

THE PERIL OF PROSPERITY

Deuteronomy 8:7-19

Introduction: When we come to this portion of scripture, this is Moses's final address to the children of Israel just before they enter the promised land. He charges them to walk in all the ways of God and to diligently serve Him. In the midst of charging them, he gives them a stern warning about "forgetting the LORD" when they receive the blessings of God that will come with their inheritance. He reminds them that all the time they were in the wilderness they had to lean upon God because there was nothing. No food, no water, just a barren wasteland. God rained down manna from heaven everyday so they had bread to eat, and He would miraculously provide water when they needed to drink. He blessed their clothes and their shoes not to wear away all the time they wandered in the wilderness. This was a time when they had to depend upon God just to survive. But now they are getting ready to cross over the Jordan and inherit Canaan. A land of plenty. A land flowing with milk and honey. A land of hills, valleys, rocks, and trees. A land of abundant wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, and pomegranates. A place where they will live in good houses and no longer live in tents. Their herds will multiply along with their silver and gold. They are getting ready to take a major step up in class. The warning that Moses gives them really is prophetic to what they will do once they come into abundance, they will forget God.

When he says "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God" he doesn't mean that they will have a memory slip. It's an act of disobedience. Moses defines forgetting God not as a mental blank, but as **failing to keep His commandments**. In the Bible, remembering God means actively obeying Him. Therefore, you can intellectually remember that God exists while still "forgetting" Him by living as if He doesn't matter. This verse sets up the warning for the rest of the chapter. Moses is telling the Israelites that their greatest spiritual danger will not come during their hardships in the wilderness, but during their **comfort and success in the Promised Land**.

The word "beware" means to be cautious, alert, or on your guard against potential danger, harm, or deception. To beware requires intentionality because the default human setting when things are going well is to forget God. It takes conscious daily effort and intentional guardrails to remain obedient and grateful when you no longer feel an immediate, desperate need for survival. The true test of a Christian's faith isn't how they handle poverty or trials, but whether their soul can survive success.

The church at Laodicea: In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the Lord Jesus gives a progress report to 7 churches of that time that are in what is present day Turkey. The last church he addressed was in Laodicea. Laodicea was a booming metropolis, widely recognized as one of the wealthiest, most self-sufficient commercial hubs in the Roman Empire. Laodicea was a place of great luxury because of its banking, textile industry, and medical school that specialized in treating eye diseases. That great prosperity had so influenced the church there that they were lifted up in pride. Jesus quoted them in **Revelation 3:17** Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: *They were materially wealthy and spiritually bankrupt*. They had so forgotten the Lord, that Jesus was knocking on their door and calling for anyone to open the door to fellowship with him. The scriptures consistently warn us against the peril of prosperity.

Why is prosperity dangerous?

- **Heart shift** – it shifts the heart from dependence of God to dependence on self. It fosters the illusion of self-sufficiency. Prosperity eliminates that immediate feeling of need. When a person can buy their own comfort, solve their own problems, and secure their own future, **God easily shifts from being their lifeline to an optional "add-on."**
- **Heart hardens** – Pride is trusting our strength instead of God's, our wisdom instead of God's, and our direction instead of God's. Moses warned that after prospering for so long that their heart would be "lifted up" (meaning that it would be hardened in pride). Then they would say in their heart, "My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth". When pride hardens a heart, that person relies fully on themselves and takes glory away from God. A hard heart doesn't hear the voice of God.
- **Heart blinded** – The second half of Revelation 3:17 Jesus says to the Laodiceans "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked". Pride blinds a heart to be able to see reality. A proud heart can't see its own spiritual condition. Pride creates a massive gap between a Christian's *perceived* spiritual health and their *actual* spiritual bankruptcy. A blinded believer genuinely believes they are thriving simply because they are comfortable, moral, or successful.

How do we avoid the peril of a proud heart?

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul recalls a time when he had an "out-of-body" experience and was caught up to the third heaven. He was in paradise and the presence of God. He explains that the glories, sounds, and truths of heaven are so far beyond human comprehension

that human language completely lacks the vocabulary to describe them. It was not lawful or permitted for Paul to share what he heard. God deliberately placed a seal of secrecy on this revelation. He speaks about this experience in the third person because he does not want to fall into the trap of boasting or being lifted up in pride. Right after telling us that this happened to him he says **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. *With Paul's abundant revelations also came a "thorn in the flesh". This meant that Paul dealt with something in his life that was painful, frustrating, and caused him affliction. Paul did not tell us what it was only that he prayed earnestly three times for it to be taken away. The Lord responded with "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness". In other words, "No I'm not taking your thorn away because it keeps you needing Me".*

Needs keep us:

- **Looking for Him** – The Canaanite woman (Syrophoenician woman) came relentlessly looking for Jesus because her daughter was grievously vexed with a devil. **Matthew 15:23-28** But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast *it* to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.
- **Leaning on Him** – When Israel went through 3 and a half years of drought because of no rain, God told Elijah exactly where to go to be sustained. He spent time by the brook Cherith, and ravens brought him food in the morning and evening. When the brook dried up God told him to go to Zarephath and widow woman would sustain him. When he got there, she was about to run out of everything but because she acted in faith, God kept meal in her barrel and oil in her cruse until the drought ended.
- **Loving Him - Psalm 116:1-2 Psalm 116:1-2** I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice *and* my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore

will I call upon *him* as long as I live. When God provides for us, it causes us to love Him more because His provision transforms our relationship with Him from an abstract theological concept into an intimate, personal romance. Provision is never just about the object given (the money, the healing, the job); it is about the heart of the Giver. When we experience God's timely care, it triggers several keys that unlock a deeper, more affectionate love for Him. When provision is viewed correctly, the gift serves as a megaphone magnifying the sweetness, reliability, and goodness of God, drawing our affections deeper into Him.