

Place: Lurgan Baptist 5:3:2002

Reading: Matthew 6:19-34

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

18. NAME AND CLAIM IT !

One of the most unusual legacies of World War 2 has been the cargo cults of the South Pacific. Many aboriginal island peoples ranging from Australia to Indonesia were exposed to modern civilisation through the Allied Armed forces during the war. The American military in particular often used the remote islands that dot that part of the globe as sites for temporary landing stripes and supply depots. White men came bearing cargo, then they left as quickly as they had come. The tribal peoples had not no time to learn the ways of civilisation. But for a brief time they saw technology up close. Cargo planes would swoop from the sky, land, leave their payload, then take off. Island natives saw cigarette lighters produce fire instantly and believed it to be miraculous. They saw large machinery push aside whole forests to build airstrips. They saw for the first time jeeps, modern weaponry, fridges, radios, power tools and many varieties of foods. They were fascinated by all of that and many concluded that the white men must be gods. When the war was over and the armies were gone, tribesmen built shrines to the cargo gods.

Their tabernacles were perfect replicas of cargo planes, control towers, and airplane hangers .... all made of bamboo and woven material. These structures all looked exactly like the real thing, but they were non-functional except for their use as temples to the cargo gods. On some of the more remote islands, the cargo cults still thrive today. Some have personified all Americans in one deity they call Tom Navy. They pray for holy cargo from every airplane that flies over. They venerate religious relics .... such as cigarette lighters, camera's, ball-point pens, nuts and bolts, and so on. As civilisation has begun to penetrate some of these cultures, their fascination for cargo has not diminished. Missionaries who have been sent to areas where cargo cults have flourished receive a warm reception at first, the cargo cultists view their arrival as a sort of second coming. But the cultists are looking for cargo not the gospel, and missionaries have found it very difficult to penetrate the materialism that is the very essence of the islander's religion.

In recent years the charismatic movement has spawned its own variety of cargo cult. Its called by many names, " Name it and claim it," " Health and wealth," " Prosperity Gospel," " Positive confession," " Word of faith." The basic premise of the prosperity gospel is that God wants believers to have the best of everything. This means no financial difficulties. The Christian can have whatever he or she wants, spiritual or material. Listen to these book titles, " God's key to success and Prosperity," " God doesn't want you Poor," " Redeemed from Poverty," and so on. So the leaders of this movement promise each believer financial prosperity and perfect health. Anything less, they argue is not God's will.

God " wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything." My .... the prosperity gospel is big business. Some estimate it is the fastest

growing segment of the Charismatic movement. Its sold on TV and radio. Tapes and books on the subject sell in the millions. It has great appeal. For those strapped for cash and driving an old car about to collapse, it is especially tempting. What about you ? Are you driving an 1989 cavalier ? Are you living from paycheque to paycheque having about a hundred pounds in the

bank ? My .... can you see why it so appealing ? Why it attracts the masses ? Now virtually every false religion ever spawned by man worships a god whose function is to deliver some sort of cargo.

That is, human religions invent gods for useful and selfish reasons, the deities exist to serve men, rather than the other way around. The prosperity gospel has turned Christianity into a system no different from the lowest human religions .... a form of voodoo where God can be coerced, cajoled, manipulated, controlled, and exploited by the Christians own ends. One prosperity gospel teacher sent out his brochure with " bar of prayer blessed soap." David Epley said, " We are going to wash away all bad luck, sickness, misfortunes and evil. Yes, even that evil person you want out of your life." Inside that brochure were testimonies from people who had been blessed by that ministry. " Door opens to new job !" " An \$80,000 dollar dream comes true."

" Couldn't use my hand for twelve years." Also inside was a personal letter from Epley, closing with a full page of instructions on how to use the soap for healing or a " money miracle." " Now after you wash the poverty from your hands .... take out the largest bill or check you have .... that \$100, \$50, or \$20 bill .... hold it in your clean hands and say, " In Jesus' name I dedicate this gift to God's work .... and expect a miracle return of money." Of course, your " largest bill or check," must be sent to Epley's organisation.

When I was in South Africa in 1983 one of the preachers there told me off of a large Charismatic church where they were " naming it and claiming it."

He said " they are asking God for expensive cars Roll's Royce, Mercedes etc.; but that's not all, they are even specifying the colour." My .... do you see what is happening ? These teachers are corrupting the heart of NT Christianity. moving the believers focus off sound doctrine, worship, service, sacrifice and ministry, shifting it instead to promised physical, financial and material blessings. Now having given you that little bit of background I want us to come to our subject from a threefold angle.

#### (1) THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

You might ask, where did all this come from ? The prosperity teaching seems to have originated in the teachings of E.W. Kenyon, a Bible teacher and author whose writings greatly influenced the Charismatic movement. The leading teacher today is Kenneth Hagin. He has spoken and written much on the subject.

The main idea is that every Christian should have plenty of money and an abundance of material things. They teach that prosperity is the right of every Christian who claims it by faith. Not to prosper is to be out of God's will. The universe is governed by certain spiritual laws and physical laws. By faith, one can maximise these laws and become prosperous. Also, if a person is God's child, then he or she can always go first-class through life. Now there are certain arguments that these prosperity teachers put forward, to bolster their case. There is:

(a) THE TEXTUAL ARGUMENT:

1. They use ( Deuteronomy Ch 28 ) to support their views:

There God promises blessing on the nation of Israel, if they obey Him, conversely, " all these curses shall come upon thee, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God." ( 28:15 ) Do you know that little chorus ? " All the promises in the book are mine,"? Its not true ! For all the promises in the Bible are not yours. Remember many Old Testament promises were specifically made to the nation of Israel, not to the church. All God's promises are not given to all God's people. For example, God specifically promised the land of Palestine to His chosen people Israel. That promise is not intended for Christian believers today.

My .... in ( Deut Ch 28 ) God was speaking specifically to Israel, as a nation !

2. They use ( Mark Ch 10 ) to support their views:

Look at ( Mk 10:29-30 ) So Christ is promising here a hundred fold blessing. Does that sound like guaranteed prosperity ? Well, one prosperity gospel teacher put it like this, " If I am not prospering, it is not God's fault nor the fault of the Word of God .... it is my fault." But what does Christ mean here ? Does He mean that He will give Peter a 100 boats in the place of the one he has left behind ? No ! Christ is saying that the disciple who

" for His sake," leaves loved ones, possessions, will find that wherever he goes he has access to the hearts and homes of God's people. Any of us who have served God overseas for any length of time have proved this. But lets go beyond that. For Christ does not pay His

" 100 times as much," in just one kind of currency. He pays it in many others as well. Christ pays some of it in the currency of " the peace of God," in the currency of a

" contented spirit," freedom from " anxiety," one thing is absolutely sure, the Master who employs rewards abundantly. Now there's another text they use:

3. They use ( 3 John 2 ) to support their views:

Have a look at it ( 3 John 2 ) Now these prosperity teachers have latched onto this word " prosper." They tell us from this that it is God's will for all believers to be financially prosperous. But what does the verse really say ? The word " prosper," literally means " to get along well." The word was used as a common greeting and desire expressed in the letters of New Testament times. My .... this verse is not a blanket guarantee that Christians will be healthy and prosperous.

Some of you have Sky T.V. and you watch the God channel. Do you remember Jim Baker in USA ? He taught and lived prosperity. The glitzy, glamorous lifestyle of PTL certainly got America's attention. Now looking back on a 1989 conviction for twenty four counts of fraud and five years in prison, Jim Baker calls the prosperity gospel a deception of Satan. He says, " I was proof texting all the time. Just looking up Scriptures to prove my belief."

(b) THE VERBAL ARGUMENT:

What the prosperity gospel teachers call " positive confession." In other words, to get what you want you need a positive confession. You've got to say audibly what you want from God. Here's a good definition of positive confession, " A statement, made in faith, that lays claim to God's provisions and promises." Do you see it ? Your words determine reality ! Now you'd better not use negative words like " tickled to death," because this is inviting death, so they tell us. If your words are positive life's a party. Now here's how it works. All Christians are to be prosperous. If they have a financial need or desire, they just find a verse that promises prosperity. Then they audibly quote that verse, no matter what. By believing it in the heart and speaking it with the mouth, the financial provision will be manifested according to the believers faith. This is why the movement is called " name it and claim it. But my .... does God bless us only when we use positive words ? In the Old Testament, King Jehoshaphat confessed his lack of strength against his enemies.

Now that was a negative statement, yet God gave him a glorious victory. ( 2 Chron 20:1 ) In the NT Paul speaks of his weakness, but he said he was strong because God's strength was made perfect in his weakness. ( 2 Cor 12:10 ) The final argument that the prosperity teachers use is:

(c) THE CHRISTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT:

Was Christ rich while on earth ? These teachers tell us He was ! Do you recalls Christ's words " Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." ( Lk 9:58 ) Do you know what these prosperity teachers tell us ? They say that He meant, " I don't have a place to stay in Samaria. So He had to go back to His luxury home in Jerusalem." My .... Paul says something different. For speaking of the Lord Jesus he says, " For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." ( 2 Cor 8:9 ) My .... we need to be beware of those who corrupt

Scripture ! Do you recall Pauls warning to Timothy about " Men of corrupt minds supposing that gain is godliness, from such withdraw thyself .... but they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drawn men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." ( 1 Tim 6:9-10  
Jude 11-16 2 Pet 2:1-19 ) (1)

(2) THE ARTICLES OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

What are the things to which they hold ? Well,

(a) They have a Defective view of GOD:

The god of the prosperity gospel is not the God of the Bible. They set the believer above God and relegate God to the role of a genie, or Santa Claus or a valet who is at the Christians beck and call. They have no concept of God's sovereignty. The Bible says, " The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom ruleth over all." ( Ps 103:19 ) God is " the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords. "

( 1 Tim 6:15 ) But they don't talk about the sovereignty of God. Rather they teach that God is bound by spiritual laws that govern health and

prosperity. If we say the right words, or believe without wavering, God is forced to respond in whatever way we determine. But they go further, by using ( Ps 82:6 ) which says " ye are gods and all of you are children of the most high," they teach that we are all little gods.

Incidentally, a simple reading of that psalm reveals that these words were spoken to unrighteous rulers on the verge of their judgement. God was deriding them for their haughtiness. It was THEY who thought they were gods. Read ( Ps 82:6&7 ) together, " Ye are gods .... but ye shall die like men." Far from affirming their godhood God was condemning them for thinking too highly of themselves. Yet Benny Hinn says, " You are a little god on earth running around." Kenneth Hagin says, " If we ever wake up and realise who we are, we'll start doing the work that we're supposed to do. Because the church hasn't realised yet that they are Christ. That's who they are. They are Christ." My .... do you see now why they teach health and prosperity for every Christian ? Because in their system Christians are gods, deserving of those things. (a)

(b) They have a Defective view of CHRIST:

They tell us that the Lord Jesus had to be born again to make it possible for us to be prosperous. Kenneth Copeland states and I quote, " The Spirit of God spoke to me, and He said, Son realise this. ( Now follow me in this. Don't let your tradition trip you up. He said, think this way: a twice-born man whipped Satan in his own domain. And I threw my Bible and I sat up like that. I said what ? He said, a born-again man defeated Satan. The first born of many brethren defeated him. He said, you are the very image and the very copy of that one. )

My .... do you know what that is ? That is blasphemy !  
For God is God. We are not God. But we are God's children. So they have  
(a) (b)

(c) They have a Defective view of FAITH:

Faith to them is not submissive trust in the Lord, but rather a formula by which to manipulate spiritual laws which they believe govern the universe. As we noted already they about " positive confession. "

Kenneth Hagin writes, " You can have what you say. You can write your own ticket with God. And the first step in writing your own ticket with God is: Say it."

He says later, " If you talk, about your trials, your difficulties, your lack of faith, your lack of money .... your faith will shrivel and dry up. But, bless God, if you talk about the Word of God, your lovely Heavenly Father and what He can do .... your faith will grow by leaps and bounds." Bruce Barron tells of a pastor and his wife, unable to bear children, who " were told by a member of their church that they needed to " confess, " a pregnancy and display their faith by purchasing a baby stroller and walking down the street with it." Some years ago a dear woman who was deceived by these teachers wrote to a godly pastor. Listening to this teaching she believed that God wanted her to write to everyone she knew with a baby announcement for the child she was hoping to conceive. Tragically, that poor woman was physically incapable of bearing children. Months later, she had to write to everyone again to explain that the expected " faith baby, " had not arrived. She was quick to add that she was still claiming a pregnancy by faith however. She was obviously fearful that someone might take her second letter as a

" negative confession."

Kenneth Hagin seem callous even about the death of his own sister from lingering cancer. " My sister got down to 79 pounds. The Lord kept telling me that she was going to die. I kept asking the Lord why I couldn't change the outcome. He told me she had five years in which she could have studied the Word and built up her faith ( she was saved ) but she hadn't done it. He told me she was going to die and she did. This is a sad example, but it's so true." My .... is it not strange that these teachers make the healer a hero when miraculous cures are claimed, but always blame the seeker for a lack of faith when healing does not happen ? They love to quote ( Jn 14:14 ) " If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it," but they are reluctant to quote ( 1 Jn 5:14 ) " And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us." Is it God's will that all of us be healthy and wealthy ? Robert Tilton says, yes !

He says " Being poor is a sin, when God promises prosperity." Tilton says " New house ? New car ? That's chicken feed. Thats nothing compared to what God wants to do for you." Will, how is this cargo to be obtained. Tilton suggests, you've guessed it, that his followers make " a vow of faith," in the form of a gift to his ministry. My .... lets turn aside from this teaching which is contrary to the Word of God and notice:

### (3) THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

What is the alternative ? What is God's perspective on prosperity ? Someone has said, " Worldly ambition has a strong fascination for us. The spell of materialism is hard to break." Listen to this analysis:

" Mr and Mrs Thing are a very pleasant and successful couple. At least, that's the verdict of most people who tend to measure success with thingometer.

And when the thingometer is put to work in the life of Mr. and Mrs Thing, the result is startling. There he is, sitting down on a luxurious and very expensive thing, almost hidden by the large number of other things. Things to sit on, things to sit at, things to cook on, things to eat from, all shining and new. Things, things, things ! Things to clean with, things to wash with, things to clean and things to wash. Things to amuse, things to give pleasure, things to watch, and things to play. Things for the big thing in which they live, things for the garden, things for the lounge, things for the kitchen and things for the bedroom. Things on four wheels, things on two wheels, things to put on the top of the four wheels, things to pull behind the four wheels, things to add to the interior of the thing on four wheels .....

Well, Mr. Thing, I've some bad news for you. What's that ? You can't hear me ? The things are in the way ?

But then, that's the problem with things. Look at that thing standing outside your house. Whatever its value to the second-hand thingdealer, its means a lot to you. But then, an error in judgement, a temporary loss of concentration, and that thing can be a mass of mangled metal being towed off to the junkyard." My .... is this not the way life goes ? In spite of how stupid it sounds you and I are basically committed to acquiring things.

Now what does God say about things ?

(a) IT IS NOT WRONG TO OWN THINGS:

Look at ( Matt 6:19 ) Now what was Christ forbidding ? Was He forbidding a bank account, savings account, life insurance policy, or a wise investment. Does He mean that we should not possess anything when He says,

" Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth. ( 6:19 ) Some people say, " That means you shouldn't have anything .... don't have any earthly treasure." In other words, sell all your own, walk the street, get a brown bag and be a hobo. But my .... the Lord never condemns possessions. God says in His law, " Thou shalt not steal." ( Exod 20:15 ) That very statement of God assumes that something can be mine that you can't have.

We have a right to possessions. ( Matt 19:29 Deut 28:1

Acts 5:1 2 Chron 20:7 ) (a) In ( Gen 1:31 ) we read,

" And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."

1. God Made Things that are Good:

In this universe there is God, there are people, and there are things. God is to be worshipped, people are to be loved and served, and things are to be used. God made things and He did not make anything that is wrong.

2. God Knows we need Things:

Look at ( Matt 6:32 ) We don't need everything, but we do need basic things. If God knows my life and my needs, then all I need to know is that He cares. If He knows and cares, then I am home free.

3. God Wants us to Enjoy Things:

Paul says to Timothy, " Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." ( 1 Tim 6:17 ) God wants us to enjoy things. He made things. They are good and it is not wrong to enjoy them.

4. God Wants us to Use Things:

Paul said that we should do good, be rich in good works, be ready to distribute, and be willing to share.

( 1 Tim 6:18 ) John Wesley was an extremely wealthy man. We think of John Wesley as a great man of God, of prayer, a man who devoted long periods of time to the Word of God. Wesley was up early every morning and studied for hours in his Greek New Testament. We think of Wesley as a man of low means, but John Wesley was extremely wealthy. He gained his wealth from the hymns that he wrote and the books that he penned. At one point in his life he gave away £40,000 pounds .... a fortune in his day. Yet, when John Wesley died his estate was worth £28-00. He didn't lay up his treasure on earth. When it came in it went right back out into the lives of the people .... invested in the kingdom of God. My .... the issue is not what you have, but what you do with what you have ? Is it for you or for the kingdom of God and His purposes ? (a)

(b) IT IS WRONG FOR THINGS TO OWN US:

Things are marvellous servants but terrible masters. Do you see what Christ says in ( Matt 6:21 ) ? The question that arises out of this text is very simple. Where is your heart ? For according to Christ, your heart is wherever your treasure is ! So where is the concentration and the preoccupation of your life ?

What particular object do you spend most of your thinking, planning, and energy on ? You see, materialism will enslave the heart ( 6:19-21 ) the mind

( 6:22-23 ) and the will. ( 6:24 ) Mark Twain once said, " Civilisation is a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities." We get all wrapped up in things ! Now let me ask you, do you own things or do things own you ?

(c) GOD MUST BE THE MASTER OF EVERYTHING:

Look at ( 6:33 ) " But seek ye first .... " In other words, take things out of the centre of your life, and let God put things where they really belong. When things become your master, life becomes cheap, but when Christ is your Master, then everything in your life finds its proper place, and you start putting the proper price tags on the " furniture," of life !

In " The Name and Claim It," teaching the Christian uses God, in Biblical teaching God uses the Christian.

My .... God may make you rich ( Deut 8:18 ) but He may not. God prospers some, but not others. He knows what we can handle and what we cannot. So what should our attitude be ? Do you recall Paul's words ?

" I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." ( Phil 4:11 )

God will not give us everything we want but He will supply our needs. God will take care of those who seek His kingdom and His righteousness ! There's a beautiful prayer in ( Prov 30 ) that we would do well to use.

" Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord ? Or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain." ( Prov 30:8-9 ) Take these Three words home with you.

FAITH: ( 6:30 ) Trust God to meet your need !

FATHER: ( 6:32 ) Know that God cares for you His child !

FIRST: For if we have faith in our Father, and put Him first, He will meet our needs !