

## Scattering the Darkness: The Righteous Endure Forever

### Psalm 112 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands. <sup>2</sup> Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. <sup>3</sup> Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. <sup>4</sup> Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous. <sup>5</sup> Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. <sup>6</sup> Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. <sup>7</sup> They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. <sup>8</sup> Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. <sup>9</sup> They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures forever; their horn will be lifted high in honor. <sup>10</sup> The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

What do you think it takes to make you feel rich? Do you have to be part of the notorious 1%, people whose net worth is \$11.1 million or more? Do you need to have enough for all the bills, premium healthcare, a nice 401k that you add to regularly, and enough for a nice vacation every year? Or maybe it's not the dollar amounts that make you feel rich. Maybe being rich for you is that large family gathering once a week around a table, talking, laughing, feasting, spending quality time together making memories. Maybe being rich is all the nights going out with friends - joking, telling stories, playing games, experiencing life together. Maybe being rich is volunteering your time to help other people, going out on a mission trip, having a conversation about Jesus.

Rich is the picture painted here in Psalm 112. "Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who find great delight in his commands. Their children will be mighty in the land...Wealth and riches are in their houses...Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice...They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear." (verses 1,2,3,5,7,8)

This psalm is meant to rejoice in all the ways that God blesses his people, how he brings happiness into their lives. But, does this picture line up with your life? Do you see wealth and riches in your house or do riches seem elusive, that you never have much breathing room when it comes to paying the rent, the mortgage, the grocery bills? Are you even able to have extra that you can freely give away to other people? Do you feel like nothing but good is coming to you because you're a believer? Is your heart secure, or are you deathly afraid of the next bit of bad news, that you're kind of waiting for the other shoe to drop? Are you afraid of the unknown of the future? Does the picture of your life look not like this happy, put together picture but more like a mess, a chaos of colors and lines that nobody would ever buy or ever think to display in an art gallery?

If your life does not seem to match the picture painted here in Psalm 112, your mind may go where my mind went: what's wrong with me that this is not how my life looks? Am I not believing in God hard enough and that is why I feel so insecure, that I dread the next bit of bad news coming my way? Am I failing to be a good steward of the riches that God has committed to me? Am I squandering them away? Is that why I feel poor? Have I instead been very miserly or stingy when it comes to sharing what I have with others? Is that why good is not coming my way? Have I been a bad parent, not present enough, not enough discipline, not enough love, that my children are not mighty, but weak, broken? Is it my fault that they walked away from God? Am I the reason that I am not rich?

When my faith life doesn't match the picture presented in the Bible, I focus inward to try to fix it. I try to control what I can control. I look to blame myself for when things are not as "blessed" as I think they should be, which, if I can pin the blame on me, then I am back to controlling why the picture of my life is so messed up. And if we aren't blaming ourselves, then we are turning outward. We blame other people. We blame the world we live in. We blame God for not blessing me like he has blessed other believers.

Blessed. Blessings. Those are pretty churchy words, aren't they? What are blessings? It's a word that is synonymous with happiness. Well, how do we get that happiness? Our first instinct might be to think that a blessing, happiness is transactional. If I do this good thing, then you give me this. If I eat my vegetables, I get dessert. If the class is quiet, we'll be rewarded with extra recess. Do your chores, and you get more video game times. Life sometimes works this way, and it can make us happy to do good things.

So, it's easy to apply that to how God operates with his blessings. "God, I believed in you. I came to church. I had my kids baptized and confirmed here. So, why am I struggling to get by? Why am I afraid of getting another bit of bad news? Why are my kids not mighty, successful in their jobs, promoted at work?" We think blessings are based on our obedience first, that if we are good, then God will give us the wealth and the riches and the prosperous kids and the secure heart. This becomes our motivation for obeying God and his commands, but that motivation goes away if we don't feel we are being "blessed" in accordance with our faithfulness.

When it comes to our relationship with God, what actually comes first: our obedience to him or his blessings to us? Think of our first Bible reading from Exodus 19. Did God rescue the Israelites out of Egypt because they had been so obedient? No, he decided to bless them first by choosing them, by coming to their rescue in Egypt, carrying them out of slavery as if they were being carried away on strong eagle's wings. Then he gave them the 10 Commandments, ways that they could exercise obedience after they were blessed, happily rescued by God. Last week, we started Matthew chapter 5, a section often called the beatitudes. It wasn't a to do list for people to get God's blessings. No, it was a statement of fact that because you have these things from God, you are happy, you are blessed. These beatitudes carry over into today's Gospel reading where Jesus says that his followers, his believers, are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. This is what God has already blessed you to be, not the goal of what you are to become in order to have a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees and the teachers of God's Word. With God, his blessings to us come first, then our obedience follows in thankfulness.

Now take that understanding of God's blessings back to Psalm 112. This is not a to do list of what I get when I fear or believe in the LORD, what I get when I find great delight in his commands. No, it now becomes a picture to help us recognize that we have already been blessed by the Lord in this earthly life, that he has given us things that make us happy.

When God's Word brings you comfort to help you get through dark times, this is a blessing from God. When you have more than the absolute bare necessities, when you are able to give freely of the extra you have, this is because God has opened his hand and richly satisfied your needs and then more. When the outlook for the future is murky and you don't know what will happen next and it could be bad, you experience God's blessing when you walk confidently into that unknown, that you are not afraid of what comes next because God care for you has already happened and will continue and this has made your heart secure. When your kids prosper, when they experience success as they grow up and live according to God's Word, this is also what God has worked in them, how he has blessed them.

But what about when I don't see God blessing me and my family in these ways, when things are sad and hard? "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright." (verse 4a) We have a light, a richness, a happiness, a blessing from God every single day that no one can take away from us. God has rescued us from a spiritual slavery, from a transactional relationship with God that we have to obey his Word first and then he would "bless" us with forgiveness, with wealth, with children, with a secure future. We have a righteousness that far surpasses the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of God's Word because we have the righteousness accomplished by Jesus, a complete and full life of perfection lived for us, covering us completely. This bright perfection was given to us by God the Holy Spirit through his Word, through baptism, renewed with the Lord's Supper. By Christ's life lived for us, we have a secure future that we will be with him in heaven at the end of this life, no matter what else happens to us here and now. Our hearts are secure because our future is based on Christ's obedience, not ours.

Maybe we don't have the wealth and the riches, the prospering children, the extra to give to the poor - like the believer pictured in Psalm 112. But we do have a light dawning on us in the darkness of those times. We have God, the Light of the World, the Light no darkness can overcome. We can lose a lot of things in this life, but Christ - his payment for our sins, his perfect life lived for us, our forever home with God in heaven - these cannot be taken from us. This is the light that scatters the darkness in our lives and brings us joy every day. This is how God can say that our "righteousness endures forever." (verse 3b, 9b)

What does the picture of your life look like? The answer: richly blessed! God has blessed us by paying for our sins with his life. He has blessed us by covering us with his righteousness, his perfection, a righteousness which endures forever. He has blessed us by giving us a secure place within his family and a happily ever after in heaven with him. When dark times come, remember that God richly blessed you first and this scatters the darkness as his Light has dawned in your life. Amen.