

## God's Kingdom and Success

Have prosperity and success become norms for spirituality? You would think so, judging by some of the popular Christian literature on the market. Some modern day evangelicals preach a trouble-free walk with Jesus Christ, a life without battle, and material blessings if we only believe.

The late revivalist, A.A. Allen, wrote in his booklet, *"Power To Get Wealth. How You Can Have It!"* that one of the greatest promises in the Word of God unclaimed today is Deuteronomy 8:18: "It is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." And Allen proclaimed that you can choose the curse of poverty or the blessing of prosperity. He said: "Christ came to do away with the works of the devil, and one of the works of the devil is POVERTY!"

God promises the miracle of prosperity, but to get it, you must promise God something. The promise? A pledge of \$100 for Allen's campaign ministry. How do you get wealth? "It is one hundred percent spiritual to send a blest handkerchief to drive out the demons of poverty from your life," Allen said. "Just as soon as I receive your letter with your gift of one hundred dollars, or pledge for one hundred dollars, or more ... I will send you a new handkerchief over which I have prayed for your prosperity."

A book by Gloria Copeland, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, makes the same claims as Allen. She writes that through studying God's Word you can become established and confident that it is indeed the will of God for you to prosper. It is not God's will for you to suffer want in the material world. God's covenant causes material prosperity. She says: "We have been living far below our covenant rights as heirs of the promise. I am an heir - an heir to the blessing of Abraham! The world thinks that to become an heir to the Rockefeller fortune would be sensational. Let me tell you, Rockefeller could not begin to buy Abraham!"

How do we acquire wealth? We must decide that we want it. If you make up your mind - make a quality decision - that you are not willing to live in lack, but that you are willing to live in divine prosperity and abundance, Satan cannot stop the flow of God's financial blessings." Gloria Copeland testifies that her success formula has never failed to produce. She claims that she and her husband received, "healing, airplanes, houses, office buildings, equipment, clothes, food, cars, boats, wisdom, guidance, help with our children, and national radio coverage - to name a few."

Is this the message that we need to hear in our age of suffering and violence? I don't believe so. It is part of a long standing American tradition that seeks, by one means or another, to locate the Kingdom of heaven on earth. Ernest B. Koenker's book, *Secular Salvation*, quotes on the first page, a passage from Alex de Tocqville's *Democracy in America* (1840):

"The Americans not only follow their religion from interest, but they often place in this world, the interest which makes them follow it. In the Middle Ages the clergy

spoke of nothing but a future state; they hardly cared to prove that a sincere Christian may be a happy man here below. But the American preachers are constantly referring to the earth; and it is only with great difficulty that they, can divert their attention from it. To touch their congregations, they always show them how favourable religious opinions are to freedom and public tranquility; and it is often difficult to ascertain from their discourses whether the principal object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the other world or prosperity in this."

Don't misunderstand me. I don't say that God cannot bring material prosperity. But I do believe that saving faith is no simple matter. The Biblical picture is different from the current "God's Will is Prosperity" teaching. There is both a cross and a crown. Instead of describing an easy road, the Bible says that "We must through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

After the young ruler had departed from Christ, filled with sorrow as he couldn't surrender what he loved most, the Lord turned to His disciples and said: "Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24-25).

Has the church militant undergone a change of attitude? Is the desire to live in the secular city of man now greater than the pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem? There is no victory without conflict and no success without the expectation of failure. So often God's people have risked their all for the sake of the Gospel. The apostles Peter and John were arrested; Stephen was stoned, followed by a severe persecution of the church; Herod killed James; Paul was shipwrecked and imprisoned.

The life of one of the great saints of the early church was not a success story in the sight of man. Athanasius had won a battle against the heretic Arius and his followers at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. But the war was not won at the moment the Nicene Creed had been drawn up. In later years, Athanasius was five times in exile, banished for a total of 17 years. His life was in constant danger. Eventually Arianism was defeated, but at great cost to Athanasius.

One of the finest missionaries of the modern missionary movement was Samuel Zwemer, but in the eyes of many his life was a total failure. A Muslim in Arabia, once said to Samuel Zwemer: "You have worked among us for years, you have seen no converts, you will see no converts; why do you stay?" To which Zwemer replied: "I am here because my Commander-in-Chief sent me here and I have to stay until His command is rescinded."

Let us not try to be Christians on our own terms, but on God's. We shall overcome and be victorious. But we may not equate victory with "the good life" of prosperity and success. Jesus said: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him, God the Father, has placed His seal of approval" (John 6:27).

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