

Acts 20:35 Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow! Pentecost 14 September 11, 2017

By Pastor Kenneth Mellon, Trinity Lutheran Church and School, Pleasant Valley Rd., West Bend, WI
God's grace and peace to you to bring you daily blessing through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord! Amen.

God's Word to motivate us to live for Christ is written in Acts 20:35

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify our lives by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Redeemed People, in Christ, who gave His life to give us life!

Many words of Jesus often sounded confusing to people. He said phrases like: the first shall be last, whoever gives up his life shall save his life, and our words for today's verse where Jesus says, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" Why did Jesus say such things? Did He want to confuse people? No, He "is the way, the truth, and the life." He wants everything about God to be clear. But, when people refuse to listen or learn of Him there are times when He takes an indirect approach. It's like He planted seeds through His words that stayed hidden and didn't immediately grow, but in time they would be seen. In the end, His purpose was to help people see the goodness of God that He was bringing to people so that they could say:

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow!

First, the devil wants people to mis-understand the purpose for God's blessings. Our sinful nature wants everything for ourselves. When people give things they expect something in return. People work to receive a wage. People sign up for a drawing to win, not to lose. If people find unclaimed money on ground, they don't say, I'll be blessed as soon as I give this money away. Even we can misunderstand when it comes to generosity toward others. We tempted to think, "Why should I help others if they can't help me?" Even some people who are giving to help the hurricane victims have a motive that if some problem happened to them in the future they would expect people to give to help them like they helped others.

There is nothing wrong with helping or receiving help or for working for what we need in life. The Bible even encourages work! The problem is with our motives. If our sinful nature leads us to think only of this world, we are missing God's spiritual blessings. Paul told the Ephesians to follow his example. Would we want to do that? Paul wrote, "*Five times I received ... 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked.... My life was in danger from people, governments, storms, and from false brothers. I ... went without sleep.*" (2 Corinthians 11:24-27) You would think that after all that, Paul would tell the people to follow someone else and not continue to live and speak for Jesus! Yet, he considered himself blessed, because God was accomplishing many good things.

Paul once referred to his work as if he was a farmer. He said, "*I planted, [another person] watered, but God made it grow.*" (1 Corinthians 3:6) Paul understood that properly using what God gave Him was important. Suppose a kernel of grain that was developed to be planted said to itself, "I'm not going to sacrifice myself to be planted. I'll hide from the farmer and save myself." So, while the other seeds were being planted, this sat on a shelf. By fall, the seeds planted had grown and each produced 100's of seeds. The seed that lived for itself withered and died. Which kind of seed are we? Are we living for ourselves or are we being used by God to produce many good things? Have we become terminal with God's blessings that He gives them to us and they stop with us, or by faith in God do we become a channel to bring His blessing to others? We would like to say that we are always giving and God is blessing others through us, but honestly we can't say that all the time.

Remember Jesus' parable of the talents? The owner gave his servants various amounts of money and told them to put it to use. Two went to work and earned more; but one buried his money. When the owner returned, the two were rewarded for their work, but the one who did nothing with the money was punished for the wasteful use of his gift. We need to follow the Apostle Paul's example and be willing to give of ourselves: our time, talents, and treasures for the Lord! Earlier Paul reminded the Ephesians that he

had earned money to support other missionaries and he had also helped the poor. He wanted to do whatever would advance the work of the Lord and to show the love for others that Jesus had shown to him. Paul was far from perfect, just like us; but at least he had the goal of using God's blessings for good.

Second, we need faith in Jesus to be blessed to give. In the Bible, Paul told the church leaders in Ephesus that believers in Jesus Christ have been blessed with "every spiritual blessing." (Ephesians 1:3) This does not mean that we will always be blessed in the same physical way we gave. A married couple once sued a TV evangelist. He had claimed a special revelation from God that if people gave their money to his ministry, God would more than give that amount back to them in a short time. So, the couple sold their house and gave all the money to the man's ministry. One month went by and then two months, and finally, they were so angered that they didn't get their money that this man promised, they sued him to get their money back. I don't know if they ever did.

But, by faith know that we don't need to give in order to get more from God. We give because God has so richly blessed us in Christ, we have received more blessings than we deserve or need. Christ deserved to have us serve Him, but He was willing to live His whole life and die to serve us! Through His death, Christ opened the treasures of heaven to all! Eternal life was purchased with His blood and by faith we receive all the blessings He won! Through faith in Him, God credits the perfect obedience of Jesus to us so He considers us holy and worthy to stand in His presence. By faith we are confident that God will listen to our prayers and answer for our good. We didn't do a thing to get these blessings. They are all a gift of God! A few verses before he quoted Jesus' words, Paul told the Ephesians that he would not see them again. But they were not to be discouraged. He said, "*I commit you to God and to the Word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*" (v. 32)

Even the good things we do now as Christians are motivated by the power of the Holy Spirit. He has taken up residence in the hearts of believers and daily gives us the hope and peace of eternal life that we may encourage others with the same. We are united with Christ, the living Vine. His love powerfully works through us to produce fruits of faith for God and people. In Christ, we can find contentment in all His blessings! Through the promises of God based on Christ's work for us, God gives joy in times of sadness, hope in times of despair, and strength in times of weakness. Surrounded by the blessings through Christ, we serve the Lord with our whole lives by what we say and do. We owe God our love and gratitude for all His gifts, especially the gift of eternal life in His Son! Paul knew that there was so much more to life than just getting things. God was working to bring Christ to Him and through him to bring Christ to others!

So, whenever we hear one of those sayings of Jesus, which make us puzzle over what He meant, pray that the Holy Spirit will help us understand the truth. We don't need to do good works to save ourselves or to earn God's favor. Jesus paid for our sins in full. All lasting blessings from God come to us through Him! We understand Jesus' promise that it is *more blessed to give than to receive*, (v.35) because God has already blessed us in so many ways, now He will work through us to bring many more blessings to others. As we use our money or time or talents to honor the Lord, we can be sure that God will continue to provide for us in Christ. Amen