

### Prosperity

Over this previous holiday season, I read a book I was given about a man (Charles Mulli) who grew up as an orphan in Africa. He was abandoned by his parents and left to fend for himself as just a little boy. His story is truly amazing to say the least. He became a "Father to the Fatherless" (name of the book) and has lived a life full of faith and wonders that only God could have navigated him through. Of all the touching and truly difficult moments that were expressed in the book (and there were many), there was one instance that struck home with me more so than some of the others. Toward the end of the book, this man was asked the question, "What is prosperity?" by a young man that was volunteering at one of his children's homes. His answer to the young man was born out of the fruit that had been sown and reaped with his life ... he thoughtfully replied to the question, "Prosperity, to me, is a changed life."

I am sure glad that young man asked him that question.

In a day and time when the word "prosperity" in the American church almost always refers to a "How to get mine" doctrine of some sort that's taught any number of ways, it is sure a breath of fresh air and a wake up call to stop and look at "prosperity" with a perspective from heaven. This man's answer, I believe, is God's perspective. Since reading that question and his reply, I have thought a lot about how "prosperity" is a word we throw loosely around and I have wondered if we have totally lost sight (or ever had proper sight) of what prosperity and prospering is truly about. I believe I have spent a large portion of my Christian life lost and blinded to the correct understanding of it just on a day-to-day basis. How we look at prosperity itself is largely a matter of our faith walk, what we fear or don't fear, how we view God and how we see ourselves in relation to our Father and His working through us.

Just before Jesus shared with a crowd of people a story about a rich man whom He referred to as a fool (not because he was rich, but because of the man's stated intentions), He said this:

#### **Luke 12**

*15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*

Let's be honest with ourselves, when we think of prosperity or prospering, how often does our mind go directly to what Jesus referred to here ... the abundance of things we possess, or want to possess? Or let me phrase the question in a different way, how often does our mind go inward to personal possessions as opposed to outward toward "changed lives" as Mr. Mulli referred to? What Jesus was warning of here was that we can falsely make "life" be about what it's truly not about. Covetousness makes life about me and mine and possessions and stuff. Jesus said take heed and beware because that is not what life consists of ... meaning don't be fooled by a lie.

Our life on this earth is like a field. At the end of our life on this earth, we will all have another first breath that comes right after our last breath (should the Lord tarry). What are we sowing in the field that it is our life? Galatians 6 indicates that if we sow to the flesh (the covetous route Jesus spoke of above), we will reap corruption. Why? Because the flesh is a field that is corruptible. It goes on to say that if we sow to the spirit, we will reap everlasting life. Why? Because the spirit is a field that is incorruptible.

#### **Galatians 6**

*7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8*

*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

When we read passages like Galatians 6, we often think of giving money because that is how we have heard it taught from pulpits ... sowing it so we can reap it and be prosperous. However, there is a mixture in that which corrupts because the wrong motives and attitudes of heart are at the foundation of that belief and desire. God intends that our lives be lives of overflow and outflow, and in that overflow and outflow is where the prosperity of heaven manifests. In that overflow and outflow is where real prosperity becomes changed lives. The other route is a trap. We are designed to be rivers ... not lakes. Jesus would say, "He who is a lake is a fool."

Paul's counsel to Timothy was that those who desire to be rich (not "are rich", but "desire to be rich") fall into temptations, snares and into foolish and harmful lusts that drown them in destruction. If we listen carefully to that which is taught about prosperity by many in the church today, we can hear a pull from this motive of a desire to be rich. "Give and God will send a 100 fold return!" I'm sure you have heard something along those lines before. The pull is directly targeted at the flesh and at a desire to be rich. It's plain and clear ... and a trap waits along that path. Each of us is responsible for knowing what we believe and why we believe it. There will be no excuses because the Teacher abides in us all and is perfectly willing at all times to do His job with each of us individually and corporately.

The prosperity of heaven has this characteristic ... no fear. There is nothing in the prosperity of heaven that produces the attitude of "I can't". There is nothing in the prosperity of heaven that drives us to say "I must do this or that so that my soul can have rest." Heaven's prosperity does not pose a soul originated question of "What shall I do so I can store up more?" "What can I do so I can make it?" It's the worry of Matthew 6. "What are we going to eat, wear, drive? Where are we going to live?" The truth is there is a fleshly want and desire toward "laying up of treasure for ourselves" but there is also a want and desire of "richness toward God" which flows from our spirit. The two are in tension and opposition with one another. The passage we look at below about the rich man is clear about it.

It doesn't mean that there is never a storing up of treasure that is put in our stewardship ... but the storing of treasure is never fear based, it's never worry based, it's never anxiety based. Rather, it is strategic of the Lord. It's easy to tell the difference if we are honest with ourselves, but regardless, God knows our heart. He sees our heart and makes decisions about what to do with His wisdom based on what He sees.

When we read the rest of the story below of the rich man, notice a couple of things: The rich man was already rich ... already prosperous. He already had barns for storage. He had been prosperous in previous days. That much is evident. Jesus didn't refer to him as a fool because he was rich and had been prosperous in previous days. He referred to him as a fool when he started up with the intentions of tearing those barns down so he could hoard more. Instead of overflow and outflow ... it was hoard, hoard, hoard. That's foolish.

His was the same problem that the Rich Young Ruler had a few chapters later in Luke 18. He didn't believe that God was big enough to re-invent year after year, to re-supply year after year, to keep the pipeline full and flowing year after year. So, he was not willing to make decisions as though this was true about God as Jesus encouraged him to make those decisions. The truth is that God's wisdom and power can change in a second every

single situation to favor His family and kingdom ... on a tremendously grand scale if needed.

When God prospers someone, it is a Family and Kingdom operation for Kingdom purposes. It comes from His hand at His discretion. The overflow and outflow is an attitude of the heart that God can see well before increasing our stewardship. The heart issues of prosperity, like everything else are important to God. He sees the heart. He hears our heart in the words that come out of our mouth. It's not like we can hide it from Him and fool Him. He sees and hears it even if we don't (which is true a lot of times).

Now let's look at the heart of this rich man in Luke 12.

### **Luke 12**

*16 Then (after He had warned of covetousness in v.15) He 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, '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 toward God."*

We see this man's heart right off the bat when he realizes a prosperous harvest is at hand. What did he do first? He "thought within himself". We find out quickly that his soul (mind, will, emotions, intellect) is driving him around because we can see by his conversation that his soul is who he is trying to satisfy and please. God can see this in our heart regardless of what we say out loud ... this man simply "thought within himself".

Ever notice how when a wave of prosperity or plenty has arrived or is anticipated we start spending and investing those greenbacks even before they arrive? Why? We view it as ours ... that's why. That's what this rich man was contemplating. His ground had yielded plentifully, so he was consulting with the part of him that was in control. He didn't consult with God about what was coming did he? He didn't view God as the owner of it. His words and actions make that much very clear. How do we respond in the same situation? Who we consult with is a great marker for where or who we see as owner.

Here is the truth. We each have to allow God to evaluate our hearts when we are in a position of plenty. There has to be a lot of stopping and listening for this to truly be accomplished. God spoke to my heart one time that one of the highest prices to pay is pressing in for more of Him in times of fatness (or you could say prosperity). Why? Because we like to coast ... we like to sit back and let our soul have its ease just like this rich man was anticipating doing. Jesus gave his "beware" statement because desires can be fulfilled in times of fatness. A plentiful harvest can enable the fulfillment of a lot of desires. Traps and snares are in the path of those desires. Psalms 37 says to delight yourself in the Lord and He shall give you the desires of your heart. The difference is "Him giving them" versus "us taking them".

In a position of plenty, a rich man's first mistake is his view of ownership. Whose is the plenty? This is the foundation. Are we not bought with a price ... not our own? If this foundation is set properly, it actually becomes impossible to make the mistake that the rich

man made in Luke 12. Why? Because “me” and “mine” are now removed from the equation and the soul is no longer the party who is driving the bus and needs to be satisfied.

When prosperity on earth meshes with the intent of prosperity in heaven ... lives are changed. What I didn't relate at the beginning about Mr. Mulli was that he became a multimillionaire with numerous businesses ... a significant accomplishment in Africa starting from where he started. He was serving God all along, but there came a point when God wanted to shift gears with him and take the plenty and focus it on the fatherless. Overflow and outflow. What he had amassed had been strategic of the Lord. When God came to him there was a battle there and he yielded to God. Virtually all of what he had amassed was used to accomplish being a father to the fatherless. So you see why his view of “what is prosperity?” was answered with “it is changed life”. That's what happened with his prosperity ... it became changed lives. He didn't view it as his own and he didn't consult with his mind, will and emotions in ultimately deciding what to do with it. And, I would bet 1000:1 that if you asked him if he ever had to do without in the midst of those decisions, he'd tell you emphatically “No”.

Isaiah 45 speaks of the treasures of darkness. The real treasures of darkness are controlled lives. Controlled lives are the only way Satan can gain power and influence in the earth. Taking those treasures from him and changing those lives ... that's bottom line prosperity from God's perspective. The rest of it is just a means of accomplishing that end. The rich man specifically chose against overflow and outflow ... thus no lives were changed and he was a fool. Let's not be fools.

Like I said, I am sure glad that young man asked that question. Amen.

### **Matthew 6**

*26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*