

The Bible Doesn't Say That: Obedience leads to Financial Blessing

Philippians 4:10-13;19

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Canadians are rich! So if you google "How rich am I" you will come to a website called "Givingwhatyoucan.org." And if you punch in your yearly income it will tell you what percentile of wealth you fall into. And it turns out average Canadians are really rich.

So if you will make \$73,000 in 2020 you qualify as one of the top 1% of all humanity – not Canada, humanity. That means it's you, me, Bill Gates and Julius Caesar hanging out here at the top. Now the Canadian dollar has slumped over the last few years. Just seven years ago, the first time I referenced this website, it only required somewhere around \$60,000 to hit the top 1%.

So we can bemoan that, but even so, Stats Can says the average household income in Canada this year will be around \$75,000. So depending on how many people are in your home there are a lot of us who qualify.

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But maybe you don't. I mean who cares about those rich guys. Maybe you are thinking: "Boy, \$73,000 would sure be nice! I fall a long way short of that! I'm poor."

Not likely. Here's the crazy thing, if you are on CERB because you lost your job due to COVID-19 then you are making \$2000 a month. And this qualifies you for being in the top 10% of the richest people who have ever lived.

In order to be globally poor – or poorer than half the people on earth, you have to make less than \$3530 Canadian this year – and if you're living in mom's basement you have to add her income to yours. So no matter how poor you think you are today, when humanity is polled, most of the world thinks we're loaded.

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Now today we are going to talk a little about blessing. And we are going to do this as us – as wealthy people. We've got no choice but to bring our experience to the table.

Let me start by asking you a question, and if you are watching this live just fire your answer into the chat on the side: When people talk about being blessed what kinds of things are they referring to? Or perhaps think about times you've described yourself as blessed. What kinds of things have happened in your life that made you feel that way?

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As you are answering that go ahead and grab your Bible from wherever it is you left it. Today we are in Philippians 4 starting in verse 10.

If you are looking for Philippians it's in the New Testament: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians or General Electric Power Company. And we are in Philippians 4 and looking at a very familiar passage as we continue our series – The Bible Doesn't Say That.

So would you stand with me wherever you are as we come to God's word.

[Read Philippians 4:10-13;19]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Now verses 13 and 19 are the famous ones here. And they have been used to paint a picture of how God blesses His followers. The problem is that they often get taken out of context to do this.

So here's how people take this: Verse 19 says "God will meet all your needs." And Verse 13 says "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength." So we put that together and conclude that if we are obedient then God will bless us – and usually that blessing is material.

Of course I'm referring here to a theology called the Prosperity Gospel or the Health and Wealth Gospel which teaches that God blesses His faithful followers with good things – money, health, whatever. Name it and claim it.

Now the bad side of this is obvious. This kind of God is a divine vending machine. So you put a loonie in and a bag of chips pops out. You give God what He wants, so He will give you what you want. This is seeking God to get His stuff.

But ultimately this makes stuff our god as it's what we want. And so this kind of theology is totally opposed to what the Bible teaches.

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Now as you hear this I suspect most of us would say we don't believe in the Prosperity Gospel. But when we look at our actions it's a little more complicated. The truth is that often wealthy Jesus followers into thinking this way.

After all we've got what we've got because God has given it to us – right? I mean, every good and perfect gift comes to us from the Father of Lights – that's James. So the good stuff we've got is from Him. And it's a small jump to move from here to thinking we deserve the good stuff He gives.

After all we've worked hard. We've studied hard. We've been smart with our resources. And we've got a country built on Christian principles – at least our Charter of Rights and Freedoms mentions God, so that should count. So why shouldn't God bless us?

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So the Spruce Kings had their show home lottery draw on Friday this last week. And I like the Spruce Kings and want to support them. And last year I bought a ticket and it gave me a great sermon illustration. So I figured I'd do it again.

And I didn't plan it out like this, but it just so happens that I'm preaching about blessing on the weekend this draw happens. And so wouldn't it be an awesome illustration to talk about how I just won this \$730,000 house! Wouldn't that be a blessing? Maybe you aren't sure about me, but wouldn't it be a blessing if you won?

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Or what if you recovered from a sickness, or narrowly escaped a traffic accident or got a promotion at work or got a parking spot right near the door. Have you ever received something "good" and described it as a blessing? Have you done that? I have.

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But here's the problem, imagine the opposite scenario for a second. Has anything bad ever happened to you and you not described it as a blessing?

So have you ever lost your job, or gotten sick or had the family pet run over by a car, or helped the Spruce Kings fundraise without getting anything in return? Have any of those kinds of things ever happened to you and you not thought of it as a blessing?

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Of course bad things aren't blessings. Well if it isn't a blessing is it a curse? It would be a blessing if I won the house. But I didn't, and I just lost \$150. So is that a curse? Has God cursed me with being a sucker for punishment?

We don't talk that way do we? Why not?

Well we like the idea that God would bless us because we deserve to be blessed, but we don't like the idea that God would curse us because that would imply that we deserve to be cursed.

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So do you deserve to be blessed, or do you deserve to be cursed?

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In Deuteronomy 28 Israel has just come out of slavery in Egypt; they've crossed the desert and were perched on the edge of the Promised Land. And Moses was old and about to die. So he lays out how God's people are supposed to live.

And if you look up Deuteronomy 28 in your Bible it will be titled something like "Blessings for Obedience, Curses for Disobedience." And this is what Moses says:

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully keep all his commands that I am giving you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the world. You will experience all these blessings if you obey the LORD your God:

Your towns and your fields will be blessed.

Your children and your crops will be blessed.

The offspring of your herds and flocks will be blessed.

Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be blessed.

Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be blessed. (Deuteronomy 28:1-6)

And it goes on for 7 more verses talking about how all your enemies will be scattered and the nations will look up to you. It will rain on your crops when it's supposed to. And you will be the head and not the tail. It's quite an awesome passage.

The problem is it doesn't end there. Moses goes on:

But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey all the commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come and overwhelm you:

Your towns and your fields will be cursed.

Your fruit baskets and breadboards will be cursed.

Your children and your crops will be cursed.

The offspring of your herds and flocks will be cursed.

Wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be cursed. (Deuteronomy 28:15-19)

And it goes on, not for 7 more verses, but for 48 verses. And we get a very graphic depiction of boils and mental illness and your spouse cheating on you. All your enemies attack, and they win. It doesn't rain. And eventually you will end up being the tail not the head and your corpse becomes food for the scavenging birds and wild animals. It's one of the most grotesque passages in the Bible.

So the question is what do you deserve, God's blessings or His curses?

Well Moses actually makes it really clear in the first verse of each section. The blessing section starts with the words "If you **fully** obey the LORD your God and **carefully** keep **all** His commands... you will experience all these blessings." Fully, carefully, all.

Well, that's a bit unreasonable. It's pretty hard to fully, carefully obey all God's commands. So I might not get all God's blessings. But I'm sure a lot better than Joe down the road so surely I deserve the Spruce Kings house more than he does.

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That's how we think. But the beginning of the curses section removes any question. Moses says "But if you refuse to listen to the LORD your God and do not obey **all** the commands... I am giving you... **all** these curses will come on you."

Moses says we qualify for all God's curses if we obey most of His commands but not all of them. That's what the Bible says. So let me ask you again, do you deserve God's blessings, or do you deserve His curses?

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I don't know about you, but based on what the Bible says, I deserve to be cursed by God. Your pastor deserves to be cursed by God.

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This is another great time to be asking yourself, “How did I end up on this website listening to this guy?” I mean who listens to a pastor who deserves to be cursed by God?

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This is what the Bible teaches. No one is righteous, not even one. The gospel starts with bad news, and then it pivots:

But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:8)

God stepped off His throne and became one of us in order to take the curse we deserved upon Himself. That’s grace. But here’s the thing, He only takes the curse of those who know they deserve it. Let me give you some examples.

First, the rich young ruler from Matthew 19. He comes to God and asks “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?” In other words “What do I have to give God in order to get Him to give me what I want?”

Jesus says “Go sell your stuff and give it away,” and the rich man goes away sad because when the option is lose your wealth or lose God he is deceived into thinking life without money would be worse than life without God. So was his wealth a blessing or a curse?

What about the wealthy fool from Luke 12? Wouldn’t you love to be featured in the Bible under a heading like this – ouch! Anyway, this guy has so much stuff he needs more storage – his garage is so full he can’t get his car inside. Sound familiar? And so he builds bigger barns because his wealth has convinced him that his future is secure and he can retire. But God replies, “This very night your life runs out, then who is going to get everything you worked for?” Is his wealth a blessing or a curse?

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There are all sorts of examples like this I could site, but let’s look at a couple blessed people.

How about the woman who was bleeding for 12 years? In Jewish culture it would have ostracized her from her family and her friends. She wouldn’t have been allowed to go to the temple. She wouldn’t be able to work. She would have been a total outcast. So was her bleeding a blessing or a curse?

Well it put her in such a desperate spot that she sought out Jesus and touched the hem of His robe. If she hadn’t bled then she wouldn’t have gone to Jesus and Jesus wouldn’t have ever said: “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace” – shalom. Go from here in a perfect relationship with God and those around you. Blessed or cursed?

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How about Peter? One of his best friends gets beheaded and then he gets beaten and thrown in prison. Is it a blessing or a curse? It’s from prison that he sees God show up.

How about Jairus who has a 12-year-old daughter who gets sick and dies. Is it a blessing or a curse? If she doesn't die Jesus and salvation don't come to his house.

How about Paul's thorn in the flesh – blessing or curse? He prays three times for it to go away but God says "No. My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness." It's Paul's thorn that keeps him trusting Jesus. Blessing or curse?

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Every story of God showing up in someone's life in the New Testament; every time Jesus enters the picture always happens in a moment of need. Not one time does Jesus heal someone who doesn't think they need healing. Not one time is someone saved who doesn't think they need saving. That's why Jesus says:

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. (Matthew 5:3)

So having need, is it a blessing or a curse?

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Let's go back to Philippians 4. Paul says: "My God will meet all your needs" and "For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." What this doesn't say is "If I'm obedient, and I work hard, then I can get out of every difficult situation I find myself in." The Bible doesn't say that. Here's how we know.

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The context Paul writes this from is prison. He's in jail. And Roman prisons weren't like ours. People only got fed if they could afford it. And so Paul was starving until the Philippians church sent a gift. This is what Paul's talking about in verse 10.

But then we get something interesting. Paul doesn't say "Thanks for the gift." Instead he tells them, verse 12, about an incredible secret he's learned. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation."

And then he says, verse 13, "I can do all this through Him who gives me strength." That's the context. So verse 13 isn't a blank cheque for getting everything we want. In fact it's the very opposite.

Paul says, with Christ I have the strength to remain content in every situation whether well fed or starving. And this is what we need. So in verse 19 where Paul says "My God will meet all your needs" he isn't saying "God will make sure your mortgage payments get made and your credit card balance stays small."

You don't actually need those things. We don't even need food or family or health or life itself. What we need is Christ. A thousand years from now nobody is going to say "I was sure blessed to eat three meals a day. I was sure blessed that I never defaulted on a mortgage payment. I was sure blessed that I lived until I was 93 in good health."

What we are going to say is “I was blessed because even though I deserved to be cursed, by God’s mercy He granted me the ability to see my need. And so, instead of trusting in my money, instead of trusting in my health, instead of trusting in what people thought of me, I came to Jesus for salvation.” That’s what it means to be blessed.

And nobody gets blessed because they deserve it. People get blessed when God gives mercy – when He gives what we don’t deserve.

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So have you been blessed?

Well, have you failed to obey all the commands God has given you? If yes, then you deserve all His curses and you need a Saviour or you still need a Saviour. Do you see this? If you are recognizing that for the first time or for the thousandth time, then you’ve been blessed. If you don’t then regardless how many RRSP’s you have you aren’t blessed.

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So what do we do? What do sinners do when they realize what they deserve from God but what they have received instead?

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We strive to obey. We strive for holiness in every aspect of our lives. Not to earn His blessing, but because He’s already given it.

If you have been saved you’ve been chosen for blessing by the God of the universe – not because you’re awesome – you aren’t – but because He, by His mercy, decided to save you. You see the Bible doesn’t say God blesses us with good stuff when we are obedient. It says He blesses us with Himself when we recognize our need and come to Him.

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I don’t know what kind of home you grew up in but imagine with me for a second that it was a great home – imagine it was a perfect home – then we can all imagine. And as a child you didn’t really know what you had so you took it for granted, but then imagine that one day you looked out at the brokenness around you and realized the gift your Father had given you. You realized how blessed you are.

And you did the math and realized He didn’t bless you because you did great things for Him – no kid does great things for their parent – but because He was your Father.

What would you say to Him? What would you do?

I want to encourage you to take some time today – take some time right after this to find a quiet spot or go for a walk and revel in the blessing God has given you. Thank Him. Praise Him.

And maybe you’ve never encountered Jesus’ grace before, but in this moment you realize you are a sinner who needs a Saviour – that’s the Holy Spirit blessing you. If this is you click the live prayer button and we would love to pray with you.