

THE MISFORTUNE OF FORTUNE

I have titled this sermon, "The Misfortune of Fortune." I struggle with how to present it. After all, how can someone say that living in a country as rich, as powerful, as full of opportunities as the United States is actually a disadvantage? In this country, it is said that opportunities are present and bountiful! This is the land of Dreams!

But trust me, if you ask anyone who has been on a missions trip to a 2nd or 3rd world country, they will tell that you that the verse "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" takes on a new life, a new meaning, a new understanding in your life.

So let me explain what I mean. Our fortune is a blessing, but it is a blessing that we abuse! We have clouded up our lives to such a point, that we can no longer see that it was God who gave us this life to begin with. Smartphones, computers, iPods...technology is not a sin, it is not against God, but it complicates our lives, and heaps onto the pile of distractions that pulls us farther and farther from God. It is time to simplify our lives.

It is time, now at our age, to stop seeking fortune in our lives. Don't misunderstand me; I am not saying that "fortune" is a bad thing. On the contrary. The more fortunate you are, the more opportunities you have to serve God and bless others. Your fortune is a blessing from God, and you should bless as many others as feasibly possible, and probably more than that.

Having "fortune" is not negative. Attaining fortune is not negative. But, the goal of our lives should not be "fortune." Our focus should not be to seek fortune, even if we have all good intentions on how to use it or spend it.

Our countries definition of "fortune" is different than that laid out by Jesus. Clearly, Jesus lived a life of fortune. But we have replaced the meaning of "fortune" with the meaning of "luxury." Money, fame, esteem, recognition, things have all replaced the true meaning of fortune.

Luke 6: 20-23

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when people hate you,

when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.

Matthew 6: 19-21

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Your reward, your treasure, your fortune is not on earth. It is in heaven. Jesus lived a fortunate life. He paved the way for us to do the same. The true meaning of fortune is not wealth, its not luxury. The true meaning of fortune is faithfulness, it is righteousness. Because only a life lived by these standards will bring us to the glory of God.

Malachi 3: 17-18

"On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

Our misfortune comes from how difficult it has become for us to see God, to need God, to hear and to feel God. We are so quick to doubt miracles and stories of God's glory! Because we have access to everything. Who needs a miracle when we have surgeons and modern medicines? And when a miracle of health actually occurs, we call it a "medical mystery," rather than a "mystery of God."

Our misfortune comes from what we can have as our possessions, while we overlook what we can never own, but can always have. That is our salvation and redemption through the loving Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We are fortunate to live in the United States of America, because we have all the opportunities in the world. Literally, we can reach out to any place on earth to provide aide, even if it is our own back yard, our own city. Even if it is the middle of nowhere, Africa. Our American opportunities are chances for us to really reach out to the world and serve God.

I have had the opportunity to spend a lot of time over seas on mission trips. I have spent time building homes and schools in Brasil, and I have spent time just loving orphans who aren't sure that they deserve love. I have spent time building churches in Ethiopia and forming relationships with the congregation members who have nothing else to give except their sweat and blood, and I have seen them do some incredibly

hard work because it is all they can give. And it was so humbling to me. To see these people, who have never even heard of an iPhone or a Droid, showing up to the church building over a half hour early to fall on their knees and pray. I don't even mean pray like we do, with our heads down and in silence. I mean moaning and shouting and making these guttural sounds to show their pain and reliance on God. Believing with everything within them that God will show up. There is no "if" anymore, there is just "when. When God shows up, I will be ready" ...

I realized that I'm not. I am not ready for God to show up...not yet. And it amazed me to experience this palpable sense of God's presence, impossible to ignore in the absence of consumerism, propaganda, machinery, and all these things that we surround ourselves with.

It didn't even matter if it was in Brasil, or Ethiopia, or the slums of America. To see them recognize that they need God reminded me of how much I need God. My life of fortune can sometimes seem like a disadvantage because I fail to recognize how necessary God is. Because I don't lack for many things...I am distracted, and I can get lost easily in what I have, what I don't have, or what I want.

But when I do turn to God, and sometimes reluctantly, I see how my fortune does not rest in the things that I distract myself with. My fortune rests in heaven, in the treasures I build up in heaven through the things I do in service to God. When I turn my faith into action, I see how going out into the world serves two purposes.

The first is the Great Commission. To make disciples of all people, to spread the Word of God and His Good News and love to all who will listen.

Matthew 28: 18-20

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The second is to be reminded by those I am serving that I will always need God, even when I think I have everything. Because it is not the people I am serving, but God Himself.

Matthew 25: 40

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

God Himself reminds me how necessary He is.

So my challenge to you tonight is to re-evaluate what you are seeking. Look at your life, look at what you desire and choose to search for every day. Are you seeking God? Are you trying to glorify Him and share the love shown by Christ to those you care most about? Or are you only seeking ways to better yourself, your life, your situation? Lose some of those distractions which keep you from God. Stop seeking "luxury" and go for true fortune instead. Give more than you are required to, and not just in money, but in service and action, too. Finally, to start giving God the benefit of the doubt. We still need God, as much or more than the less fortunate around us. We just don't always realize it.

I want to leave you with one last illustration.

"The Tale of Two Seas"

The Dead Sea is so high in salt content that the human body can float easily. You can almost lie down and read a book! The salt in the Dead Sea is as high as 35% – almost 10 times the normal ocean water. And all that saltiness has meant that there is no life at all in the Dead Sea. No fish. No vegetation. No sea animals. Nothing lives in the Dead sea.

Unlike the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee is pretty, resplendent with rich, colorful marine life. There are lots of plants. And lots of fish too. In fact, the sea of Galilee is home to over twenty different types of fishes.

Same region, same source of water, and yet while one sea is full of life, the other is dead. How come?

The River Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee and then flows out. The water passes through the Sea of Galilee in and then out – and that keeps the Sea healthy and vibrant, teeming with marine life.

But the Dead Sea has no outlet. The water flows in from the river Jordan, but does not flow out. There are no outlet streams. It is too salty, too full of minerals, and it is unfit for life. The Dead Sea takes in the water from the River Jordan, but it does not give.

In the same way, we as Christians can choose to take the blessings that God gives us, and let them flow through us to bless others. Leaving us full of life.

Or we can choose to take in all the blessings of God, but not share it with anyone. Leaving no room for life, and making ourselves dead.

Which do you choose?

Let's pray.