

## THE HAPPY DONORS

"In all things I gave you an example, that so laboring ye ought to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35.

The very heart-throbs of God are felt in the pulse beat of these nine short words--"It is more blessed to give than to receive." How or when Paul got from the Lord Jesus this striking declaration, so strange to our humanity, we know not. Anyway, all of us need to be reminded of this, because we, too, are prone to forget it.

This statement is revolutionary. It cuts squarely across the grain of our commonly accepted views. That we can hear it without a gasp of amazement is either because familiarity has dulled its cutting edge, or because we do not believe it. Moffatt's translation, "It is happier to give than to get," is a rendering that gives the truth a razor-sharp edge.

These are not the words of Paul, but of Jesus Christ. He is drawing a contrast between two opposite philosophies of life--that of giving and of getting. Or, to put it in terms of personality, He is drawing a contrast between two opposite types of character--the giver and the getter. The Saviour was constantly dividing people into two groups, and here He divides them into givers and getters. What He means is that our predominant passion is either giving or getting. That was true of those who belonged to the inner circle of Jesus's friends. Take Judas, for example. He was as thoroughly human as you and I. Near the end of his journey, he asked a question that gives us an insight into his ruling passion. To the Pharisees he said, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" At heart he was a getter rather than a giver.

As one looks into this text certain things are very obvious. Among them are the following:

### I. An Immense Fascination.

Paul tells us that these were the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yet, we do not find them in the Gospels. Of course, we know that many of the sayings and many of the doings of our Lord were not written down in those inspired narratives. It therefore is a message from the Master which we have before us today. And the message fits the Man, even as the Man fits the message. Here was the Prince of all givers assuring us, out of the depths of His own experience in life, that it is a finer thing to give than to get. It is the same principle as that which underlies His recorded words, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Judas Iscariot betrayed that eternally glorious principle when he asked the Pharisees, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?" He was more interested in getting than in giving. So there followed a double betrayal: the principle and the Person.

Peter, on the other hand, caught the principle that Jesus Christ had laid down and he held it fast. On his way to the temple to pray he was implored by a lame beggar. Peter replied, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give." These last two words, "I give," constitute the key to Simon's character. Giving was the ruling passion of his life. To help us to make giving the ruling passion of our lives, our Master said, "It is more blessed to give than to get." Peter was so like-minded with his Lord that he was more concerned about giving than about getting.

### II. An Implied Declaration.

#### 1. It is blessed to receive.

Christ acknowledges and announces that it is blessed to receive. His words do not pronounce a blessing only on giving, as though a curse rested on receiving. All

that He claims is that a much higher place is to be accorded the blessedness of giving than that which goes with the blessedness of getting. The satisfaction of receiving has its place, even though it be inferior.

You may search in vain for anyone who does not know the joy of getting. We have been receivers all our lives, and we know something of the joy of it. We began to receive in our young and tender years. Let your memory travel back to the Christmas scenes of your childhood. It was the presents you received, rather than those you gave, which provided you with the biggest thrill. And, alas, some people never grow up! Or, to speak more accurately, they are never changed--changed as only the power of Divine Love can change them. They remain on the level of their native selfishness--gorgers instead of givers.

But, of course, there is a getting that is altogether lawful and necessary. How many of life's riches, whether material or spiritual, are ours as a heritage: we did not create them, we only receive them! The first warm milk that ever nourished us, the first kindly roof that spread itself above us, the first protecting garment that ever was wrapped about us, the first kiss of affection that was ever imprinted upon us, the first lisping prayer that ever was taught us--what were we but the fortunate receivers of these gifts and bounties? And so it has gone through the years. And now that we work with our mature minds and hands, are we any less indebted to God for the things we receive for soul and body? Oh, the blessedness of receiving! One just can't get away from it.

Think too of all those finer, intangible values which have been handed on to us: friendship, love, encouragement, sympathy, the boon of liberty and, above all, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of these we have been the receivers, and for them we should lift our spirits in grateful celebration. There is an acknowledged blessedness in receiving. We are all debtors because we are all receivers.

### III. An Important Comparison.

It is the little word "more" that now claims our notice: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Do we believe it or not? Someone may say, "Yes, I believe it because Christ said it." Good! The authority of Christ is a perfectly sound thing to which we may make appeal. There is nothing wrong with the theory of accepting it just because Christ said it. But there is something wrong, pathetically wrong, with saying we believe it and then failing to act out our faith.

Do we believe that Christ had thoroughly sound reasons for saying what He does in our text? If so, what are some of those reasons?

#### 1. Giving fulfills the meaning of receiving.

If my receiving does not result in my giving, then it is only a blind alley--it leads nowhere.

Someone has called attention to the contrast between two shoemakers whose names are widely known in history. One was a character in fiction, the other in real life. There was Silas Marner, the widower and miser whom George Eliot has portrayed with such vivid pathos. Having lost his wife, his hungry soul turns to the love of gold. At night, in his loneliness, he takes out his shining gold pieces and fingers them fondly, while a strange light glows in his gloating eyes. A shoemaker and his money, a miser and his fortune, shut up within the imprisoning walls of his pathetic selfishness!

William Carey was that other shoemaker. Let us observe him! He lives at Northampton, England. His eagerness to make money out of his humble trade is much like that of miserly Silas Marner. But there the likeness ends. Instead of thinking

of himself as he toils away at the bench, he studies the maps of the world with great concern. Those maps tell him that there are nations without the knowledge of Christ as Lord. So the money he makes is the money he proposes to give to get the good news of Christ to those pagan peoples. Finally it breaks upon him that God would have him give himself. So William Carey sets out for India, little realizing that he is to go down in history as the father of modern Christian missions.

Behold the contrast: miser and missionary, plying the same trade, toiling at the same task, earning the same kind of money--one to hoard it and the other to share it! Selfishness makes the warnings of the miser sordid; unselfishness makes the earnings of the missionary sacred.

2. Giving puts fineness into our capacity for receiving. Jesus said, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:2.

Perhaps you have heard the fable of the Magic Vest. According to this fable the possessor of the vest could put it on, make a wish, and have the wish come true. But the vest worked in such a way that if the wish were a selfish one, the magic garment would shrink. One man got hold of it and began wishing for this and that and the other--always for himself. Each time the desire was granted, but each time the vest bound him more tightly. He kept on wishing for things for himself until the vest finally choked the breath out of him. This, of course, is only a legend, but it is nevertheless true to life. Receive without giving, and soon you will lose your capacity to receive in any fine and worthy fashion.

Why is the Dead Sea dead? It has an inlet but no outlet. It gets, but never gives. That is deadly to a sea, and even more deadly to a soul. The man who refuses to give really refuses to live. We can no more ignore this truth than we can ignore the law of gravitation. If you will look into your own heart or at the lives of others, you will realize that every person who is living a self-centered life is not in the truest sense really living. This is true whether he lives in a hovel or in a palace.

3. Giving proves our belief in what Christ said. He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." This philosophy of our Lord crashes head on into man's philosophy. It is the very antithesis of our belief as to what is blessed. It challenges our selfishness, which is the bottom layer of human philosophy. Sin began on earth with the folly of Adam and Eve in the garden of beauty and blessedness. They thought that it would be better to get something that looked good, though they were not entitled to it, than to give unto God the trust in His wisdom and the obedience of His will which were their duty and which should have been their delight. And their action brought blight instead of blessedness.

What a tragedy that our text is perhaps the most disbelieved verse in the Bible! The nerve going to the pocketbook is the most sensitive nerve in the human personality, and people shrink from touching it. But this nerve is sensitive because it is inflamed by the congestion of covetousness. The pain, when the pocketbook nerve is touched, is due either to financial congestion or a diseased thought. Relief will come just as soon as the congestion is worked out.

Occasionally some person, who goes to church very infrequently, will say, "I hate to see the collection plates stuck under our noses at every service." If it smelled good to them, they would like to have it passed under their noses. But it depends on what one's nature is whether a thing is fragrant or not. To the mother skunk the baby skunk smells like a gardenia. Yes, it makes a vast difference what one's nature is. And that nature is revealed in one's attitudes and actions.

4. Giving justifies our right to go on living. Sometimes we use the word "parasite." It is never a compliment when applied to anybody. It is the odious name we give to a creature who sucks his subsistence out of another's life, without handing back anything in return. It is only by giving that we can win the real right to respect ourselves. Someone has defined a gentleman as a man who puts more into life than he takes out of it. He is a contributor, and not a perpetual sponger. Every person has inescapable obligations resting upon him. Of a person or a thing, we inquire, what is it for? If no reason for it can be given in terms of service, then we reserve the right to junk it.

If we do not experience the blessedness of giving, we shall, sooner or later, taste the curse of withholding.