

It is More Blessed to Give than to Receive

Acts 20:35

1 January 2023

Halifax, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today I thought it would be good to do a sermon for the New Year.

- There is a maxim or a proverb of our Lord Jesus Christ that I believe would be good for us to consider today. He said: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”**
- I started thinking about this back in the summer when I was thinking about poverty and ministry to those in need because I was seeking to help a homeless man.
 - In my consideration of this subject, I listened to a talk about Thomas Chalmers by Dr. George Grant.
 - Thomas Chalmers went to Glasgow, Scotland, in 1815, with a desire to bring the city to Christ.
 - He found many people living in appalling conditions of poverty, living in tenement housing.
 - The Napoleonic Wars had just ended, and many families had been displaced and had come to the city to find work, but many had given up.
 - Chalmers was not interested in merely relieving the poverty.
 - He wanted to see the gospel take root there.
 - He wanted to see poverty replaced by productivity, and the poor, who had become addicted to receiving aid, become givers.
 - Chalmers stressed the maxim of Jesus in his ministry to the poor, telling them that it was more blessed to give than to receive—and showing how this is the way of Christ in saving sinners.
 - Many leaders in the community thought his method was foolish, but as it turned out, the poor came to the Lord and became very productive.
 - Instead of looking for relief, they looked to be a blessing to others.
- I continued to consider this maxim of our Lord Jesus, that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and I thought this would be good focus for the New Year.
 - The elders and deacon and some of our church officers (treasurers) have reported that many in the congregation are having trouble with tithing.
 - It is encouraging to see that our offerings have come up as they often do at year end—in fact, as we budget some that we do not spend, it looks like we will end up close to a situation in which our offerings meet our expenses!
 - That is helpful because it means that I can speak, not because we are lacking what we need to meet our expenses at this point,
 - but rather as a pastor who wants to encourage you all to know the blessing of giving—especially if you are one who is not even tithing at this point.
 - When you are not, it shows that you don’t believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that means that you are missing out on the blessing.
 - But this sermon applies to you who are tithing as well.

- Some of you may be doing your basic duty, but still do not know the blessing that comes from giving beyond a tithe—and from doing it in love.
- So I want to encourage you today to fully take hold of what Jesus said, that it is more blessed to give than to receive—so that it transforms you from inside out.
 - This maxim of our Lord Jesus is not found in the gospels.
 - It is preserved for us in Paul’s address to the Presbytery at Ephesus which we find in Acts 20.
 - He quotes it in Acts 20:35.

For our Scripture reading, I have selected Acts 20:17-38.

- Please give careful attention. This is the Word of God.

Acts 20:17-38: From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all

the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. ³² So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. ³⁵ I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” ³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, ³⁸ sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

In this chapter, Paul uses this maxim of our Lord Jesus to encourage the elders at Ephesus to “support the weak.”

- He reminds them of his own example in labouring with his own hands to provide for his necessities while he was among them.

This maxim might have been forgotten if Paul had not recorded it here.

- A maxim like this is a densely packed statement that can be unpacked in many different ways. Proverbs are like that.
 - They give you a lot to think about and to chew on and can be applied to many different situations and evaluated from many different angles.
 - Chalmers used this saying to address the poor, encouraging them to become those who were givers rather than receivers.
 - Of course, he was not talking about those who were incapable of providing, but most of the poor are able to become givers—as these did.
 - The gospel has shown its power to transform many villages in Africa and other places that were in poverty so that they become fruitful and productive.
- But that is just an example of how this maxim that it is more blessed to give than to receive might be applied.
 - I am going to consider it in a broader way and apply it to you as a congregation of believers—that you may come to see more clearly what a blessing it is to give and how it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - We will start by looking at how God is the supremely blessed giver.
 - Then we will look at how He constituted us to be blessed givers.
 - And then I will admonish you to be a blessed giver.

I. God our Creator is the most blessed of all beings, and He is the supreme Giver.

A. It is His nature from all eternity to give.

1. Jesus often refers to God the Father as the one whose love is expressed by giving.
 - In John 3:35, He says specifically concerning Himself as the Son, **“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.”**
 - And in John 17:24, He speaks of the wondrous love that He and the Father have had for one another from eternity.
 - **“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”**
2. We cannot fully understand divine love—how the three persons who constitute one God love each other and express love...
 - How those three persons who have all things, who have no lack, can show love to one another,
 - a. But we can be sure that however they do, it is far more wonderful, excellent, virtuous, and beautiful than any love shared among mere creatures.
 - b. We can also be certain that human love that we are able to understand and express is a true reflection of the divine original.
 - If God who gave us language calls what He has within the Trinity *love* and *giving*, we can be sure that divine love truly is like human love.

- Certainly, the scale is different, but there is an expression of this love that involves what we call giving.
 - We may think of the Son always pleasing the Father and always honouring Him and of the Father always delighting in the Son—
 - not only after the Son became flesh, but as the Holy Scripture teaches us, from all eternity—from before the foundation of the world.
 - c. And we can be sure that this love between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is part of what makes God to be the ever-blessed God.
 - It is a central aspect of His being, as 1 Tim 6:15 says, **“The blessed and only potentate.”**
 - He is supremely happy or blessed because He is the supreme eternal giver.
- B. The Scriptures show us that His giving extends also to us.
- In other words, it is not limited to the three persons, but this “love-that-gives” characterises all of His relationships—it is His nature to love.
1. He is the blessed Giver of life—the ever-blessed Creator.
 - He had life in Himself and He gave us life.
 - We are told that He made us in His own image and that when He was finished, He declared that His work was very good.
 - He also made the world for us and gave it to us to be our home.
 - His blessedness is seen in filling it with things to delight us—relationships, fresh water that we can feel and drink and swim in, all kinds of tasty foods, beautiful things to behold, lovely sounds, interesting things for us to discover and explore, abilities and talents that we can employ.
 - As Creator, He is the eternally blessed giver.
 2. He is also the blessed Provider.
 - Not only did He make all things for us to enjoy, He also brings them to us each day—He provides for us by His gracious hand of providence.
 - He sends the rain to make our crops grow.
 - He daily loads us with good things that make us glad—He brings them our way.
 - Certainly, now that we are fallen, we have many hard things—very hard things—but even through all of that we can see His good hand that causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust—He waters the crops of those who hate Him.
 - And we know that this is an expression of love because Jesus tell us that our love is not like the Father’s love unless we love our enemies.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, He says: Mt 5:44-46:
 - **“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”**

- If God delights to give to His enemies, how much more to those who love Him!
 - It is His nature as the ever-blessed One to give to His creatures.
 - Deprivation only comes when there is sin, such as there is with the now fallen human race.
- But there is an even greater way that God is revealed to us as a giver.
- 3. He is the blessed Redeemer.
 - John 3:16 is very clear: **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**
 - There is no love as great as this love—God so loved—He loved to such a high degree that He gave His only Son.
 - The eternal God is blessed because He is the one who gives.
 - He knows what it is to sacrifice!
 - Don't let your philosophising about God cause you to think that He cannot experience sacrifice because He has all and does all for His glory.
 - The Scripture is plain that He so loved that He gave His Son. To a degree that we cannot fathom, He gave His Son. He sacrificed His Son.
 - We injured His glory by our sin.
 - In Christ, we see how He became poor that He might make many rich.
 - He became poor in the way that is most outrageous and most costly to the eternal God of glory:
 - He took our place, bearing the penalty and the shame of sin—a thing that was reprehensible to Him.
 - The Bible says expressly that there is no love like this love—no giving like the giving that God did to redeem us.
 - He gave much to create us, much to provide for us, but He gives beyond all bounds to redeem us!
 - He is the blessed one who is able to give this wonderful gift of forgiveness, justification, and eternal life in His house to a people who were incapable of obtaining any of these.
 - Our God is so blessed that He is able to give us these things.
 - He loves to give—it is part of who He is.
 - He is blessed by giving to us. It is more blessed for Him to give than to receive.

TRANS> But now I want to turn our attention to our giving.

II. God constituted us in His image to be blessed by giving, just like He is!

A. Think of it!

1. You have the ability of being able to do things that actually bless other people!
 - Keep in mind that it does not say that those who receive are not blessed—

- They are! Where would we be without God's gifts and without our neighbour's gifts? We are blessed by these.
 - It is a blessing to receive from others, but it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - And you can actually be a source of that blessing.
 - That is a wonderful, powerful ability!
2. Just think how much good you can do for others by giving to others!
- You can relieve thirst by giving someone a drink—you can keep a baby alive by nursing it or giving it a bottle.
 - You can give someone joy with beautiful music,
 - give them rich understanding by teaching,
 - take a desperate sinner and lead him to Christ.
 - cook a delicious meal that bring gladness and thanksgiving to God.
 - You can produce things, move things, provide service, give medical aid, transport people, give them companionship, encourage them with hope, build things for them that they can use, design things that they will love, relieve poverty! Even if you can do little else, you can smile at them to show appreciation.
3. Just think how much good you can do simply through your daily labour in your calling—just by being a productive citizen.
- You have the work itself that you do in your employment, whether it is work you are paid for or not.
 - With the income you produce,
 - You can have your tithe that provides for worship in your community and that provides for missionaries to go to those who do not know the LORD.
 - What a privilege—God has given you such opportunity and power.
 - With that income, you can also relieve the suffering of those who have fallen on hard times—not those who refuse to work—you only harm them by preventing them from being productive when you do that—but you can relieve those who cannot work... What power you have!
 - With that income, you also pay taxes.
 - Though our government uses them for ill, you still have a hand in providing for many good things. We need government to keep law and order—God has provided it. We have judges and officers.
 - And though it is not properly the government's job, your taxes are also used to build roads, schools, hospitals.
 - The point is you are blessed as one who is able to bless others!
- B. We were made to enjoy this blessing of giving to others.
- Selfishness and sin blind us and keep us from enjoying it.
1. But isn't it a great thing to do things that will truly help others?
- Aren't you greatly blessed to have this ability?

- God made you—He made all of us—to know this blessing.
2. What if you could only receive and not give?
 - Wouldn't that be terrible?
 - What would your life be like if you had robots to give you whatever you want whenever you want it, but you were unable to do anything for them (or for anyone else)—but you could have whatever you want as far as gold and silver and technology...
 - But you could not even so much as give a smile to someone.
 - You would just be shut up in your own little bubble—having the best food and the best of everything, but with no ability to share it with others.
 - Miserable existence!
 - Giving to others—that's where the blessing is!
- C. God promises blessing and reward to us if we give.
1. He promises blessing and reward in this life.
 - Listen to what the LORD says in Malachi 3:7-11 about this:
 - **Mal 3:7-12: “Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ ⁸ Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *even this whole nation*. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you *such* blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it*. ¹¹ And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts; “And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - After being in the ministry for many years, I can testify that this is true.
 - I have seen people struggling with finances, and sure enough, they tell you that they have not been tithing.
 - They start, even in hard times, and suddenly there are new jobs, new opportunities, things that open up—all kinds of changes.
 - I do not see who gives what, but the officers who do have observed over the years how those who tithe always seem to have things work out.
 - But let me say, if you decide to give only with a view of seeing your income go up, don't even do it.
 - You are to give because you love the Lord and you because you love others and you realise that it is what God wants you to do.
 - You will see Him take care of you, but it is not to be done as a cold investment—God is not a vending machine or a good stock to invest in.
 - He is a living God who saves us that we might love Him.
 2. God also promises blessing and reward in eternity to those who give.

- Jesus promises us that not one act of kindness done by His bride (those who are saved) will escape His notice. Every single act done for His sake will receive a reward.
 - In Matthew 10:42, He says: **“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”**
 - In Matthew 25, He describes how His servants will be surprised when they receive rewards in heaven for every little act of kindness that they have done.

TRANS> What grand thing it is.

- By giving, you have the power to be a blessing to others—truly help them and make them glad, and on top of that, every act will not lose its reward.
 - Remarkable!

III. See then that you enjoy the blessing of giving!

- Enter into the joy of your LORD in giving to others.

A. We are fallen, and we must learn to enjoy giving like our Father in heaven does.

1. It is true that in the fallen world, work is toilsome and fraught with many troubles and sacrifices.
 - And often those we serve are ungrateful—just like we often are.
 - We are in a fallen world.
 - But it is still a blessing when you are able to do good to others, even to the ungrateful, as our LORD Jesus also taught us.
2. In our fallen estate, love does not come naturally to us.
 - a. We need to come to Christ—first for pardon and forgiveness, but then also for the new life that He promises—a life full of love for God and others.
 - A life transformed by His Spirit and ever growing.
 - b. We need to come to truly care about others—so that we want to bless them...
 - Not just so we can be known as a caring person or be thanked...
 - but because we really do love them and we really do want to bless them.
 - c. We need to learn to give to them for the glory of God.
 - Everything we do is to be for Him because He is God.
 - Our work is actually wretched in His eyes if it is not done for Him—even if it does benefit others.
 - We are His stewards who must see ourselves as using His resources in the way He wants us to use them—to be a blessing to others.

B. It requires faith to be able to give.

- We must trust the LORD to look after us.
- 1. One of the reasons many people don't give is because they are afraid that they will be impoverished and will not be able to take care of themselves.
 - It is important to provide for yourself—the Bible tells you that you are worse than an unbeliever if you don't provide for your own household (1 Tim 6:17f).
 - But you must not let that prevent you from giving.

2. In all your providing, you need to realise that it is God who provides for you.
 - You actually put yourself at greater risk of impoverishment by withholding what God has instructed you to give.
 - God is the one who decides what you have and what you don't have.
 - As we saw in Malachi, He says, "Test Me."
 - He doesn't usually say that, but He says it about tithing.
 - We must believe His promise to take care of it and put it all in His hands.

C. Remember that giving is something God wants you to do. He commands it.

1. He commands it because you were made in His image, as we saw, and constituted to give and to be blessed in giving.
 - God will not have His children without this.
 - He wants them to have this love to others.
 - And He wants them to enjoy the blessing of giving.
2. Those who lead, in any capacity, are to lead the way in giving.
 - First, they are to lead by example.
 - Paul speaks about that in the passage we read.
 - He taught these elders to give by his own example.
 - How much more did Jesus—who was actually supported by others in His ministry—do that as He went about doing good wherever He went.
 - How He loved people!
 - Leaders are to know by experience that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - Second, leaders are to lead by instruction, warning, and even rebuke.
 - It doesn't matter what kind of leader you are—
 - If you run a business, you are lead those who work for you to give faithful service in the labour you hire them to do—and to do it for God.
 - If you are the head of your home, you are to see that your wife and children give—that they learn to serve.
 - The same with elders in the church. Sometimes deacons err in doing all the service themselves. Their task is to teach others to serve and lead them in serving, to round up others to serve.
 - They, in particular, are to take people with them into service so that those they minister to can learn that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - Yes, leaders are to stimulate and encourage others to give.
3. In his letter to Timothy, Paul teaches us that the rich are to be especially exemplary in giving.
 - In 1 Tim 6:17-19, Paul says: **Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.** ¹⁸ *Let them do good, that they be rich in good*

works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

- The rich are able to give more—and God has given them their riches for this purpose.
 - I heard about a rich man who was a believer who turned the tithe around and give 90% of his increase to the LORD.
 - He knew what a blessing it was to give.
- But keep in mind that the poor sometimes give more than we think.
 - A poor man who works two jobs to support his family, and who is not able to do more than a basic tithe, may, in God’s eyes, give even more than the rich man.
 - The rich man still has an abundance, but this man is thrifty and diligent and so ends up providing for a poor family that cannot work.
 - How does he do it? By providing for his own when he might have been excused for doing less, he frees up money that would have gone to his family to support another family.
 - He does not get credit for it in the world or in his own mind, but the Lord will reward him for it and that man will know blessing.
 - What’s more, that man, by his labour and thrift, is giving to his family and to his church—he knows that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Conclusion: It is more blessed to give than to receive.

The best way to learn that this maxim is true is by doing it.

- I urge you all—if you are not tithing, start now.
 - If you are tithing, start setting aside a little more—for hospitality—to help someone who falls into hard times—to support missions—to sponsor a child through a trusted agency.
- And simply be a giver of yourself to others—your time, your service, your encouragements.

Truly, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

- God is the most blessed one of all, and He is the supreme giver.
- You are constituted by Him to be blessed in your giving.
- See that you do it.
 - I speak not because we have a deficit, but because this is what God wants you to know that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - Learn that it is so.