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Symbiotic economics: Wealth 5 The precious metals allegory

When we think of allegories with spiritual applications, especially in recent history, C. S. Lewis' "Chronicles of Narnia" and J. R. R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings," come to mind. Today as we look at the application of Haggai's prophesy concerning the end of the age, we can see the best of both allegorical chronicles played out in the reality of time.

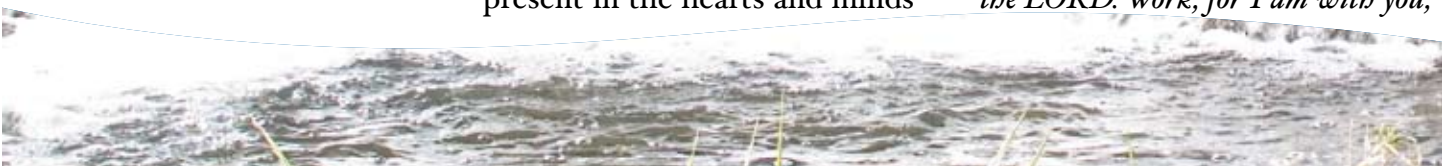
In Lewis' fashion we must come to the story in childlike wonder and anticipation, instead of Aslan, the LORD, creator of the universe, will come to save struggling humanity with deep magic from before the dawn of time. In a similar vain to Tolkien, this drama takes place in a middle earth continually shaken by dark and violent events in which the prize of the struggle is not just a golden ring with magical powers, but all silver and gold present in the world, not just the natural metals, but the silver and gold present in the hearts and minds

of mankind. Through all this, humanity must either accept these miracles with awesome amazement and the wonder of a child, or be destroyed by the Creator and Sustainer of the human living temple of God, the Son of God alone, Jesus Christ.

Let us read again this passage:

The Coming Glory of the Temple

In the seventh month, on the twenty first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, "Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you,



declares the LORD of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”
(Haggai 2:1-9)

Here silver and gold belong to God. But we will miss the point if we only look at natural metals, at least part of the point. This is simply because the temple of God established by Jesus Christ is made up of “living stones, rejected by men, but chosen by God as precious.” This whole allegorical context is spelled out in 1 Peter Chapter 2, much better and more inspired than anything I could ever write. It would be wise to read that chapter now.

The context of this Haggai Old Testament passage is entirely written in the indicative. That means that this new temple is entirely done by the Sovereign Almighty for His pleasure and glory. When we get to the 2 Peter passage however, we see what evangelicals are always looking for, some seemingly imperative applications. However, again all the heavy lifting is done by God and we humans are only required to act like children, “newborn babes.”

Does anyone in the human family want to act like a baby when the heavens and the earth are shaking? Definitely not! We want to be the gold miners, prospectors, and refiners of this precious temple. The real problem however, we don't want to be the silver and gold ore. So just to set the record straight, we want to change other people, but we really don't want to change ourselves. Why? Because we can't. Herein lies the truth of God's indicative. However, it is that outreach, or precious metals mining, that we become ore by which God can refine us. See how we quickly become lost in the slag of the refining process unless we understand this in the allegorical.

So for a better context of what is happening here, let us look at real natural precious metals mining.

Chances are good, that the only precious metal you own is in jewelry. Now I know that all your jewelry is the real thing, but just between you and me, I'm not too sure about all the jewelry of your neighbor, if you get my drift? Me? Mine is definitely real also, I just don't know where it is for sure right now.

We also know, not personally even though we have thought about it often, that there are a lot of people who invest in precious metals, and that banks, and foreign governments own a lot of the stuff. The United States used to have a lot also, but we have evolved way beyond that, our riches are now in the form of debt, even though we still are the wealthiest nation on earth, when you combine human and natural resources. We definitely need to emphasize the wealth again and get rid of the debt.

I'll bet you didn't know that all that gold today in storehouses of the world is just about what was attributed to King Solomon. He was one rich and wealthy dude, even in spite of his 900 pagan wives and concubines. Silver we use more in industry today than we mine, because silver is generally a by product of other mining adventures. Out there in the cold hard rock world and all the ground up placer deposits, there is more gold than we can accurately assess. However it is at very low concentrations, parts per million, or g/1000 kg, or less.

So back to Haggai, God claims that all that silver and gold is His and He is going to bring it to this new temple at the end of time. That works fine if you are talking only about natural precious metals, but that crushing and sifting, is not something that any of us want to undergo to be a spiritual temple.

Luckily, dispensationalists say that we Christians will be raptured out and will be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven when this takes place. They base this on a dispensation known as the Gap Theory in the Bible between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and further shown by Revelation 4:1, where this weird voice says to John in the Apocalypse, “come up here,” and you don't have to go back. We get to leave because we Christians are as refined as Enoch and Elijah, and they were taken by God. This also presupposes a specific revelation of dispensations

unknown to the Christian church and ancient Israel until a little less than two centuries ago.

However, dispensationalists do have something right that their more orthodox contemporaries have missed. In Revelation 20:2-7 where it talks about Christ returning and ruling on earth for a “thousand years” six times the six verses, it might be speaking about something quite literal in time and space. Just because it isn’t mentioned elsewhere in scripture, might just mean it doesn’t happen anywhere else in the time space continuum, and not that you should make it something other than what it clearly states.

Gangue is all that excess material we need to get rid of so we can get to the precious metals. In the imperative sense, the process will probably be less painful to us, if we know how to get rid of all that excess material without the LORD having to crush us first. The first step is knowing that gangue is there and then finding a process that will work not only on us, but also on other people. So what we are doing is really concentrating the silver and gold, before it can be refined.

Throughout history, precious metals have been concentrated by water. In actual mining a good water borne process can concentrate say ten to around a hundred times. There are two general reasons for that limitation. First of all water has a density of one, the gangue has a density of about two, and all the heavy minerals which include a small portion of the silver and gold, have a density of four or greater. The second is surface tension of water. Because of the hydrogen bonding of the water, small particles can float on the surface. Remember back to our first science classes when we were able to float a needle in a dish of still water. That was surface tension, which remained until you added a drop of liquid soap and the needle sank.

Back in my early entrepreneurial days, in return for services, I was blessed to be given development rights to a concentrating process for ore that used air instead of water. This has several advantages over water, for not only does it have virtually no interfering density or surface tension, it doesn’t require or pollute water. Above and beyond those obvious advantages,

it greatly decreases the capital cost in effectively concentrating ore to basically what you can afford, while at the same time increasing the concentration factors into the realm of thousands rather than tens to hundreds.

This process was developed by an inventor in the California desert during the Great Depression and was slightly updated in the early 70s. That inventor back in the desert was able to take scheelite tungsten tailings and concentrate it approximately 1000 times. When another plant was built in the early 1970’s the operational cost of the plant were estimated at less than ten percent of the upstream cost of removing and crushing the ore to the appropriate size to free the precious metals particles from the gangue rock.

What was never done formally however, was to properly size that crushed material so that only those particles that were processed were no larger than the ideal size of the material to be concentrated. This follows an equation known as Stokes Law, which simply means bigger lighter stuff will concentrate the same as denser smaller stuff. Therefore, proper screening will greatly increase the efficiency of the whole operation.

Now the particle sizes you are normally dealing with are about the size of mustard seed, which the Bible calls in the gospels the smallest seed on earth Mark 4:31 . Today we harvest a lot of mustard seed for it’s high oil content, now known basically as rape or canola.

This fall I was visiting my aunt in Wilbur, and attending a community after harvest festival. During the local parade this huge John Deere combine passed by with candy for kids being augered out of the grain bin. I was told that a machine this size sells for close to 300,000. Wow! From my much younger days working in wheat harvest I realized that combines really are just a moving set of screens and fans which separate the desired grain from the straw and chaff.

All this is done with densities of just a little above and below that of water. What would happen if you did the same type of thing with densities of two and greater than four, before you actually got down to separating all the more dense particles in the mineral range. You should be able then to tailor that final air separation to recover only the gold

and silver alloy particles which has a density of about twelve. Then instead of a shaking air table you might be able to concentrate using a counter current flow fluidized bed.

So bringing this back into the allegorical context, could God take your few mustard seeds of righteousness, amidst all the gangue of your life, just a few parts per million, and concentrate those seeds into a living temple of eternally precious metals. Well our first response is that all that grinding, sizing and concentrating and there will be nothing of us left. That is natural law, sure enough. Common grace would say that at least it all isn't washed or blown away, only the good remains.

However, if we stop there we miss the whole point of the absolute truth of the specific grace of the Christian message. Seeds grow and produce more seeds, but also in the mustard parables in the gospels these plants are discussed as trees in the kingdom of God. Trees producing silver and gold fruit, because the genetics have been altered from the sinful temporal world, into an eternal world where what we consider precious is forever absolutely common.