

Message #88 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"A Perspective On Prosperity"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about a subject which stirs up a lot of people in our Christian churches. It is the subject of prosperity. There are pros and cons to the subject, and there are many people in the church today on each side of the fence. I'd like to make some observations though, and you can make your own determination as to what you believe. For myself, I don't mind telling you straight up that I think the prosperity doctrine which is being preached in many church circles is absolute anti-Christ in nature, and that Satan is behind it. You can think what you want to think, but I believe the Bible is very clear about the evils of being rich. However, it isn't my intention to use the time today to complain about the teachers who preach the prosperity doctrine. What I'd really like to do is to explain some Bible principles by taking a look at some scriptures which describe the appropriate and inappropriate ownership of riches. Certainly, money is a necessity for Christians, just as in all other aspects of the financial world. And, if no one ever had any money, it would be pretty difficult to procure some of the necessary provisions of daily living, and the church would also probably suffer from a financial viewpoint, for there would be no building and maintaining of ministerial organizations.

However, in today's church environment there are many evangelical type preachers who teach a prosperity oriented doctrine. And, generally, they are pretty successful. The reason for their success is an interesting point. If you're willing to remain open minded for just a little bit longer, think about the various TV evangelists who teach that God wants us to be rich, and notice one major interesting point. In each and every case, they make a huge effort to ask their congregations for money. In addition to asking for donations, they also tend to instruct their

people that by giving a lot of money into the church coffers, they themselves will be given great riches by God. It is called, a doctrine of sowing seed money. It is intended to mean that if you give a small amount of money to the church, God can only bless you financially in a small way. And, if you give a great sum of money to the church, then God will bless you greatly. In this way the evangelists preach a doctrine which appeals to the greed of fleshly minded persons.

Of course, this whole concept is nothing new. The only thing that puzzles me is how stupid can people be? TV evangelists and even small time preachers who teach this prosperity doctrine seem to be like the old carnival phrase which says, "there's a sucker born every minute." In the days of the carnival, which actually still exist to some extent, the hawkers would line the midway and induce people to try their luck at a game of chance. It was the intention of the hawkers of the carnival game to try to get as much money out of a person as possible. Some of the games at carnivals might be considered fairly harmless, but in some instances, the games could take a sizable sum of money from a person before they really knew what was happening. The carnival hawkers depended on the ignorance and sometimes foolishness on the part of the customers, and, sad to say, the people rarely disappointed them. A carnival was the perfect example of that old saying, "A fool and his money are soon parted."

And this brings us to one of the first considerations for today's message. If you're a person who is giving your support to a ministry which teaches that God wants us to be rich with money, then do you actually realize that you're the sucker, just like those people that the carnival hawkers are looking for? The doctrine that says that God can bless you greatly if you give a very large donation to the church, is a false doctrine. God looks on the heart, not on the outward appearances. Sure, I know that the preachers of the get rich message have lots of scriptures that they use to prove that God wants you to be rich. But, let me ask you one simple question, and then see if you still think that the doctrine these people preach is still on the up and up. And, the question is this. When the preachers tell you that God wants to bless you if you will give a certain sum of money, where is it that the preachers are telling you to give it? Do they tell you to give it to the poor in your neighborhood, or to some widows and orphans personally, or do they tell you that you need to give it to them and let them decide where to put it? I can answer that question for you, if you haven't already figured it out. They will, in every case, be encouraging you to give your donation to the ministry, to the preachers organization themselves, and would never encourage you to give it to a local situation without channeling it through the church or ministry first. They want to get their hands on your money, and you're the one who is listening to them and believing them. Prosperity ministers teach prosperity, not so that you will prosper in Christ Jesus, but so that they and their own ministries will prosper.

If you are someone who is connected with a ministry where the minister teaches prosperity, I'm fairly certain that your minister, or the TV evangelist you watch, will tell you that God wants you to prosper so that you can help others through ministry. In other words, the minister will be wanting you to give large sums of money to the church and telling you that the reason for this is to reach others with the gospel. However, if you want to open your eyes, take a few minutes to consider what kind of lifestyle this minister is living himself. Do they live in a very nice house

and drive a very nice car? Do they wear very nice clothes and eat in very nice restaurants all the time? Do they always have money for very nice vacations and very nice luxuries that you don't have? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that for the most part, preachers of the prosperity doctrine live pretty high on the hog, and that their luxurious lifestyles are supported by those who donate.

In prosperity oriented churches and ministries, there are two kinds of people who attend. One is the Christian who has a heart for God and for the things of God, and who wants very much to give to God all that they can give in order for God's work to be done. And the other type of person in these churches are people who are sucked in by the prosperity theme and actually have a heart that is full of greed. Quite frankly, the prosperity doctrine appeals to people with greed. It appeals to ministers which have a heart full of greed and to those of their congregation who also have hearts full of greed.

And, just in case you're still wondering if I know what I'm talking about, ask yourself this simple question. When the widow Jesus referred to in the Bible gave her two mites into the temple treasury, how much did she have left? The answer is, "Nothing." She gave all that she had. Jesus said that her gift had been greater than all the huge sums that the Pharisees were giving, or anyone else. Jesus did not equate the greatness of the gift with an actual sum of money, but equated the greatness of the gift with all the assets which the person owned. Because the widow had given all that she had, Jesus considered her gift to be the greatest gift given by all. If you want to give greatly to God, you don't have to be rich to do that. God doesn't need a million dollars or even a thousand dollars from you in order to finance his work in this earth. What he needs from you is a great gift. You can be as prosperous as you wish, and become a millionaire. But, if you then give 50,000 dollars as an offering, it will be much less then the two mites given by the widow. If you're a millionaire, the only way your gift can be great in the eyes of God in comparison to the widow is if you give all your money. You would have to give a million dollars. Then it would be a great gift, because it would be all you had.

What the teachers of the prosperity doctrine are telling the people is that God wants you to be rich so that you can give sizable gifts to them, and they tell you that you can then still keep most of it for yourself. Certainly, the preachers of this doctrine keep a lot of it for themselves. Have you ever looked into how expensive and extravagant a lifestyle is being lived by some of the ministers in the big churches and on TV? If you do, it will either make you sick or it will make you envious. For the sake of your own soul, I hope that it makes you sick.

So, what kind of prosperity does the Bible teach that is appropriate, and how can a doctrine of prosperity really hold true with the word of God? First, in order to answer that question, let's look at the parable that Jesus taught concerning a camel going through the eye of a needle. The parable is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but we'll just read the description out of Matthew. Matthew 19:23-26, says, "Then said Jesus to his disciples, Truly I say to you, That a rich man shall, with difficulty, enter into the kingdom of heaven. 24 And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?
26 But Jesus looked at them, and said to them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”

Notice that Jesus tells his disciples that for a camel to actually go through the eye of a needle is an impossibility for man, but it is possible with God. If it is impossible with man, this rules out the story of a short gate in Jerusalem where a camel could only enter it by crawling through on its knees. Sometimes this type of story is developed to deter the scriptures from their true warning message and to keep the prosperity doctrine alive. But Jesus made it very clear. If you are a rich person, you can't make it into heaven. Now, hold on a minute, and let's see then how it is possible with God for a rich man to enter heaven, even though it is impossible from man's perspective. The simple plain answer is this. If you consider that the riches you have are yours, and you don't want anything to happen to them, then you are rich and cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. However, if you consider whatever riches you have to be God's riches, and freely give them anytime and anywhere that God moves you to do so, then, therefore, they aren't actually your riches, and in the eyes of God, you're not rich.

The real key to understanding whether you are rich or your riches are God's riches, is what you really feel. If you have a feeling of greediness, or, if you like to live with plentiful provision, or, if when you give you think about getting something in return, then you are in trouble. You're in trouble because you have your focus on money instead of on God. You're in trouble because you are focused on getting rather than on giving.

You may think that to prosper is a good thing, because of the scripture in 3rd John, verse 2, which says, “Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers.” But it is certainly true that one scripture cannot be taken out of context. If you read scripture, you must include the context of other scriptures. We should take a look at some of these verses. How about 1 Timothy 6:5, which tells us that any doctrine which teaches that getting gain is a godly thing is a false doctrine. Paul's letter to Timothy is explaining that Christians need to separate themselves from teachers and preachers who teach that God wants you to be rich. It tells us to turn away from these people, not give our money into their coffers in order that they might spend five hundred dollars on dinner in a fancy restaurant, or twenty five hundred dollars on a hotel room for one night. By the way, have you ever thought about how many poor peoples donations it takes to eat one luxury meal? If you're a lady on social security, and you give \$20 to one of these ministers, I would assume that your purpose is that the gospel would be preached to all the world. However, it would take 25 of you ladies on social security to provide just one of these TV evangelists a meal at one of their fancy restaurants. Don't be deceived. Most of your money isn't going for the gospel, it is going for the luxurious stimulation of the flesh.

Listen to what James 5:1-6 says. “ Come now, you rich men, weep and howl because of the miseries that will come upon you. 2 Your treasures are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver is corroded; and their corrosion will be a witness against you, and

will eat your flesh as if it was fire. You have heaped treasure together for the last days. 4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who have harvested your fields, which you have kept back by fraud, cries: and the cry of those who have reaped has entered into the ears of the Lord of armies. 5 You have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; you have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and killed the righteous; and he does not resist you.”

Notice that this last verse refers to the rich people who have abused the righteous people. This refers to those evil people who have taken unfair advantage of the righteous poor and taken away from them their lives. These prosperity preachers are like ravenous wolves, and are condemning and killing the righteous people. That last phrase, “and he does not resist you,” is like the poor people with true hearts who give to these destroyers. You don't resist them, and they continue to take away your power to spread the true gospel by taking your money and spreading a doctrine which is anti-Christ in nature. It is a doctrine of the flesh. It is a message of sinful stimulation with earthly things. You should do a little research to see if the wonderful words of their mouths line up with the lifestyle they are living. A person can speak words of Jesus Christ all they want to, but if their lifestyle is centered on riches, then their true message is of Satan, and not of Jesus Christ at all.

Matthew 13:22, tells us that the deceitfulness of riches will rise up and choke out the word of God. Luke 6:24, tells us that if we are rich in this world, we have already received our reward. In essence, your greediness for money will be your reward, and you need not look forward to a heavenly reward.

Let's take a look at Luke 12:15-21. It gives a very good perspective of how God feels about riches. It says, “ And he said to them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. 16 And he spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to store my fruits? 18 And he said, This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater ones; and there will I bestow all my fruits 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 shall be required of you: then whose shall those things be, which you have provided? 21 So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Notice that verse 15 is a warning which warns us against being covetous. Covetousness is wanting what is really not yours to have, and trying to get more and more. It is the opposite of being content with the things God provides you. In this parable, the rich man had more than he even had places to store it. This is equivalent to people who have many different bank accounts and investments in order to contain all their wealth. But God says to this man that he is a fool, for he will end up dying and then will have no riches at all. This last verse, verse 21, explains that anyone who lays up treasure on this earth for themselves, and is not giving it richly toward God, is a fool. The riches you can have must be those with which you give greatly toward God, expecting nothing in return. If you consider it to be just a sowing of seed money so that you can

receive back a greater sum of money, then all you're really doing is investing your money in God. You're not giving anything. You're just investing, but investing in God instead of the stock market. How do you think God feels about someone using him to get more things of earth? You may be fooled, but God is not fooled.

Well, let's leave this topic for today, and end it with this. If you're impressed by a little man in a white suit that says, "God wants to bless you today," then watch out. This little man will also tell you that in order for God to bless you, you will need to donate as much money as you can to this man's ministry. In fact, this little man will even give what are supposed to be words of prophecy to support his claim. And, to give false prophecy in order to sway the people to give more money, is just about as wicked as you can get. But, if you haven't seen enough of the rich ministers hawking their carnival games, then I guess you're just going to have to keep giving them your money. I just hope your own personal heart is right with God and that there's no greed attached to your giving. But, please, if you really want to further the gospel of Jesus Christ, then stop throwing your money away on false prophets and start putting it where it can really do some good. Besides, just how much of your money, do you think, is spent on buying those white suits and expensive furnishings instead of on the gospel? Probably more than you think!