



The Test of Prosperity (Deuteronomy 6:10-25)

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There are many challenges in the Christian life. The world pulls us away from the Lord, desperate to prove life can be found apart from him. Sinful desires tempt us to pretend we are God instead of cheerfully submitting to his authority. The great enemy of our souls, Satan himself, seizes every opportunity to sow unbelief and division, blinding our eyes to the beauty and goodness of Jesus.

Spiritual challenges often come in the form of difficult circumstances. Infertility or an ailing body makes it easy to question God's love. A spouse who refuses to change or a child whose heart remains far from the Lord makes it easy to question God's wisdom. A mountain of debt or a promotion that never materializes makes it easy to question God's power. Adversities abound in a fallen world – trouble without and trouble within. They test us, try us, squeeze us.

But there is another test that looms large, both in the pages of Scripture and in our present spiritual experience. It's the test of prosperity, the test of material blessing. At the end of Deuteronomy, immediately before Moses dies, he perceives a coming day when Israel will no longer "serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart" (Deut 28:47). Their obedience will be half-hearted and begrudging. "You will fall away from the Lord," Moses warns. Why would they do such a thing? Moses gives the reason in seven words: "because of the abundance of all things."

Jesus doubles down on the same test in Mk 10:23–25, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how difficult 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.'

"But Matthew," you say to yourself, "I'm not rich. I'm not Bill Gates. There's not much money left over after making a car payment, covering our mortgage, paying for the kid's school and sports, taking our annual beach trip, taking the wife out to dinner, keeping my wardrobe updated, saving for retirement, remodeling our kitchen, and sending financial support to family members overseas."

Friend, if you live in the United States, have your own bed to sleep in, a private means of transportation, three meals a day, clean water, medical care when you need it, and a

steady job above minimum wage, you are among the richest people on planet earth. If you are sitting in this climate-controlled room, taking notes on a smartphone, while recording a soccer game on your DVR at home, you have a test of prosperity.

And here's the scary thing. It doesn't feel like a test. It feels like comfort, convenience, and security. It feels like enjoying the reward of your labor. I'm just getting what I deserve. Adversity? That's a test. Prosperity? That's the good life. What could possibly be difficult or challenging about health and wealth?

In Deut 6, Israel is about to enter the promised land of Canaan. After 40 years in the wilderness, the Lord is about to bring them into land flowing with milk and honey. So he warns them. And he warns us. Nothing has more power to undermine the single-minded devotion to God Deut 6:5 requires than prosperity. Prosperity is pregnant with power to destroy your soul. Adopting an uncritical attitude toward prosperity is like sauntering through a field of landmines.

So be careful. Be careful when life is good even more than when life is difficult. Careful to do what? **Remember the grace of God so that you will hold fast to God.** Why do we need to remember God's grace, his undeserved favor? Moses gives us several reasons.

1) GRACE IS THE ULTIMATE EXPLANATION FOR OUR ABUNDANCE (vv. 10-15)

Moses begins by inviting Israel to imagine all the blessings that are right around the corner, blessings that point to the covenant faithfulness of God. V. 10, "And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you – with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant..."

God delights to give his people good gifts we do not deserve and cannot earn. In other words, he delights to lavish us with grace. Yahweh took cities, houses, cisterns, vineyards, olive trees, the choice fruits of civilization, from the Canaanites as an expression of his righteous judgment and gave them to Israel as gifts of grace.

What's the oh-so-tempting narrative? We built that. We filled that. We dug that. We planted that. I showed up in this country nearly broke and now look at me. I'm the prototype of a self-made woman. I'm an American success story. Cue the personal responsibility applause track. And therein lies the danger.



Friend, no matter how hard you've worked, no matter how much you've sacrificed, no matter how many years you studied or how many shifts you stayed late, no matter how many wise choices you've made, Deut 8:18 tells the true story, "It is [the LORD your God] who gives power to get wealth." Jas 1:16-17, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights..." Or in the searing words of 1 Cor 4:7, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

If your life is full of blessings – material blessings included – there is only one explanation. God has been gracious to you. Grace is the ultimate explanation for our abundance. That's not what I believed in my heart of hearts as a young man. As a young man I was convinced my diligence, moral discipline, attention to detail, hunger to learn, was the reason I experienced so much success in school. "God, I thank you that I'm not like other men who cram before finals, turn in sloppy papers, forget assignments, can't manage their time, and seem generally disinterested in working hard!"

It's easy to see pride in others. It's hard to see it in ourselves. So, test yourself, friend. When blessings abound, when in the final words of v. 11, "you eat and are full," do your eyes fill with tears of gratitude? Or in the words of v. 12, do you "forget the LORD"? Do you pat yourself on the back? Or do you make Ps 103:1-2 your cry? "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits..." All we have is a gift of grace.

The ease with which we forget the grace that explains our abundance reveals the extent to which we have loved him for our sake, not his. We look to him, we cry out to him, to bring an end to our adversity and deliver the goodies we want. But once we have them, once our material needs are satisfied, we move on. We think of God as a spiritual Door Dash driver. I appreciate the help; I'll gladly pay the delivery fee and toss some prayers your way when I'm hungry. But when he finally rings the doorbell, I'm not interested in a conversation. I just want my Chipotle!

If you read your Bible, come to church, and pray when life is hard. But everything goes out the window when life is easy, Jesus isn't your treasure. He's your errand boy. And that's a grievous mistake because you owe your very life to him. You wouldn't be here, Christian, let alone able to enjoy good things in this life, apart from God's mercy. We don't deserve his favor. We deserve his judgment on account of our sin.



So why are we still here? Why do any of us have good things? If you're not a disciple of Jesus, it's only because of God's common grace. Matt 5:45, "For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." If you are a Christian, it's because of God's saving grace, the unmerited favor he has lavished upon you for Jesus' sake. Rom 8:32, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Why did Israel experience the good life in the land of Canaan? Because the LORD (v. 12) brought them "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Why, Christian, do you already enjoy every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and will soon enjoy untold material blessings in the new heavens and the new earth? Why do some of those future blessings invade the present in seasons of prosperity? Because the LORD brought us out of the land of slavery to sin and death through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The grace of God, flowing down from the hill called Calvary, is the only explanation for our abundance.

The opposite of forgetting the Lord is fearing the Lord, a heart filled with trembling awe at the grace God has poured out on your life. V. 13, "It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear." The fear of the Lord says, "Look at all God has done for me!" Amazed by grace, we serve him. Amazed by grace, we remain loyal to him. In contrast, when we forget God's grace, we treat him as someone of little account.

Losing sight of God's grace is the first step toward apostasy. Why? Because we're all worshipers. We are hardwired to serve and swear by something, to look to someone or something to satisfy our souls. We cannot be godless. So when we forget the Lord, we inevitably embrace a false god. It could be a possession. It could be your physical health. It could be a hobby. It could be your success at work. The possibilities are endless, which is why Moses warns in v. 14, "You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you." Idolatry is the guaranteed consequence of forgetting the Lord.

And why is idolatry such a big deal? Because it's an act of betrayal. When you build your life around getting the next promotion instead of around loving and serving God, you're not just exchanging your parents' religious philosophy for something that works for you. It's personal. You are rejecting the living God! And if you spurn him, he doesn't play the wounded boyfriend card and languish in a puddle of self-pity. He is jealous for his glory. He will not sit idly by while you edit the story of your life to put yourself at the center.

V. 15 warns you what will happen. If you forget the Lord, if you refuse to acknowledge his grace as the ultimate explanation for your abundance, and begin serving other gods, “the anger of the LORD your God” will be “kindled against you” and he will “destroy you from off the face of the earth.” Come on, Matthew, isn’t that a little harsh? Friend, God’s anger is a righteous expression of his justice. Justice demands he respond when you denigrate his honor. There will be consequences, both in this life and the life to come.

So remember, friend. Grace is the ultimate explanation for your abundance. That’s why offering a prayer of thanksgiving before you eat is valuable. That’s why taking my boys to Chick-fil-a to celebrate the anniversary of God giving us our home is worth it. That’s why going out of your way, in public and private, to specifically thank people for the way they have served you, especially in the church, is so important. That’s why sharing testimonies of God’s work in our life is critical. It’s not about adopting an attitude of gratitude. It’s about having the humility to see God’s grace and give thanks for his grace. An ungrateful Christian is a contradiction in terms.

2) GRACE IS THE SURE REWARD OF OUR FAITH (vv. 16-19)

When Israel forgot God’s grace in the past, she stopped trusting the Lord for the grace she needed in the present and in the future. It’s exactly what happened decades earlier at a place called Massah. Ex 17:2-3, 7 reports what happened.

“The people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ ...And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD among us or not?’”

When we forget his benefits, we quickly fall into grumbling and unbelief, don’t we? We survey the landscape of our life and conclude, “Nothing good to see over here! No water in this corner of the world!” We create our own tests for God, sitting in judgment over him, summoning him to the court of human reasons, charging him with injustice. If you’re really loving, then give me a child. If you’re really wise, then make them pay. If you’re really powerful, then heal my body.

The problem with Massah was a lack of faith in the Lord, an unbelief rooted in forgetting the grace that had brought them safely thus far. We do the same thing when

we forget the gospel, brothers and sisters. Instead of saying, “Where is his grace and goodness known? In our great Redeemer’s blood.” We say, “Where is his grace and goodness known? In whether he gives me water right now!” And if he fails to measure up, we refuse to trust and obey him. I’ll only play by your rules if you give me what I want.

Heed the warning in v. 16, my friend. “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.” What should you do instead? Instead of testing him, trust him! And demonstrate your trust by diligently obeying his commands. V. 18, “And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the LORD has promised.” The obedience commanded in v. 18 is fueled by faith in v. 19 that God will do what he has promised to do.

So what sort of future grace could Israel expect to receive from the Lord in response to the obedience of faith. First, Israel could expect holistic blessing touching every aspect of her life. It will “go well with you,” Moses says. Jesus makes the same promise in Jn 10:10 to all who are willing to trust and obey him. “I came that they may have life and life abundantly.”

Israel could also expect to experience the joy of living in God’s place. You will “take possession of the good land,” Moses says. Today, God brings those who choose to trust and obey Jesus into his place in an immeasurably greater way! Col 1:13–14, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

He makes us his individual dwelling place by filling us with the Spirit. He unites us to his corporate dwelling place, the church, through covenant membership. And he brings us home to heaven, our eternal dwelling place with God, a land where righteousness dwells and sin and death are no more. Both then and now, God lavishes his unmerited favor on those who are willing to trust him by obeying his commands. That’s Moses’ point. If you want to experience God’s grace, you have to trust and obey his Word.

We often try to reverse the equation. We bargain with God. We say things like, “Lord, I’ll give generously if you give me a better paying job.” Or, “Lord, I’ll walk in sexual purity, if you increase my spouse’s sexual desire.” Give me some gifts of grace, Lord, and then I’ll decide to obey your commands. Bring me into the promised land, and then I’ll choose to follow you.

Friends, that's not biblical faith. Biblical faith steps out in obedience of God's commands because we trust him to do what he has said he will do. Heb 10:35-36, "Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised." If you want to experience the fulfillment of God's promised grace in your life, what must you do? Express your trust in the Lord by obeying his commands. Why? Because grace is the sure reward of our faith.

3) GRACE IS THE ENDURING MOTIVE FOR OUR OBEDIENCE (vv. 20-25)

Moses anticipates a coming day when Israelite children will ask, v. 20, "What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?" Translation? "Dad, mom, why are you doing all this stuff? Why is 'what God says' so important? Why should I listen to what he commands instead of doing what I want? Why should he be my God and not just your God?"

How do many Christian parents often answer? They go immediately to v. 24. Why should you obey? Because God tells you to. "The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes." But that's not what Moses instructs the parents around him to say, at least not first. Nor is it what we should say when friends or family members ask the same question!

What should we say? What's the chief reason, the primary motivation, for obeying God's commands? V. 21, "Then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand...' He redeemed us. He rescued us. God has been gracious to us, son. That's why we obey his commands. Brothers and sisters, how much more gracious is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the redemption God has accomplished by rescuing us from slavery to sin and death!

So what should we say to our sons and daughters today? "Son, we're all sinners, chained to a darkness of our own making, separated from God, deserving nothing but judgment. But God brought us out. He died and rose from the grave to make dead hearts like mine alive. He will make you alive too if you're willing to trust and obey him! We don't obey to earn his favor. We obey because he has poured out his favor upon us in Jesus. We don't obey to make God gracious. We obey because God is full of grace, abounding in steadfast love. We obey because of the gospel, Son. That's the answer."

Tit 2:11-14, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing



of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

The promise of grace doesn't remove the necessity of our obedience. Rather, it is the very thing that empowers our obedience. If obedience is the car, grace is the fuel. It's the grace God has poured out on us in Jesus that makes us eager and able to please him!

So when you're admonishing your children, take care. When you're exhorting a friend, take care. Take care to root every call to obey God in the grace of God. Start with the gospel. Start with God's power to redeem. Start with the way the Spirit delights to take spiritually dead heart and make them alive. Ground every imperative (do this for God) in a gracious indicative (because God has done this for us in Christ)!

Why should you honor God by pursuing sexual purity? 1 Cor 6:19-20, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Why should you give sacrificially to the advance of the gospel and the needs of the saints? 2 Cor 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

Why should you persevere in battling all manner of besetting sins – anger, impatience, pride, selfishness, envy? Rom 6:6-7, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin." Grace is the enduring motive for our obedience.

CONCLUSION

When the Lord tells us to "do all these statutes" in v. 24, what's his angle? What's his goal? "And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day." He's eager to do "good" to you, friend. He is eager to give you life and preserve your life. Ps 31:19, "Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you..." It's what compelled the Lord to give the law to Israel and compelled Jesus to say, "Follow me."

Obedience isn't a burdensome addition to the substance of our salvation like the fine print in a contract. It's the divinely ordained means by which we experience the life of God. Why is the path of obedience to God's commands the path of life? Because doing



“all these statutes” requires trust, dependence, submission, surrendering our will to his. Obedience leads us in the right way of relating to God, a faith-filled way, so we can receive and experience the life that is only found in him. It’s how God keeps us faithful to the end, so that we can be saved on the final day.

The “righteousness” Moses describes in v. 25 is not a work of merit or a means of achieving redemption. It’s a right response to the grace of redemption. So remember the grace of God, brothers and sisters. Grace is the ultimate explanation for our abundance. Grace is the sure reward of our faith. And grace is the motivation for our obedience. In the test of prosperity, friend, don’t forget the Lord. Remember the grace of God so that you will hold fast to him. For ‘tis grace hath brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.