

DOES CHRISTIANITY PROMISE A CHARMED LIFE?

Yes and no, it depends on when

At times I wonder about the sanity of explorers, like the chap being interviewed on CBC some time ago who told a harrowing tale of his boat capsizing in choppy Arctic waters and how he got to shore by standing on the upturned hull using his body as a sail. On reaching land, however, hypothermia sucked the strength right out of him and it was only a passing walrus hunter who saved him from certain death.

"Wow, he was lucky," I thought, but the interviewer went far deeper in his thoughts than I did because he immediately asked our intrepid explorer, "Do you believe God helped you?"

"Why should I," the explorer replied, "when it was God who created the storm that caused my boat to capsize in the first place?" In other words, why would God be involved in saving his life when it was God who put his life at risk?

People with cancer could ask the same question. If God is truly interested in our physical well-being why did he create such a horrible disease like cancer in the first place? And what about all the other dreadful diseases like anthrax, small pox, SARS and AIDS? And why earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes and all the other natural disasters that kill and maim thousands of people every year? How can we believe God's interested in protecting and healing us when he created so many ingenious ways of killing us off?!

Some would say, however, that these horrible diseases and disasters are our fault. God is punishing us for our evil ways. If that's true, though, then earthquakes and cancer had better select only evil people to kill and not the innocent! But good people suffer and die the same deaths everyone else does.

It strikes me, then, that God isn't that interested in giving us charmed lives devoid of all harm, because if he was he'd be healing and protecting a whole lot more people than he is, right?

"Ah, but the reason he isn't healing and protecting," some say, "is because people don't have enough faith. If you really believed God would heal and protect you, he would. It's because you don't believe he will that he doesn't."

A well-meaning Christian actually said those words to me when I asked why God let lightning blow a hole in my roof a couple of years ago. "God would've protected your roof," she told me, "if you'd only believed he would."

Wow, if that's true, then make out your wish list folks, because God's on his way down the chimney with bags full of health and protection just as soon as you believe. Who said Santa Claus was only for kids?! But pity the people who get cancer or heart disease, or end up in accidents, because the health and wealth brigade will tell them it's their own fault, that God doesn't give gifts to naughty people who don't believe enough.

Believe in what, though? That God will give us charmed lives devoid of all harm if we believe he will? But Jesus never promised health, wealth and protection in the first place, because his focus was never on a charmed life now. That's not to say God doesn't care about us now, but making us perfectly healthy and safe is clearly not his top priority, because our planet is awash with ways of killing and hurting us.

What was far more important to Jesus was the charmed world that he came from, where sickness and injury are truly non-existent, and death and disaster never happen. And his entire purpose in coming here, he said, was to lift us into that world with him, because he alone had the power to do so. And, what's more, we could totally believe in him for that because his death and resurrection sealed it for us.

Our intrepid explorer had a point, then. Why should we expect God to bale us out of all our troubles when it was God who also created the potential for so many problems in the first place?

On the other hand, if we're asking God to bale us out of our short-sighted preoccupation with a life devoid of all harm now so that we fling everything to the wind in favour of the life God made possible for eternity through his Son, instead - well, we can certainly look to God to help us in that because that's exactly what he came here for.

If one day, then, we find ourselves on the upturned hull of a capsized boat in choppy Arctic waters - representing whatever awful thing is knocking us about at that moment - we too can hope for a passing walrus hunter to save our skins. But God doesn't guarantee it, because he isn't into saving skins, or giving us a charmed life now. He is, however, guaranteeing a charmed life later, stretching into eternity, for those who seek that life, instead.

Does Christianity promise us a charmed life, then? Yes and no, it depends on when.

