

Jesus, the Greatest Prosperity Preacher

by David Servant

Jesus' promise of abundance in Luke 6:38 applies only to those who give sacrificially and live a life of simplicity, not to those who give selfishly to receive more wealth.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:7, Psalm 41:1, Proverbs 3:9, Proverbs 22:16, Isaiah 58:7, Malachi 3:10, Luke 6:38, Luke 12:20, 1 Corinthians 13:3, 2 Corinthians 9:6, James 4:3

Topics: "Sacrificial Giving", "Stewardship"

Description

David Servant preaches on the importance of giving with the right motives, emphasizing the need to interpret Scripture in context and not for personal gain. He highlights how Jesus' promise in Luke 6:38 is often misused by prosperity preachers to promote greed, contrasting it with the true meaning of sacrificial giving and blessings for those who give to the poor. Servant warns against selfish motives in giving and encourages a lifestyle of generosity and simplicity, focusing on laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

Transcript

"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." -- Jesus (Luke 6:38).

The primary reason that Scripture is misinterpreted is because context is ignored. Every verse must be interpreted in light of its surrounding scriptures and within the context of the entire Bible. If our interpretation of any verse does not harmonize with the rest of Scripture, our interpretation needs adjusted.

The wonderful words of Jesus quoted above are certainly among those scriptures that have been abused by ignoring context. So let's consider the context.

Just seconds earlier, Jesus had told the very same audience:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied....But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry....Give to everyone who asks of you...Treat others the same way you want them to treat you...lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great... (Luke

6:20-21, 24-26, 30-31, 35).

Within that context, Luke 6:38 takes on an entirely different meaning than what is often proffered to the masses.

Clearly, Jesus wasn't unveiling a God-guaranteed investment scheme for greedy, rich people who lust for even more wealth. Rather, He was assuring those who would be obediently liquidating their wealth--giving, lending, obeying the Golden Rule--getting out of the "woe" category and into the "blessed" category--that they had nothing to worry about. God would see to it that their needs would be fully supplied--and more. He would pour out an abundant return.

Obviously, however, God was not going to return their giving so they could then lay up treasures on the earth in direct disobedience to one of Jesus' commandments. His return on their giving would supply their own need--created by their sacrificial giving--and it would enable them to give more.

Similarly, within an exhortation to give sacrificially to the poor, Paul once wrote to the Corinthian believers:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed....Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness....you will be enriched in everything for all liberality (2 Cor. 9:8-11, emphasis added).

Notice that three times Paul affirmed that God would bless the Corinthians as they gave, but not so they could hoard up the blessing, but so they could continue to be a blessing to others.

All of this is to say that Jesus' "shaken together, running over" promise applies only to self-denying followers of Christ. It doesn't have the slightest application to the greedy. Yet ripped from its context, that is how it is so often applied by modern prosperity preachers: "Give and you will get rich!" What is more tragic is that modern wolves in sheep's clothing are proclaiming these things to people who are already very rich by comparison to the majority of the world's people.

Prosperity preachers have discovered that their followers will gladly part with some of their beloved money temporarily, as long as they can be convinced that giving is the ticket to more wealth. Such giving requires no love for God or neighbor. It requires only greed.

A Motive Check

Imagine for a moment that I made you an offer, promising to pay you \$500 if you would agree to buy your spouse a gift worth at least \$100. Now imagine the moment when you give your spouse that unexpected gift. You would be showered with appreciation because of your kindness and thoughtfulness. But then imagine what would happen if your spouse discovered your true motive. Imagine how he or she would feel upon learning that you didn't buy the gift because of your love for him or her, but because of the promise of making a profit for yourself! That is how God must feel when His supposed people can be motivated to give only by means of a promise of getting more in return to spend on themselves. And incidentally, He does not bless those who give from a selfish motive:

If I give all my possessions to feed the poor...but do not have love, it profits me nothing (1 Cor. 13:3, emphasis added).

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures (Jas. 4:3).

Giving to get, however, is the main theme of most prosperity preachers. And, if you're familiar with their methods, you know they flaunt their wealth as proof that their teaching works. It never occurs to their gullible followers that in order to make the teaching also work for them, they'll need some gullible followers of their own--from whom they can receive offerings after some Scripture sleight of hand.

Those who give to prosperity preachers (or their "ministries") actually do have at least one promise in the Bible that has application:

He who oppresses the poor to make more for himself, or who gives to the rich, will only come to poverty (Prov. 22:16).

Of course the person who oppresses the poor to make more for himself and the one who gives to the rich have at least one thing in common--they are expecting to profit from their actions. But according to God's promise, when people give to the rich (including rich prosperity preachers), not only will God not return their giving, but He will also see to it that they ultimately lose everything they have. Jesus once made mention of the sudden poverty of a rich man upon his death (see Luke 12:20). Every greedy person ultimately finds himself impoverished. Isn't it safe to say that everyone in hell is fairly poor?

Modern prosperity doctrine is not only selfish, but also short-sighted. It is focused on this life, and it promotes the lie that "life consists of possessions" (Luke 12:15). Jesus taught, however, that those who believe such a lie are fools (Luke 12:20). They, to use Jesus' words, "lay up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). Materially wealthy but spiritually poor, they ultimately find themselves eternally impoverished, both materially and spiritually.

Jesus commands us lay up our treasures in heaven because there they will never perish. Those who obey Him in that regard are "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21) and will forever enjoy "true riches" (Luke 16:11) according to His promises. When you think about it, Jesus was actually the greatest prosperity preacher of all time--but He defined wealth much differently than do most modern prosperity preachers. If He ever wrote a book about prosperity, I think it would be titled, *Your Best Life Later*.

The Promise Applied

I believe that Jesus will keep His Luke 6:38 promise for anyone who applies it (as He meant it in context). I've observed people who are finding ways to live more simply so they can give more and more--who don't limit themselves only to tithing, but who give sacrificially and generously, who live below their means so they can lay up more treasure in heaven--where their hearts are. Those kinds of givers end up being financially blessed in amazing ways. But you wouldn't know it by their lifestyles, because they never multiply their stuff with what God gives them. Rather, they are delighting in having more to give. And give they do.

The kind of people I'm describing have many more scriptures with which they can encourage themselves than just Luke 6:38. Take a look at the promises of blessing below. As you do, take note that the large majority clearly apply only to those who give to the poor--to the chagrin of prosperity preachers and pastors who so often twist these scriptures as they are about to receive offerings for themselves.

If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks....You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings (Deut. 15:7-8, 10, emphasis added).

When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands (Deut. 24:19, emphasis added).

How blessed is he who considers the helpless; the Lord will deliver him in a day of trouble. The Lord will protect him and keep him alive, and he shall be called blessed upon the earth; and do not give him over to the desire of his enemies. The Lord will sustain him upon his sickbed; in his illness, You restore him to health (Ps. 41:1-3, emphasis added).

Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine (Prov. 3:9-10, emphasis added)

And in reference to that last promise, how does one "Honor the Lord from one's wealth"? Proverbs 14:31 tells us:

He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him (Prov. 14:31, emphasis added).

And to continue with our list:

There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered (Prov. 11:24-25).

One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed (Prov. 19:17).

He who is generous will be blessed, for he gives some of his food to the poor (Prov. 22:9).

He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses (Prov. 28:27).

Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry

And bring the homeless poor into the house;

When you see the naked, to cover him;

And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then your light will break out like the dawn,

And your recovery will speedily spring forth;

And your righteousness will go before you;

The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

You will cry, and He will say, "Here I am"...

And if you give yourself to the hungry

And satisfy the desire of the afflicted,

Then your light will rise in darkness

And your gloom will become like midday.

And the Lord will continually guide you,

And satisfy your desire in scorched places,

And give strength to your bones;

And you will be like a watered garden,

And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail (Is. 58:7-11).

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Mal. 3:10).

In reference to that last promise, and contrary to what many pastors want their congregations to know, under the old covenant, tithes were not only given to the priests and Levites, but also to aliens, orphans and widows (see Deut. 14:28-29, 26:12-13). And incidentally, the priests and Levites did not live at a higher standard than all the rest of the people of Israel. When God spoke through Malachi in the above-quoted verses, it is likely that the priests and Levites were living at a lower standard than the average Israelite--putting them in the category of the poor--since the entire nation was withholding tithes (see Mal. 3:8-9).

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

This final promise is also found in the context of two chapters that are all about giving to the poor.

In light of all these promises that for the most part apply only to those who give to the poor, it is incredible that rich preachers and pastors regularly receive offerings--of which no portion makes it to the poor--while promising God's blessing upon those who give. This common phenomena is even more incredible when we consider the fact that the Bible promises God's curse upon those who give to the rich and warns that no greedy person will enter God's kingdom (see 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5)! Is there any greater example of the blind leading the blind?

Get Rich--Quick!

If you aren't tithing, that is a great place to start. If you are already tithing, I suggest that you set your sights higher. Figure out how you can live on less and give more because you love God and your neighbor. Live below your means. Get out of debt as fast as you can. Seek first the kingdom of God with the money He entrusts to you. Get rich--quick! Truly rich! Eternally rich!

And if you live in Disney World like the rest of us and are having a difficult time finding fellow believers who need food, clothing, shelter and water, then visit OrphansTear.org and IWasHungry.org. 100% of all that is received for any project by either ministry is sent to those with the actual needs. Nothing is used for administration, and nothing goes to any prosperity preachers--with just one exception--prosperity preacher Jesus, incarnated in "the least of these" among His family!

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