

Disciples

Stewardship

Introduction

The life of Jesus reset the faithful's expectation of God when it comes to material blessing. The Torah suggest that you will prosper if you do the right thing, live for God and prosperity will follow.

Deuteronomy starkly presents it. Positively Moses says

¹⁵ See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. ¹⁶ For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)

Negatively Moses says

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, ¹⁸ I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. (Deuteronomy 30:17-18)

Some branches of Christianity follow a similar pattern. Believing that by practicing good behaviour blessing follows and cursedness follows bad behaviour. The life of Jesus clearly shows that although the simplicity of this idea is inviting it cannot be used to describe the Christian life in general. Jesus was a perfect man, yet he ended his life on a cross. Jesus' disciples also experienced significant suffering. We can even draw on the life of Job in the Old Testament to see and good life well lived exposed to suffering.

Christianity clearly shows that health and material comfort are not indicators of a holy life. There was a time when they were considered an acceptable measure by God's people, but they have not been an effective measure for at least two millennia. Rather the Apostle Paul and Jesus challenged those who were materially comfortable. Yet we also need to understand that being financial wealthy is morally neutral in and of itself but does mean that the wealthy, in particular need to be careful how they live. Following a rather harsh parable Jesus concludes,

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48b)

Wealth from a Christian perspective is a double edge sword. It is good and provides opportunity and comfort, but we're also called to keep a light grip on it, everything is ultimately God's. Paul encourages Timothy the young pastor at the church in Ephesus, to teach and instruct the wealthy.

Living before God

Wealth can provide comfort, but it cannot save that which is most precious, our souls.

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

John Chrysostom was a Church Father that lived across the fourth and fifth centuries after Jesus, and commenting on the words of Paul, says,

‘and this advice he (the apostle) gives, knowing that nothing so generally produces pride and arrogance as wealth’ (Mounce 2000: 366)

A rather harsh thing to say, but it recognises that wealth provides a ‘sense’ of isolating those that have it from some of the poverty related ravages of the world. We might feel beyond the cold grasp of poverty, and we might be, but others aren’t. God invites us to use our wealth toward the betterment of others lives.

The spirituality of wealth

Wealth can be spiritual and be a great asset to our growth as disciples.

18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

The spirituality of disciples can be measured according to how free they feel, and this can be displayed by practicing the following.

1. Am I free to do good whether it will be repaid?
2. Can I offer good deeds to other people?
3. Am I growing in generosity?

The transforming power of wealth

Wealth can transform people’s lives.

If you have ever lived in poverty, you will know that it is cruel. If we have been without food, you will know that it causes an ache in the stomach. The Apostle Paul had been hungry at times and know that ache. He encouraged the rich by using the wealth available for the transformation of others discipleship was developed.

19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

The way we live now provides a foundation for the life that is coming. Christianity is a life building faith for the here and now but the actions of today have ramifications for tomorrow.

Seventeenth century preacher and writer John Bunyan exhorts his hearer to practice discipleship.

“You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.”

Conclusion

Wealth is a state of the heart more than a healthy bank balance, nevertheless how we use material wealth is an important aspect of discipleship.

Connect group questions

1. Has your feeling toward wealth changed over the years?
2. Do you believe that faith and wealth are related, if so, how?
3. Is giving a fundamental part of being disciples or peripheral? Explain your answer.
4. If money matters how important is what we spend it on?