

Text: *Deuteronomy 30:9* And the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings. . .

Luke 10:25-27 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher, "he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your minds; and your neighbor as yourself."

THE LAWYER'S TEST AND YOUR ABUNDANT PROSPERNESS

We dislike lawyers, until we need one, and then they are indispensable. Probably the main reason for our dislike is that, by and large, lawyers tend to be bright people. In the United States we haven't liked bright people since our national origins. We even had a political party called the Know Nothings! Jesus was welcoming back the seventy-two disciples who had been on the road, when he was tested by the lawyer. It was far from the first time that a mortal had tested God. My favorite example is Jacob's wrestling match with God. Even with God playing dirty, he dislocated Jacob's hip, Jacob won. [*Genesis 32:22-32*]

All of us, at some time or another, have tested God. Most frequently, we test Her performance. "Now, God, if you heal me, save me from this situation, etc., I will build you a church, or at least light a candle in thanksgiving. Our relationship to God becomes a sort of bargaining test. If God does so and so, I will reciprocate by doing X. The only churches supporting this kind of relation are ones that still sell indulgencies.

Another kind of test is of God's faithfulness. God, why have you forgotten me? Why do bad things happen to good people? In the Old Testament the answer was clear: You, your family or tribe had done something to displease God. The bad things happening to you were God's vengeance. A vivid example was Elisha's prophecy for soon to be King Hazael saying that he would "attack the Israelites, burn their cities, crush the heads of their babies and rip open their pregnant women." Fortunately, Jesus revealed the true nature of God. Vengeance was replaced by love and God always is concerned about lost sheep and welcomes them back into the fold. God never shuts people out of His grace.

We may also test God by challenging His very existence. "God, give me a sign so that I might believe!" The best sign is usually a bag of money, but a meteor shower might also do. It has been thought that Galileo killed God, then Copernicus, Darwin, Freud and more recently the Higgs boson particle, courtesy of sub-atomic particle physics. The view that scientific methods of inquiry kill God presuppose a very small God. I like to call that kind of small god a shrink wrapped god. A person creates their god by attributing to it all of the positive and negative notions one might have and then wraps god up tightly so that it never changes and is never subject to scrutiny. Christian nationalism comes from this kind of god-thinking. The truth of the matter is simple: God is infinitely greater than our imaginations. If you can imagine God, then your god is too small.

We all test God in various ways. We give God performance evaluations, loyalty tests and existential examinations. All have the same result: We may test God, but we are the ones who flunk the exams. Fortunately, we all learn from our experiences and emerge from our bouts of extreme ego more humble and fit Christians.

One of the most interesting things we learn from this experience is to rethink what the prophet means when he says that God will make us “abundantly prosperous.” I wouldn’t mind if he had in mind a really large bank account or, at least, a coffee can full of silver dollars. While some societies may have an abundance of the super-rich, we all know that there is always an abundance of the poor.

We will all have an abundance of love, through God’s grace. The abundance of love is the dominant theme of the Gospels. When the lawyer cited the necessity of loving God and one’s neighbor, he immediately asked “who is my neighbor”? Jesus answers in the parable of the Good Samaritan, everyone, even those most despised.

Our neighbor becomes our church family, our church family becomes our community and so on through-out all of creation. Jesus didn’t say that it would be easy to always love your neighbor; he said that if you profess to love God, then you must love your neighbor. How interesting it is to see the abundant prosperity of our spiritual lives built on love with the strength that comes from God’s grace.

Amen