

# Be Prosperous

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now can we turn back to, well you don't really have anywhere to turn back to because we've had three different readings.

But I'll be referring to chapter 5, chapter 11 and chapter 22 briefly as an overview of what we're looking at today.

And for those of you who have been here, I think you're beginning to get a little bit of a picture about what's happening in Job and about the teaching of Job and what it's there for in our lives.

Can I just say again by way of introduction that facts are very important, aren't they? And we've seen that in the story of Job that part of the problem with Job's friends is that they don't have all the facts and they haven't even really looked into the whole situation with Job nor do they have all the facts about God and His dealings, neither than of course this Job.

But it's important and we've seen that, that misunderstandings come in our lives when we don't know all the facts and that can often get us into hot water. I remember many years ago doing, I did it several times with the young people in various places, youth fellowships and I think I did it here in St. Columbus but I imagine the young people who were involved in it are probably either old now or married or don't remember or have left a congregation.

[ 1 : 2 3 ] But it was about highlighting prejudice and the importance of not being prejudiced and it was at the time when AIDS was very much in the news and it was all about setting the scene where they'd found a cure for AIDS but then lost it and they only had one vaccine, they only had one formula left, one dose left of this vaccine and there was six or seven different people who all had AIDS and the aim of the exercise was to get people to think about which person they would give the vaccine to.

So there was a businessman, a hemophiliac, a prostitute, a single woman, a drug addict, a baby and a doctor. And so people were in groups, were asked to discuss who they would give the vaccine to, who is the person most likely to benefit and the best person to receive that and there was all kinds of different answers and you had to defend it.

But then you were given a little bit more about each situation. So for example the businessman had a wife and two children, the prostitute lived in a slum, the single woman was from a rich family, the drug addict shared needles, the baby was infected by her mother, the doctor was on placement in rural Africa.

And so with this more information maybe some of the decisions were changed and some of the thought processes were changed as more facts were made aware. And then the third, the third layer of information was given and it said the businessman had sex with prostitutes on a business trip.

The hemophiliac received infected blood. The prostitute sells sex to support a child. The single woman was raped by soldiers at war, the drug addict who shared needles was because he was so poor.

[ 3 : 2 0 ] The baby who was infected was orphaned and was dying of malnutrition and the doctor on placement was infected through his own carelessness.

So you see that there's no easy answer, there's no right and wrong, but that when we know the facts and more of the facts then it does change the way we think and it does change the decisions that we make because generally speaking misunderstandings mess things up for us and mess us up.

If a car comes across your path when you're driving and goes through a red light, throw up your hands in horror, what are they doing? Going through a red light, it was my green light, my green light, until you find or hear or know that the driver is a father who is driving his seriously ill child to accident and emergency and it changes the way we think.

And so Job is very much a book that is changing the way we think about Job, about suffering and about God and about his involvement with us because misunderstandings in our lives tend to mess us up no more so than in our Christian lives as well.

You know we can think, I'm a good Christian, you know I deserve more than that from God, God owes me. You know we've looked at that in some of our earlier studies on Job, God owes me, I deserve better, I'm a good person.

[ 4 : 53 ] Or we might say, well I'm a disciple of Christ, why is this happening to me? Why is this suffering and this difficulty happening to me?

Because I am his disciple. Really the kind of argument that Job had himself. Or we can look as the Samists and various Sam's looked and said, why is it that people who don't believe, the unbelievers have it so easy?

They don't have any hassles or problems and life is just one long part for them. Why is it like that and why do I struggle so much as a believer?

Or, and this is formalized into a genuine theology of the Bible, God wants me to prosper. You know that kind of health and wealth, prosperity, gospel that is prevalent in many parts of the world where God wants me to be rich, God wants me to be healthy all the time, God's children should always go first class.

Is the kind of thinking that lies behind that theology? Or maybe it was slightly mimicked and mocked in the 60's song by Janice Joplin, Oh Lord will you not buy me, I'm our series Ben's.

[ 6 : 12 ] You know that kind of idea that God gives us and just gives what we want all the time like some large Santa Claus figure that we are to be prosperous and wealthy as believers.

So I think we're seeing in some ways some of these things coming out in our study in the book of Job and you will be able to discern I hope by now some kind of pattern.

Especially in the spiritual underpinning and thinking of the three friends of Job who we saw last week had the right kind of beliefs.

They believed the things about God's sovereignty, God's justice and God's mercy but they didn't understand it fully and they certainly didn't apply it in Job's life in the right way.

They didn't take account of Job and his situation and they were kind of simplistic and selective in their application of these things to him.

[ 7 : 14 ] We're going to say one thing about them really which I think is important and it came across in the readings that we had and I'm just going to highlight one or two things in a minute. But if we could highlight and I'm not sure if I'm right about this, okay, I haven't seen many other commentaries that have necessarily agreed with me.

Not that they've disagreed but they just haven't brought it out, okay? So if I'm wrong, you'll know, okay? But it seems to me particularly in the readings and it fits in very well with what we've already looked at in Job that part of their problem was they believed that they got heaven on earth.

You know, so they had this very clear cut belief that blessing or obedience to God brings blessing and disobedience to God brings cursing, judgment.

So that they were basically saying as we've seen to Job, you are obviously harboring secret sin that you haven't confessed and that is why you're under God's judgment. And Job's argument was I'm not.

I'm not harboring secret sin. I'm a sinner who has gone to God for forgiveness and I'm leading an upright and blameless life and I'm not harboring secret sin.

[ 8 : 33 ] So this was where the confusion was coming in for them. And it seems that their thinking was simply in the here and now every believer who obeyed and who followed God in that Old Testament way would know obvious blessing, riches, happiness, fruitfulness, things in life would be great, almost heaven from the get go.

It's the kind of things we do believe but we believe have a future element, have a future fulfilling as well as a present reality in one way or another. Can I say, can I speak just very briefly, theologically about what I think that they believed?

I believe that they had an over-realized eschatology. They eschatology being the kind of belief in the end times. They over-realized it for today so that they get everything on a plate right now, everything about belief and everything about heaven and everything about blessing was theirs now and almost there was nothing future to look forward to.

That maybe I'm guilty of doing the same thing as they were being a bit simplistic but that seemed to be the way they were thinking. If you look at Zophar and Eliphaz's language in the chapters we read, it's almost like the passages from Revelation about heaven.

They speak in Job 5 about being, your tent will be at peace, you'll inspect your fold, you'll miss nothing, your offspring will be many, your descendants the grassy there, you'll grow ripe old age, your sheaf shall be gathered in its season, fruitfulness, blessing, happiness or job 11 surely you will lift up your face without blemishes, you'll be secure, you will not fear, you'll forget your misery, you'll remember the word, your life will be brighter than the noonday, even in the darkness it says, the darkness will be like morning.

[ 10 : 26 ] So there's this whole picture of beautiful light and blessing and forgetting of all bad things and misery because there is hope and none will make you afraid.

You know what Revelation speaks about, not being afraid and about this great hope of the Gospel. It's almost eschatological in times, the type of language they have.

It's as if they are realising heaven on earth now. And actually one passage we didn't read that I down to read was Job chapter 20 where one of the other friends speaks and he speaks in almost the opposite terms about the judgment of God and it's just like hell.

So there's almost this language that is heavenly and hellish and it's as if they are saying it's all about now and if you're a believer and you're following God everything should be rosy, everything should be great in your life.

Well what's the problem with that philosophical and spiritual viewpoint, a theological viewpoint, health, wealth and prosperity as it were? Well it doesn't fit the facts.

[ 11 : 36 ] It's simplistic and it's external. It just is looking at the external realities around us. It doesn't fit the fact of Job's life and Job's experience nor does it fit ours.

And it tends to legalism. It tends to being judgmental. Well you know if things are going bad then that must be because they are sinning. It tends to externalism and self-righteousness, things are going great for me.

I must be so blessed and God must be so shining His favour on me. I must have things right and if I'm right that means they are wrong because it tends to that because it's external and it's judgmental at that level.

And we know that that's a misguided theology because of the teaching of the New Testament, the wider teaching of God's Word and the Bible and the experience of Jesus Christ and His innocence who suffered.

So I go back to the first point very often that we make that misunderstandings mess us up.

[ 12 : 49 ] Job's three friends with all the correctness of much of what they said evoked God's anger. God was angry with them.

I'm not making that judgment. God makes that judgment. He asks them to repent. You haven't said what's right about me. And that's a great challenge to us. It's a great challenge as we read through Job with all the comments that they make that seem to us so right.

But if we in our own lives with different misunderstandings continue in them then what we will find is a whole lot of D's. We've got three D's here.

Disappointment with God where our faith will be cast into doubt, will be doubting in our faith and will drift spiritually. If we don't understand God as He's revealed, if we don't work at that, if we don't seek to know Him better and love Him more and seek the Holy Spirit to guide us into who God is then our faith will doubt our faith, we will be disappointed with God and we will drift spiritually.

And you might find yourself in that place today. No one else might know it but you might know that you're drifting, that you're doubting and that you're disappointed with God.

[ 14 : 07 ] And that then always brings in, should bring in as that concern about do I understand God, do I understand His grace, His person, His character, what He claims about Himself and the reality of Him in my life.

So briefly, and I just want to say a little bit about this today, it's kind of more of an overview today. In many ways as I said we're going to skim through these discussions between Job and his three friends.

But again, can I say, can I encourage you to read through the whole book again twice? Do it, keep doing it because you get a much better picture of what's happening, maybe especially with some of the things we've thought through and you look at it with that lens.

So read it again and read it again, right through, it doesn't take long to read the whole book of Job and you'll find, because we're not going to read the whole book of Job and Church. I want to finish by looking at just a wider picture of Scripture about blessing, because that is really what Job's friends are questioning and arguing about all the time in this chapter, sorry, in this book.

They're talking about the blessing of God and the judgment of God, the favour of God and the cursing of God. And basically that's what the whole problem in their lives and their understanding stems from, the simplistic understanding of the blessing of God.

[ 15 : 31 ] So what is the blessing of God then and now and in the future? Well, I just want to say one or two things very generally by way of that. And I want us to be encouraged first of all, because we can be too discouraged and we can be too negative and we can be too defeatist and we can be too dark.

And we must remember that here and now we are God's children and we are redeemed and we are in a new relationship and the Kingdom of Heaven has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

So there is an already to the Gospel and there's a not yet that we look forward to, but there's an already for what we have in Christ is a great blessing and we should come to God's house to thank Him.

Not just to church. I mean anywhere we should be able to thank Him. Ephesians 2.13, but now in Christ you who are once far off have been brought near. That's the Gospel.

We're brought near to the living God through Jesus Christ, through the blood of Christ, for He Himself is our peace. And it goes on to say that we might be reconciled to God in one body through the cross.

[ 16 : 42 ] So with that great truth that in Christ Jesus we are reconciled to our loving Father. You've got that wonderful, the best for me, the best picture in the whole Bible of the Gospel is the prodigal Father's hands reached out for the Son who decides to come back.

And the Father risks all manner of embarrassment in His day and generation by running out to meet the Son and to welcome Him back. The Son of Mine that was dead is alive again.

We rejoice and there's this great blessing of Scripture that we need to remember, blessing of truth. As believers what we have in all the battles and all the struggles and all the suffering and all the difficulties, we are children of God.

Let's not wallow which is our nature in the negative. Let's not wallow in what we don't have yet, but let us be able to remind ourselves of what we have.

And my daily reading is now reading through John's Gospel. John 15, you know, Jesus is praying for the church, the people of God, that they might remain in His love, that they will bear fruit, that they will know complete joy, that if they ask whatever in my name they will receive it, that He is our best interest at heart.

[ 17 : 57 ] And His love is a divine love, it's a perfect love, that's challenging. And sometimes we don't understand what that means for us, but we're united to the maker, the Creator, the sustainer of the universe who has drawn us to Himself, forgiven us for all our wrongdoing, transformed us so we can be like Himself and has a great future for us as well.

So there are many things to give thanks for. That this Father, even in our darkest times, is the one who holds us. The one who holds us.

Now I've used this illustration before here, but Katrina and Ross just came back from Glenelg this week. Glenelg's the most beautiful place in the world. Okay, can you forget your islands?

Glenelg is the most beautiful place in the world at any time, but especially when it's dark. But I remember once as a very small child going to Glenelg with my family and after, I think I've, have you heard this story?

No. Are you forgotten if you did? After dinner tea, what we call it, five o'clock, six o'clock, one summer's night my dad decided to take me and walk me over the Glenelg hill to the other side, okay, which takes out two words, letter, fern and lachduch, for any of you who know the area.

[ 19 : 17 ] And it's beautiful, but it's quite a long walk and I had little legs as I did till I left school. But halfway up the hill, the mist descended very powerfully and I was left frightened, but holding my father's hand.

And there was a great security and a great sense of, I know where he's going, he'll take me to the other side. And of course it wasn't till after we got down to the other side and probably many years later they said I had no idea where we were going.

Now that illustration stops obviously a bit earlier than that when we're talking about God because there's times when we need that hold, isn't there?

When we need just to feel and sense a loving father holding us in the darkness and he does know, he does know where he's going. It's not like a human father with all our love and all our concern and all the way that we would die for our children, but we don't know.

But he does and that's the wider picture of the blessing of God and we're asked to trust in him day by day. We're asked to trust in him day by day because it's not yet heaven, okay?

[ 20 : 39 ] That's why we have to trust in him because Job's friend's got it wrong. It's not yet heaven, it's not yet easy to follow the living God. It's not yet unparalleled blessing for us because we remain in enemy territory.

1 Corinthians 13, that great passage of love says, now we see in a mirror dimly. We don't see, one day we will see face to face. Now we know in part, then we will know fully, even as we've been fully known.

So God knows we don't, we're asked to trust, we're asked to hold on, we're asked to believe. Your trust is easy when things are going well.

Do you know that in life? Isn't that true? When things are going easy and going the way we want them to, it's swimmingly. It's easy to trust. But the challenge comes when we're asked to trust when things are going absolutely not the way we expect them or want them to go.

God is patient, God's timing is perfect, God is invoking delayed justice in this world because He wants all to be saved and none to perish.

[ 21 : 47 ] Trust Him day by day and trust Him particularly through suffering and through darkness. You know, it's not easy and there aren't any easy answers for those who are suffering.

But trust and we can't, we can't invoke trust for other people. We can stand alongside them, we can be there for them, we can support them.

We don't need to say anything. But trust through suffering is an intensely personal thing. Sin and justice or persecution, Christ faced all of these things.

But we remember that in that temporary suffering, we are not alone. It will not destroy us. We will be empowered over it.

We can be transformed through it. It will draw us closer and enable us to see Him better and more clearly and more sharply if we allow ourselves to be entrusting ourselves to Him.

[ 22 : 53 ] Our faith even will be proven. Those who are going through darkness, those who are going through difficulty, those who are going through depression, those who are going through unmitigated disasters in their life are not those with the weakest faith usually.

They're the ones with the strongest faith. And their faith has been tested and it will come through fire and be purified.

And they will be a witness and we are asked to be a witness to others. Not sure if people take note of us at a party or when we've bought a new house or a new car or things are going great and our lives are just got promotion.

Not sure if people notice our response to that quite so much as Christians as they do when we lose a child or when we struggle with unmitigated suffering in our lives.

I'll mention a little bit more about that at the end. So we trust Him day to day. We trust Him through suffering and we trust Him into a certain future.

[ 24 : 05 ] And that's one of the great things that they do speak about. They speak about hope. And you know, I may be too hard, I have probably been too hard on jobs for you friends but only because God says He's not happy with them.

I sometimes am quite happy with what they say and maybe that says a lot about me and my relationship with God. But they do say things that are right and they do speak about knowing the riches and blessing of God in this life as well and also the hope of a certain future.

And there's nothing worse than hopelessness is there because that is usually what drives people to suicide and despair completely. That fear of the unknown.

And what the future does for us, it reminds us we're not in control. And if anything, it reminds us that God is, that we're not, but that He is.

And He holds and much of the Bible is about His promise for the future which is not just a kind of vague undecided and un-clarified and uncertain hope, like vague longing.

[ 25 : 13 ] It's not that, oh I really hope that I lived 120 and I looked at him like I'm 25 the whole time. It's not that kind of hope. It's a sure and certain hope based on who He is, based on Him being beyond and above time, based on Him holding the world in His hands and His life and His person and His character and His work.

The best is still to come. The resurrection. We meet on a Sunday morning exactly because of that, because it's a resurrection morning that points forward to the hope of the Gospel. And that for us tempers the present is that we've got a great future, physical, spiritual, relational hope in eternity when all of these shadows have gone and it tempers the present.

It does temper the present. I know it's a kind of, probably a well-worn example, but I think Joni Erickson for example is a great, a great ambassador for that hope which has tempered her present, having been paralyzed from the neck down in a swimming accident as a teenager, she went on to serve and has gone on phenomenally to serve the Lord in her life.

And she's not a kind of sugary, sweet character. Her book is full of times of darkness and despair and questions, but it's magnificent to see someone whose present is tempered by the hope that one day she will run into Jesus arms.

That's what she will do. She will physically run into Jesus arms. And that is her hope and that is what tempers her present suffering and allows her to glorify God in all she does.

[ 27 : 02 ] So that hope is a spine-tingling hope of the future. You know, blessed one Peter, one Be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

To an inheritance. This is what we have. An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept for us. Or 1 Corinthians 2,9, as is written, with what no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

It's not heaven now. If it's heaven now, then we've not got that much to look forward to and it's a pretty poor heaven in many ways.

It's a poor reflection. But what they, Job's friends, felt ought to be realized here and now, the safety, the peace, the abundance, the family, the lack of trouble, the light, the life, the unparalleled love, the perfect dream.

The resurrected reality is ours in Jesus Christ. Promise matters in the dark. And that is what the Bible gives us, a future hope.

[ 28 : 21 ] And it's one that's reflected very much in the baptism of our children in Christ. There is a future dimension and a promise that is at the very foundation of our covenant with God, that the covenant of baptism involves recognizing God's promise for His covenant people and for their children in Acts 2.

And which reminds us, it's a sign that we also take promises of recognizing God and His perfect word and recognizing the responsibility we have to lead our children up in the teaching and instruction of the Lord.

We have promises to keep as congregations and one of the things we'll do on Wednesday is we'll hand out a list of all our baptized children over the last five years because we've promised to pray for them.

And it's a solemn and great privilege and responsibility to do so, not just to pray for them but to be an example to them in our lives.

And so we look forward to baptism as an important part of the ongoing covenant of God working in our lives and working in our families and to Caleb's baptism today.

[ 29 : 43 ] Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we ask that you would bless our thoughts around your word and we do recognize that much, if not all of what I've said today, has been geared towards us as believers.

But we pray and I pray that if there are any who are not Christians here today that the very fact of what they don't have and don't know and don't experience and can't be sure of and that uncertain future and that sense of the unknown would drive them to the claims and the person of Jesus Christ with great power today and that they would know and understand, particularly if they themselves have been baptized as children.

The responsibilities, the privileges and the responsibilities they have to take what has been made on promise to them, take that for themselves in Christ and know the gospel in their hearts.

So we pray that you would bless what we do and what we do would be done in Jesus' name for we ask it with the forgiveness of our sins. Amen.