Our Faith is in God not Our Interpretation of Prosperity

Matthew 10:29-31; 1 John 2:15-17

Whenever I get to take part in a baptism, it makes me think of the expectations of new believers.

What are we supposed to be working at? How is our life supposed to change? What does it look like to be a “New Creation?”

God tells us that as those who are empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit our lives should be characterized by:

“… *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...*” (Galatians 5:22–23, ESV)

These are the things, I think, that Jesus had in mind when He said:

“19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you…”

(Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)

The New Testament makes numerous commands on how we should treat one another and as believers we are to dedicate our lives to learning to obey commands like…

Be at peace with one another. (Mark 9:50)

This I command you: that you love one another. (John 15:17)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

Live in harmony with one another. (Romans 12:16)

…stop passing judgment on one another. (Romans 14:13)

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace the building up of one another. (Romans 14:19)

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you. (Romans 15:7)

Serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

It would be awesome if all of us, as Christians, just lived out these kinds of commands all the time, but is this what the normal Christian life looks like?

The scriptures also tell us:

“*…In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*” (John 16:33, ESV)

“*…that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 14:22, ESV)

Just in this church alone I have seen…

Broken Bones

Broken relationships (Divorces, separations, estranged children, custody battles)

Cancer and other diseases or physical conditions

Tragic deaths

The effects of natural disasters

Deaths from natural causes

Addictions

Guilt and Shame from past mistakes and present failings

Anger problems

Financial troubles

Selfishness (Lust of the eyes, Lust of the flesh, pride of life)

Educational deficiencies (disparity between what we believe and what is true)

Ageism (too young and too old) and other discrimination

Past hurts and knowledge of future difficulties

Satan’s active attempts to confuse and destroy

Difficulty in discerning God’s will

As your pastor I want to encourage you to put your faith in Jesus, not in your circumstances or your interpretation of biblical prosperity.

Jesus said:

“Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny?

Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father’s will,

but the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

Therefore don’t be afraid.

You are of more value than many sparrows.”

(Matthew 10:29-31)

According to this, God knows, and cares for everything, even the sparrow, and yet, according to His will some fall to the ground. Prosperity isn’t measured by the temporal things God gives us, it is measured by how much we get to know God through whatever we are given. Remember Jesus said:

“*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*” (John 16:33, ESV)

He overcame the world and we find our peace in Him. So who is He? If we are going to find our peace from knowing God, let’s look at some of the words that Christians use to describe who God is, as we look at each of the attributes I want you to recognize that there is a comforting side and an exhorting (challenging) side to every attribute of God.

Webster’s dictionary defines encouragement as…inspiring with courage, spirit or hope…to spur on, to attempt to persuade.

Exhortation is defined as inciting by argument or advice, to strongly urge, or to give warnings or advice.

Living the abundant life is achieved by being either encouraged or exhorted by who God is.

Slide 1(a-d)

  Immutable (Psalm 102:25-27; Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8).

“*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.*” (Psalm 102:25–27, ESV)

“*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” (Hebrews 13:8, ESV)

Encouragement…If God was loving today He will be loving tomorrow.

Exhortation…If God was a consuming fire yesterday He will be a perfectly Holy consuming fire today and tomorrow as well.

Slide 2 (a-c)

 Omniscient (Psalm 139:1-6; Psalm 147:5).

“*O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.*” (Psalm 139:1–6, ESV)

 Encouragement…God knows everything

 Exhortation…God knows everything

Slide 3 (a-c)

 Infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Isaiah 66:1; Psalm 145:3; Job 5:9; Job 9:10).

“*“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*” (1 Kings 8:27, ESV)

Encouragement…There is no end to discovering how great God is

Exhortation…If you think you have got God all figured out, think again

Slide 4 (a-d)

Holy (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:3; Leviticus 19:2; Job 34:10; Luke 1:49).

“*“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*” (Exodus 15:11, ESV)

“*“He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot.*” (Job 9:32–35, NIV84)

Encouragement…God is perfect in everything He is and does and allows.

Exhortation…We should not think we can approach Him with our own holiness

Slide 5 (a-e)

Faithful (Deuteronomy 7:9; Lamentations 3:22-23; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 10:23).

“*Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*” (Lamentations 3:22–23, NIV84)

“*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*” (Hebrews 10:23, NIV84)

“*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 8:38–39, NIV84)

Encouragement…God is faithful and sticks with us through all things

Exhortation…We will probably have to deal with height, depth, angels, demons, life and death in order to see and believe in God’s faithfulness.

Slide 6 (a-c))

Omnipotent

(Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17; Job 42:2).

Encouragement…Jesus healed the lepers and the blind and turned the water into wine.

Exhortation…If He hasn’t turned our water into wine, then water must be the best thing for us at the time.

Slide 7 (a-c)

 Incomprehensible

(Job 11:7; Job 26:14; Romans 11:33).

Encouragement…God and His ways are big and it is encouraging to know that our God is far above us.

Exhortation…Do not put God or His people in a tight theological box.

Slide 8 (a-c)

k. Self-sufficient (Psalm 50:12; Acts 17:24-25).

“*“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.*” (Acts 17:24–25, NIV84)

 Encouragement…God doesn’t need us, He wants us

Exhortation…God doesn’t need us, so we shouldn’t be full of ourselves

Slide 9 (a-d)

 Just (Numbers 14:18; Psalm 89:14).

“*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you.*” (Psalm 89:14, NIV84)

“*‘The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’*” (Numbers 14:18, NIV84)

Encouragement…All who put their trust in God will not get what they deserve, they will receive according to Christ’s riches

Exhortation…All who don’t put their trust in Christ will receive exactly what they deserve

Slide 10 (a-c)

 Loving (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8).

“*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*” (1 John 4:8–11, NIV84)

Encouragement…God is love and He loved us so much He sacrificed Himself for us

Exhortation…In the way that God loved us we are called to love one another.

I could go on today, but I’m going to leave it at that. Never stop searching and digging to know and trust God.

He is our Savior. He is our portion. He is our Peace. Knowing Him for who He is, is the key to being inspired and encouraged, and it is the key to being spurred on to doing what is right and good. After all, didn’t Jesus say that the scriptures were written so that we would know Him?

Jesus once said to the Pharisees…

“39 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life...”

John 5:39 ESV

“46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

John 5:46 ESV

And the apostle John described his reason for writing about Jesus’ miracles…

“…these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

John 20:31 ESV

Abundant life comes from knowing Christ and following His example. Temporal things fade, riches disappoint, power corrupts, our interpretations of what is good for us are often incorrect.

God will not fail us, He is who He says He is and the more I get to know who He is, the more aware I am that He is providing for me the abundant life, water or wine, dry bread or a donut, mazaratti or geo metro. Prosperity is found in our relationship with God.

No matter who you are and how long ago you made your commitment to Jesus

Never stumble in your trust in Him and His example and His commands.