

Worldly Prosperity a Curse and a Bar to Future Reward

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Worldly Prosperity A Reward of Righteousness and a Blessing (Job 22:23-24; Ps. 37:25; 112:1-3; Prov. 15:6; Mk. 10:29-30).

Worldly Prosperity a Curse and a Bar to Future Reward (Mt. 6:19; 19:24; Lk. 6:20, 24; 16:22).

It seems a proclivity on the part of many religious people to equate God's rewards in physical terms rather than understanding that His blessings are first and foremost spiritual in nature. Sadly, there is a gospel message that some refer to as the "health and wealth gospel." In other words, if you are healthy and wealthy God is pleased with you, and this explains why you have received certain physical blessings. Conversely, if you are doing something wrong, God is going to make sure you do not enjoy these same "blessings." This is a false doctrine and one of many "different gospel messages" that began to creep into God's church soon after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,

I (Paul) marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you (Almighty God; Jn. 6:44, 65; cf. Rom. 2:4b) in the grace of (forgiveness of sin provided by) Jesus Christ, **to a different gospel** (Gal. 1:6; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added; NKJV used throughout unless otherwise noted).

God makes it very clear that the acquisition of riches should not be the goal of His people. Instead, they should be desirous of a different kind of wealth that is measured by a person's character and not the goods he possesses,

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing (no longer reliant upon God)' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (spiritually speaking) – ¹⁸I (Christ) counsel (warn) you to buy from me gold refined in the fire (change your attitude, even if it means going through some very difficult trials as a means of humbling oneself), that you may be rich (in Godly character and values); and white garments (instead of being soiled by this world's values), that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness (sin) may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see (because right now you are deceived; cf. Rev. 12:9). ¹⁹As many as I love, I rebuke (verbally correct) and chasten (discipline). Therefore be zealous (eager) and repent (of sin) (Rev. 3:17-19; Ed. notes in parentheses).

With this in mind, the riches that God bestows should not be viewed strictly in physical terms. The first scripture some use to claim that "worldly prosperity is a reward of righteousness and a blessing" is a commentary by an individual who believed in the "health and wealth gospel." His name was Eliphaz and he came to a wrong conclusion regarding the situation Job found himself in. Eliphaz decided that Job was suffering because he had committed some sin against God. However, this was not the case at all

(cf. Job 1:8). Instead, Job was experiencing a series of trials as a means of strengthening his faith in Almighty God,

If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up; you will remove iniquity (sin) far from your tents.
²⁴Then you will lay your gold in the dust, and the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks
(Job 22:23-24; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The next scripture that some propose is proof that God's people will be rewarded by worldly prosperity is not dealing with this at all. Instead, it is a promise to those who trust and obey God that they will not be allowed to starve,

I (King David) have been young, and now am old; yet **I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread** (Ps. 37:25; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

It is interesting that none of the blessings that Christ mentioned during his earthly ministry involved physical riches (cf. Mt. 5:3-10) and yet many religious people today insist that God's blessings are measured primarily in terms of good health and physical wealth, and they will quote the next section of scripture to support this position,

Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments (Ps. 112:1).

Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures (stands) forever (Ps. 112:3; Ed. notes in parenthesis).

As mentioned in the opening of this study, God describes mankind's true riches in terms of His values as summarized by His law and commandments (cf. Rev. 3:17-19). This is first and foremost how Psalms 112:3 should be viewed as well as the next text,

In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but in the revenue of the wicked is trouble (Prov. 15:6).

Christ confirmed that the treasure of God's people should never be measured by physical possessions or the pursuit of them,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but (instead) lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt. 6:19-21; cf. Lk. 12:34; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Instead of proving that "worldly prosperity is a reward of the righteous" the next section of scripture confirms the opposite. In it, Christ stated that if the righteous are willing to forsake everything and everyone who is near and dear to them in their pursuit of God's way of life, they will be rewarded by receiving "others" whose goals are the same. For example, if an individual was forsaken by their family members who disowned them due to their religious beliefs, then Christ promised that these family members would be replaced by members of the household of God, or church brethren who shared the same beliefs,

So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields (source of work; therefore referring to

losing one's job or livelihood), for my sake and the gospel's,³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and (more importantly) in the age to come (following Christ's return), eternal life (Mk. 10:29-30; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Now, the scriptures that are used to claim that “worldly prosperity is a curse and a bar to future reward” will be examined. The first text, which is Matthew 6:19-21, was explained earlier in this study. In it, Christ pointed out that God's people should not make the acquisition of wealth a priority in their life. Instead, they need to place the pursuit of God's values as their most important goal. The next scripture is similar to Matthew 6:19-21 in the sense that Christ is pointing out the serious consequences for those who make the pursuit of riches their main focus in life. Those who succumb to this objective, make seeking God's way of life of secondary importance at best,

And again I (Christ) say to you (his disciples), it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (Mt. 19:24; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Evidently, there was a proverb in Palestine stating that a camel with a large load could not enter the gate of a city after dark. It had to be unloaded first. This principle could be applied to a rich person. In other words, before even considering entrance to God's Kingdom someone, who is pre-occupied with physical wealth and possessions, would have to shift their priorities. Failing to do so, would be an impediment to their relationship with God. However, having many possessions did not impede the relationship between God and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, it is a matter of how an individual prioritizes their life (cf. Mt. 6:33). Regarding a pre-occupation with physical goods, Christ gave a parable stressing the importance of seeking what really matters in life, and that is a close relationship with God,

Then he (Christ) spoke a parable to them saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?”¹⁸ So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry,’”²⁰ But God said to him, “You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?”²¹ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich (in the time and energy he spends) toward God (Lk. 12:16-21; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The next scripture is used by those who wish to prove that wealth, of and by itself, will prevent a person from entering God's Kingdom. This position is incorrect based on Christ's response to this erroneous belief (cf. Mt. 19:26),

Then he (Christ) lifted up his eyes toward his disciples, and said, ‘Blessed are you poor (in spirit, or attitude; cf. Mt. 5:3), for yours is the kingdom of God (Lk. 6:20; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So Christ was not commenting on one's physical wealth. Instead, he was speaking about a humble attitude (cf. Isa. 66:2). Of note, Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy man and he secured the tomb for Christ's burial,

Now when evening had come, **there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph**, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus (Mt. 27:57; emphasis added).

Those who claim the next scripture proves that being rich is “a bar to future reward” need to keep in mind that it is the pre-occupation with riches that is the problem,

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation (Lk. 6:24).

The last scripture that some use, to support their position that the wealthy are cursed when it comes to a future reward in God’s Kingdom, is dealing with how the wealth is used. It is not a commentary on the rich being refused everlasting life just because they have wealth or many possessions,

So it was that the beggar (Lazarus) died, and was carried (figuratively) by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried (Lk. 16:22; Ed. notes in parentheses).

The implication in this parable is that Lazarus will be in the first resurrection with Abraham, but the rich man will have to wait until the second resurrection due to his lack of charity and compassion toward a very poor and sick beggar that he should have helped during his physical lifetime. Again, it is not the riches that are the problem. Instead, it is how those riches are used and whether the possessor of the riches is pre-occupied with retaining and increasing them. The Apostle Paul commented on the proclivity of rich people to be totally absorbed with their wealth to the point that it becomes their love,

For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some (not everyone) have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through many sorrows (1Tim. 6:10; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

So, worldly prosperity is not the focus, or pre-occupation, of those who seek to serve Almighty God. Instead, they apply themselves diligently to living in accordance with God’s word, as expressed in His law and commandments. If God’s people do receive riches during their physical lifetime, it does not automatically mean they will be barred from their future reward. It’s the attitude toward wealth, and how it’s used, that determines one’s outcome. True and lasting wealth is not physical. It is measured by one’s relationship with God, which is spiritual. The scriptures that are put forward as being contradictory in this study are not. Instead, they have been misused and for the most part have nothing to do with the statements that supposedly apply to them.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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