An Easy Life or a Blessed Life?

Mike Davies 9 June 2016



The danger of equating material comfort with the favour of God is very real. Likewise, to suggest that hardship is a sign of His disapproval is an overly simplistic and dangerous line of thinking. As we will see, a blessed life doesn't always mean an easy life.

Largely on the basis of promises, such as Deuteronomy 30:15-20, a theology developed in Israel that prosperity, health and a long life were evidence of God's favour, and that sickness, poverty and death were evidence of God's displeasure. Such thinking continued through to New Testament times, as evidenced, for example, by the apostles' questioning of Jesus about a man born blind. 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' (John 9:3).

This type of theology survives to this day, most notably within the so-called 'Prosperity Gospel', but also, more subtly, in the thinking of many believers. But it is a theology that is clearly proven false in Scripture.

Bad Things Happen to Good People

Even before the establishing of the Old Covenant, we can see that God allowed righteous men to

suffer: Abel was murdered by his jealous brother, and Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, wrongfully imprisoned and forgotten by those he helped.

In the story of Job, we see that Job's friends hold to this simplistic view that Job's suffering was because of his sin. They urge their friend to repent of his sins, but in the end they get rebuked by God for doing so. Job suffered not because he had sinned but because he was righteous!

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Subsequently many other righteous men suffered, including Jeremiah, David and Daniel. Ultimately, Isaiah prophesies about the coming Messiah, who Himself will be considered cursed because of the suffering He is to endure, despite being sinless (Isaiah 53).

The New Testament also explicitly undermines such thinking. Jesus answers the apostles about the blind man in John 9:3, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him'. The writer of Hebrews describes Christians who were 'destitute, afflicted, mistreated' (Hebrews 11:37), yet they were commended for their faith! The list goes on.

The Dangers of Equating Material Comfort with The Approval of God

- It can lead to **decision-making based upon circumstance**, rather than hearing the voice of God.
- It can make us **blind to the enemy's schemes**. Satan, too, knows how to give 'good' things, as evidenced by his offer to Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:8-10). An offer of the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would just bow to him.
- It can lead to **confusion and a reluctance to persevere**, or even rejoice in, our sufferings, as we are encouraged to do.
- It can lead to us **seeking lives of comfort and convenience**, instead of sacrifice and hard work.

> Consider whether you would prefer to receive blessing in this life or the next.

How Can We Reconcile the Texts that Promise Blessings with those that Promise Hardship?

We need to view our circumstances from an eternal perspective. In Deuteronomy, Israel is the people of God, the community of faith, which represents the church. The promise was of a blessed life in the promised land, which Hebrews 11 (and many other places in Scripture) clearly tell us refers to our promised, eternal destination. God is preparing us for our eternal home, and suffering is part of this process (Romans 5:3-4).

It is with an eternal perspective that we can rightly view our difficulties as 'light and momentary troubles' and rejoice in God's promises that we will be delivered from them. Consider whether you would prefer to receive blessing in this life or the next. Of course, sometimes we are promised both, but our focus should be on our eternal reward!

'For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.' (Job 19:25-27)

We should also consider what blessings really are. For example, 1 Peter 3:14 tells us that 'even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed'. Our sufferings can be our blessings, because they are making us more Christ-like and are gaining for us a better resurrection!

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Trusting God in Hardship

We don't always get specific answers as to why we are to endure hardship. Job wrestled with God on this very issue, but is never given an answer as to why. He is simply told that he needs to trust his Maker, who is wiser and more powerful than he. As he chooses to place his trust in God, he concludes: 'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you' (Job 42:5). Hardship resulted in intimacy.

So should we pray and ask for deliverance in the midst of hardship? Yes! Should we repent if we are aware that we are being disciplined? Of course! We can and should pray for God also to bless us and meet our needs materially. But we should also follow the example of the Thessalonian church of whom Paul boasted concerning their faith in the midst of persecutions

and afflictions. (2 Thess 1:3-5).

We have a choice, just as the Israelites did: Two paths lie before us: one leads to life and one to death; one to blessing and one to cursing. The path that leads to life is the narrow one and the harder one, yet it is worth it.

'There are always two choices. Two paths to take. One is easy. And its only reward is that it is easy.' (Unknown)