

Poverty & Prosperity

Prayer

A few weeks ago we spoke about the prosperity gospel. Not the one where it is name it and claim it nor blab it and grab it but the prosperity that God has planned for each of our lives.

You have often heard me quote the scripture Jeremiah 29:11 which says: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Scriptures tells us somethings seemingly contradictory in Matthew 19:23, 24 where it reads: “Then Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” This was a common Jewish proverb of the day that was used to express the difficulty of a thing.

There are a few of aspects of this lesson that we need to understand. The first is a warning to us about placing our treasure in the assets of this life. God wants us to focus on the everlasting, not the accumulation of worldly assets. The second aspect is that the actual translation of this scripture from the greek adverb for hard here actual means shall not easily enter. Study of the word will show that it implies not so much the mere difficulty but rather the painfulness of the process. One other item of note here is that here as elsewhere the kingdom of heaven is not referring to a state of happiness after dying but rather the spiritual life and society of God established here on earth.

What is all this leading to...

There has been a common misconception among many Christians that having wealth and resources is evil and the attaining of such wealth precludes an individual from heaven. Today I want to clarify this topic.

Can you feel the tension between the topics. God wants to prosper us and it is hard for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God. This seems dichotomous in nature, but in fact the answer is quite simple.

This morning consider the truism that says: The problem with most self-made men is that they worship their creator. I'll let that sink in for a minute.

Let me ask a leading question this morning... Do we understand that God judges us on the intentions of our hearts not just our actions? As men and women all we have to go by is the results we see. If a person does something we basically assume that the results declare the intention of the individual.

We as a people are not omniscient like God.

So, let me ask another question this morning. If a man lives in the abundance of wealth and riches is he evil? I want to consider two scenarios here:

Scenario 1: A man has been selfish and never given to charity nor has he been fair with his staff. His every focus has been the accumulation of wealth for his benefit and his pleasure. His family has the best of everything and it is a point of pride that they have the best of everything, they are the

trendsetters. They are the gold standard by which other families will judge their success. He looks down his nose at others who are lesser and may consider them unworthy of his time or attention. He disdainfully considers them lazy. He invests only where he is guaranteed a high return for himself and his family. His wealth is accumulated for his comfort. It may also be a sense of power or control for this individual. Bonuses and gifts of appreciation are a joke to him.

Now let us consider scenario 2: In this scenario we examine a wealthy woman. This woman attends church and loves God more than her wallet. She is giving to a fault. She cares for those around her and if she saw a brother or sister hurting she would give the shirt off of her back to help them. For some miraculous reason, she is always happy and seems to continue to be blessed financially. People wonder how when she is like this she acquires not just wealth, but a prosperity of spirit. She is joyful and loved. The woman in question is blessed and loved by those around her. Her family has all their needs met. Her business is blessed and her staff find her great to work for. Loyalty of staff is amazing. Moral at the company is high. Those who have abused her grace have been systematically removed from her company by those who love her. She has had to be a leader, but has often tried to work with the people in her company. She believes in Servant leadership.

When we consider these two very different approaches, one might wonder, how is the woman who helps others and gives to support God's kingdom faithfully can be so prosperous and happy and not bankrupt.

I have seen both types of wealthy people. And I have come to understand, that man's logic of wealth accumulation is a safe and easy way. All you have to do is simply care more about yourself than anyone else.

I know of one homeless man in Vancouver who cared more about himself than anyone else. His approach was to be homeless and ask others for money. He thought it was funny that he retired a millionaire by preying upon the giving nature of people. He was well to do, but thought people suckers. My point is that there are people who will abuse the system. Many are paranoid or scared to help because of all the scamming that happens in this world. This "Homeless" man hurt those who have the heart of Christ because of a lack of discernment. When people are abused in this way it is a trick of the enemy to stop the Christian and others from caring about seeing God's word done.

What is the secret here...

God has said in Matthew 25:40: "The King will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

What others think of charity is irrelevant. It is what God thinks that matters. God looks to the intentions of our hearts and prospers us and blesses us based on our heart relationship with him. Where the so called Prosperity Gospel fails is that the intention is to motivate people to serve God for what they can get, not to serve God and live in his promised abundance and prosperity.

God is not stupid, when people serve him for selfish reasons and motivations, the blessing is curtailed because God knows the intentions of the heart. Don't be deceived the enemy wants to confuse the Christian and rob them of their blessings and he can be sneaky. But real prosperity of spirit, finance and life comes from God. He wants to bless his people and bless them abundantly.

So why aren't all Christians rich?

The simple answer is that God is a loving and caring Father.

Let's say you are wealthy and you have a car obsessed son. You know that if you give him that Aston Martin he wants, within a week he will wrap it around a pole and either injure or kill himself or someone else. You have the resources to give him what he desires, but you know that if you do it is not what is best, what do you do?

Buy the Aston Martin or a Honda Civic?

I have seen wealth literally rip families apart... Why would God give his child what they are not ready to handle? I have also seen when the heart is right God take people from a desperate situation to a successful one when the attitudes and heart relationship were right.

I know of a woman who was stuck in a relationship with a non-believing man. She was not fulfilled and felt trapped. She had no way to support herself outside of the relationship. She knew that she needed to get out of the relationship, but feared how she could meet her basic needs. Ultimately she trusted God, was obedient to what he was telling her in her heart and God blessed her with favour. She found herself in a successful business and was blessed and prosperous. Why did this happen? Because she chose to trust God and have faith. Faith pleases God.

So we must ask the following questions:

Is the accumulation of wealth evil? No

Is being wealthy evil? No

Is it evil to want to have our needs met and our bills paid? No
now...

Is it evil to get wealthy by treating others unfairly? Yup

Is it evil to get wealthy to manipulate or control others? Yup

What does this tell us?

Wealth by itself is not evil, but it is our motivations and intentions that will determine whether or not it will be hard to enter into the kingdom of God.

It comes down to heart relationship.

Consider what Jesus is doing here in Mark 10:17-31 NLT:

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked. "Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: 'You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honour your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."

Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. "There is still one thing you haven't done," he told him. "**Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.**"

At this the man's face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!" This amazed them. But Jesus said again, "Dear children, it is very hard to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

Jesus looked at them intently and said, **"Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But not with God. Everything is possible with God."**

Then Peter began to speak up. "We've given up everything to follow you," he said.

"Yes," Jesus replied, and I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property, for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then."

Why did Jesus tell the man to sell what he had? Is it that Jesus was against wealth?

Why did Jesus tell the man to give the money to the poor?

Jesus was teaching... What was the lesson?

I know of two very successful men who attended church in Calgary, the pastor and I were talking about this topic and a couple of interesting details popped up. I won't use names but The first guy's tithe to the church was over \$100,000 a year. God keeps blessing this man over and over and he just keeps getting more and more wealthy. Why is that relevant? I believe it was because of his heart. Does that seem to be a lot of money. For most of us that is a lot of money.

The second is an oil multi-millionaire in the same church. God placed it on his heart and he decided to support 80 small churches overseas and anonymously several churches with bi-vocational pastors in Alberta. His business is booming and he is richly blessed... I told the pastor if the oil guy is looking for anyone else to help send him my way... lol

Recently, this guy sold two of his Finning trucks and used the funds to support students at bible college.

He owns the company and his company is prospering and is now making over \$20 million dollars a year gross.

From his personal income he donates approximately 50% of his income.

Can you imagine being that wealthy and having that kind of heart? For most of us that kind of giving is beyond comprehension.

The pastor said that when the oil guy was asked why he was doing all this his response was amazing: he said: "It all belongs to God, he gave it to me to steward and that's what I am doing..."

Most of us don't have those kind of resources... But I must acknowledge that his heart relationship certainly seems in the right place with God. Do you think he fits in scenario 1. or scenario 2?

Here is what I am saying. We can certainly prosper like the guy in scenario one did or we can be like the woman in scenario 2. Scenario one will enrich our pockets but scenario 2 allows us to live in abundance. An abundance used for the work of God.

Most of you are tired of this story by now, but my wife and I both gave us high paying jobs to follow God's leading and come up here to serve in the ministry. But we have been blessed. I didn't know how I would afford bible school and I was concerned about making ends meet. We prayed and God laid it on my Father in Laws heart to pay off our house. That freed up over a grand in mortgage payments for me to be able to pursue the call. I am not bragging, I am telling you from personal experience that God will bless you when you are obedient and keep your heart right.

I will close with one more set of thoughts. These thoughts relate to King David.

We don't have time today to go through the Narrative of David. If you are interested, I suggest you read the narrative this week. For now I will assume that you are familiar with it.

Here are my points:

- David was considered by his brothers to be like the runt of the litter
- David wasn't even called in from the field when Samuel came to anoint of the brothers
- Jesse didn't consider David at all.
- God had a plan to prosper David

I would go so far as to say that by their consideration his brothers didn't give him permission to prosper

I would go farther to say that Jesse didn't give him permission to prosper

But as I said... God gave him permission to prosper.

- David then killed Goliath
- Married the kings daughter
- Became the favorite king of Israel
- Davids son would become the richest and wisest man in the world

But like so many who prosper David messed up for a while and God had to correct him

But God blessed him when he got his heart right and by the end of his life we must conclude that God had blessed and prospered him. He came a long way from being the last considered and a simple shepherd of his fathers sheep.

What I am saying this morning is that too many Christians believe that they have to live in defeat and or in poverty. The enemy loves this because it keeps them from rising above the enemies plans of destruction.

The bottom line. Is that God wants to prosper you.

- Prosper you Spiritually
- Prosper your relationships
- Prosper your finances

We need to shake off what the world says and embrace that God has given us permission to prosper the right way and with the right heart.

Be encouraged, because he has come to give you life and life more abundantly. His word tells us how to receive these blessings but we must carefully read what he says, be obedient and keep our hearts right.

Prayer.