

The Myth of the 'Wonderful Life' Gospel

If you've read the Book of Acts, you've read how Saul of Tarsus (aka Paul the apostle) had a life-changing encounter with Jesus.

As a zealous Jew, Saul was persecuting fellow Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and then Jesus appeared to him.

Paul tells the story years later, "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'" (Acts 22:6-8)

What happened next? Let me share the next part of the story, not according to the Scriptures, but according to the contemporary American gospel version, with Paul narrating for us:

"And I said to the Lord, 'What do you have for me?'

"And He said to me, 'I have a wonderful life of health, wealth, and success for you.'

"And I said to Him, 'And what do you require of me?'

"And He said to me, 'I require nothing of you at all. I just want to take away your guilt and make you happy. Simply believe that I am good, say this little prayer, and I would be honored to have you as part of My family.'

"And I said to Him, 'That's an incredible deal. I'll take it.'"

Is that the gospel? Not a chance.

Let's go back to the Word and continue with the real account: "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'" (Acts 22:10)

That's quite different from the contemporary version!

"Lord, You require something of me? You have an assignment for me? And it's going to cost me personally to follow You?"

But this does not just apply to Paul.

Every believer has a specific calling and assignment, and every believer will have to give account to God one day, not for sins but for service.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19b-20a); and again, "[Jesus] died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15); and again, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor 5:10).

We are saved to serve, and salvation means a life of obedience, not to earn our salvation but because He has saved us.

Sadly, that is not the message sounded from pulpits and broadcast on TV and internet around the world.

Instead, lost sinners are told that if they will simply believe in Jesus, God will give them a wonderful life – and I mean wonderful in the terms of this world.

To repeat: That is not the gospel.

Do I believe that God is the Healer and that we should pray for the sick with expectation of healing? Absolutely.

Do I believe that God meets our needs and enables us to bless others? Certainly.

But I do not believe – no, I am 100 percent sure about it—that we are to tell lost sinners that God promises them health and wealth if they will only believe in Jesus.

That is not the gospel that Jesus preached or that Paul or the other apostles preached. You will not find it anywhere in the New Testament, nor can you derive it from the “abundant life” promise of John 10:10.

Jesus said that in this world we would have tribulation (John 16:33), that in order to be His disciples we had to deny ourselves and take up the cross (Mark 8:34), that if we loved father or mother or son or daughter more than Him we were not worthy of Him (Matt 10:37).

(What a terrible shame that some teachers today claim that none of these words of Jesus apply to us since they were spoken before the cross. That is one of the more serious deceptions of our day.)

Now, to be perfectly clear, salvation is a gift, paid in full by Jesus.

It cannot be earned, and 10 million years of our best works cannot possibly pay for the gift of eternal life. And God forgives us, freely and fully, the moment we put our trust in Him to save us from our sins.

But when God saves us, He purchases us, and for the rest of our lives, we belong to Him and are called to do His will, completely given over to Him.

That is Gospel 101.

We serve Him because we love Him, and we serve Him because He is our Lord. (According to Paul, in order to be saved, we must confess Jesus as Lord, which means nothing if it does not include submission to Him.)

The bottom line is that we were guilty sinners, deserving of divine judgment, but Jesus took our place and died for our sins so that we could pass from death to life and from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God, receiving eternal life and becoming His sons and daughters.

To lure sinners to Jesus with the “wonderful life” gospel is to do a disservice to them and to dishonor the Lord.

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