

BULLEEN BAPTIST CHURCH

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SERIES : "Resources For Life's Crises"

STUDY 6 : Sunday, June 20, 2004

"Responding to Prosperity"

Notes by Rev. Gary Lockyer

INTRODUCTION

This Study is

- A warning to avoid the deadly traps associated with materialism and greed
- A reminder that true fulfilment is not to be found in amassing wealth
- A call to consider that following Christ requires that we put him first at the expense of all that the world tells us that we must have.

We note :

- that poverty and prosperity are relative within a culture and across cultures
- that a pursuit after prosperity can be stronger in someone who feels themselves to be poor than in someone who is more wealthy, but not "addicted" to their wealth.
- that the issue has more to do with how we think than with an actual level of wealth.

How can prosperity bring on a crisis? Surely poverty has more significant problems attached to it? Viewed from our perspective, maybe; but viewed from God's perspective, prosperity has a range of significant dangers. To summarise:

Prosperity brings on a crises in our RELATIONSHIPS when our priorities are

- to SEEK greater wealth for its own sake,
- to be DEPENDENT on (addicted to) a lifestyle made possible only by that wealth,
- and to PURSUE continued material abundance.

A. A DANGER TO RELATIONSHIPS

A life centred around the acquisition and enjoyment of material things is a life that has little room for committed, significant relationships :

1. WITH OTHER PEOPLE.

"I love kids, but I don't want any. I'm too selfish to give what is necessary to raise them properly. Eventually I'd resent them from taking me away from my interests."

"I may have a child in five years or so when we can afford good child care. We want our careers to be established and have all the material things we want. At the moment we can't afford good child care and all the things we like."

... from an interview with "promising young executives" in "Fortune" magazine

When pursuing prosperity, people are seen as either DISTRACTIONS along the way or THINGS to be used in order to reach the goal. Eg. Acts 16:16-19 - the slave-girl's owners were distressed that their money making was at an end, rather than pleased that she was healed!

2. WITH GOD

In the Old Testament, worshipping an idol is classed as "Spiritual Adultery"

"On every high hill and under every spreading tree, you lay down as a prostitute. How can you say, 'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals?' You are a she-camel in heat. Who can restrain her? You said, 'It's no use. I love foreign gods and I must go after them.'"
... From Jeremiah 2:20-25

Paul said that "greed is idolatry" (Col3:5)

Jesus said : "You cannot serve two masters. You will ... be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Mat6:24)

John's vision of "Babylon the Great" in Rev18 combines the two images of greed and adultery. (Rev18:3, 9) The call? "Come out of her, my people so that you will not share in her sins or receive her plagues." (Rev18:4)

God requires that our allegiance is to him ALONE; he will not share us with another.

See Josh24:14-15, 1Kng18:21; Jer1:2, 2:32, 3:1, 6-8

B. THE SEARCH FOR GREATER PROSPERITY

1. BLINDS us to our true condition before God (Rev3:17-18) *"When men prosper, they can hardly believe that they are so ill when they feel so well."* (Richard Baxter)

2. Causes us to REJECT the "Good News" of Jesus. (Mt13:22; or TURNS us away from following him. (1Tim6:10, 2Tim4:10, Mt19:16-23; Lk8:14)

3. SETS the wrong priority : What is our heart's desire, to be like Christ or to be wealthy?

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and into harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. They wander from the faith and pierce themselves with grief. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil " (1Tim6:9-10)

NOTE 1 : Here is the paradox, it's possible to be both, but not possible to seek both!

NOTE 2 : Note that the rich are not more inherently sinful than the poor - its just that they have more resources in order to indulge their sinful nature and inflict their selfishness on others.

4. LEADS us on a course to futility : (Ecc2:10-11) We forget that "man cannot live by bread alone." (Deut8:3 / Mt4:4) *"I am the most miserable man on earth"* (John Jacob Astor)

5. PROMOTES pride, arrogance and abuse of power. (1Cor4:7, 1Tm6:17, Jms5:1-6)

C. SOME "RESPONDING TO PROSPERITY" STRATEGIES

1, Cultivate CONTENTMENT : (1Tim6:6-8; Php4:11-12)

2. TRUST God for our security : (Php4:11-12; 1Tim6:17; Mat6:25-34)

3. MAINTAIN our first priority - *"Seek first the kingdom"* (Mat6:33) and refuse to fill our lives with things that, while good, distract us from our calling. (2Tim2:1-7; Lk14:16-24)

4. WATCH the drift away from God (Deut8:6-18 cf. the attitude of David in 1Ch29:10-18)

5 PRACTICE generosity irrespective of "wealth" : (2Cor8:1-5; 1Tim6:17-19)

D. and lastly THE MOST VALUABLE THING IS FREE

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come buy and eat.. ... Isaiah 55:1

"Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take freely of the gift of the water of life." ... Rev22:17

"By grace are you saved - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." ... Eph 2:8

For Further Thought

1. Paul does not command "the rich" to divest themselves of all they own (1Tim6:17-18) List what he does command. See 2Cor9:7 What principles of stewardship do you see in these references?

2. Comment on : "What matters is not our actual level of wealth, but our attitudes to what we have and how we use it."

3. Look up the references from point C.4 How does Moses' warning relate to us in the 21st century. In what ways is David's approach an antidote to the attitudes that Moses warns