

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: August 22, 2010

What *IS* Prosperity?

by Dan Trygg

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in every way and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”

3 John 1:2

“Then Yahweh your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for Yahweh will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; ¹⁰ if you obey Yahweh your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul.”

Deuteronomy 30:9-10

“Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Matthew 6:31-33

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed...”

2 Corinthians 9:8

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”

Hebrews 13:5

“For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by striving for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.”

1 Timothy 6:10

God designed this world so that human survival was dependent upon the fruit of human effort, in some capacity. Even before the fall, God had put humankind in the garden of Eden as a steward and caretaker. He was to get his living from the trees of the garden, and from the “shrubs and plants of the field” which God had provided. Even in the garden, human effort was required for these plants to grow successfully. The man was put there to till and keep the garden. **It was clear, however, that God, the Creator, was the Source of blessing.** He had created the edible plants and trees for human consumption. They were pleasing to the eye and tasted good. *The provision of God showed His benevolent character and personal love.* God caused the plants to grow profusely in those ideal conditions.

As a result of human sin, however, our first parents were driven out of the garden, and the soil was no longer as productive. Thorns and thistles grew up, and survival became a laborious task, a “sweat of the brow” struggle. After the flood, which again drastically changed the face of the land, people spread out across the earth, hunting, gathering, tending flocks and herds, and settling on little homesteads. There also arose merchants and skilled workers. These people did not work the land themselves; they developed a symbiotic relationship with those who did, providing goods or services in exchange for food and, eventually, money. There were also violent oppressive men, who began to dominate others, taking their food and possessions, or forcing them to pay some kind of tribute to them for protection against other marauding oppressors. We read of the first kingdom, a fairly large area of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley (Gen. 10:10). Government officials and soldiers were supported either by the taxes of their own people, or by the plunder gathered from other city-states. **At the base of everything, however, was the agrarian economy. Without good crops and reproductive flocks and herds, the stability of everything was endangered.**

Another development in civilization as people dispersed across the land was the development of superstitions, false beliefs and idolatrous practices. Although everyone initially knew of the one Creator God, the imagination of man, and the deceptive influence of Satan, soon led people astray. What was the motivation for most of these religious practices? **Virtually all of these belief systems were attempts to manipulate the weather for crops, or the reproduction of children and animals.** They were all fertility religions. **It was all about prosperity.** The teaching was, “If you do this, or offer that, the god will be pleased with you, and will give you rain, good crops and will increase your animals.” There were also magical charms, incantations and spells which people would offer to the spirit world, either for good fortune, or for protection from disaster. **By the time of Abraham, these beliefs and practices were quite widespread.** Some of the belief systems had become quite extreme, encouraging even human sacrifice (especially children) as a way to secure the help of the “gods”. Sexual acts with cult prostitutes, male or female, were encouraged as part of the religious rites observed by followers of these false religions. **This is the cultural backdrop for the story of Abraham, the patriarchs, and the history of Israel in the OT.**

It is important for us to see that **the desire for peace and prosperity, security and abundance, are ancient felt needs of humankind.** In a world that could sometimes become inhospitable or unpredictable, people were very

much aware of how fragile their security and stability were. **From ancient times, people were trying to “get ahead”, whether to store up a little against future uncertainty, or to improve their lot in life. This is understandable.**

When Yahweh began to call out a people for Himself, part of what He was offering to people was a promise of blessing. *This was not a unilateral, unconditional offer. It was extended to those who would trust in Him and follow His instructions.* It is clear as well, that **it did not mean that there would be no setbacks, hardships or difficulties.** Reading the stories of the OT saints quickly dispels any such notions. **Rather, it meant that God would work on your behalf. He would help you. He would be your Source and your Security. He would oversee your life and care for you.**

Many today are proclaiming a notion of prosperity that is not consistent with the teachings of the scriptures. Again, so many are quick to accept what is being taught without carefully checking into it from the biblical worldview. As is often the case with aberrant teachings, **one of the problems is that our English words are not as precise as the original words.** For example, there are 5 Hebrew verbs that are translated as “prosper” in our English translation, but they don’t necessarily mean what some prosperity preachers seem to be saying. **The word, *yatab*, means that God would “cause it to go well” for someone, or would “do you good” (Gen. 32:9,12; Deut. 28:63; 30:5; Judg. 17:13).** *This does not necessarily mean financial abundance.* The opposite of this was “to cause you to perish” or “to destroy you” (Deut. 28:63). It basically means that God will “treat us well”. Another word, *tsalach*, means to **“have success, to advance, or to cause to thrive”.** It was used of Joseph while a slave in Potiphar’s house. *It meant success, but not necessarily wealth,* at least in this case (Gen. 39:3,23; cf. Deut. 28:29; I Chron. 22:13; II Chron. 24:20; Prov. 28:13; Isa. 53:10; 54:17; Jer. 2:37; 5:28; 22:30; Dan. 3:30; 8:12,24). **The word, *sakal*, means to “be wise, prudent”,** yet it is translated as “prosper” (Deut. 29:9; Isa. 52:13). **Another word, translated as “make you plenteous” (KJV) or “prosper you abundantly” (NASB) in Deut. 30:9 is *yathar*, meaning “to have extra, some left over, more than enough”.** *Having some left over in the Biblical world view was to be abundantly prospered. We routinely throw leftovers away, and think little of it!* When we think of being “abundantly prospered”, we are thinking of abundant cash flow over and above what we are spending. **Finally, the word, *shalach*, means “to have peace and quiet” (Job 12:6; Ps. 122:6; Lam. 1:5), instead of conflict and oppression.** Having peace and safety was considered as “prosperity” in those days.

Part of our problem in understanding Biblical prosperity is that we are not as consciously dependent on the success of our crops or the multiplication of our herds. Most of us don’t even *have* crops or animals. In actuality, the success or failure of crops *does* affect prices, and if bad enough could deeply affect all of our lives. The success of agriculture is *still* the most fundamental aspect of our economy. **Our experience here in the United States has not at all been the common experience of most of the people on the face of the planet.** Before modern refrigeration, food storage technology and our food distribution capabilities, it was not at all uncommon to run out of food, at least for periods of time. **In the Biblical world, drought and famine were closely related, and not uncommon. Famine was not just a matter of higher prices and inconvenience, it was often a matter of life or death.** In Europe, or even in North America, it was not uncommon to run out of food at the end of winter. Again, **starvation or severe malnourishment was a normal part of life for many.** This remains true today in many parts of the world. Having peace, security, enough to eat, health and an opportunity to be self-sufficient would be seen as great blessing and prosperity to many people in this world. Then, to have enough to be able to share with others, that would be incredible. *We already have more than most people dream of!!*

The Bible does teach that God is the one who can give you the ability to work to earn what you need, and more besides. It will require effort and discipline on our parts. It is a principle of the creation God has made that if we do not work, we will not prosper. In the NT we are told not to feed someone who willfully chooses not to work. Work is important. Jesus said, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (Jn. 5:17). **God made us to be productive, like He is. Find something constructive to do, even if it is volunteer work.** God will use that in your life to develop *you* as a person, and to lead you to opportunities. Another important lesson we can learn from the scriptures is that **God will generally bless those who are living in trusting obedience to Him, and will often remove blessings from those who are in rebellion.** This is not a hard and fast rule. Many faithful, obedient people experience hardship, and there are evil people who seem to prosper. If you are looking for God to provide for you, make sure you are honoring Him by the way you live. **Do not be anxious. Know that God is *for* you. Jesus said to seek first the Kingdom of God, and God will give you what you need.** What is the Kingdom of God? It is choosing to serve God as your King. **Finally, keep yourself free from the love of money, be content with what you have, and know that God is with you.** Most of the prosperity preaching out there is about getting more money. *It is telling the richest people on the planet that they don’t have enough, and that they ought to seek God for more.* **What I read in the NT is that the rich people who knew Jesus were eager to use their wealth to help others and expand the Kingdom.** Financial freedom is *not* about having more money, but being free from fear, greed, or covetousness to *use it* well.