**Earthly Prosperity – Why Not Everybody?**

The New Testament clearly teaches that our material blessings come from God. Paul told the Athenian philosophers that “He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25). He told Timothy to “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). But let’s face it: Some folks are doing really well while others are barely getting by. Why is that? If we owe God our thanks for our physical blessings, why isn’t He blessing everyone equally? I don’t have all the answers, but the Scriptures give us some insight. Let’s start with a factor that is *not* relevant.

**Look at how righteous I am!** Nope, this isn’t it. In fact, the first century church was made up of both rich people and poor people with those of modest means being in the majority (James 2:5). Some Christians were driven to poverty by those who resented their faith (Revelation 13:17). (Sort of like photographers and bakers and florists who refuse to participate in festivities they believe are sinful.) Even Jesus said, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” No, prosperity is not a sign of righteousness and poverty is no indication that a person has spiritual problems.

**Where you were born can make a big difference.** Some economic systems are breeding grounds for widespread poverty. Some cultures are so steeped in corruption that dishonesty and injustice are rewarded over honesty and initiative. Some regions of the world have been war-torn for so long, meaningful economic activity is simply not possible. God designed us as beings of free will, and, sadly, poor judgment and sinful behavior has consequences, even for the innocent. Sometimes outside assistance is difficult because of the ruthlessness of those in positions of power. God will hold those leaders accountable for their cruelty and injustice.

**There are factors within the individual’s control.** Folks with positive attitudes, strong work ethics and initiative tend to do pretty well, while those without these attributes tend to struggle. Interestingly enough, the New Testament instructs Christians to develop and exhibit these positive characteristics, but having them is no guarantee of success. There are simply too many factors that are beyond one’s control to arrogantly proclaim sole credit when things go well.

**Some have extra precisely so they can help.** Paul taught that we should labor at what is good so we will have something to share with those who have need (Ephesians 4:28). He is basically saying that we often will end up with more than we actually need and can use it to help others. In fact, 2 Corinthians 9:8-9 seems to suggest that, at times, God will ensure that some folks have extra for precisely that reason. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, ‘He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.’”

**I’m not privy to God’s providential care.** A young Jewish girl named Esther was taken from among a nation of captives in Persia and made queen. Why was she blessed with royalty while her friends remained in their poor neighborhoods? In this case, we are told that the Israelite people were being threatened with annihilation and that influence was needed to thwart the plot. Esther’s uncle Mordecai said it best: “Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Excellent question. God won’t whisper in our ear; we must continually express our gratitude and watch for opportunities to serve Him as well as others.

**True success is spiritual, not temporal.** This is really the key to the whole issue. Every spiritual blessing is in Christ (Ephesians 1:3); Forgiveness of sins, membership in God’s family, the peace of mind that comes from complete trust in God and the hope of eternal salvation. Even a Christian with absolutely nothing in this life is richly blessed beyond comprehension. James taught that my life is a puff of smoke compared to eternity; my comfort level while I am here is essentially irrelevant.

**Contentment is the key.** Paul said, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity” (Philippians 4:11-12). A Christian of modest means thanks God for what he has and does what he can to help others. A Christian of considerable means thanks God for what he has and does what he can to help others. In the end, all Christians put their complete hope and trust in God, not the material things of this life. They seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, confident that He will provide for their basic needs (Matthew 6:33). Anything beyond that is of no real importance anyway.

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