

HOW ARE WE FLOURISHING?

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Psalm 92:7 speaks of times “when the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish.” The same psalm also speaks of the flourishing of the righteous: *“Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”* (Psa 92:13-14). There is an obvious difference between the flourishing of the wicked and of the righteous. That difference will play a key role in where we spend our eternity.

The prosperity of the wicked

In Job 21:7, Job asked a question based on what he observed in this life: *“Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?”* Job noted that the wicked “spend their days in wealth” (Job 21:7-13) and “heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay” (Job 27:16). “The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God brings abundantly” (Job 12:6). The psalmist Asaph also noticed the same thing, and it almost caused him to slip. “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Psa 73:2-5). “Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish” (Psa 73:7), and “waters of a full cup are wrung out to them” (Psa 73:10). “Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches” (Psa 73:12). The problem for the wicked is that this kind of “flourishing” is strictly in a physical or material sense. They are looking on the things which are seen, but these things are only temporal (2 Cor 4:18). *“And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all”* (Rev 18:14). The wicked who lay up their treasure on this earth are utterly unprepared for the eternity that awaits them.

The suffering of the righteous

In contrast to the wicked who flourish in this life, children of God can expect many trials, tribulation, and suffering for righteousness while living in this world. Again, as Asaph saw the physical prosperity of the wicked, he looked at his own life, and said, “For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning” (Psa 73:14). Of course, Job suffered greatly as he lost all of his possessions, his children, and his health. These servants of God are not alone. We are promised in 2 Timothy 3:12 that *“all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* Hebrews 11:35-38 gives an overview of the life of God’s faithful children: *“Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered*

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in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.” Why is it this way? Is this something that we cannot understand until “farther along?” That should not be the case, since our Lord has taught us that his strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:7-10). Job recognized that we grow spiritually through the trials on our faith as he said, “*When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). Indeed, for this reason we are taught to rejoice when our faith is tried: “*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 1:6-7). James 1:2-4 also says, “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*”

The judgment to come

If we were to make our decision about how to live our lives on this earth strictly by what is happening now, we might come close to slipping as Asaph did. The apostle Paul acknowledged, “*If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*” (1 Cor 15:19). However, the rest of that chapter teaches about the future victory of the righteous in the resurrection. Asaph recovered himself as he thought about what would happen to the wicked in the hereafter: “*When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction*” (Psa 73:16-18). After they die, “*the workers of iniquity shall be scattered*” (Psa 92:9) and “*shall be destroyed for ever*” (Psa 92:7). Now they have gained, but then they will not be spared (Job 27:22), but will lose their souls for eternity (Job 27:8). The eyes of the wicked “*shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty*” (Job 21:20). In Luke 16:19-31, righteous Lazarus was physically miserable and a beggar in this life, while his wicked neighbor “*fared sumptuously every day.*” After they died, Lazarus was comforted, and the formerly rich man was in torment and became the beggar. That man learned too late that it was not worth it to exchange his soul for a few years spent loving this world and enjoying its pleasures. In Matthew 16:26-27, Christ said, “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*” Therefore, the Lord teaches us to “*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*” (Matt 6:19-21).