

Day 22 – Feb. 28

I grew up a teacher's son. My mom stayed home to raise my sister and me, so we lived off of a high-school teacher's salary. We lived in a two-story house with 3 bedrooms and a den. We only went out to eat about once a week, usually Sunday afternoons with someone from church. And we were happy. We were rich compared to most. My high school was mockingly called "Sparkle Valley" by the kids at our rival high schools because of the wealth of our area. I never felt rich, but neither did I feel poor. We were "middle class", and comfortable if not wealthy.

When I got my first job in Cheboygan, MI as a youth pastor, I was curious and so I plugged my annual salary into the Global Wealth Calculator which was a website that would give you your rank in terms of overall wealth compared to the world. With one youth-pastor salary and 4 in our household, we were in the top 2% of the world in terms of wealth. Again, we never felt rich, yet never felt poor either. We felt "middle class". We still do in most ways. We don't vacation in Europe or have a second home or even a cottage. Yet we can go out to eat whenever we want, put 3 kids through college with minimal loans, and never want for much. We are "middle class" and that is our downfall.

The reading today is all about reversals. It begins with Hannah's song, which, like Mary's Magnificat which is likely based on this song from Hannah, spells out God's justice for the poor, and that justice is all about reversal. The rich become poor and the poor rich. The powerful become weak and the weak powerful. The starving are fed, the childless become part of a large family, and the world flips on its head. Then we get into the story of Samuel and we find reversal there as well. The sons of the priest are corrupt and the son of a barren nobody is righteous. The sons and the priest Eli himself do not hear from God – in fact, few do in those days – yet Samuel the nobody hears from God 4 times. Reversals of fortune seem to be the way of God's justice.

And for me who grew up and now live rich, this is probably not great news. I am not corrupt – far from it – but the reversal could still come for me. I could lose everything while our friends we are helping through Love INC or in North Chicago could gain it all. God's justice is about bringing the lowly up and the haughty down. Scary stuff if we take it seriously.

Yet if we are truly only focused on God, would this really matter? Should it matter? If I'm honest and true when I sing, "All I need is You, Lord", then a reversal of fortune doesn't change anything for me. To lose my worldly wealth only draws me to prayer and to God. So while I don't pray for it, a reversal that would serve God's justice is something I should welcome, even if it means losing all I have. Because God will never take Himself away. And that is amazingly Good News.