

Does God promise prosperity?

By

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In the Bible, there are several examples of people who are financially prosperous, but also of people who are financially poor. An important term in this respect is “blessedness“. We are introduced to this term as a general description of favor that God provides a person, both spiritually and materially.

Spiritual blessing

Blessedness in the Bible can often refer to material blessing, namely with land, livestock, trade, and production (for example Abraham, Genesis 13:2). Yet, Biblical blessing is primarily focused on the relationship one has with God. Principally, a person who is blessed is the recipient of God’s protection, God’s holy pleasure, and God’s grace (cf. Genesis 12:2-3). We are blessed beyond measure when we become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). The inheritance promised to a faithful believer is spiritual, is future, and is eternal; God promises treasures in heaven (Luke 18:22). And yet,

with all the blessings spoken of in Scripture, God's pleasure and favor upon the Christian does not necessarily mean that He will make each faithful person materially rich.

Financial poverty

Some experienced financial poverty because of their faithfulness to God, like Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus. Poverty and wealth happen to all kinds of people and Jesus teaches us that God causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45). In His sovereign good pleasure and providential control, God makes it so that some inherit or produce great wealth while others live without, choose to abstain from, squander, or fail to produce great wealth (1 Samuel 2:7).

Be content

Rather than teaching us to pursue prosperity, the Bible teaches us to be content and to find our contentment in God through Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about his trials and hardships in the book of Philippians, and towards the end he says that he has learned to be content whatever

the circumstances. He writes in Philippians 4:11-12, “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” Contentment is being pleased with what the Giver of every perfect gift has given you, and ultimately finding pleasure in Him alone. If we are content, then we are really prosperous.

Health and wealth gospel

Too often, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is distorted into what many call a “Health and Wealth Gospel,” which is no gospel at all. Proponents of such a teaching believe that if a person has enough “faith”, then they will experience healing or great financial blessing. Unfortunately, this teaching is grossly misleading and has resulted in many turning their backs on Christ and His church. If God intended for people to be prosperous when they have faith in Christ, why do we read of so much affliction, persecution, scorn, and trials being experienced by the

Apostles? Jesus addresses financial wealth multiple times in the Gospels and on so many occasions, He warns against a heart that pursues money. We cannot “serve two masters” – God and money (Matthew 6:24). We will love one and hate the other. Instead, Jesus says, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). “Seek first the kingdom of heaven and all these things (food and clothing) will be added to you as well” (Matthew 6:35).

Warning about pursuing or expecting prosperity

1 Timothy 6:6-11 gives us a stern warning about pursuing or expecting prosperity. “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into

temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Jesus says this in Luke 12:15, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

How did Jesus view His prosperous state?

When confronted with the question of God’s promise of prosperity, we should turn first to how Jesus viewed His prosperous state. We read in Philippians 2 that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing. He took the very nature of a servant, rather than presenting Himself in full glory and taking over as a master. He became poor, so that we might be rich in spiritual blessing. How could we suppose that a path of discipleship would follow a different course than the one Jesus led? God would rather that we focus on Him and let Him be our pursuit, joy, and treasure.

While it is possible that God would extend the spiritual blessings into temporal and earthly financial blessings, our hearts and prayers should always be focused on developing our relationship with Jesus and our single-minded devotion to God. For richer or for poorer, the Christian life is the true prosperous life. As James 2:5 assures us, “Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?”

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