

NOTE: In re-reading the original version of this message, I noticed a rather glaring (and embarrassing) error in the context of my wording. That has been corrected in this version, and I apologize both to anyone who may have been confused by my lack of clarity and to my Lord for my mishandling of what He gave me.

The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouses of His bounty...

-- Deuteronomy 28:12

The Storehouses of His Bounty

God controls the resources of the earth and the prosperity and the lack of the same in people, cities and nations. If you're thinking, "Well, *duh*," at this point, please bear with me; even though we touched on this idea in last month's message, it is important to expand on it because the concept has become a bit distorted over time.

In many cases, any time someone mentions the provisions of the Lord or even one of His names, *Jehovah Jireh* – the Lord will provide, the "prosperity gospel" is immediately brought to mind, the idea that God wants you to be rich. Increased wealth is somehow a sign of His favor, and the lack thereof is a sign of either a lack of commitment to Him or outright sin in the person's life.

Let me be clear on this subject – there are Scriptures that do say that God does not want His people to be lacking anything:

- "*You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none*" (Deut. 28: 12)
- "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*" (3 John 2, KJV)

My wife and I both have experienced God's abundant provision in our own lives. The principle does exist in the Word. My problem, however, with the "prosperity gospel" is twofold. First, when material prosperity is emphasized above spiritual prosperity – as eventually occurs with this teaching – the focus shifts away from the Giver to the gift. God is seen less as the Almighty, Eternal, Omnipotent Creator and Sustainer of the Universe and more as a great cosmic "claw machine" who can be manipulated into giving you whatever you want, even if it's spiritually damaging. The believer is less inclined to be submissive to God's Will as the chief priority of his or her life. Secondly, this kind of teaching has vastly increased potential for misuse by the greedy, the unscrupulous and those who "think Godliness is a means to great gain" (1 Timothy 6:5), or in plain English are just in it to make a pile of cash. Such hucksters not only steal from the flock and give nothing to the believer, but also leave the Gospel held up for ridicule by unbelievers, who point to such people and say, "See? What did I tell you? It's *all* a big con!"

A third problem with this mind set, and this is closer to the heart of the argument, is that as we shift attention away from the Lord, we tend to forget that He is in control... of everything. God has the keys to the storehouses of the Earth, and can create, renew, distribute or withhold their resources to whomever He sees fit. People can forget this part

of the reality of God, especially when they are not fully sold out to the Will of the Lord. The fruit of *this* spirit is that the resources of the Earth become seen as limited and finite and, therefore, must be conserved. Now, while there's nothing wrong with the idea of conservation – we should not be wasteful about anything, after all – some people take this idea to extremes: *We must conserve what little we have; therefore we must limit access so it doesn't get depleted too quickly.* This, invariably, leads to the idea of who should and should not have access. The concept of eugenics is an inevitable result of this faulty logic.

God is the One who calls things into being that were not there before. The discoveries of science regarding the creation of the universe and all that make it up do nothing to detract from this point; as a matter of fact, they actually serve to *enhance* God's Glory and His power in our eyes. Remember when Jesus, in admonishing us not to worry, said that we cannot add a single hour to our lives? "Since you cannot do this little thing, why do you worry about the rest?" (Luke 12:26) Little to *whom*? Certainly not *us*. And yet, God is able to extend life; look at King Hezekiah of Israel (Isaiah 38:1-5), whom God added 15 years to his lifespan when after he was originally told he would die.

The Bible is full of accounts where God either creates provision seemingly out of nowhere, or extends the life of what resources exist well beyond their natural abilities:

- Deuteronomy 2:7 – God not only miraculously provided water, manna and quail for the Israelites in the wilderness (even when they continued to wander for 40 years because of their disobedience), but He also prevented their clothes and shoes from wearing out.
- 1 Kings 17:6 – Nearly anyone who reads the Bible knows the account of how God commanded ravens to feed the prophet Elijah in a time of famine, then made the widow's last bit of flour and oil stretch for years while she fed Elijah.
- 2 Kings 3:20 – Provision of water for the army of Israel against the army of the three kings
- 2 Kings 4:6 – Multiplying oil for the prophet's widow to sell and prevent the enslavement of her sons.
- 2 Kings 7:8 – For Samaria in the time of famine after having the Arameans slaughter each other.
- Matthew 14:20 – For the multitude that followed Jesus (feeding of the 5,000, 4,000, etc.)
- Luke 5: 1-10 – Jesus and the miraculous catches of fish
- Matthew 17: 4-27 – Jesus telling Peter to catch a fish, in which he would find a coin to pay the Temple Tax for himself and Jesus
- Philippians 4:19 – "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

The key to such supernatural provisioning, as in so many other areas of life with the Lord, is surrender to Him and His Will. In all these incidents from Scripture, we find they occur for people who have staked their lives on a relationship with God and live their lives in such a way that He can use them at any given moment or place. People who can say, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did in the face of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace (Daniel 3), that God is perfectly able to provide, deliver and protect – but even if He decides *not* to, we'll *still* serve Him.

The same principle holds true for nations. God sets before the world the same choice He gave Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 28; the choices of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience.

You may ask, *Wasn't Israel a special case? Called by God to be His chosen people?* Yes, that is true; God chose to bestow those blessings on Israel because of the promise He made their progenitor, Abraham. But God's ultimate plan was that through Abraham all the nations of the Earth would be blessed through the knowledge of God and the way of Salvation opened by the sacrifice of His Son, the Lord Jesus. Any nation that calls upon the name of the Lord has this same choice set before it; and, despite the strenuous efforts of many over the years to deny, erase or obfuscate the fact, the United States of America very clearly called upon God in its early history. *In God We Trust* was not selected as the national motto simply because it sounded nice; the Founding Fathers *meant* it, every word.

Those who are trying to erase those facts, who try to remove the Lord as the God of this nation and censor believers in the national dialogue, suffer from the faulty reasoning mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:17. The fruit of their spirit leads them to conclude that the resources of the Earth are finite and limited, or (to use their term) unsustainable. They do not reckon upon the God of the universe who controls such things and creates resources where none exist (Titus 1:15). This logic leads to the conclusion that those supposedly finite resources must be rationed; to accomplish this, individual liberties and freedoms must ultimately give way to the greater good of the state as a whole. The logical next question then becomes, *And who gets to decide what the "greater good" is?*

This is where the science and philosophies of eugenics come into play. This is also the resurrection of the old "useless eaters" mindset of the last century, that only those who can contribute to society are worthy to share its resources. Human beings under this way of thinking are valuable only for the services they can contribute to others, leaving little room for those who cannot contribute much or at all because of chance, accident and circumstance. This also once went by another name, *surplus population*; a term coined in the 1800s when the Industrial Revolution led to many people forced out of a job by the change in working conditions. In Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*, the character Ebenezer Scrooge cites this thinking when declining the offer to contribute to a fund to help the poor:

"If they would rather die," said Scrooge, "they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

For your information, the population of the world was estimated to be about 1 billion at the time the story takes place... as opposed to the nearly seven billion now alive, by the estimates of the U.S. Government.

And yet, when God looks at us, He sees the vast masses of mankind now a part of His creation, but He also sees us *individually*. He sees our life as it is, and as He planned for us to be. Our value to God is not what we can give back to Him, because as Creator He owns everything already. Our value to God lies in the fact that we simply exist – and, for that reason alone, He loves us as we are and wants the best for us. He loves us so much that he was not willing for any to pay the penalty for the wrong things we had done, but sent His son to pay the penalty for those sins. As a result, God's justice is

satisfied and His wrath can be set aside, if we are willing to accept the transaction Jesus made available by His sacrifice.

This once was a fact that was well-known; in fact, since we're using the reference to A Christmas Carol, Scrooge is rebuked for his attitude by the Ghost of Christmas Present in a passage that I believe was closest to the heart of Dickens himself. Scrooge inquires of the Ghost of the future of Bob Cratchit's lame child, Tiny Tim, only to find his "surplus population" remark thrown back at him when told that Tim may not be alive by next Christmas:

"Man," said the Ghost, "if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! To hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust."

I know it's not Christmas, but it's a point that bears repeating in the light of this discussion. Also, even though I touched on these points last month, I believe this required elaboration in the light of the current health care reform debate going on in this country. You see, the people that believe the storehouses of the Earth are in limited supply, who do not know the Lord, unfortunately, are numerous and widespread... and some have the ears of our leaders.

Pray for President Obama, that he would be sent Godly counsel and have a heart inclined to listen and be obedient. Pray for his safety and that his salvation be secure. Pray the same for our legislators and, in the name of Jesus, take authority over this mindset that refuses to acknowledge God as the source of our supply. Pull down this stronghold before more people believe the lie.

For the Glory of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ
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