where you're forced to make difficult choices. What Avner Offner is suggesting here is that in the face of plenty the "better off" increase their sense of satisfaction by slowing down. Not to continually increase your consumption.

So many people in the west are now running on what's called the hedonic treadmill; from hedonism. We're running faster and faster, trying to achieve more and more, getting richer and richer to maintain the same level of satisfaction and fulfillment in life. We find that what we were doing before simply isn't enough and it has to increase in speed. We're simply running around this hamster wheel faster and faster and faster just trying to keep the status quo and wondering whether it's possible to maintain it.

How do we learn to live in true merriment, in true enjoyment? In the true, deep satisfaction that should come from all of the blessings that we've been given? At times it's counter-intuitive. Even now, what this secular economist is saying is the way to fulfillment,

when you find yourself in a situation of plenty, is not to indulge yourself in whatever you want to. It is to find a way to pace and to moderate everything else around you. This is hard.

Offner says "Imagine a girl called Emma. Emma's a high school student and has just gone to university. She's doing very well, but she has a problem. It's Saturday night. She knows she needs to stay home and finish one of her essays, but she also wants to go out and party with her friends. How does she make that decision? There is a framework around her that helps her make that decision. It would be fun to do that now, but she also knows there is a greater reward to come if she actually gets a degree and gets a good job. She'll reap the benefits of that in a few decades time. So what does she do? Well, she has a framework around her that helps her decide that. She has her own expectations she's laid on herself. She has the influence around her of her parents, of her peers, of those who have invested in her education and those who are paying for her to be at university; the expectations of her teachers. She also has the moral and religious code that she grew up with that lay various expectations on her about family and about fulfillment and about responsibility. Within that framework there comes the matrix, the bright lines of commitment, that help her decide what is valid for now and what will she postpone for later. That is often where we find that satisfaction comes. How do we live with the immediate tension for the desire of satisfaction now and the fact that we're also looking to the future.

However, we now live in a society where many of those bright lines have been utterly destroyed and removed. The influence of the church; of Biblical teaching about how we handle wealth have been removed. Society is fueled by debt. Instant gratification: we want it now! The peer pressure to succeed, to do well in terms of education is often replaced by immediate pressure for immediate gratification. It makes that decision harder. It makes it more difficult. We need to recover a Biblical wisdom. What does it mean to live in an age of affluence?

This guy says "I will store everything I have now, and from the euphrata will come the abundance of things, the euphroon." God says, "You fool." The word fool there is very specific. The common Greek word for fool is the Greek word *moron*. We translate it into the English language *moron*. It means, "To be a moron." But the word used here is aphroon. If the phroon is the diaphragm the Greek alpha is a negative. Now the mental picture is reversed. Instead of the abundance of things comes this abundance from life. With this expanded, big, deep diaphragm; you are now diaphragm-less. You are empty inside; having pursued everything you thought would bring satisfaction you now find yourself on the opposite end of the spectrum.

In one of his books, Ravi Zacharias quotes two American Psychologists, Minirth & Meier, who wrote a book entitled "Happiness is a Choice." I even find the title arresting. In the introduction to that book they make a comment to this effect (to the best of my memory): *As a further point of clarification Dr. Minirth and I would like to say that though many people choose to be happy they still do not obtain it. The reason for this is that even though they choose happiness they look for positions of fulfillment by seeking positions of power in corporations, in government, even in their own families. Yet, they remain unfulfilled. We have had millionaire businessmen come to our offices and tell us that they have yachts in the Mediterranean, big houses, loving children, a beautiful mistress, an unsuspecting wife and a secure corporate position yet they still remain unfulfilled. They have everything this world has to offer except one thing: inner peace and joy. They come to our offices as a last resort, begging us to help them conquer the urge to kill themselves. Why? The answers are not simple. The human mind and emotions are a complex, dynamic system.*

Did you hear that?! *Everything this world has to offer except one thing... inner peace and joy.* It is simply not the case that from the abundance of things come an automatic satisfaction in life. That is not true. It is an inadequate and insufficient basis. As this guy comes with an apparent cry for justice, "Tell my brother to give me half... it's not fair he got everything, he got more than me, it's not fair! Give it to me then I'll be ok." Jesus says, "You be careful of greed." Be careful of covetousness because even if this desire is met it will not

bring you what you actually think it will bring. You will not be in the place where you want to be. This is why the Apostle Paul said "I have learned to be content in the face of plenty and in the face of great need." It's a discipline that many of us have never truly learned to experience or to learn what it actually is.

This is why Robert McNamara in a very famous speech in 1954, nine years after the Second World War, said this, "The test of your generation will not be how well you stood up under adversity, but how well you enjoyed prosperity." It's an arresting quote because we often think of prosperity as something to be enjoyed instead of endured. But he's right. How do we live in the face of plenty? Well here in this text we are actually given an answer by the person of Jesus Christ himself. This is what it is like for anyone who lives for themselves and is not rich towards God. The solution to this issue is not poverty. As one person said "I've been rich, I've been poor, rich is better." The solution to this problem is not to abject ourselves into poverty. That's why as a person I was always suspicious about communism. They had nothing but wanted to share it with you. The solution is not an enforced poverty. The solution is a true generosity of heart before God and before everyone else.

The very fact that my wife and my family are here is because it's been made possible by the generosity of other people. They have blessed us enormously beyond anything we could have imagined so we could enjoy this time of break and writing and so on. I have to say that we are thoroughly enjoying ourselves. And in fact, so often, the greater blessing comes not to the person who receives the gift, but to the person who has given it. We need to recapture a true sense of joy in what it means to be able to give.

God's plan is not to force His Christian people and those who love Him into some kind of poverty, but to teach them to be generous with everything they have. So whether it is money, whether it is time, whether it is talent, whether it is ability, whether it is insight, whether it is service... whatever He has given. Whether He's given you much or whether He's given you little, be faithful with it! This passage, if you keep on reading, ends with Jesus saying, "To whom much has been given, much is expected and to whom little is given, little is expected." So many of us have been given so much.

We've heard today from our Israeli and Palestinian brothers and sisters. Now, last time I checked this statistic was two years ago and it might be out of date. But two years ago, if you took all of the Christian giving in the world, all of it, every penny that every Christian has given, not **.1%** percent is spent in the entire Middle Eastern region. But in an age of affluence we tend to become so narcissistic. Everything becomes about "us" and about "me." We need to learn to be more generous. We need to give more open heartedly. We need to learn to stand with those who are in great need. We are called to be rich towards God, to follow Him, to listen to Him, to go where He would have us go.

If you go to the country of Cypress, and up to the ancient City of Korim on the southern side of the island, you'll see some of the most extensive archeological mosaics that have been uncovered in that part of the world. It was quite a large city. The largest home in that community was built by a Christian. As we've uncovered his home and uncovered everything else there's a fascinating story behind it. This young man grew up in this place and it was a thoroughly pagan city. He went off into the wide world and two things happened. He was a very successful businessman and he became a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ. On his return to his homeland, he built the largest home in the city in which he lived. Having experienced Rome, he built a series of interconnecting and separate baths. Some of them were heated so you had hot baths, warm baths, and tepid baths. He also had a system of cooled pools – he covered all of this indoors – that ran over stone. So in the winter he could invite all of those around to come and bathe in the hot waters and enjoy the pleasure that comes when you're in a cold time in the middle of winter and having access to hot water; just being able to soak yourself or do washing or just siphon it off. And in the summer, the opportunity take a bath and relax in cool pools. He opened up his home to that community.

That City of Korim became a largely Christian town and they built a Christian basilica. You can see the ruins of the basilica to this day. The stone chair of the throne of the Bishop is one of the few pieces of furniture that actually survived. In 343 AD in one of the famous Christian councils the Christian Bishop from that basilica went off and made very important representations about the nature of scripture and the deity of Christ. The spiritual heritage that this businessman left behind was enormous and influenced many generations to come, including our own today. As you walk into his home, the mosaic that greets you is still visible in the floor. There, in Greek, you can read, "This house is built not out of bricks and stone and mortar, but on the solid foundation stone that is Jesus Christ." His witness, and his determination to glory God and to use everything that God had given and blessed him with to be a witness for him, won over his townsfolk. It has rippled down throughout eternity.

God has called all of us to live; to be rich for Him. However He has blessed you, whatever He has given you, think of how you might invest it into His kingdom; how you might live for Him. How you might take something of your time and your talent; how you might take something of your insight, your professional expertise; how you might help others in need. Whether you are involved in banking and you can help people with financial planning who haven't got a clue how to live in an age of affluence; or whether you can help because you're a builder or a plumber; or whether you're in a position where you can give generously here or to other places. **Live your life in a way to glorify God.** Live being rich for him and you'll not be disappointed.

Let me conclude with this particular story. For the last six or seven years I've had the privilege of doing a lot of traveling in the Middle East. I have a large heart for that part of the world. I was in a Muslim majority country. I can't name it, but it's one of the most populous Muslim countries in the world. If you know your geography you might be able to start figuring out roughly where I'm talking about. When I was over there I had the opportunity to speak in a setting where a group of 1000 people were being trained in one of that country's most radical madras' to be suicide bombers. We had 2 leading professors of Islam. One has a weekly television program in which he advocates Islam and helps sponsor (and is the thought-leader) for a political party in that country that is one of the most radical militant groups in the world. The other guy was slightly more moderate and then they had me.

They said, "Okay, you've got three and a half hours and here's what's going to happen. Each professor of Islam gets 25 minutes each then you get 25 minutes. Then you're going to take questions from the floor and they're going to put you on the spot." I won't go into the details of everything that happened, but I can remember feeling absolutely terrified. When I was in the car on my way there I can remember praying, thinking I was making a big mistake. The one source of solace I had was that six months earlier my family and I had been in South Africa. We had some people praying for us and one of them said, "I see you surrounded by red and white flags and God wants to say to you in that situation 'You need fear nothing.'" I can remember thinking when this person said this, red and white flags? What country had red and white flags?

Now my diary is planned 18 months in advance. Not knowing much about flags I decided to see what country I was going to in the next 18 months that had a red and white national flag. Zero. There wasn't any country that had a red and white flag.

As we're driving along to this madras, my wife nudges me and says, "Look out the window." On every street post and running diagonally across every street, zig-zagging all across the street for two and a half miles down the road were red and white flags. Was asked the driver, "What are the red and white flags?" He said, "These are the flags of the football team of this city. We won the game yesterday so we're celebrating."

So we stepped into that auditorium, and for three hours we took questions from the floor. At the end of that meeting, the final question came to me. The question was, "Does it make any difference if you follow Jesus Christ?" So, I was able to share my own testimony, and as I explained about the fact that Christ died on the cross in order to give us new life, you

could literally hear weeping in the room; about half of the people had broken down into tears. The professor of Islam who has the television program came up to me, poked me in the chest, and said, "They should have warned us." I asked, "Warned you about what?" He said, "This wasn't meant to happen. It was too powerful. They should have warned us about you." I said, "Look, I'm just a guest here and thank you for your hospitality." You'll understand why I needed to avail myself of their hospitality because of the protection it afforded me.

We hear those stories and the temptation is to think, "Oh Michael. You have these wonderful opportunities and that's amazing!" But there's an untold story behind that story. There's a business couple in that country. They love Christ. He's been successful beyond most people's wildest imaginations which are some pretty wild imaginations. They have determined to bless God's kingdom and to live for Him in every way that they can. They personally support two to three thousand missionaries in that part of the world. They set up this meeting and put their reputations on the line because they had enough political and economic clout to make it happen. They're the ones who financed the whole thing and brought the whole thing together. They're the ones who provided the translator. And, they were the ones who got a group of people to pray every single day for six months before we arrived that the meeting would go well and that God would be glorified and honored.

There are all kinds of things happening in this world right now which we never see. There's an army of people living for God, rich lives towards God behind the world making all kinds of untold things possible as they surrender themselves to Him. God uses His people for His glory and His purpose. Let us not be foolish, but let us live wise in this world - redeeming the time, making the most of every opportunity. Let us be generous with everything that God has given us. Let's not hold it up for ourselves, but let us learn what it means to be truly merry in our walk with God and to feel His pleasure as we live for Him.