

Mythbuster – If you do _____, God will bless/curse you

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SLIDE 2

What comes to mind when you think of blessings and curses in the Bible?

- Many churches in the West propagate what I call a 'blessing theology'. It's not quite the prosperity gospel but it's not too far away from it. And it's mainstream in many of our churches.
- This idea is brought across as a subtle form of "trusting" God. It is believing that if we live right, things will go right, that if we tithe a certain amount we will get financial blessing. It is also the subtle belief that if life is going wrong for me then I must be doing something wrong; I must be even sinning in some way.
- If I do something right then good things will happen. This is not faith, its superstition.
- It's ultimately about you and is not Christian.

SLIDE 3 – Body by God book and Lucado book

- What I saw in Koorong one day. Book called 'Body by God' about how God wants you to be fabulously beautiful. Right underneath it was a book by Max Lucado called 'It's Not About Me'.
- The Gospel is not about self-fulfilment; it's about submitting to the love of God for us and realising that we often get in the way of that.

SLIDE 4 – Blessing theology is ultimately self-centred

- Unfortunately the church is so caught up in this thinking that it falls mostly on secular artists to come out and write honestly about life. Listen to John Mellencamp from his song *Longest Days*:

SLIDE 5 – Mellencamp song

"Nothing lasts forever,
The best efforts don't always pay.
Sometimes you get sick and you don't get better.

That's when life is short, even in its longest days"

SLIDE 6 – Job

- Job knew that. Yes, he received abundant material blessings after his suffering, but he is an exception, not the rule.
- The rule in the Bible is that all of its great leaders went through a wilderness experience of some sort, especially Jesus. That's why he is referred to in Isaiah as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, and that by his suffering we are healed. It is not despite his suffering, but through his very suffering that salvation is offered to the world.
- Jesus said the rain falls on the just and the unjust. When asked about who sinned when the tower fell and killed 18 people, Jesus said it wasn't about whether or not anyone sinned.
- Tim Costello tells the story of when he was in Sri Lanka just after the Asian tsunami in 2004. Back in comfortable Australia, people were asking how you could believe in a God who would allow such a disaster to happen. But that wasn't what the people directly affected by it in Sri Lanka were asking. The people who lost everything over there were answering that question by saying "How can we not believe in God; he is all we have left!".
- Good and bad things happen to anyone. People who do bad things often get away with it and people who do good things are often misunderstood and not recognised.
- It's not about reward and punishment. It's about love. Jesus said to go away and do your good deeds and don't worry about whether or not anyone sees them. It's not about that. It's about love, about giving to others.
- Don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.
- It is only when we accept that bad things happen to us no matter what type of people we are (and that good things happen to all sorts of people as well) that we realise that life is ultimately out of our control. I
- t is then that we can more fully surrender to Christ and more fully and finally realise that nothing in life can be ultimately relied upon to give us what we need and want except God alone.
- And it is this that leads to the joy we really desire in our heart of hearts. This is why the only time Jesus speaks of his own joy is on the night before

he dies, the night he is betrayed by one of his closest friends, the night he is denied by an even closer friend, the night his best friends abandon him in the hour of his greatest need as he endures an unjust trial and the mockery of the ones who should know better.

- It is when we fully surrender to God because we finally know that he is the only one who can satisfy the deepest longing in our hearts that we find the joy we ultimately long for.
- Life is ultimately about how we deal with loss. In life we will suffer, and when we love we open ourselves up to more suffering.

SLIDE 7 – C.S. Lewis quote

CS Lewis quote on love and cocooning ourselves.

“To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.”

- Loving is sadness. The love of Jesus is suffering love. A mother's love for their child is like this. They will do literally anything to protect their child. They would literally die for them. Love is willing to suffer. Can you see how different that is from a thinking that is all about you?
- When Jesus talked about blessings, he gave the Beatitudes.

SLIDE 8 - Beatitudes

- Blessed are the poor, those who mourn. The ones that nobody cares about, the ones who always miss out, the ones for whom something is always going wrong. They are blessed by God. It's not about being blessed if you do those things. It's that you are already blessed, now. That's how God sees you. Not as the world sees you.
- The reason he said that these people are blessed is because it is when you

are poor in spirit, when you mourn and when you are persecuted; in other words, when you are at the end of your rope and have nothing left to hold on to, it is then that you realise that God is all you have left.

SLIDE 9 – The upside-down kingdom and grace, not karma

SLIDE 10 – Myth busted, true, plausible?