

December 3, 2017
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Communion
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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USE WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN
Romans 8:32; Luke 12:48b

Right now most of us are caught up in the frenzy of Christmas shopping. We are bombarded daily with hundreds of advertisements about what our children and loved ones must have this year. We have been swept along by threats that if we don't get to the stores on Black Friday, we will miss the best deals. We were made to feel that if we didn't participate in some way with Cyber-Monday, we should question if we are really part of the land of the living.

So what happens to those material objects that we sacrificed to purchase for our loved ones and for our not-so-loved ones? Most of them are set aside almost immediately and never used. Some of them are useful for awhile but then end up at the summer yard sale. Americans are so caught up in materialism that investors build storage units endlessly in which people store all their gifts from Christmas past that they do not use.

What a sad picture. I heard going into Black Friday that many Americans were rushing out to purchase gifts on their credit cards even while they had not paid off the purchases from last Christmas.

In the true spirit of giving, God has given to us the greatest gift possible in Jesus Christ. Along with Him, the loving Heavenly Father has given us all things. That term "all things" includes much, not the least of which is the Holy Spirit's indwelling and equipping us with the capacity to serve Him. So what do we do with the "gifts" that cost our Heavenly Father the ultimate price? Do we use them? Or do we store them away thinking that some day they might come in handy?

Unlike the typical gifting of this passing world, when God gives a gift, He expects the recipient to use it. In fact, one day God "the gift giver" is going to call all of us recipients into account for how we

used or did not use what He has given to us. Wise recipients are always sensitive to the fact that we have received much and, therefore, much is required.

God Has Given Freely.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (Romans 8:32a). From God's statement to the Christians in Rome, we realize that God gave us the greatest gift. Paul taught that God gave up His Son. Is that no big deal? Stop to consider just how precious God the Son is to God the Father. The best comparison to help us understand the Father's love for the Son is found in human relationships. However, the most loving father's affection for his most wonderful and obedient son does not compare to the love God the Father has for the Son.

At Christ's baptism, the Father declared from His throne room that Jesus of Nazareth was His beloved Son. That declaration sounds good to human thinking. But, because God's love is perfect, it also has to be supreme and incomparable to the best that humans can experience. Furthermore, the Father confessed that this Son of His (emphasizing possession) for whom He has perfect love, also pleases Him. That same idea of possession of the Son by God the Father is emphasized in the words *His own* found in our text. God loves what is His deeply. Therefore, He was firmly resolved that He takes delight in the Son.

The Father's love for the Son is humanly incomprehensible. Nevertheless God the Father gave Him up. He intentionally took control and delivered the Son over. The words *gave him up* express the same action Jesus described multiple times to the disciples. Such as when He foretold, "*The Son of man will be delivered over to the hands of men*" (Matthew 17:22). Or "*The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death*" (Mt 20:18). And that they will "*deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified*" (Matthew 20:19a).

Could God the Father not have spared the Son? Of course He could have. He could have refrained, avoided, kept from doing it. That is the definition of the word *spared*. But if God would have chosen that path, who else could atone for sin? There is no one else.

God either had to deliver His beloved Son over to death, or deliver all humans over to eternal destruction. And He did.

Therefore, we read the good news that He gave Him up for us. “Us” includes wicked people like the Scribes and Pharisees who were proud, arrogant, liars who cheated and mislead the people. “Us” includes Gentiles who were outside the promises and covenants God gave to the children of Jacob. Most important “us” includes you and me. We who enjoy the regeneration, the miracle of the new birth, received the gift of God the Son. We who have the gift of eternal life, have it because the Father delivered over the Perfect Son for us!

How valuable is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, to God the Father? What level of “precious” would the Father assign to the Son?” Once we have settled the fact that there is nothing and no one in all of eternity more precious than Christ, we are forced to answer a question: *How will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32b)?*

And God does indeed continue to give lesser, but important, gifts to us. Along with Christ, God gives the Holy Spirit. Sadly, when humans think of “all things” they are thinking “things.” The prosperity gospel preachers actually interpret this promise to mean that God desires to load down His people with junk from this passing world. Why would God love to give His people the very things He tells us to avoid? God’s gifts to us will be in line with His warning through John, *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world (1 John 2:15-16).*

God gives only good gifts. James taught, *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (James 1:17).* And the best gift after giving us Jesus our Savior is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Reception of the Holy Spirit is the theme of Romans 8. We read in this context that the law of the Spirit of life sets us free (v.2). Righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us who walk according to the Spirit (v.4). Living according to the Spirit means setting our minds on the things of the Spirit (v.5). Setting the mind on

the Spirit is life and peace (v.6). Anyone without the indwelling Spirit is not Christ’s person (v.9). God’s people are expected to put deeds of the flesh to death by the Spirit (v.13). Sons of God are led by the Spirit (v.14). We have received the Spirit of adoption (v.15). The Spirit bears witness that we are God’s children (v.16). The Spirit intercedes for us in prayer (v.26).

Because God the Father did not spare His Son from us, how will He not freely give us all things—especially the Holy Spirit. And with the Holy Spirit, God gives capacities for service. You’ve seen the high pressure television ads for silly, junky items you must have. For example, here is the one and only sock slider. If you have ever struggled to put on your socks, just get one of these little gadgets for \$19.99 and your struggles are over. But wait! If you order in the next hour, they will send you two of these useless contraptions and throw in free shipping. God’s gifts are way more valuable, precious, and useful.

Capacities to serve God by serving others are called spiritual gifts because He (God the Holy Spirit) gives them to us. But, as we shall see in a moment, all three members of the Trinity are involved in parceling out spiritual gifts. They are spiritual gifts because the Holy Spirit Himself empowers us to use them. Spiritual gifts and the opportunities to use those gifts are the package of blessings we receive along with the gift of atonement through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the faithful servant of Christ will identify his or her capacity to serve, will look for opportunities to serve, and will serve.

God Requires Much.

In the context of a couple of very important parables, Jesus taught, *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required (Luke 12:48a).* Some people have been entrusted with much. What does God expect of us?

The principle flows from a parable. The story is about faithful and wise managers who the master will set over his possessions (*household*) (v.42). The unwise servant doubts his master’s return and mistreats underlings (v.45). The master will show up unexpectedly and destroy the unfaithful manager (v.46). The point of the parable is a matter of servants knowing and doing the master’s will (vv.47-48).

The principle Jesus taught is that the true and great Master (Himself) blesses the faithful servant. The original application may well have regarded truth that the Master, Jesus Christ, had given the disciples. Jesus often upbraided the religious leaders for hiding or twisting the truth God had given them. That being the case, each person is responsible for the amount of truth they receive. This part of the principle applies to all people saved and unsaved. Some people have little truth (pagans) and some people have much truth (preacher's/teacher's kids). Will people who reject the truth God gives or twist that truth receive varying degrees of final judgment like the different servants received different beatings according to the story?

However, another application must follow in that Jesus was telling this parable and giving this challenge to the disciples not the religious leaders. The question is still whether the servants were *acting according to their master's will*, which is a matter of knowing and doing the truth (v.47). Therefore, the follower of Christ must know what God has given him or her and must use it faithfully.

This simple principle should weigh heavily on us because God the Father has given us much along with the gift of Christ. As we learned previously in this sermon, along with Christ, God has given us the Holy Spirit who ministers to us. His ministry includes the spiritual gifts He grants each of us. God's gifts also include the Bible which the Holy Spirit uses to teach us about spiritual gifts and the will of our Master.

So then, what is the typical response to this challenge about faithful use of our gifts from the average Christian? Some say it doesn't really matter. Others argue that we (the local church) hire professionals to do ministry. A common response is, "I would like to serve but I don't have time." Another response is that being required to attend church more than once a week is a manmade rule. Or "I've served my time," "It's not convenient," or "It's just not my thing."

To those people God offers the following warning. "They will demand the more." The basic principle of the parable is: *Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required*. Jesus went on to say, *and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more (Luke 12:48b)*.

This additional statement should cause us to wonder who "they" are. "They" would point back to the story about earthly masters who give abilities and responsibilities to earthly servants. Those earthly masters expect compliance and their expectations will be commensurate with what they have entrusted to the servants.

However, when the application for the principle is made, "they" becomes a reference to God. God the Father gives abilities and opportunities. Paul taught that he was a minister to *[the Church] of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known (Colossians 1:25)*. God the Son gives spiritual gifts. *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Ephesians 4:7-8)*. God the Spirit gives spiritual capacities of service. *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7)*. *All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills (1 Corinthians 12:11)*.

They who give the abilities to serve demand results according to what they have given to us. What have we done with what is given? Would you argue that it doesn't really matter? The Scripture teaches that in the end it matters greatly. When we stand before the eternal Judge, what we have done or not done will have eternal ramifications.

For example, the basis of final judgment for sinners is what they have done. John wrote in the Revelation, *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done (Revelation 20:12)*.

But we are not talking about sinners. Sinners don't receive spiritual gifts with which to serve God. Yes, but an interesting comparison reveals a similar reckoning for Christians that will take place at the judgment seat of Christ. Paul warned Christians that *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Corinthians 5:10)*. What will that look like? *Each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because*

it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Christians will not have their works judged as a basis for inheriting eternal life. That is already determined. We are saved by grace through faith and that salvation results in doing good works with the gifts God has given to us. However, Christ expects all of His followers to use what God has given in service to Him.

So what is demanded? In short, we must be busy about faithfulness to God. This faithfulness is demonstrated by our personal worship. The reason believers read their Bible and pray every day is to honor God, remind themselves of who and what God is to them, to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The lifestyle we live reveals the level of faithfulness we have toward God. This is the vertical relationship and is generally more private. No one knows exactly how faithful we are, though our lifestyle gives hints to that end.

The second thing God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (our Master and giver of gifts) requires is that we be found doing faithfulness to each other. These are the horizontal relationships which are generally more obvious to fellow humans. In this faithfulness, we are found ministering to each other, building each other up, helping each other become more like Christ.

This is the Master's will for all of us. He gave the Church spiritually gifted men, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes (Ephesians 4:12-14).* What is required is that we minister to each other with the goal of everyone growing in knowledge of Christ. Every saved person is to be engaged in this ministry.

Third, what we are to be doing is being faithful with the gospel. Paul explained this kind of faithfulness when he informed the contrary and critical Christians in Corinth, *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge*

of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us (2 Corinthians 4:5-7). Part of the purpose and intent for the gifts God gives us along with Christ is to make this treasure, the gospel, known to others.

In the final analysis, everyone who is part of Community Baptist Church has been given much. Our Master rightfully requires much. The wise servant of Christ will regularly assess what he or she is doing for the Body of Christ, knowing that one day an accounting will be given. In preparation for that day, ask yourself a few questions. "What am I able to do?" "What would I like to do?" "What am I doing?"