

Is Pastor Joel Osteen The Next Alan Greenspan?

Susan Lee, 04.24.09, 12:01 AM ET

To live in New York City is to live in the gloomster center of the universe. Financial workers are either unemployed, about to be unemployed or employed by irritated taxpayers. Co-op and condo owners have seen prices drop like a stone in the last six months, taxes--and subway fares--are rising.

So what better place than Yankee Stadium for Pastor Joel Osteen to hold a giant pep rally?

Mr. Osteen is the wildly popular preacher of the prosperity gospel. This good news has a very simple premise: Pray to God for prosperity. And it's based on a very simple notion: God wants Christians to be abundantly successful, especially financially.

A perfect example of the prosperity gospel is the prayer of Jabez. Here's the text: "Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from hurt and harm!' And God granted what he asked." (1 Chronicles 4: 9-10)

Please note that Jabez doesn't base his request on anything that might be required of him. He doesn't offer to work on weekends. He doesn't promise to share his gains with the needy. He doesn't even ask for this wealth as a reward for his virtue. He just wants what he wants, and God, apparently, is willing to give it.

In 2000, this prayer was packaged into a book, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. It sold over 9 million copies in two years. And many millions of people followed the book's instructions to repeat Jabez's prayer daily, so--in as little as 30 days--they would receive blessings.

Well, Joel Osteen, with his dozen or so published books, is a master of this genre. (And so is his wife, Victoria, also author of several books.) Here's a taste from [one](#) of Joel's many books: "God doesn't create us to be average. We were created to excel. Every day, we should make positive declarations over our lives. We should say: I am blessed. I am prosperous. I am wise."

Sounds great! No wonder Osteen's audience is so large--over 7 million broadcast viewers a week in the U.S. But what happens when millions of people are given a message that is the financial equivalent of "What, me worry?"

Let's say they're busy saying to themselves, "I am blessed, I am prosperous, I am wise," when a big suburban house--the house of a blessed, prosperous and wise person--comes on the market. What are they to do? Of course they should buy it. After all, they're blessed, prosperous and wise.

And then what happens when they can't make the mortgage payments? Of course they should seek advice from Joel and Victoria Osteen's [blog](#). And what a relief! Don't worry, say the Osteens: "What enemies are you facing today? Are you facing an enemy of debt? An enemy of fear? An enemy of lack? God wants to silence those things that come against you. Instead of focusing on all those things coming against you, focus on the One who is for you! No matter what's going on in your life, all you have to do is please God Almighty and He will take care of the rest."

OK. Lest it be said that I'm indulging in a snarky variety of defeatism--a sin in the Osteen theology--let me observe that there must be something valuable in their advice. God has prospered the Osteens big time. His latest book deal is said to be worth \$13 million. And his Houston mega-church, Lakewood, along with his media empire, gathers \$75 million in revenue annually. (And of course the Osteens live in a big, 5,000 square-foot suburban house.)

And so, fellow gloomsters, take heart. Get yourselves over to Yankee Stadium [this Saturday](#) and have a listen to Joel Osteen, the Alan Greenspan of personal finance. When I checked with Ticketmaster this week there were still some \$15 seats left, but be prepared to pay up to \$125. But, hey--you are blessed, you are prosperous, you are wise!