

## **God Wants You to Be Healthy and Wealthy?**

Isaiah 53:1-6

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I've not preached the last two weekends but have been here the past two Sundays to hear great sermons from Pastor Tim and Pastor Dan. On Sunday I gathered for worship during the 8:00 service and then hung out in the nursery, preschool and children's ministry for part of the 10:45 service. I was so impressed! Our nursery servants were smiling as they cared for babies. The preschool area was filled with joy as the teachers taught the Word of God with enthusiasm and Sheila Kursicak held the older student's attention through her creative presentation of what it means to follow Christ.

At 9:30 I led Pastor Dan's Growth Group and was impressed with this team's depth and desire to live on mission. I popped my head into a number of other rooms and was reminded again that we are out of space as several of our Growth Groups are at capacity. I also looked through the doors during the 10:45 service and saw people singing their hearts out and leaning forward to hear God's Word. It struck me again that we are out of space as the auditorium was full and both overflows were overflowing.

In order to give attention to the stewardship of the space God has given to us, we're calling a special business meeting for Sunday, August 6 at 6:00 p.m. If you're a member, please make every effort to attend as we have an exciting proposal to share with you.

Our entire family was together over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and on Saturday we ventured to Adventureland. I normally avoid any rides that take me up in the air or spin me around but for some reason I felt brave that day – I think I was trying to impress our grandson Pip. The first ride I went on was the Space Shot. It was thrilling going up but on the way down my breakfast almost came up!

I'm not sure why I didn't learn my lesson but I also went on two roller coaster rides. One of them was so rickety that I asked a worker when it was built. She said something about the 1980's just as I was buckling my seat belt. I discovered that there's a video of that experience where I'm screaming, "*I want to go home!*" The other roller coaster took us upside down twice and I almost lost my breakfast twice. After that I stayed down on the ground, except for one kiddy ride with Pip.

I felt all sorts of things that day – fear, exhilaration, queasiness, and light-headedness. Thankfully, this didn't last when I got my feet back on the ground.

But I've been taken on some other rides these past two weeks that have made me nervous and nauseous, queasy and uneasy. Here's why. In preparation for this message I forced myself to listen to 10 sermons from "prosperity preachers." In short, prosperity preachers teach that financial blessing and physical well-being is God's will for every believer.

A couple years ago when I preached through the books of 1 and 2 Peter, I gave a warning to stay away from false teachers and at that time chose to not use their names. I did that for several reasons...

- I wanted to be accurate and not quote someone out of context.
- I didn't want to slam someone I've never met.
- When I encounter error I strive to address it personally, not in public.

But, I've adjusted my position for the following reasons...

- We have a lot of new believers at Edgewood and I want to make sure no one slips into heresy.
- There's an increasing amount of error on the airwaves and on the Internet. We're warned about the rising prominence of false preachers in the last days in 2 Timothy 4:3-4: ***"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."***
- The Apostle Paul called out certain false teachers by name. For example, Hymenaeus, Alexander and Philetus are mentioned in 1 Timothy 1 and 2 Timothy 2.

While my list is certainly not exhaustive, here are the "prosperity preachers" I listened to these past two weeks: Joel Osteen, Victoria Osteen, Creflo Dollar, Kenneth Copeland and Joseph Prince.

Let me say it clearly: *The prosperity gospel is not the gospel at all.* It's been branded as "name it and claim it" theology and is also known as the "word of faith" movement or the "gospel of greed."

I have a lot to share today so I'm going to talk fast if you'll agree to listen fast.

Let's first unpack Galatians 1:6-9: ***"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."***

When the Apostle Paul wrote letters to churches, it was his practice to begin with an expression of thanksgiving to God for his readers. He doesn't do that here because he can't find much to be grateful for in the Galatian believers since they had bailed on the gospel. Let's define what the gospel is. *The gospel means the good news of Jesus Christ dying as the final offering for sin as our substitute and rising again on the third day. Our sins are forgiven and we are given eternal life when we repent and receive Him by faith as our Lord and Savior through the new birth. Salvation is available as a free gift and not a result of our works or performance.*

The Apostle Paul clearly has no tolerance for false teachers who get the gospel wrong. Here are three words that summarize this section of Scripture.

**1. Desertion.** The word *"astonished"* means, *"to wonder at something reprehensible."* Paul is shocked by how suddenly and unexpectedly believers had gone AWOL and had turned to a *"different"* gospel. He then quickly confirms that there is not *"another"* gospel because there is only one gospel of grace. Incidentally, the gospel is always under threat. It's been said that the church is just one generation away from extinction. We must therefore guard the gospel and fight for the faith.

**2. Distortion.** These false teachers had *"troubled"* the Galatians, which means, *"to shake back and forth, to agitate through inward commotion."* That's exactly what happened on the second roller coaster as it bounced our heads around side to side and back and forth! The word, *"distort"* refers to turning something into its exact opposite. These teachers were adding law to the gospel, focusing on what believers needed to do; instead of on what Christ had already done for them. By gutting grace out of the gospel, they were no longer proclaiming the true gospel.

**3. Damnation.** In verse 8 we see that even if Paul or an angel should come with a different gospel, they would be **“accursed.”** It doesn’t matter if someone is smiley or is the pastor of the largest church in America or even as beautiful as an angel...if someone preaches a different gospel they are to be considered accursed. This is a strong word that means to be given up to the curse of eternal condemnation. The Greek word is *“anathema”* and comes from the Hebrew that means, *“devoted to destruction.”* These are some of the strongest words in the New Testament. Paul is saying that if an apostle or an angel or anyone else preaches a different gospel, they will face damnation. In essence, he is saying, *“Let them go to hell.”*

Some of you may be recoiling at how strong this is. But notice that Paul repeats this curse in verse 9 so we don’t miss it: **“As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a **gospel** contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”** In verse 8 he mentions a hypothetical situation and in verse 9 he refers to an actual situation that has occurred in the past and is still occurring in the present. Paul is strong because eternal lives are at stake! If we get the gospel wrong, people end up going to hell!

Salvation is by grace through faith, entirely apart from law-keeping. We are justified by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Those who proclaim any other gospel, which is not really the gospel, are considered cursed, or anathema before the Almighty.

In one of the saddest ironies that I’ve come across in recent memory, one of the prosperity preachers I listened to began one of his messages from this very passage! I was initially glad to see that he was going to preach from Galatians. But then he said something like this: *“The gospel is all about God giving to us so now we’re going to focus our giving.”* Unbelievably, he used this passage as a springboard into a 10-part series on giving! To play off the name of our series, this was more “CON” than “TEXT.”

Did you hear the news this week that some sharks were spotted in the Mississippi River near Davenport? This was shared on Facebook so it must be true, right? Actually, this picture was taken in Costa Rica many years ago. Apparently, this picture made the rounds two years ago, only then the sharks were spotted near St. Louis. This shark story has been debunked but it won’t go away.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there are also a lot of unholy hoaxes being propagated from pulpits and podcasts and unfortunately they're not going away. This is a big problem because these spiritual sharks are causing significant damage to the cause of Christ. Remember this: *God doesn't want you to be healthy and wealthy; He wants you to be saved and sanctified!*

For the sake of time, I'm going to highlight just two core beliefs of prosperity theology.

- **Positive confession leads to health.** Known as “name it, claim it” thinking, I’ve also heard it called, “decree and declare.” The idea is that since God spoke the world into existence, we too can speak things into existence. That’s why there’s such an emphasis on positive words and not negative words. One person who came out of this teaching said this: *“I believed I had absolute authority to create my own world through positive thinking...I insisted that right thinking and confessing would obligate God to do as we desired.”* One leader in this movement said this in his book: *“Change what you are saying, it will change what you have...God will be obligated to meet your needs because of His word.”* He’s treating God like a puppet on a string!

It’s hard to even read these words from another teacher without getting nauseous: *“Don’t say, ‘O God, help me, remove this sickness from me.’ Say ‘Flu, I’m not going to let you come into my body. Go from me in the name of Jesus. Nose, I tell you, stop running. Cough, I tell you to leave in Jesus’ name.’ Say, ‘Cancer, you can’t kill me. I will never die of cancer in Jesus’ name...talk to your business. Command customers to come into your business and spend their money there.”*

In one podcast I listened to, the preacher said this: *“You have to give God permission to prosper you...You’re coming into an anointing of ease...I declare that ease is coming your way in Jesus’s name. If you receive it, can you say, ‘Amen’ today?”* This was followed with loud “Amens” and thunderous applause from the congregation. On Thursday of this week while I was on a run, I heard his wife say these words: *“If you want mental strength, you must be your biggest cheerleader...one of the most spiritual things you can do is to fill your emotional tank.”* My stomach turned again because God doesn’t need our permission for anything.

Here's another example: *"What is the desire of your heart? Name it, claim it by faith, and it is yours! Your heavenly Father has promised it. It's right there in the Bible."* Another advocate makes this claim: *"Believe it in your heart; say it with your mouth. That is the principle of faith. You can have what you say."*

You'll hear a lot of this related to health. I almost fell off my bike when I heard one pastor say, *"Because Jesus had perfect health, you can have perfect health...Jesus didn't have tumors so you don't have to have them either...as Jesus is in his health, so are you."* Another preacher recently made this bold claim: *"He [God] promises to heal all – every one, any, any whatsoever, everything – all our diseases."* When I asked Pastor Tim to read this sermon he pointed out that if this were true, no one would ever die!

- **Seed-faith theology leads to wealth.** Another popular tenet of the prosperity gospel has to do with money and possessions. It goes something like this: *Whatever you give, God guarantees to give you more.* Friends, it is dangerous to try to obligate God to our wishes!

1 Peter 2:14 says false teachers have hearts ***"trained in covetous practices."*** All you have to do is watch some preachers make their emotional pitch for money to see that they are well trained in these kinds of methods. One well-known preacher recently asked donors to give \$60 million so he could buy a private jet. I think I'm starting to get queasy again.

God warned his people about prophets and priests who just wanted to get wealthy in Jeremiah 6:13: ***"Everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely."***

One clip I watched showed people bringing their cash up front and throwing it on the stage while the preacher marched on the money shouting, *"I'm putting some anointing on this money...prosper I said...your bills are paid!"* The King James translates 2 Peter 2:3 this way: ***"...with feigned words they make merchandise of you."***

One preacher wrapped up her show by looking sternly into the camera and said that many people are enjoying her teachings without giving anything to her ministry. She went on to say that if they didn't send money to her, God was going to *"lift His anointing off"* these people, and they would no longer

be able to “*understand*” what she was talking about. I guess I’ve lost the anointing because I don’t understand what she’s talking about! Friends, the “greed gospel” is unbiblical! The goal of the gospel is God, not gold!

### **Problems with Prosperity Preaching**

After riding the rollercoaster of prosperity preaching, I wrote down some key problems that I see. I won’t take the time to develop these but I hope you will.

- 1. Man is magnified.** Obviously, according to Genesis and Psalms 8 and 139, we matter a lot to God, but we are not God. I’m reminded of what Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:5: “*...and you will be like God.*”
- 2. The Almighty is marginalized and manipulated.** At its core, this teaching guts the glory of God and shuts down His sovereignty. Psalm 135:6: “*Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the deeps.*” God is not a genie who does our bidding.
- 3. An inadequate theology of suffering.** We learned a couple weeks ago that God *will* give us more than we can handle but He’ll never give us more than *He* can handle. 2 Corinthians 1:8: “*For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.*”
- 4. No emphasis on self-denial.** Jesus lifted up the cost of discipleship and the importance of crucifying self in Mark 8:34: “*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’*”
- 5. Limited teaching on sin, righteousness or judgment.** These themes were totally absent in all the sermons I listened to. In John 16:8, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit’s role: “*And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.*”
- 6. The focus is on having our best life now and not on the life to come.** While Paul was torn about whether to stay or go, he was living in light of eternity. Philippians 1:21: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”
- 7. The substitutionary death of Christ is often absent.** 2 Corinthians 5:21: “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*”
- 8. Repentance from sin is hard to find.** When this word is used it often refers to low self-esteem or negative thinking. Jesus said in Mark 1:15: “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*”

**9. The true gospel is not preached.** Again, I never heard the gospel message of the life, death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Romans 1:16-17: ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”***

**10. Lack of serious exposition of Scripture.** Most of what I heard sounded like new age mysticism or psychological self-help coupled with a funny story. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, ***“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”***

If you’d like to dive deeper into the problems with the “prosperity gospel,” check out an article I posted on the “sermon extras” link on our website called, *“The ‘Gospel’ That Almost Killed Me.”*

### **Texts Out of Context**

Here are six verses that many prosperity preachers point to as justification for their beliefs. We won’t be able to fully expound on these passages for the sake of time. In 2 Peter 3:16-17, Peter refers to Paul’s letters and writes: ***“There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable **twist to their own destruction**, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”***

Keep three things in mind when you hear this kind of preaching (or any preaching for that matter).

1. Always consider the context.
2. Know that some teachers twist the clear meaning of the text.
3. Be sensitive about what Scriptures are left out.

Here then are some texts that are twisted and taken out of context and are quoted more than others. It’s good for us to know this before we’re strapped into a spiritual rollercoaster.

- Mark 10:30. Many prosperity preachers proclaim the 100-fold blessing for those who give to their ministry by quoting part of this verse: ***“...who will***



***not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands...***” One teacher regularly says, “*You give one dollar and 100 belongs to you; give \$10 and receive \$1,000, give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000.*”

Here are three quick things...First, the context is all about leaving relationships and possessions to follow Christ – it has nothing to do with giving money. Secondly, they conveniently skip over one of the promises that appear in verse 30: “***with persecutions.***” Remember, Jesus didn’t teach the prosperity gospel; He taught the persecution gospel. By the way, there’s a Voice of the Martyr’s conference coming up near Des Moines in a couple weeks. Thirdly, they very conveniently leave off verse 25 that says, “***Its easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.***”

- Luke 6:38: “***Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.***” If we back up one verse, we see clearly that this verse is not referring to giving money but to the giving of mercy. The context is about forgiveness, not finances! It’s all about the love of mercy, not the love of money. The idea is that we’re to love, serve and forgive without expecting anything in return. It’s interesting that verse 24 from this same chapter is ignored: “***But woe to you who are rich...***”
- John 10:10: “***I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.***” Jesus came to give us eternal life and for us to live out this life now. There is nothing in the context about material abundance. The term used for life here is *zoe*, which refers to life in the spirit and soul, rather than *bios*, which is used to refer to physical, material life. Thus, Jesus is saying, “*I want you to have an abundant life in spirit.*” Interestingly, the first part of verse 10 is often not quoted because it deals with false shepherds who fleece the flock and feed themselves: “***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy...***”
- 2 Corinthians 8:9: “***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.***” Prosperity preachers claim that Christ died to make us wealthy but if you read the context this is clearly referring to poor

Christians giving to other Christians in need. We're called to live sacrificially and generously.

- 3 John 2: ***“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.”*** One prosperity preacher writes: *“You must realize it is God’s will for you to prosper. This is available to you, and frankly, it would be stupid of you not to partake of it.”* Listen. The phrase, **“go well”** (or “prosper”) means, *“a good road, route or journey.”* This verse is nothing more than John’s personal wish that things would go well for a guy named Gaius, not a guarantee of good health. This was a standard form of greeting in that culture, much like when we say, *“I hope things are well with you”* or *“I hope you have a nice time in Wisconsin”* (how couldn’t you?).
- Isaiah 53:5: ***“...and with his wounds we are healed.”*** These words are often quoted out of context as “proof” that Jesus heals us from all sickness and disease. Actually, portions of this chapter are quoted 41 different times in the New Testament to show how the Savior died as the substitute for our sins. Jesus died in our place, taking our punishment, so that we might be free. We could say it like this: *“Because of grace, Jesus took our place.”* Here’s how verse 5 begins: ***“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace...”***

We see this clearly in how Peter quotes Isaiah 53:5 in 1 Peter 2:24: ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”***

Dying to sin and living to righteousness is the healing that Christ’s sacrifice has won for us. If you’re straying today because you’ve either not been saved or you’ve been swept up by prosperity teaching, it’s time to come for the first time, or return to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

I recognize that this sermon may have stirred you up. Can I appeal to you to study this for yourselves? Don’t take my word for it. Be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who ***“received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see***

***if these things were so.***” If you need to talk to someone, feel free to reach out to any pastor. Our email addresses are on the back of the bulletin and on the app.

For those of us who have been saved and are growing in sanctification, it’s time to reach out as a team to those who are drowning. Did you see the story a week ago about the family that got caught in a dangerous riptide in Florida so 80 people grabbed hands to form a chain to save them? The person who started this rescue said this in an interview: *“These people are not drowning today. It’s not happening. We’re going to get them out.”*

We’re going to close with a song called, *“I Can’t Save Myself.”* As the band comes up I wonder if you would feel comfortable enough to hold hands with the person next to you to demonstrate that you need the help of others and ultimately the help that only Christ can provide.

*No one can accuse me of not trying  
To make the most of this hand I’ve been dealt  
To move past all the pain and fear I’ve felt  
Turns out in the end that  
All my best attempts  
Could never keep my weary heart from drowning*

Stay seated for now but when the song comes to this familiar chorus, *“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,”* I’d like you to stand.