

# Winning the Jackpot

## In a wicked world

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If you dream of conquering evil, God offers you the Jackpot of your dreams.

**God's News is so Good** that if you reject it, it won't be because you can't see how good it is. It will be because you don't believe how much good God says *you* can accomplish. Or it will be because you truly won't lift a finger to lessen anybody's suffering besides your own. But if you are an average guy who cares that you and others suffer - who is troubled by the evil in the world - who yearns to understand why a God of Love allows it, here is the good news ["Gospel", in Greek]:

You, yes you, sinful finite faithless insignificant little you, can correct the evils in the world which trouble you! God *will* help you do it, and "*with God all things are possible*", Mark 10:27!

Hard to believe, right? That's nothing: *...whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Mark 11:23*

**What the Gospel is *not*:** that Jesus died to appease a God so "holy" that your mistakes fill God with too much "wrath" for Him to stand being around you.

"Holiness" is never defined in the Bible as inability to survive the presence of sin. God will not melt into a puddle at its touch, like the Wicked Witch of the West at a splash of water.

That was the Pharisee's definition of "Holiness". They demanded of Jesus, "*Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*"

Jesus answered that mingling with sinners, to call them to repentance, doesn't make Him "unclean" any more than treating patients makes a doctor unhealthy. Luke 5:30-31.

God can survive intimacy with sinners as well as Jesus! God is generous to the most God-hating sinner, Matthew 5:44-45. In fact, God is not too "holy" to even praise mere men, Job 1 - even you and me! "*...and then shall all men have praise of God*", 1 Corinthians 4:5!

God even tries, in Job 1, to engage *Satan* in a friendly conversation! It's *Satan* who prays for a cruel test to prove Job is as phony as Satan is - and God *generously* indulges him!

In a bit I will explain how God used Satan's cruelty to bless Job. God gives us limited liberty even to sin, up to the point where it will not bless the innocent.

**Theologies that Justify Christian Failure.** One is "*we are not called to be victorious, but faithful.*" See Mark 11:23, Mat 21:21, Luke 17:6.

Another is "*God always answers prayer, but sometimes His answer is no.*" This turns plain words upside down to mean it is presumptuous to expect victory.

The theology that God sometimes answers "no" is based on Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" which he prayed three times for God to remove before God explained why He shouldn't. 2 Cor 12:7-12. So even that one single time where a righteous man's prayer was refused offers hope that God will at least let us know if we are moving the wrong mountain, so we can start pushing the right one. We needn't sit placidly around, just waiting for death to take us away from all these evils which God will make us forget, because we have no way to know what we can do for Him that He will help with.

A third excuse not to expect victory is saying "*it must not have been God's Will*" at the setbacks of life so it is OK to give up and watch TV; or *praying that God will do His Will* while we watch TV. This is an attitude of Hell according to Mat 25:24-30. God wants our involvement, James 2:14-26.

God *does* answer all good prayers! Not just what He pre-approves! God invites us to be creative when we pray. It was *Peter's* idea to walk on water, Matthew 14:29. All Jesus said was "*come*". Even when God isn't crazy about what we ask, Luke 11:8 indulges "*importunity*" [persistent demands]: God dotes on us, anxious to spoil us as much as any parent his child.

Elijah had no more inside track than we do, according to James 5:17. God didn't tell him what to pray for, any more than He told Peter to ask if he could walk on water. But Elijah cared so much for the evil of his generation, that He begged God for 3 years of no rain, believed - however desperately - that God would answer, and used it to end worship of a cruel rain "god".

**Reasons Prayers Aren't Answered** are common sense. Wronging our loved ones makes us the evil which they pray to be removed, which will "*hinder*" our own prayers, 1 Pet 3:7. Causing divorce, thinking God will tolerate *our* evil, causes God not to "*hear*" us, Mal 2:13-17. Prayer to "*consume it upon your lusts*", James 4:3, apparently meaning to think only of yourself, Luke 6:30-32, won't satisfy. If your prayers aren't supported by your actions, you won't "*receive anything of the Lord*", James 1:7. The key to self discipline is to want something so much that desires in its way become unthinkable.

**God Gives Good**, when we ask! James 1:5, Luke 11:13. Prayer focuses our vision on good, by the same principle that children know better than to ask parents for harmful things.

God wants you to pursue victory over evil, in hope. Not just victory over tiny evils, but

victory over *as much evil as you are willing to focus your energies and prayers upon.*

Matthew 17:20 describes the amount of faith needed to make this happen "*as a grain of mustard seed*", which Mat 13:32 describes as "*the least of all seeds*". I used to think, since no one orders mountains into seas, that human giants of faith by my standards must, by God's standards, have faith even *smaller* than a mustard seed! Leaving no hope for me!

**Victory takes Time.** But history is full of heroes taking on impossible odds, and winning the Jackpot. But big victories can take a lifetime.

William Wilburforce learned on his deathbed that his decades of pleading finally persuaded England's Parliament to outlaw slavery. Many missionary stories follow the same plot.

Jesus didn't say the mountain would jump into the sea *instantly*. In fact, Jesus didn't conclude His ministry instantly. He took 3 years, and prepared for it 30 years, after waiting 4,000.

**God's 6,000 year project.** Daniel 2 foresaw world tyrannies toppled by a "stone... Cut out of the mountain without hands". They vaporize as the stone grows to replace them. But many still vote for tyranny. 1 Samuel 8.

What displaces tyranny? Freedom.

Consider the theologies essential to freedom found only in the Bible: (1) *all* human life is sacred, created in the Image of God, Gen 1:27! (2) God's Heroes of Faith, Hebrews 11, included critics of truth-suppressing government, inspiring our First Amendment Freedom of Speech! (3) The Bible condemns slavery as we know it, making the stealing of a man a capital offense, Deut 24:7; capping servitude to repay debt at 6 years, Deut 15:18; and not allowing injurious physical treatment, Exodus 21:26. Philemon, a book of the New Testament, is a plea for a Christian to free his slave. 1 Cor 7:21-22 urges servants to become free if

they can. Col 3:11 is U.S. civil rights law in a nutshell, attacking theories of racial inferiority: *"...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all."*

God's Stone has slowly spread, building hospitals and schools, preserving libraries, mitigating really barbaric cultures, and purifying itself along the way until Bible study dared the Pilgrims to create a government in which *all* participated in elections, with freedom of speech to discuss their corporate vision without being punished for disagreeing with their leaders! Their Freedom spread across the U.S., whose light began toppling Earth's tyrannies!

**Fixing Evil Starts with You.** Not that Christianity's ugly moments stand out against its pagan contexts, but any parent's standards are as high as their children can reach, so God orders judgment to *"begin at my sanctuary"*, Eze 9:6, Rom 2:24. So as we pray against others' evil, let's not overlook our own. Mat 7:1-5, *"cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."* As we cry for cruelties between strangers, let us cry for our cruelties to loved ones! Let's let God answer the prayers, of those *we* hurt, to end *our* evils!

**Sin is Not Some Good** which God hates because it gives us pleasure! The Greek word *ἁμαρτία* means "to miss the mark". It means our *own* mark (target), since we can't "miss" a target at which *we* do not aim. In other words, failure pleases God as little as it pleases us!

Not that God doesn't use the word "sin" to describe "sinning" deliberately. But a child who deliberately sticks a fork in the electric outlet, in violation of his parents' strict commands, is missing his *own* target. He expected adventure, not the shock of his life. What we think will satisfy us, which doesn't, God calls "sins".

Example #1: Sexual sins are thought to

make sinners the happiest, yet they bring ruthless diseases, and heartbreak because promiscuity is routinely clothed in deceit. It doesn't even beget sex as often as marriage!

Example #2: Jesus warns His followers, *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* Mark 8:38.

But even Christians shame politicians who quote God to defend their positions. Is not politics where we as a people reason together about what is evil in the world, and what we together should do about it? If we are not free to reason from the highest principles we know, how can we reason together? Can there be any greater evil in the world, than for sincere efforts to correct the evil in the world, to cancel each other because we won't reason with each other about what is evil?

Example #3: eating only plants out of reverence for animals, while killing humans in the womb, shows how we stumble into the crosshairs of those aiming at the world's evils, for want of a Moral Standard more objective or consistent than personal opinions.

**Sin is Shooting Yourself in the Foot** and then blaming God for your suffering!

Do you think God denies us pleasure to honor Himself in some way? To satisfy some ethereal image of "holiness"?

*Job 35:3-8 You ask, "What's in it for me to not sin?" God answers, "Who else do you think your sin hurts? Me? Your sin hurts you. Your love benefits you." (Paraphrase)*

God doesn't want us to pray "hallowed [Holy] be thy name" for *His* benefit, but for ours! He doesn't want us to be failures! Do you think He grieves for all the evil in the world less than you? He yearns for you to partner with Him in cleaning it up - beginning with your

own unintended cruelty to others!

God wants, so seriously, for you to weep for the sins of your land, that He looks for that in deciding who will fit in Heaven. Ezekiel 9.

God's vision is not for us to create a Heaven on Earth by our own efforts, and then leave it for a Heaven made so complete by His efforts that nothing remains for us to do there. Luke 19:12-27 describes earth as a place to develop success-breeding, resource-doubling work and learning habits, to prepare us for as much more responsibility than we have here, as adults are given more than children. If you won't learn or work, you won't like Heaven. Mat 25:24-30.

God wants us to *"fear"* Him, Ecc 12:13, in the same way we *"fear"* electricity if we violate its rules. God doesn't want us *living in fear*, like Job. Job 3:25 says all the time he was the most influential man in the world, Job 29, he was afraid the very thing would happen, which did: that his faith would be tested. His fear that he would then doubt God was articulated in chapter one by Satan.

"The fearful and unbelieving" will fit in Hell, Rev 21:8. How can God deliver a man from his terror? Only by putting him through what he fears so he can learn that with God, there is victory, and nothing to fear!

**We are not "Cursed" through Adam.** Adam wasn't cursed! Gen 3:17 says *"cursed is the ground for thy sake"*. Adam refused the labor God assigned, so God created hunger to compel minimal labor, because *"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should...make his soul enjoy good in his labour."* Ecc 2:24. Even that curse does not affect those who, today, accept the labor God assigns! Mat 6:31 *"...take no thought, saying, What shall we eat?... 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righ- teousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* Not that we need not work. But if our priority is God's work, God

will help us.

Don't blame Adam for your sins! Jer 31:30 *"...every one shall die for his own iniquity"*. We have the same choice Adam had. Rom 5:12-19.

**God Came** to pour love on the evil in the world. He came to personally hand-deliver His promises to help us win Victory. He came close enough for us to reach out and touch Him, *and kill Him*, which we did, and still do by silencing His witnesses. This shows God's love for us, and our need for it. It shows human resistance, even of God's people, John 1:11. It underlines the cost we must accept of doing good.

No wonder some accept such cost! It is for Love like none other. John 15:13 *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* Such love moves us to sacrifice in return, which we find more fulfilling than all we had previously desired!

Little satisfies like Truth's Victories. When none can refute it, but only silence it, it is confirmed as so good, and its enemies so evil, that Life for so noble a cause seems well spent.

**Cure for Apathy.** Isn't this news good? I pray what you want to go away is the evil in the world - not just your responsibility to oppose it!

Love moves us to help when reason says we can't. Apathy says we can't, when God says we can. God medicates apathy with "double" what we do to others, Rev 18:6, Ex 22:4, 7, 9, including what we could stop if we cared, 1 Cor 4:5. But God corrects in love, Heb 12:6-7. God is as merciful with us as we are with others, Mat 18:21-35. If we can turn from God, Love, Light, Life, and Truth for even a moment, what will make it impossible to turn away forever?

God is anxious to do miracles through us, working together, Matthew 18:20, as we reason together about what is evil, and how to end it.

Questions? Comments? Help?  
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