

## MORE BLESSED TO GIVE

Acts 20:35

We begin today's message with three pennies.

There was once a greedy miser who owned and rented his land to others. He stored up his gold and silver in a great treasure chest kept safe in a strong and locked room. One of his farmers came to pay his rent, but was a penny short. The miser insisted the farmer bring the penny before he would give the receipt. He would not wait until next month. The farmer made the long trip and returned with the penny, and more. "Here is your penny, and here is \$20 if you will let me only see your treasure-chest of gold and silver." The man took the money, opened the room with the box full of rich coins. "There" said the farmer, "I am as rich as you are." "How can that be?" asked the farmer. "Because I have LOOKED at your gold and silver, and that is all YOU will ever do with it!"

Now the second penny is about a man and his three sons. He told them he had to decide on which one would receive his great inheritance. So he bought with one penny three handfuls of grain. To each of the sons, he gave one handful, and told them to do the best they could with it. Weeks and months passed as the father was away. And when he returned, he asked each son what he had done with the grain. The first brought forth a nice wood box. "See, father, I have kept the grain just as you gave it to me." "How foolish!" was the father's reply, "it did not help yourself or anyone else!" The second son was asked what he had done, and his reply came with a smile. "I have ground the grain into flour, and made and baked a sweet little cake, which I have eaten." Again, the father was not pleased. "You have used it only for yourself, and now it is all gone."

Sadly, the son turned to the third son, who also had empty hands. “What have you done with the grain?” “Come, father, and I will show you.” The boy took his dad to a field at some distance from the house. There he had planted the grain earlier in spring, and a crop of golden wheat waving in the gentle breeze. “Well done, my son, you will reap as you have sown, and the inheritance is yours.”

Our third and last penny belonged to a poor five-year-old girl who lived in the 1800’s. Her Sunday school class put together a box for missionaries in India. But while others gave nice gifts for the Lord’s servants, she only had one penny. She decided to give it, and with her penny bought a gospel tract to put in the box. Off it went to India, to a place called Burdwan. There, that one-cent gospel tract was given to one of the sons of the chief – a prince of the region. That message led him to trust in Christ Jesus, and he began to tell others of what Jesus did for him. He told his family members about the Lord. He bought Christian books and tracts by the 1000’s, and everywhere he went, told people about Jesus. Being an influential member of the leading family, his example had a wonderful effect. In one year, the number of people who had given up their idols, and turned to Christ and were baptized, reached 1500 souls! And where did it begin? When a little poor girl gave away her last penny, and sent the gospel clear around the world!

Each of these stories illustrates what Paul says in Acts 20:35: “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Jesus is the great Giver. ‘He who was rich became poor, that we, who are poor, might be made rich.’ The Son of God became the Son of man, that the sons of men might become the sons of God.

Let us be encouraged today as we consider the blessing of giving above that of receiving.

This passage is found in Paul's farewell. He calls upon the church to remember the poor and needy. He quotes a saying of the Lord not recorded in the 4 Gospels.

This should not surprise us. Christ said many things which His Holy Spirit did not include in the Gospels. Yet the same Spirit desired to have it included for us. Thus, we find it placed here in the book of Acts. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

See that Christ's own authority stands behind these words. See how His example makes these words most weighty. See how His grace has made us into "givers"; He is commanding you in this regard. And feel as well the certainty of this truth: not "it might be" or "it sometimes is" – but "it IS" more blessed to give.

How is this so? We know the world does not believe it. Selfishness rules the heart of man. The ancient proverb is still our custom today: "Silly the giver, lucky the receiver." Truly, only the believer in Jesus can follow this command.

What then is Jesus teaching us here? How is it more blessed to give than to receive?

Well, to begin, it is more blessed in that we are very much like the Lord Himself, and follow His pattern and ways. What God does should not merely interest us. He should as well be the pattern of our lives. **Ephesians 5:1, 2** *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.* How does God give? Why He gives freely, not out of

constraint. He gives joyfully, and not grudgingly. He gives generously, and not with a tight fist. And He gives richly and abundantly, withholding nothing. He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. He gives to all life and breath and being. He has given you your bodies. He has given your hands, feet, backs, eyes, ears, mouths, minds, and hearts. The light around you, the air you breath, the food on your tables, every stitch, every possession is from Him. He is the first and great Giver of all. Why, He did not even deny giving you His very own Son!

Now obviously, our giving is entirely dependent upon His giving. This passage does not condemn all receiving. All that we have to give, have we not received it first from Him? The Apostle Paul asks three questions in 1 Corinthians 4: *“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”*

Here then let us see the first blessing of giving rather than receiving – it shows us to have overcome selfishness in our lives; it is a fruit of being the real children of our Heavenly Father. Does it not please and bless you to see the wonderful Savior working in and through you? Proverbs 19:17 says “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD...”

A little boy taught a lesson to his father on this point. He was trying to follow the Lord in giving to others. When he saw a person in need, he would ask his father for a little money to give to the person. Sometimes he would ask his dad several times a day! Every Sunday, he asked for money to send to missionaries or to give for the poor. At last the father sat him down and said, ‘don’t you think you are giving away a lot of money?’ The boy said, ‘yes, father, I love to give to the needy.’ ‘But you come to me for the money you give, and it is not

your money but mine that you are giving away.’ The little boy hadn’t thought about that. But he asked his dad, ‘who gives you the money that you give away?’ ‘I earn it by my hard work every day.’ ‘And dad, who gives you the strength?’ ‘God does,’ said the father, ‘God gives us every good thing.’ The boy responded in this innocent and memorable fashion: “Dad, I love to give away the money you give me; don’t you love to give away the money God gives you?” The lesson was learned.

Those who follow God, follow a giving God, and are givers themselves.

Now **secondly**, see how useful giving is to ourselves. God himself has said, that he who waters others will himself be watered. As a man sows, so shall he reap. He who sows little reaps little. Generosity is the way in which the Christian is to walk. Look at Proverbs 11.24: *There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.*

The way of selfishness is a cursed way, no matter how we dress it up. The way of giving to others is a blessed way, no matter how much the world says otherwise. Will you follow the Lord or the world? Will you follow the way of blessing or of cursing?

A man comes to a trainer and tells him he wants to build up his arms and make them very muscular. He tells him, ‘don’t use you arms at all – save up all our strength – put both of them in slings, and they will grow mighty.’ What happens? The opposite – saving his life he loses it. But another trainer says, ‘use those arms – exercise them – push them to the very limits, and do so repeatedly.’ What happens? They grow.

When we expend ourselves for others, we grow. When we hoard our gifts, our wealth, ourselves, for ourselves, we shrivel up. Many Christians have their hearts in a sling. They want to grow, but instead their hearts shrivel up, grow smaller, more narrow, and become useless.

Which one are you? Are you Lord Great-Heart, blessed for you are giving? Or are you Mr. Little-Heart, liberal only to yourself? God loves a cheerful giver.

Now **third** and **last**, the blessing is found in how we are useful to others.

God has not given an equal portion to every person. What you see around you is a portrait of diversity. Some are fabulously rich, while others are just as remarkably poor. No two souls are the same in the gifts given from above. Some are gifted with intelligence and quickness of thought. Others are rich in compassion and tenderness. Still others have yards of strength, and able to labor manually from dawn till dusk.

What sort of world would it be if each kept to their own? But God has commanded otherwise, hasn't He? He has made us social creatures. He places us in families to minister to the weak. He puts us in cultures where we can help others, and be helped ourselves. He is building a church, where each member is different, and each member is needed. The hand cannot say to the foot, 'I have no need of you.' The ear cannot say, "I am nothing because I am not a mouth." All of God's people have talents and gifts. Some have ten, others five, and others only one.

Your talents are given for the benefit of others. We know what God thinks of the one who buries his talent. What happens, however, to those who are robbed of the blessings of those talents?

Thankfully the Lord does not depend on us, but we depend on the Lord. If I bury my talent, the Lord will raise up another to minister to those He intends to bless. No Christian is indispensable. No individual church is indispensable.

Having said that, God is a God of means. He does use us for His glory to bless others. To be so employed by the Lord – to be fellow-laborers with Him – is a most excellent service indeed.

How is God using you? How are you giving to others for their blessing? Can all of you say, ‘I am giving for the Lord abundantly?’ None can say, “I don’t have anything to give – all I can do is take.”

I want you to spend some time meditating on one verse – 2 Corinthians 9.8. It is one of those passages that is filled with richness from Christ. *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.*

None can say, “I can’t,” because God is able. None can say, “I am unworthy,” because God has all and abounding grace to you. None can say, “I don’t have,” because God has an all-sufficiency for you. None can say, “I can’t help today,” because you always have all sufficiency in everything. None can say, “I have some but not enough,” because you have an abundance through God. And none can say, “I can’t help in every way,” because God enables you unto every good deed or work.

Now only God is able to do this. Remember the little girl with her penny which saved 1500! That is always how it works. We give the little, the Lord multiplies it into much. We keep our much to ourselves, and our pockets grow holes.

Place all that you have, all that you are, all that you will ever be, in the Lord, where it belongs. See yourself as you ought, not as your own, but the Lord's servant – the Lord's slave. Ask Him what He would have you do. And follow His blessed way of grace, obeying the Lord.

He has never lied. And he has said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Amen.